



SHORT STORIES

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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BY

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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WINTER DREAMS

I

Metropolitan Magazine (December 1922)

Some of the caddies were poor as sin and lived in one-room houses with a neurasthenic cow in the front yard, but Dexter Green's father owned the second best grocery-store in Black Bear — the best one was "The Hub," patronized by the wealthy people from Sherry Island — and Dexter caddied only for pocket-money.

In the fall when the days became crisp and gray, and the long Minnesota winter shut down like the white lid of a box, Dexter's skis moved over the snow that hid the fairways of the golf course. At these times the country gave him a feeling of profound melancholy — it offended him that the links should lie in enforced fallowness, haunted by ragged sparrows for the long season. It was dreary, too, that on the tees where the gay colors fluttered in summer there were now only the desolate sand-boxes knee-deep in crusted ice. When he crossed the hills the wind blew cold as misery, and if the sun was out he tramped with his eyes squinted up against the hard dimensionless glare.

In April the winter ceased abruptly. The snow ran down into Black Bear Lake scarcely tarrying for the early golfers to brave the season with red and black balls. Without elation, without an interval of moist glory, the cold was gone.

Dexter knew that there was something dismal about this Northern spring, just as he knew there was something gorgeous about the fall. Fall made him clinch his hands and tremble and repeat idiotic sentences to himself, and make brisk abrupt gestures of command to imaginary audiences and armies. October filled him with hope which November raised to a sort of ecstatic triumph, and in this mood the fleeting brilliant impressions of the summer at Sherry Island were ready grist to his mill. He became a golf champion and defeated Mr. T. A. Hedrick in a marvellous match played a hundred times over the fairways of his imagination, a match each detail of which he

changed about untiringly — sometimes he won with almost laughable ease, sometimes he came up magnificently from behind. Again, stepping from a Pierce-Arrow automobile, like Mr. Mortimer Jones, he strolled frigidly into the lounge of the Sherry Island Golf Club — or perhaps, surrounded by an admiring crowd, he gave an exhibition of fancy diving from the spring-board of the club raft. . . . Among those who watched him in open-mouthed wonder was Mr. Mortimer Jones.

And one day it came to pass that Mr. Jones — himself and not his ghost — came up to Dexter with tears in his eyes and said that Dexter was the — best caddy in the club, and wouldn't he decide not to quit if Mr. Jones made it worth his while, because every other — caddy in the club lost one ball a hole for him — regularly —

“No, sir,” said Dexter decisively, “I don't want to caddy any more.” Then, after a pause: “I'm too old.”

“You're not more than fourteen. Why the devil did you decide just this morning that you wanted to quit? You promised that next week you'd go over to the State tournament with me.”

“I decided I was too old.”

Dexter handed in his “A Class” badge, collected what money was due him from the caddy master, and walked home to Black Bear Village.

“The best — caddy I ever saw,” shouted Mr. Mortimer Jones over a drink that afternoon. “Never lost a ball! Willing! Intelligent! Quiet! Honest! Grateful!”

The little girl who had done this was eleven — beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men. The spark, however, was perceptible. There was a general ungodliness in the way her lips twisted down at the corners when she smiled, and in the — Heaven help us! — in the almost passionate quality of her eyes. Vitality is born early in such women. It was utterly in evidence now, shining through her thin frame in a sort of glow.

She had come eagerly out on to the course at nine o'clock with a white linen nurse and five small new golf-clubs in a white canvas bag which the nurse was carrying. When Dexter first saw her she was standing by the caddy house, rather ill at ease and trying to conceal the fact by engaging her nurse in an obviously unnatural conversation graced by startling and irrelevant grimaces from herself.

“Well, it’s certainly a nice day, Hilda,” Dexter heard her say. She drew down the corners of her mouth, smiled, and glanced furtively around, her eyes in transit falling for an instant on Dexter.

Then to the nurse:

“Well, I guess there aren’t very many people out here this morning, are there?”

The smile again — radiant, blatantly artificial — convincing.

“I don’t know what we’re supposed to do now,” said the nurse, looking nowhere in particular.

“Oh, that’s all right. I’ll fix it up.”

Dexter stood perfectly still, his mouth slightly ajar. He knew that if he moved forward a step his stare would be in her line of vision — if he moved backward he would lose his full view of her face. For a moment he had not realized how young she was. Now he remembered having seen her several times the year before — in bloomers.

Suddenly, involuntarily, he laughed, a short abrupt laugh — then, startled by himself, he turned and began to walk quickly away.

“Boy!”

Dexter stopped.

“Boy — ”

Beyond question he was addressed. Not only that, but he was treated to that absurd smile, that preposterous smile — the memory of which at least a dozen men were to carry into middle age.

“Boy, do you know where the golf teacher is?”

“He’s giving a lesson.”

“Well, do you know where the caddy-master is?”

“He isn’t here yet this morning.”

“Oh.” For a moment this baffled her. She stood alternately on her right and left foot.

“We’d like to get a caddy,” said the nurse. “Mrs. Mortimer Jones sent us out to play golf, and we don’t know how without we get a caddy.”

Here she was stopped by an ominous glance from Miss Jones, followed immediately by the smile.

“There aren’t any caddies here except me,” said Dexter to the nurse, “and I got to stay here in charge until the caddy-master gets here.”

“Oh.”

Miss Jones and her retinue now withdrew, and at a proper distance from Dexter became involved in a heated conversation, which was concluded by Miss Jones taking one of the clubs and hitting it on the ground with violence. For further emphasis she raised it again and was about to bring it down smartly upon the nurse’s bosom, when the nurse seized the club and twisted it from her hands.

“You damn little mean old *thing!*” cried Miss Jones wildly.

Another argument ensued. Realizing that the elements of the comedy were implied in the scene, Dexter several times began to laugh, but each time restrained the laugh before it reached audibility. He could not resist the monstrous conviction that the little girl was justified in beating the nurse.

The situation was resolved by the fortuitous appearance of the caddy-master, who was appealed to immediately by the nurse.

“Miss Jones is to have a little caddy, and this one says he can’t go.”

“Mr. McKenna said I was to wait here till you came,” said Dexter quickly.

“Well, he’s here now.” Miss Jones smiled cheerfully at the caddy-master. Then she dropped her bag and set off at a haughty mince toward the first tee.

“Well?” The caddy-master turned to Dexter. “What you standing there like a dummy for? Go pick up the young lady’s clubs.”

“I don’t think I’ll go out to-day,” said Dexter.

“You don’t — ”

“I think I’ll quit.”

The enormity of his decision frightened him. He was a favorite caddy, and the thirty dollars a month he earned through the summer were not to be made elsewhere around the lake. But he had received a strong emotional shock, and his perturbation required a violent and immediate outlet.

It is not so simple as that, either. As so frequently would be the case in the future, Dexter was unconsciously dictated to by his winter dreams.

II

Now, of course, the quality and the seasonability of these winter dreams varied, but the stuff of them remained. They persuaded Dexter several years later to pass up a business course at the State university — his father, prospering now, would have paid his way — for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East, where he was bothered by his scanty funds. But do not get the impression, because his winter dreams happened to be concerned at first with musings on the rich, that there was anything merely snobbish in the boy. He wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people — he wanted the glittering things themselves. Often he reached out for the best without knowing why he wanted it — and sometimes he ran up against the mysterious denials and prohibitions in which life indulges. It is with one of those denials and not with his career as a whole that this story deals.

He made money. It was rather amazing. After college he went to the city from which Black Bear Lake draws its wealthy patrons. When he was only twenty-three and had been there not quite two years, there were already people who liked to say: “Now *there’s* a boy — ” All about him rich men’s sons were peddling bonds precariously, or investing patrimonies precariously, or plodding through the two dozen volumes of the “George Washington Commercial Course,” but Dexter borrowed a thousand dollars on his college degree and his confident mouth, and bought a partnership in a laundry.

It was a small laundry when he went into it but Dexter made a specialty of learning how the English washed fine woollen golf-stockings without shrinking them, and within a year he was catering to the trade that wore knickerbockers. Men were insisting that their Shetland hose and sweaters go to his laundry just as they had insisted on a caddy who could find golf-balls. A little later he was doing their wives’ lingerie as well — and running five branches in different parts of the city. Before he was twenty-seven he owned the largest string of laundries in his section of the country. It was then that he sold out and went to New York. But the part of his story that concerns us goes back to the days when he was making his first big success.

When he was twenty-three Mr. Hart — one of the gray-haired men who like to say “Now *there’s* a boy” — gave him a guest card to the Sherry Island Golf Club for a week-end. So he signed his name one day on the register, and that afternoon played golf in a foursome with Mr. Hart and Mr. Sandwood and Mr. T. A. Hedrick. He did not consider it necessary to remark that he had once carried Mr. Hart’s bag over this same links, and that he knew every trap and gully with his eyes shut — but he found himself glancing at the four caddies who trailed them, trying to catch a gleam or gesture that would remind him of himself, that would lessen the gap which lay between his present and his past.

It was a curious day, slashed abruptly with fleeting, familiar impressions. One minute he had the sense of being a trespasser — in the next he was impressed by the tremendous superiority he felt toward Mr. T. A. Hedrick, who was a bore and not even a good golfer any more.

Then, because of a ball Mr. Hart lost near the fifteenth green, an enormous thing happened. While they were searching the stiff grasses of the rough there was a clear call of “Fore!” from behind a hill in their rear. And as they all turned abruptly from their search a bright new ball sliced abruptly over the hill and caught Mr. T. A. Hedrick in the abdomen.

“By Gad!” cried Mr. T. A. Hedrick, “they ought to put some of these crazy women off the course. It’s getting to be outrageous.”

A head and a voice came up together over the hill:

“Do you mind if we go through?”

“You hit me in the stomach!” declared Mr. Hedrick wildly.

“Did I?” The girl approached the group of men. “I’m sorry. I yelled ‘Fore!’”

Her glance fell casually on each of the men — then scanned the fairway for her ball.

“Did I bounce into the rough?”

It was impossible to determine whether this question was ingenuous or malicious. In a moment, however, she left no doubt, for as her partner came up over the hill she called cheerfully:

“Here I am! I’d have gone on the green except that I hit something.”

As she took her stance for a short mashie shot, Dexter looked at her closely. She wore a blue gingham dress, rimmed at throat and shoulders with a white edging that accentuated her tan. The quality of exaggeration, of thinness, which had made her passionate eyes and down-turning mouth absurd at eleven, was gone now. She was arrestingly beautiful. The color in her cheeks was centered like the color in a picture — it was not a “high” color, but a son of fluctuating and feverish warmth, so shaded that it seemed at any moment it would recede and disappear. This color and the mobility of her mouth gave a continual impression of flux, of intense life, of passionate vitality — balanced only partially by the sad luxury of her eyes.

She swung her mashie impatiently and without interest, pitching the ball into a sand-pit on the other side of the green. With a quick, insincere smile and a careless “Thank you!” she went on after it.

“That Judy Jones!” remarked Mr. Hedrick on the next tee, as they waited — some moments — for her to play on ahead. “All she needs is to be turned up and spanked for six months and then to be married off to an old-fashioned cavalry captain.”

“My God, she’s good-looking!” said Mr. Sandwood, who was just over thirty.

“Good-looking!” cried Mr. Hedrick contemptuously, “she always looks as if she wanted to be kissed! Turning those big cow-eyes on every calf in town!”

It was doubtful if Mr. Hedrick intended a reference to the maternal instinct.

“She’d play pretty good golf if she’d try,” said Mr. Sandwood.

“She has no form,” said Mr. Hedrick solemnly.

“She has a nice figure,” said Mr. Sandwood.

“Better thank the Lord she doesn’t drive a swifter ball,” said Mr. Hart, winking at Dexter.

Later in the afternoon the sun went down with a riotous swirl of gold and varying blues and scarlets, and left the dry, rustling night of Western summer. Dexter watched from the veranda of the Golf Club, watched the even overlap of the waters in the little wind, silver molasses under the harvest-moon. Then the moon held a finger to her lips and the lake became a clear pool, pale and quiet. Dexter put on his bathing-suit and swam out to the farthest raft, where he stretched dripping on the wet canvas of the springboard.

There was a fish jumping and a star shining and the lights around the lake were gleaming. Over on a dark peninsula a piano was playing the songs of last summer and of summers before that — songs from “Chin-Chin” and “The Count of Luxemburg” and “The Chocolate Soldier” — and because the sound of a piano over a stretch of water had always seemed beautiful to Dexter he lay perfectly quiet and listened.

The tune the piano was playing at that moment had been gay and new five years before when Dexter was a sophomore at college. They had played it at a prom once when he could not afford the luxury of proms, and he had stood outside the gymnasium and listened. The sound of the tune precipitated in him a sort of ecstasy and it was with that ecstasy he viewed what happened to him now. It was a mood of intense appreciation, a sense that, for once, he was magnificently attune to life and that everything about him was radiating a brightness and a glamour he might never know again.

A low, pale oblong detached itself suddenly from the darkness of the Island, spitting forth the reverberate sound of a racing motor-boat. Two white streamers of cleft water rolled themselves out behind it and almost immediately the boat was beside him, drowning out the hot tinkle of the piano in the drone of its spray. Dexter raising himself on his arms was aware of a figure standing at the wheel, of two dark eyes regarding him over the lengthening space of water — then the boat had gone by and was sweeping in an immense and purposeless circle of spray round and round in the middle of the lake. With equal eccentricity one of the circles flattened out and headed back toward the raft.

“Who’s that?” she called, shutting off her motor. She was so near now that Dexter could see her bathing-suit, which consisted apparently of pink rompers.

The nose of the boat bumped the raft, and as the latter tilted rakishly he was precipitated toward her. With different degrees of interest they recognized each other.

“Aren’t you one of those men we played through this afternoon?” she demanded.

He was.

“Well, do you know how to drive a motor-boat? Because if you do I wish you’d drive this one so I can ride on the surf-board behind. My name is Judy Jones” — she favored him with an absurd smirk — rather, what tried to be a smirk, for, twist her mouth as she might, it was not grotesque, it was merely beautiful — “and I live in a house over there on the Island, and in that house

there is a man waiting for me. When he drove up at the door I drove out of the dock because he says I'm his ideal."

There was a fish jumping and a star shining and the lights around the lake were gleaming. Dexter sat beside Judy Jones and she explained how her boat was driven. Then she was in the water, swimming to the floating surfboard with a sinuous crawl. Watching her was without effort to the eye, watching a branch waving or a sea-gull flying. Her arms, burned to butternut, moved sinuously among the dull platinum ripples, elbow appearing first, casting the forearm back with a cadence of falling water, then reaching out and down, stabbing a path ahead.

They moved out into the lake; turning, Dexter saw that she was kneeling on the low rear of the now uptilted surf-board.

"Go faster," she called, "fast as it'll go."

Obediently he jammed the lever forward and the white spray mounted at the bow. When he looked around again the girl was standing up on the rushing board, her arms spread wide, her eyes lifted toward the moon.

"It's awful cold," she shouted. "What's your name?"

He told her.

"Well, why don't you come to dinner to-morrow night?"

His heart turned over like the fly-wheel of the boat, and, for the second time, her casual whim gave a new direction to his life.

III

Next evening while he waited for her to come down-stairs, Dexter peopled the soft deep summer room and the sun-porch that opened from it with the men who had already loved Judy Jones. He knew the sort of men they were — the men who when he first went to college had entered from the great prep schools with graceful clothes and the deep tan of healthy summers. He had seen that, in one sense, he was better than these men. He was newer and stronger. Yet in acknowledging to himself that he wished his children to

be like them he was admitting that he was but the rough, strong stuff from which they eternally sprang.

When the time had come for him to wear good clothes, he had known who were the best tailors in America, and the best tailors in America had made him the suit he wore this evening. He had acquired that particular reserve peculiar to his university, that set it off from other universities. He recognized the value to him of such a mannerism and he had adopted it; he knew that to be careless in dress and manner required more confidence than to be careful. But carelessness was for his children. His mother's name had been Krimlich. She was a Bohemian of the peasant class and she had talked broken English to the end of her days. Her son must keep to the set patterns.

At a little after seven Judy Jones came down-stairs. She wore a blue silk afternoon dress, and he was disappointed at first that she had not put on something more elaborate. This feeling was accentuated when, after a brief greeting, she went to the door of a butler's pantry and pushing it open called: "You can serve dinner, Martha." He had rather expected that a butler would announce dinner, that there would be a cocktail. Then he put these thoughts behind him as they sat down side by side on a lounge and looked at each other.

"Father and mother won't be here," she said thoughtfully.

He remembered the last time he had seen her father, and he was glad the parents were not to be here to-night — they might wonder who he was. He had been born in Keeble, a Minnesota village fifty miles farther north, and he always gave Keeble as his home instead of Black Bear Village. Country towns were well enough to come from if they weren't inconveniently in sight and used as footstools by fashionable lakes.

They talked of his university, which she had visited frequently during the past two years, and of the near-by city which supplied Sherry Island with its patrons, and whither Dexter would return next day to his prospering laundries.

During dinner she slipped into a moody depression which gave Dexter a feeling of uneasiness. Whatever petulance she uttered in her throaty voice worried him. Whatever she smiled at — at him, at a chicken liver, at nothing — it disturbed him that her smile could have no root in mirth, or even in amusement. When the scarlet corners of her lips curved down, it was less a smile than an invitation to a kiss.

Then, after dinner, she led him out on the dark sun-porch and deliberately changed the atmosphere.

“Do you mind if I weep a little?” she said.

“I’m afraid I’m boring you,” he responded quickly.

“You’re not. I like you. But I’ve just had a terrible afternoon. There was a man I cared about, and this afternoon he told me out of a clear sky that he was poor as a church-mouse. He’d never even hinted it before. Does this sound horribly mundane?”

“Perhaps he was afraid to tell you.”

“Suppose he was,” she answered. “He didn’t start right. You see, if I’d thought of him as poor — well, I’ve been mad about loads of poor men, and fully intended to marry them all. But in this case, I hadn’t thought of him that way, and my interest in him wasn’t strong enough to survive the shock. As if a girl calmly informed her fiancé that she was a widow. He might not object to widows, but —

“Let’s start right,” she interrupted herself suddenly. “Who are you, anyhow?”

For a moment Dexter hesitated. Then:

“I’m nobody,” he announced. “My career is largely a matter of futures.”

“Are you poor?”

“No,” he said frankly, “I’m probably making more money than any man my age in the Northwest. I know that’s an obnoxious remark, but you advised me to start right.”

There was a pause. Then she smiled and the corners of her mouth drooped and an almost imperceptible sway brought her closer to him, looking up into his eyes. A lump rose in Dexter's throat, and he waited breathless for the experiment, facing the unpredictable compound that would form mysteriously from the elements of their lips. Then he saw — she communicated her excitement to him, lavishly, deeply, with kisses that were not a promise but a fulfillment. They aroused in him not hunger demanding renewal but surfeit that would demand more surfeit . . . kisses that were like charity, creating want by holding back nothing at all.

It did not take him many hours to decide that he had wanted Judy Jones ever since he was a proud, desirous little boy.

IV

It began like that — and continued, with varying shades of intensity, on such a note right up to the dénouement. Dexter surrendered a part of himself to the most direct and unprincipled personality with which he had ever come in contact. Whatever Judy wanted, she went after with the full pressure of her charm. There was no divergence of method, no jockeying for position or premeditation of effects — there was a very little mental side to any of her affairs. She simply made men conscious to the highest degree of her physical loveliness. Dexter had no desire to change her. Her deficiencies were knit up with a passionate energy that transcended and justified them.

When, as Judy's head lay against his shoulder that first night, she whispered, "I don't know what's the matter with me. Last night I thought I was in love with a man and to-night I think I'm in love with you — " — it seemed to him a beautiful and romantic thing to say. It was the exquisite excitability that for the moment he controlled and owned. But a week later he was compelled to view this same quality in a different light. She took him in her roadster to a picnic supper, and after supper she disappeared, likewise in her roadster, with another man. Dexter became enormously upset and was scarcely able to be decently civil to the other people present. When she assured him that she had not kissed the other man, he knew she was lying — yet he was glad that she had taken the trouble to lie to him.

He was, as he found before the summer ended, one of a varying dozen who circulated about her. Each of them had at one time been favored above all others — about half of them still basked in the solace of occasional sentimental revivals. Whenever one showed signs of dropping out through long neglect, she granted him a brief honeyed hour, which encouraged him to tag along for a year or so longer. Judy made these forays upon the helpless and defeated without malice, indeed half unconscious that there was anything mischievous in what she did.

When a new man came to town every one dropped out — dates were automatically cancelled.

The helpless part of trying to do anything about it was that she did it all herself. She was not a girl who could be “won” in the kinetic sense — she was proof against cleverness, she was proof against charm; if any of these assailed her too strongly she would immediately resolve the affair to a physical basis, and under the magic of her physical splendor the strong as well as the brilliant played her game and not their own. She was entertained only by the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercise of her own charm. Perhaps from so much youthful love, so many youthful lovers, she had come, in self-defense, to nourish herself wholly from within.

Succeeding Dexter’s first exhilaration came restlessness and dissatisfaction. The helpless ecstasy of losing himself in her was opiate rather than tonic. It was fortunate for his work during the winter that those moments of ecstasy came infrequently. Early in their acquaintance it had seemed for a while that there was a deep and spontaneous mutual attraction — that first August, for example — three days of long evenings on her dusky veranda, of strange wan kisses through the late afternoon, in shadowy alcoves or behind the protecting trellises of the garden arbors, of mornings when she was fresh as a dream and almost shy at meeting him in the clarity of the rising day. There was all the ecstasy of an engagement about it, sharpened by his realization that there was no engagement. It was during those three days that, for the first time, he had asked her to marry him. She said “maybe some day,” she said “kiss me,” she said “I’d like to marry you,” she said “I love you” — she said — nothing.

The three days were interrupted by the arrival of a New York man who visited at her house for half September. To Dexter's agony, rumor engaged them. The man was the son of the president of a great trust company. But at the end of a month it was reported that Judy was yawning. At a dance one night she sat all evening in a motor-boat with a local beau, while the New Yorker searched the club for her frantically. She told the local beau that she was bored with her visitor, and two days later he left. She was seen with him at the station, and it was reported that he looked very mournful indeed.

On this note the summer ended. Dexter was twenty-four, and he found himself increasingly in a position to do as he wished. He joined two clubs in the city and lived at one of them. Though he was by no means an integral part of the stag-lines at these clubs, he managed to be on hand at dances where Judy Jones was likely to appear. He could have gone out socially as much as he liked — he was an eligible young man, now, and popular with down-town fathers. His confessed devotion to Judy Jones had rather solidified his position. But he had no social aspirations and rather despised the dancing men who were always on tap for the Thursday or Saturday parties and who filled in at dinners with the younger married set. Already he was playing with the idea of going East to New York. He wanted to take Judy Jones with him. No disillusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability.

Remember that — for only in the light of it can what he did for her be understood.

Eighteen months after he first met Judy Jones he became engaged to another girl. Her name was Irene Scheerer, and her father was one of the men who had always believed in Dexter. Irene was light-haired and sweet and honorable, and a little stout, and she had two suitors whom she pleasantly relinquished when Dexter formally asked her to marry him.

Summer, fall, winter, spring, another summer, another fall — so much he had given of his active life to the incorrigible lips of Judy Jones. She had treated him with interest, with encouragement, with malice, with indifference, with contempt. She had inflicted on him the innumerable little slights and indignities possible in such a case — as if in revenge for having

ever cared for him at all. She had beckoned him and yawned at him and beckoned him again and he had responded often with bitterness and narrowed eyes. She had brought him ecstatic happiness and intolerable agony of spirit. She had caused him untold inconvenience and not a little trouble. She had insulted him, and she had ridden over him, and she had played his interest in her against his interest in his work — for fun. She had done everything to him except to criticise him — this she had not done — it seemed to him only because it might have sullied the utter indifference she manifested and sincerely felt toward him.

When autumn had come and gone again it occurred to him that he could not have Judy Jones. He had to beat this into his mind but he convinced himself at last. He lay awake at night for a while and argued it over. He told himself the trouble and the pain she had caused him, he enumerated her glaring deficiencies as a wife. Then he said to himself that he loved her, and after a while he fell asleep. For a week, lest he imagined her husky voice over the telephone or her eyes opposite him at lunch, he worked hard and late, and at night he went to his office and plotted out his years.

At the end of a week he went to a dance and cut in on her once. For almost the first time since they had met he did not ask her to sit out with him or tell her that she was lovely. It hurt him that she did not miss these things — that was all. He was not jealous when he saw that there was a new man to-night. He had been hardened against jealousy long before.

He stayed late at the dance. He sat for an hour with Irene Scheerer and talked about books and about music. He knew very little about either. But he was beginning to be master of his own time now, and he had a rather priggish notion that he — the young and already fabulously successful Dexter Green — should know more about such things.

That was in October, when he was twenty-five. In January, Dexter and Irene became engaged. It was to be announced in June, and they were to be married three months later.

The Minnesota winter prolonged itself interminably, and it was almost May when the winds came soft and the snow ran down into Black Bear Lake at last. For the first time in over a year Dexter was enjoying a certain tranquility

of spirit. Judy Jones had been in Florida, and afterward in Hot Springs, and somewhere she had been engaged, and somewhere she had broken it off. At first, when Dexter had definitely given her up, it had made him sad that people still linked them together and asked for news of her, but when he began to be placed at dinner next to Irene Scheerer people didn't ask him about her any more — they told him about her. He ceased to be an authority on her.

May at last. Dexter walked the streets at night when the darkness was damp as rain, wondering that so soon, with so little done, so much of ecstasy had gone from him. May one year back had been marked by Judy's poignant, unforgivable, yet forgiven turbulence — it had been one of those rare times when he fancied she had grown to care for him. That old penny's worth of happiness he had spent for this bushel of content. He knew that Irene would be no more than a curtain spread behind him, a hand moving among gleaming tea-cups, a voice calling to children . . . fire and loveliness were gone, the magic of nights and the wonder of the varying hours and seasons . . . slender lips, down-turning, dropping to his lips and bearing him up into a heaven of eyes. . . . The thing was deep in him. He was too strong and alive for it to die lightly.

In the middle of May when the weather balanced for a few days on the thin bridge that led to deep summer he turned in one night at Irene's house. Their engagement was to be announced in a week now — no one would be surprised at it. And to-night they would sit together on the lounge at the University Club and look on for an hour at the dancers. It gave him a sense of solidity to go with her — she was so sturdily popular, so intensely "great."

He mounted the steps of the brownstone house and stepped inside.

"Irene," he called.

Mrs. Scheerer came out of the living-room to meet him.

"Dexter," she said, "Irene's gone up-stairs with a splitting headache. She wanted to go with you but I made her go to bed."

"Nothing serious, I—"

“Oh, no. She’s going to play golf with you in the morning. You can spare her for just one night, can’t you, Dexter?”

Her smile was kind. She and Dexter liked each other. In the living-room he talked for a moment before he said good-night.

Returning to the University Club, where he had rooms, he stood in the doorway for a moment and watched the dancers. He leaned against the door-post, nodded at a man or two — yawned.

“Hello, darling.”

The familiar voice at his elbow startled him. Judy Jones had left a man and crossed the room to him — Judy Jones, a slender enamelled doll in cloth of gold: gold in a band at her head, gold in two slipper points at her dress’s hem. The fragile glow of her face seemed to blossom as she smiled at him. A breeze of warmth and light blew through the room. His hands in the pockets of his dinner-jacket tightened spasmodically. He was filled with a sudden excitement.

“When did you get back?” he asked casually.

“Come here and I’ll tell you about it.”

She turned and he followed her. She had been away — he could have wept at the wonder of her return. She had passed through enchanted streets, doing things that were like provocative music. All mysterious happenings, all fresh and quickening hopes, had gone away with her, come back with her now.

She turned in the doorway.

“Have you a car here? If you haven’t, I have.”

“I have a coupé.”

In then, with a rustle of golden cloth. He slammed the door. Into so many cars she had stepped — like this — like that — her back against the leather, so — her elbow resting on the door — waiting. She would have been soiled long since had there been anything to soil her — except herself — but this was her own self outpouring.

With an effort he forced himself to start the car and back into the street. This was nothing, he must remember. She had done this before, and he had put her behind him, as he would have crossed a bad account from his books.

He drove slowly down-town and, affecting abstraction, traversed the deserted streets of the business section, peopled here and there where a movie was giving out its crowd or where consumptive or pugilistic youth lounged in front of pool halls. The clink of glasses and the slap of hands on the bars issued from saloons, cloisters of glazed glass and dirty yellow light.

She was watching him closely and the silence was embarrassing, yet in this crisis he could find no casual word with which to profane the hour. At a convenient turning he began to zigzag back toward the University Club.

“Have you missed me?” she asked suddenly.

“Everybody missed you.”

He wondered if she knew of Irene Scheerer. She had been back only a day — her absence had been almost contemporaneous with his engagement.

“What a remark!” Judy laughed sadly — without sadness. She looked at him searchingly. He became absorbed in the dashboard.

“You’re handsomer than you used to be,” she said thoughtfully. “Dexter, you have the most rememberable eyes.”

He could have laughed at this, but he did not laugh. It was the sort of thing that was said to sophomores. Yet it stabbed at him.

“I’m awfully tired of everything, darling.” She called every one darling, endowing the endearment with careless, individual comraderie. “I wish you’d marry me.”

The directness of this confused him. He should have told her now that he was going to marry another girl, but he could not tell her. He could as easily have sworn that he had never loved her.

“I think we’d get along,” she continued, on the same note, “unless probably you’ve forgotten me and fallen in love with another girl.”

Her confidence was obviously enormous. She had said, in effect, that she found such a thing impossible to believe, that if it were true he had merely committed a childish indiscretion — and probably to show off. She would forgive him, because it was not a matter of any moment but rather something to be brushed aside lightly.

“Of course you could never love anybody but me,” she continued. “I like the way you love me. Oh, Dexter, have you forgotten last year?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten.”

“Neither have I!”

Was she sincerely moved — or was she carried along by the wave of her own acting?

“I wish we could be like that again,” she said, and he forced himself to answer:

“I don’t think we can.”

“I suppose not. . . . I hear you’re giving Irene Scheerer a violent rush.”

There was not the faintest emphasis on the name, yet Dexter was suddenly ashamed.

“Oh, take me home,” cried Judy suddenly; “I don’t want to go back to that idiotic dance — with those children.”

Then, as he turned up the street that led to the residence district, Judy began to cry quietly to herself. He had never seen her cry before.

The dark street lightened, the dwellings of the rich loomed up around them, he stopped his coupé in front of the great white bulk of the Mortimer Joneses house, somnolent, gorgeous, drenched with the splendor of the damp moonlight. Its solidity startled him. The strong walls, the steel of the girders, the breadth and beam and pomp of it were there only to bring out the contrast with the young beauty beside him. It was sturdy to accentuate her slightness — as if to show what a breeze could be generated by a butterfly’s wing.

He sat perfectly quiet, his nerves in wild clamor, afraid that if he moved he would find her irresistibly in his arms. Two tears had rolled down her wet face and trembled on her upper lip.

“I’m more beautiful than anybody else,” she said brokenly, “why can’t I be happy?” Her moist eyes tore at his stability — her mouth turned slowly downward with an exquisite sadness: “I’d like to marry you if you’ll have me, Dexter. I suppose you think I’m not worth having, but I’ll be so beautiful for you, Dexter.”

A million phrases of anger, pride, passion, hatred, tenderness fought on his lips. Then a perfect wave of emotion washed over him, carrying off with it a sediment of wisdom, of convention, of doubt, of honor. This was his girl who was speaking, his own, his beautiful, his pride.

“Won’t you come in?” He heard her draw in her breath sharply.

Waiting.

“All right,” his voice was trembling, “I’ll come in.”

V

It was strange that neither when it was over nor a long time afterward did he regret that night. Looking at it from the perspective of ten years, the fact that Judy’s flare for him endured just one month seemed of little importance. Nor did it matter that by his yielding he subjected himself to a deeper agony in the end and gave serious hurt to Irene Scheerer and to Irene’s parents, who had befriended him. There was nothing sufficiently pictorial about Irene’s grief to stamp itself on his mind.

Dexter was at bottom hard-minded. The attitude of the city on his action was of no importance to him, not because he was going to leave the city, but because any outside attitude on the situation seemed superficial. He was completely indifferent to popular opinion. Nor, when he had seen that it was no use, that he did not possess in himself the power to move fundamentally or to hold Judy Jones, did he bear any malice toward her. He loved her, and he would love her until the day he was too old for loving —

but he could not have her. So he tasted the deep pain that is reserved only for the strong, just as he had tasted for a little while the deep happiness.

Even the ultimate falsity of the grounds upon which Judy terminated the engagement that she did not want to “take him away” from Irene — Judy, who had wanted nothing else — did not revolt him. He was beyond any revulsion or any amusement.

He went East in February with the intention of selling out his laundries and settling in New York — but the war came to America in March and changed his plans. He returned to the West, handed over the management of the business to his partner, and went into the first officers’ training-camp in late April. He was one of those young thousands who greeted the war with a certain amount of relief, welcoming the liberation from webs of tangled emotion.

VI

This story is not his biography, remember, although things creep into it which have nothing to do with those dreams he had when he was young. We are almost done with them and with him now. There is only one more incident to be related here, and it happens seven years farther on.

It took place in New York, where he had done well — so well that there were no barriers too high for him. He was thirty-two years old, and, except for one flying trip immediately after the war, he had not been West in seven years. A man named Devlin from Detroit came into his office to see him in a business way, and then and there this incident occurred, and closed out, so to speak, this particular side of his life.

“So you’re from the Middle West,” said the man Devlin with careless curiosity. “That’s funny — I thought men like you were probably born and raised on Wall Street. You know — wife of one of my best friends in Detroit came from your city. I was an usher at the wedding.”

Dexter waited with no apprehension of what was coming.

“Judy Simms,” said Devlin with no particular interest; “Judy Jones she was once.”

“Yes, I knew her.” A dull impatience spread over him. He had heard, of course, that she was married — perhaps deliberately he had heard no more.

“Awfully nice girl,” brooded Devlin meaninglessly, “I’m sort of sorry for her.”

“Why?” Something in Dexter was alert, receptive, at once.

“Oh, Lud Simms has gone to pieces in a way. I don’t mean he ill-uses her, but he drinks and runs around — ”

“Doesn’t she run around?”

“No. Stays at home with her kids.”

“Oh.”

“She’s a little too old for him,” said Devlin.

“Too old!” cried Dexter. “Why, man, she’s only twenty-seven.”

He was possessed with a wild notion of rushing out into the streets and taking a train to Detroit. He rose to his feet spasmodically.

“I guess you’re busy,” Devlin apologized quickly. “I didn’t realize — ”

“No, I’m not busy,” said Dexter, steadying his voice. “I’m not busy at all. Not busy at all. Did you say she was — twenty-seven? No, I said she was twenty-seven.”

“Yes, you did,” agreed Devlin dryly.

“Go on, then. Go on.”

“What do you mean?”

“About Judy Jones.”

Devlin looked at him helplessly.

“Well, that’s — I told you all there is to it. He treats her like the devil. Oh, they’re not going to get divorced or anything. When he’s particularly outrageous she forgives him. In fact, I’m inclined to think she loves him. She was a pretty girl when she first came to Detroit.”

A pretty girl! The phrase struck Dexter as ludicrous.

“Isn’t she — a pretty girl, any more?”

“Oh, she’s all right.”

“Look here,” said Dexter, sitting down suddenly, “I don’t understand. You say she was a ‘pretty girl’ and now you say she’s ‘all right.’ I don’t understand what you mean — Judy Jones wasn’t a pretty girl, at all. She was a great beauty. Why, I knew her, I knew her. She was — ”

Devlin laughed pleasantly.

“I’m not trying to start a row,” he said. “I think Judy’s a nice girl and I like her. I can’t understand how a man like Lud Simms could fall madly in love with her, but he did.” Then he added: “Most of the women like her.”

Dexter looked closely at Devlin, thinking wildly that there must be a reason for this, some insensitivity in the man or some private malice.

“Lots of women fade just like *that*,” Devlin snapped his fingers. “You must have seen it happen. Perhaps I’ve forgotten how pretty she was at her wedding. I’ve seen her so much since then, you see. She has nice eyes.”

A sort of dulness settled down upon Dexter. For the first time in his life he felt like getting very drunk. He knew that he was laughing loudly at something Devlin had said, but he did not know what it was or why it was funny. When, in a few minutes, Devlin went he lay down on his lounge and looked out the window at the New York sky-line into which the sun was sinking in dull lovely shades of pink and gold.

He had thought that having nothing else to lose he was invulnerable at last — but he knew that he had just lost something more, as surely as if he had married Judy Jones and seen her fade away before his eyes.

The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him. In a sort of panic he pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes and tried to bring up a picture of the waters lapping on Sherry Island and the moonlit veranda, and gingham on the golf-links and the dry sun and the gold color of her neck's soft down. And her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning. Why, these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer.

For the first time in years the tears were streaming down his face. But they were for himself now. He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne was left behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.

“Long ago,” he said, “long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more.”

DICE, BRASSKNUCKLES & GUITAR

International (May 1923)

Parts of New Jersey, as you know, are under water, and other parts are under continual surveillance by the authorities. But here and there lie patches of garden country dotted with old-fashioned frame mansions, which have wide shady porches and a red swing on the lawn. And perhaps, on the widest and shadiest of the porches there is even a hammock left over from the hammock days, stirring gently in a mid-Victorian wind.

When tourists come to such last-century landmarks they stop their cars and gaze for a while and then mutter: "Well, thank God this age is joined on to something" or else they say: "Well, of course, that house is mostly halls and has a thousand rats and one bathroom, but there's an atmosphere about it —"

The tourist doesn't stay long. He drives on to his Elizabethan villa of pressed cardboard or his early Norman meat-market or his medieval Italian pigeon-coop — because this is the twentieth century and Victorian houses are as unfashionable as the works of Mrs. Humphry Ward.

He can't see the hammock from the road — but sometimes there's a girl in the hammock. There was this afternoon. She was asleep in it and apparently unaware of the esthetic horrors which surrounded her, the stone statue of Diana, for instance, which grinned idiotically under the sunlight on the lawn.

There was something enormously yellow about the whole scene — there was this sunlight, for instance, that was yellow, and the hammock was of the particularly hideous yellow peculiar to hammocks, and the girl's yellow hair was spread out upon the hammock in a sort of invidious comparison.

She slept with her lips closed and her hands clasped behind her head, as it is proper for young girls to sleep. Her breast rose and fell slightly with no more emphasis than the sway of the hammock's fringe.

Her name, Amanthis, was as old-fashioned as the house she lived in. I regret to say that her mid-Victorian connections ceased abruptly at this point.

Now if this were a moving picture (as, of course, I hope it will some day be) I would take as many thousand feet of her as I was allowed — then I would move the camera up close and show the yellow down on the back of her neck where her hair stopped and the warm color of her cheeks and arms, because I like to think of her sleeping there, as you yourself might have slept, back in your young days. Then I would hire a man named Israel Glucose to write some idiotic line of transition, and switch thereby to another scene that was taking place at no particular spot far down the road.

In a moving automobile sat a southern gentleman accompanied by his body-servant. He was on his way, after a fashion, to New York but he was somewhat hampered by the fact that the upper and lower portions of his automobile were no longer in exact juxtaposition. In fact from time to time the two riders would dismount, shove the body on to the chassis, corner to corner, and then continue onward, vibrating slightly in involuntary unison with the motor.

Except that it had no door in back the car might have been built early in the mechanical age. It was covered with the mud of eight states and adorned in front by an enormous but defunct motometer and behind by a mangy pennant bearing the legend “Tarleton, Ga.” In the dim past someone had begun to paint the hood yellow but unfortunately had been called away when but half through the task.

As the gentleman and his body-servant were passing the house where Amanthis lay beautifully asleep in the hammock, something happened — the body fell off the car. My only apology for stating this so suddenly is that it happened very suddenly indeed. When the noise had died down and the dust had drifted away master and man arose and inspected the two halves.

“Look-a-there,” said the gentleman in disgust, “the doggone thing got all separated that time.”

“She bust in two,” agreed the body-servant.

“Hugo,” said the gentleman, after some consideration, “we got to get a hammer an’ nails an’ *tack* it on.”

They glanced up at the Victorian house. On all sides faintly irregular fields stretched away to a faintly irregular unpopulated horizon. There was no choice, so the black Hugo opened the gate and followed his master up a gravel walk, casting only the blasé glances of a confirmed traveler at the red swing and the stone statue of Diana which turned on them a storm-crazed stare.

At the exact moment when they reached the porch Amanthis awoke, sat up suddenly and looked them over.

The gentleman was young, perhaps twenty-four, and his name was Jim Powell. He was dressed in a tight and dusty readymade suit which was evidently expected to take flight at a moment’s notice, for it was secured to his body by a line of six preposterous buttons.

There were supernumerary buttons upon the coat-sleeves also and Amanthis could not resist a glance to determine whether or not more buttons ran up the side of his trouser leg. But the trouser bottoms were distinguished only by their shape, which was that of a bell. His vest was cut low, barely restraining an amazing necktie from fluttering in the wind.

He bowed formally, dusting his knees with a thatched straw hat. Simultaneously he smiled, half shutting his faded blue eyes and displaying white and beautifully symmetrical teeth.

“Good evenin’,” he said in abandoned Georgian. “My automobile has met with an accident out yonder by your gate. I wondered if it wouldn’t be too much to ask you if I could have the use of a hammer and some tacks — nails, for a little while.”

Amanthis laughed. For a moment she laughed uncontrollably. Mr. Jim Powell laughed, politely and appreciatively, with her. His body-servant, deep in the throes of colored adolescence, alone preserved a dignified gravity.

“I better introduce who I am, maybe,” said the visitor. “My name’s Powell. I’m a resident of Tarleton, Georgia. This here nigger’s my boy Hugo.”

“Your son!” The girl stared from one to the other in wild fascination.

“No, he’s my body-servant, I guess you’d call it. We call a nigger a boy down yonder.”

At this reference to the finer customs of his native soil the boy Hugo put his hands behind his back and looked darkly and superciliously down the lawn.

“Yas’m,” he muttered, “I’m a body-servant.”

“Where you going in your automobile,” demanded Amanthis.

“Goin’ north for the summer.”

“Where to?”

The tourist waved his hand with a careless gesture as if to indicate the Adirondacks, the Thousand Islands, Newport — but he said:

“We’re tryin’ New York.”

“Have you ever been there before?”

“Never have. But I been to Atlanta lots of times. An’ we passed through all kinds of cities this trip. Man!”

He whistled to express the enormous spectacularity of his recent travels.

“Listen,” said Amanthis intently, “you better have something to eat. Tell your — your body-servant to go ‘round in back and ask the cook to send us out some sandwiches and lemonade. Or maybe you don’t drink lemonade — very few people do any more.”

Mr. Powell by a circular motion of his finger sped Hugo on the designated mission. Then he seated himself gingerly in a rocking-chair and began revolving his thatched straw hat rapidly in his hands.

“You cer’nly are mighty kind,” he told her. “An’ if I wanted anything stronger than lemonade I got a bottle of good old corn out in the car. I brought it along because I thought maybe I wouldn’t be able to drink the whisky they got up here.”

“Listen,” she said, “my name’s Powell too. Amanthis Powell.”

“Say, is that right?” He laughed ecstatically. “Maybe we’re kin to each other. I come from mighty good people,” he went on. “Pore though. I got some money because my aunt she was using it to keep her in a sanitarium and she died.” He paused, presumably out of respect to his late aunt. Then he concluded with brisk nonchalance, “I ain’t touched the principal but I got a lot of the income all at once so I thought I’d come north for the summer.”

At this point Hugo reappeared on the veranda steps and became audible.

“White lady back there she asked me don’t I want eat some too. What I tell her?”

“You tell her yes mamm if she be so kind,” directed his master. And as Hugo retired he confided to Amanthis: “That boy’s got no sense at all. He don’t want to do nothing without I tell him he can. I brought him up,” he added, not without pride.

When the sandwiches arrived Mr. Powell stood up. He was unaccustomed to white servants and obviously expected an introduction.

“Are you a married lady?” he inquired of Amanthis, when the servant was gone.

“No,” she answered, and added from the security of eighteen, “I’m an old maid.”

Again he laughed politely.

“You mean you’re a society girl.”

She shook her head. Mr. Powell noted with embarrassed enthusiasm the particular yellowness of her yellow hair.

“Does this old place look like it?” she said cheerfully. “No, you perceive in me a daughter of the countryside. Color — one hundred percent spontaneous — in the daytime anyhow. Suitors — promising young barbers from the neighboring village with somebody’s late hair still clinging to their coat-sleeves.”

“Your daddy oughtn’t to let you go with a country barber,” said the tourist disapprovingly. He considered — “You ought to be a New York society girl.”

“No.” Amanthis shook her head sadly. “I’m too good-looking. To be a New York society girl you have to have a long nose and projecting teeth and dress like the actresses did three years ago.”

Jim began to tap his foot rhythmically on the porch and in a moment Amanthis discovered that she was unconsciously doing the same thing.

“Stop!” she commanded, “Don’t make me do that.”

He looked down at his foot.

“Excuse me,” he said humbly. “I don’t know — it’s just something I do.”

This intense discussion was now interrupted by Hugo who appeared on the steps bearing a hammer and a handful of nails.

Mr. Powell arose unwillingly and looked at his watch.

“We got to go, daggone it,” he said, frowning heavily. “See here. Wouldn’t you *like* to be a New York society girl and go to those dances an’ all, like you read about, where they throw gold pieces away?”

She looked at him with a curious expression.

“Don’t your folks know some society people?” he went on.

“All I’ve got’s my daddy — and, you see, he’s a judge.”

“That’s too bad,” he agreed.

She got herself by some means from the hammock and they went down toward the road, side by side.

“Well, I’ll keep my eyes open for you and let you know,” he persisted. “A pretty girl like you ought to go around in society. We may be kin to each other, you see, and us Powells ought to stick together.”

“What are you going to do in New York?”

They were now almost at the gate and the tourist pointed to the two depressing sectors of his automobile.

“I’m goin’ to drive a taxi. This one right here. Only it’s got so it busts in two all the time.”

“You’re going to drive *that* in New York?”

Jim looked at her uncertainly. Such a pretty girl should certainly control the habit of shaking all over upon no provocation at all.

“Yes mamm,” he said with dignity.

Amanthis watched while they placed the upper half of the car upon the lower half and nailed it severely into place. Then Mr. Powell took the wheel and his body-servant climbed in beside him.

“I’m cer’nly very much obliged to you indeed for your hospitality. Convey my respects to your father.”

“I will,” she assured him. “Come back and see me, if you don’t mind barbers in the room.”

He dismissed this unpleasant thought with a gesture.

“Your company would always be charming.” He put the car into gear as though to drown out the temerity of his parting speech. “You’re the prettiest girl I’ve seen up north — by far.”

Then with a groan and a rattle Mr. Powell of southern Georgia with his own car and his own body-servant and his own ambitions and his own private cloud of dust continued on north for the summer.

She thought she would never see him again. She lay in her hammock, slim and beautiful, opened her left eye slightly to see June come in and then closed it and retired contentedly back into her dreams.

But one day when the midsummer vines had climbed the precarious sides of the red swing in the lawn, Mr. Jim Powell of Tarleton, Georgia, came vibrating back into her life. They sat on the wide porch as before.

“I’ve got a great scheme,” he told her.

“Did you drive your taxi like you said?”

“Yes mamm, but the business was right bad. I waited around in front of all those hotels and theaters an’ nobody ever got in.”

”Nobody?”

“Well, one night there was some drunk fellas they got in, only just as I was gettin’ started my automobile came apart. And another night it was rainin’ and there wasn’t no other taxis and a lady got in because she said she had to go a long ways. But before we got there she made me stop and she got out. She seemed kinda mad and she went walkin’ off in the rain. Mighty proud lot of people they got up in New York.”

“And so you’re going home?” asked Amanthis sympathetically.

“No mamm. I got an idea.” His blue eyes grew narrow. “Has that barber been around here — with hair on his sleeves?”

“No. He’s — he’s gone away.”

“Well, then, first thing is I want to leave this car of mine here with you, if that’s all right. It ain’t the right color for a taxi. To pay for its keep I’d like to have you drive it just as much as you want. ‘Long as you got a hammer an’ nails with you there ain’t much bad that can happen — ”

“I’ll take care of it,” interrupted Amanthis, “but where are you going?”

“Southampton. It’s about the most aristocratic watering trough — watering-place there is around here, so that’s where I’m going.”

She sat up in amazement.

“What are you going to do there?”

“Listen.” He leaned toward her confidentially. “Were you serious about wanting to be a New York society girl?”

“Deadly serious.”

“That’s all I wanted to know,” he said inscrutably. “You just wait here on this porch a couple of weeks and — and sleep. And if any barbers come to see you with hair on their sleeves you tell ’em you’re too sleepy to see ’em.”

“What then?”

“Then you’ll hear from me. Just tell your old daddy he can do all the judging he wants but you’re goin’ to do some *dancin’*. Mamm,” he continued decisively, “you talk about society! Before one month I’m goin’ to have you in more society than you ever saw.”

Further than this he would say nothing. His manner conveyed that she was going to be suspended over a perfect pool of gaiety and violently immersed, to an accompaniment of: “Is it gay enough for you, mamm? Shall I let in a little more excitement, mamm?”

“Well,” answered Amanthis, lazily considering, “there are few things for which I’d forego the luxury of sleeping through July and August — but if you’ll write me a letter I’ll — I’ll run up to Southampton.”

Jim snapped his fingers ecstatically.

“More society,” he assured her with all the confidence at his command, “than anybody ever saw.”

Three days later a young man wearing a straw hat that might have been cut from the thatched roof of an English cottage rang the doorbell of the enormous and astounding Madison Harlan house at Southampton. He asked the butler if there were any people in the house between the ages of sixteen and twenty. He was informed that Miss Genevieve Harlan and Mr. Ronald Harlan answered that description and thereupon he handed in a most peculiar card and requested in fetching Georgian that it be brought to their attention.

As a result he was closeted for almost an hour with Mr. Ronald Harlan (who was a student at the Hillkiss School) and Miss Genevieve Harlan (who was not uncelebrated at Southampton dances). When he left he bore a short note in Miss Harlan’s handwriting which he presented together with his peculiar card at the next large estate. It happened to be that of the Clifton Garneaus. Here, as if by magic, the same audience was granted him.

He went on — it was a hot day, and men who could not afford to do so were carrying their coats on the public highway, but Jim, a native of

southernmost Georgia, was as fresh and cool at the last house as at the first. He visited ten houses that day. Anyone following him in his course might have taken him to be some curiously gifted book-agent with a much sought-after volume as his stock in trade.

There was something in his unexpected demand for the adolescent members of the family which made hardened butlers lose their critical acumen. As he left each house a close observer might have seen that fascinated eyes followed him to the door and excited voices whispered something which hinted at a future meeting.

The second day he visited twelve houses. Southampton has grown enormously — he might have kept on his round for a week and never seen the same butler twice — but it was only the palatial, the amazing houses which intrigued him.

On the third day he did a thing that many people have been told to do and few have done — he hired a hall. Perhaps the sixteen-to-twenty-year-old people in the enormous houses had told him to. The hall he hired had once been “Mr. Snorkey’s Private Gymnasium for Gentlemen.” It was situated over a garage on the south edge of Southampton and in the days of its prosperity had been, I regret to say, a place where gentlemen could, under Mr. Snorkey’s direction, work off the effects of the night before. It was now abandoned — Mr. Snorkey had given up and gone away and died.

We will now skip three weeks during which time we may assume that the project which had to do with hiring a hall and visiting the two dozen largest houses in Southampton got under way.

The day to which we will skip was the July day on which Mr. James Powell sent a wire to Miss Amanthis Powell saying that if she still aspired to the gaiety of the highest society she should set out for Southampton by the earliest possible train. He himself would meet her at the station.

Jim was no longer a man of leisure, so when she failed to arrive at the time her wire had promised he grew restless. He supposed she was coming on a later train, turned to go back to his — his project — and met her entering the station from the street side.

“Why, how did you — ”

“Well,” said Amanthis, “I arrived this morning instead, and I didn’t want to bother you so I found a respectable, not to say dull, boarding-house on the Ocean Road.”

She was quite different from the indolent Amanthis of the porch hammock, he thought. She wore a suit of robins’ egg blue and a rakish young hat with a curling feather — she was attired not unlike those young ladies between sixteen and twenty who of late were absorbing his attention. Yes, she would do very well.

He bowed her profoundly into a taxicab and got in beside her.

“Isn’t it about time you told me your scheme?” she suggested.

“Well, it’s about these society girls up here.” He waved his hand airily. “I know ’em all.”

“Where are they?”

“Right now they’re with Hugo. You remember — that’s my body-servant.”

“With Hugo!” Her eyes widened. “Why? What’s it all about?”

“Well, I got — I got sort of a school, I guess you’d call it.”

“A school?”

“It’s a sort of Academy. And I’m the head of it. I invented it.”

He flipped a card from his case as though he were shaking down a thermometer.

“Look.”

She took the card. In large lettering it bore the legend

JAMES POWELL; J.M.

"Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar"

She stared in amazement.

“Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar?” she repeated in awe.

“Yes mamm.”

“What does it mean? What — do you *sell* ’em?”

“No mamm, I teach ’em. It’s a profession.”

“Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar? What’s the J. M.?”

“That stands for Jazz Master.”

“But what is it? What’s it about?”

“Well, you see, it’s like this. One night when I was in New York I got talkin’ to a young fella who was drunk. He was one of my fares. And he’d taken some society girl somewhere and lost her.”

”Lost her?”

“Yes mamm. He forgot her, I guess. And he was right worried. Well, I got to thinkin’ that these girls nowadays — these society girls — they lead a sort of dangerous life and my course of study offers a means of protection against these dangers.”

“You teach ’em to use brassknuckles?”

“Yes mamm, if necessary. Look here, you take a girl and she goes into some café where she’s got no business to go. Well then, her escort he gets a little too much to drink an’ he goes to sleep an’ then some other fella comes up and says ‘Hello, sweet mamma’ or whatever one of those mashers says up here. What does she do? She can’t scream, on account of no real lady’ll scream nowadays — no — She just reaches down in her pocket and slips her fingers into a pair of Powell’s defensive brassknuckles, débutante’s size, executes what I call the Society Hook, and *Wham!* that big fella’s on his way to the cellar.”

“Well — what — what’s the guitar for?” whispered the awed Amanthis. “Do they have to knock somebody over with the guitar?”

“No, *mamm!*” exclaimed Jim in horror. “No mamm. In my course no lady would be taught to raise a guitar against anybody. I teach ’em to play. Shucks! you ought to hear ’em. Why, when I’ve given ’em two lessons you’d think some of ’em was colored.”

“And the dice?”

“Dice? I’m related to a dice. My grandfather was a dice. I teach ’em how to make those dice perform. I protect pocketbook as well as person.”

“Did you — Have you got any pupils?”

“Mamm I got all the really nice, rich people in the place. What I told you ain’t all. I teach lots of things. I teach ’em the jellyroll — and the Mississippi Sunrise. Why, there was one girl she came to me and said she wanted to learn to snap her fingers. I mean *really* snap ’em — like they do. She said she never could snap her fingers since she was little. I gave her two lessons and now *Wham!* Her daddy says he’s goin’ to leave home.”

“When do you have it?” demanded the weak and shaken Amanthis.

“Three times a week. We’re goin’ there right now.”

“And where do I fit in?”

“Well, you’ll just be one of the pupils. I got it fixed up that you come from very high-tone people down in New Jersey. I didn’t tell ’em your daddy was a judge — I told ’em he was the man that had the patent on lump sugar.”

She gasped.

“So all you got to do,” he went on, “is to pretend you never saw no barber.”

They were now at the south end of the village and Amanthis saw a row of cars parked in front of a two-story building. The cars were all low, long, rakish and of a brilliant hue. They were the sort of car that is manufactured to solve the millionaire’s problem on his son’s eighteenth birthday.

Then Amanthis was ascending a narrow stairs to the second story. Here, painted on a door from which came the sounds of music and laughter were the words:

JAMES POWELL; J. M.

"Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar"

Mon.--Wed.--Fri.

Hours 3-5 P.M.

"Now if you'll just step this way — " said the Principal, pushing open the door.

Amanthis found herself in a long, bright room, populated with girls and men of about her own age. The scene presented itself to her at first as a sort of animated afternoon tea but after a moment she began to see, here and there, a motive and a pattern to the proceedings.

The students were scattered into groups, sitting, kneeling, standing, but all rapaciously intent on the subjects which engrossed them. From six young ladies gathered in a ring around some indistinguishable objects came a medley of cries and exclamations — plaintive, pleading, supplicating, exhorting, imploring and lamenting — their voices serving as tenor to an undertone of mysterious clatters.

Next to this group, four young men were surrounding an adolescent black, who proved to be none other than Mr. Powell's late body-servant. The young men were roaring at Hugo apparently unrelated phrases, expressing a wide gamut of emotion. Now their voices rose to a sort of clamor, now they spoke softly and gently, with mellow implication. Every little while Hugo would answer them with words of approbation, correction or disapproval.

"What are they doing?" whispered Amanthis to Jim.

“That there’s a course in southern accent. Lot of young men up here want to learn southern accent — so we teach it — Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Eastern Shore, Ole Virginian. Some of ’em even want straight nigger — for song purposes.”

They walked around among the groups. Some girls with metal knuckles were furiously insulting two punching bags on each of which was painted the leering, winking face of a “masher.” A mixed group, led by a banjo tomtom, were rolling harmonic syllables from their guitars. There were couples dancing flat-footed in the corner to a phonograph record made by Rastus Muldoon’s Savannah Band; there were couples stalking a slow Chicago with a Memphis Sideswoop solemnly around the room.

“Are there any rules?” asked Amanthis.

Jim considered.

“Well,” he answered finally, “they can’t smoke unless they’re over sixteen, and the boys have got to shoot square dice and I don’t let ’em bring liquor into the Academy.”

“I see.”

“And now, Miss Powell, if you’re ready I’ll ask you to take off your hat and go over and join Miss Genevieve Harlan at that punching bag in the corner.” He raised his voice. “Hugo,” he called, “there’s a new student here. Equip her with a pair of Powell’s Defensive Brassknuckles — débutante size.”

I regret to say that I never saw Jim Powell’s famous Jazz School in action nor followed his personally conducted tours into the mysteries of Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar. So I can give you only such details as were later reported to me by one of his admiring pupils. During all the discussion of it afterwards no one ever denied that it was an enormous success, and no pupil ever regretted having received its degree — Bachelor of Jazz.

The parents innocently assumed that it was a sort of musical and dancing academy, but its real curriculum was transmitted from Santa Barbara to Biddeford Pool by that underground associated press which links up the so-called younger generation. Invitations to visit Southampton were at a

premium — and Southampton generally is almost as dull for young people as Newport.

The Academy branched out with a small but well-groomed Jazz Orchestra.

“If I could keep it dark,” Jim confided to Amanthis, “I’d have up Rastus Muldoon’s Band from Savannah. That’s the band I’ve always wanted to lead.”

He was making money. His charges were not exorbitant — as a rule his pupils were not particularly flush — but he moved from his boarding-house to the Casino Hotel where he took a suite and had Hugo serve him his breakfast in bed.

The establishing of Amanthis as a member of Southampton’s younger set was easier than he had expected. Within a week she was known to everyone in the school by her first name. Miss Genevieve Harlan took such a fancy to her that she was invited to a sub-deb dance at the Harlan house — and evidently acquitted herself with tact, for thereafter she was invited to almost every such entertainment in Southampton.

Jim saw less of her than he would have liked. Not that her manner toward him changed — she walked with him often in the mornings, she was always willing to listen to his plans — but after she was taken up by the fashionable her evenings seemed to be monopolized. Several times Jim arrived at her boarding-house to find her out of breath, as if she had just come in at a run, presumably from some festivity in which he had no share.

So as the summer waned he found that one thing was lacking to complete the triumph of his enterprise. Despite the hospitality shown to Amanthis, the doors of Southampton were closed to him. Polite to, or rather, fascinated by him as his pupils were from three to five, after that hour they moved in another world.

His was the position of a golf professional who, though he may fraternize, and even command, on the links, loses his privileges with the sun-down. He may look in the club window but he cannot dance. And, likewise, it was not given to Jim to see his teachings put into effect. He could hear the gossip of the morning after — that was all.

But while the golf professional, being English, holds himself proudly below his patrons, Jim Powell, who “came from a right good family down there — pore though,” lay awake many nights in his hotel bed and heard the music drifting into his window from the Katzbys’ house or the Beach Club, and turned over restlessly and wondered what was the matter. In the early days of his success he had bought himself a dress-suit, thinking that he would soon have a chance to wear it — but it still lay untouched in the box in which it had come from the tailor’s.

Perhaps, he thought, there was some real gap which separated him from the rest. It worried him. One boy in particular, Martin Van Vleck, son of Van Vleck the ash-can King, made him conscious of the gap. Van Vleck was twenty-one, a tutoring-school product who still hoped to enter Yale. Several times Jim had heard him make remarks not intended for Jim’s ear — once in regard to the suit with multiple buttons, again in reference to Jim’s long, pointed shoes. Jim had passed these over.

He knew that Van Vleck was attending the school chiefly to monopolize the time of little Martha Katzby, who was just sixteen and too young to have attention of a boy of twenty-one — especially the attention of Van Vleck, who was so spiritually exhausted by his educational failures that he drew on the rather exhaustible innocence of sixteen.

It was late in September, two days before the Harlan dance which was to be the last and biggest of the season for this younger crowd. Jim, as usual, was not invited. He had hoped that he would be. The two young Harlans, Ronald and Genevieve, had been his first patrons when he arrived at Southampton — and it was Genevieve who had taken such a fancy to Amanthis. To have been at their dance — the most magnificent dance of all — would have crowned and justified the success of the waning summer.

His class, gathering for the afternoon, was loudly anticipating the next day’s revel with no more thought of him than if he had been the family butler. Hugo, standing beside Jim, chuckled suddenly and remarked:

“Look yonder that man Van Vleck. He paralyzed. He been havin’ powerful lotta corn this evenin’.”

Jim turned and stared at Van Vleck, who had linked arms with little Martha Katzby and was saying something to her in a low voice. Jim saw her try to draw away.

He put his whistle to his mouth and blew it.

“All right,” he cried, “Le’s go! Group one tossin’ the drumstick, high an’ zig-zag, group two, test your mouth organs for the Riverfront Shuffle. Promise ’em sugar! Flatfoots this way! Orchestra — let’s have the Florida Drag-Out played as a dirge.”

There was an unaccustomed sharpness in his voice and the exercises began with a mutter of facetious protest.

With his smoldering grievance directing itself toward Van Vleck, Jim was walking here and there among the groups when Hugo tapped him suddenly on the arm. He looked around. Two participants had withdrawn from the mouth organ institute — one of them was Van Vleck and he was giving a drink out of his flask to fifteen-year-old Ronald Harlan.

Jim strode across the room. Van Vleck turned defiantly as he came up.

“All right,” said Jim, trembling with anger, “you know the rules. You get out!”

The music died slowly away and there was a sudden drifting over in the direction of the trouble. Somebody snickered. An atmosphere of anticipation formed instantly. Despite the fact that they all liked Jim their sympathies were divided — Van Vleck was one of them.

“Get out!” repeated Jim, more quietly.

“Are you talking to me?” inquired Van Vleck coldly.

“Yes.”

“Then you better say ‘sir.’”

“I wouldn’t say ‘sir’ to anybody that’d give a little boy whisky! You get out!”

“Look here!” said Van Vleck furiously. “You’ve butted in once too much. I’ve known Ronald since he was two years old. Ask *him* if he wants you to tell him what he can do!”

Ronald Harlan, his dignity offended, grew several years older and looked haughtily at Jim.

“Mind your own business!” he said defiantly, albeit a little guiltily.

“Hear that?” demanded Van Vleck. “My God, can’t you see you’re just a servant? Ronald here’d no more think of asking you to his party than he would his bootlegger.”

“You better get out!” cried Jim incoherently.

Van Vleck did not move. Reaching out suddenly, Jim caught his wrist and jerking it behind his back forced his arm upward until Van Vleck bent forward in agony. Jim leaned and picked the flask from the floor with his free hand. Then he signed Hugo to open the hall-door, uttered an abrupt “You step!” and marched his helpless captive out into the hall where he literally *threw* him downstairs, head over heels bumping from wall to banister, and hurled his flask after him.

Then he reentered his academy, closed the door behind him and stood with his back against it.

“It — it happens to be a rule that nobody drinks while in this Academy.” He paused, looking from face to face, finding there sympathy, awe, disapproval, conflicting emotions. They stirred uneasily. He caught Amanthis’s eye, fancied he saw a faint nod of encouragement and, with almost an effort, went on:

“I just *had* to throw that fella out an’ you-all know it.” Then he concluded with a transparent affectation of dismissing an unimportant matter — “All right, let’s go! Orchestra —!”

But no one felt exactly like going on. The spontaneity of the proceedings had been violently disturbed. Someone made a run or two on the sliding guitar and several of the girls began whamming at the leer on the punching

bags, but Ronald Harlan, followed by two other boys, got their hats and went silently out the door.

Jim and Hugo moved among the groups as usual until a certain measure of routine activity was restored but the enthusiasm was unrecapturable and Jim, shaken and discouraged, considered discontinuing school for the day. But he dared not. If they went home in this mood they might not come back. The whole thing depended on a mood. He must recreate it, he thought frantically — now, at once!

But try as he might, there was little response. He himself was not happy — he could communicate no gaiety to them. They watched his efforts listlessly and, he thought, a little contemptuously.

Then the tension snapped when the door burst suddenly open, precipitating a brace of middle-aged and excited women into the room. No person over twenty-one had ever entered the Academy before — but Van Vleck had gone direct to headquarters. The women were Mrs. Clifton Garneau and Mrs. Poindexter Katzby, two of the most fashionable and, at present, two of the most flurried women in Southampton. They were in search of their daughters as, in these days, so many women continually are.

The business was over in about three minutes.

“And as for you!” cried Mrs. Clifton Garneau in an awful voice, “your idea is to run a bar and — and *opium* den for children! You ghastly, horrible, unspeakable man! I can smell morphin fumes! Don’t tell me I can’t smell morphin fumes. I can smell morphin fumes!”

“And,” bellowed Mrs. Poindexter Katzby, “you have colored men around! You have colored girls hidden! I’m going to the police!”

Not content with herding their own daughters from the room, they insisted on the exodus of their friends’ daughters. Jim was not a little touched when several of them — including even little Martha Katzby, before she was snatched fiercely away by her mother — came up and shook hands with him. But they were all going, haughtily, regretfully or with shame-faced mutters of apology.

“Good-by,” he told them wistfully. “In the morning I’ll send you the money that’s due you.”

And, after all, they were not sorry to go. Outside, the sound of their starting motors, the triumphant put-put of their cut-outs cutting the warm September air, was a jubilant sound — a sound of youth and hopes high as the sun. Down to the ocean, to roll in the waves and forget — forget him and their discomfort at his humiliation.

They were gone — he was alone with Hugo in the room. He sat down suddenly with his face in his hands.

“Hugo,” he said huskily. “They don’t want us up here.”

“Don’t you care,” said a voice.

He looked up to see Amanthis standing beside him.

“You better go with them,” he told her. “You better not be seen here with me.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re in society now and I’m no better to those people than a servant. You’re in society — I fixed that up. You better go or they won’t invite you to any of their dances.”

“They won’t anyhow, Jim,” she said gently. “They didn’t invite me to the one tomorrow night.”

He looked up indignantly.

“They *didn’t*?”

She shook her head.

“I’ll *make* ’em!” he said wildly. “I’ll tell ’em they got to. I’ll — I’ll — ”

She came close to him with shining eyes.

“Don’t you mind, Jim,” she soothed him. “Don’t you mind. They don’t matter. We’ll have a party of our own tomorrow — just you and I.”

“I come from right good folks,” he said, defiantly. “Pore though.”

She laid her hand softly on his shoulder.

“I understand. You’re better than all of them put together, Jim.”

He got up and went to the window and stared out mournfully into the late afternoon.

“I reckon I should have let you sleep in that hammock.”

She laughed.

“I’m awfully glad you didn’t.”

He turned and faced the room, and his face was dark.

“Sweep up and lock up, Hugo,” he said, his voice trembling. “The summer’s over and we’re going down home.”

Autumn had come early. Jim Powell woke next morning to find his room cool, and the phenomenon of frosted breath in September absorbed him for a moment to the exclusion of the day before. Then the lines of his face drooped with unhappiness as he remembered the humiliation which had washed the cheery glitter from the summer. There was nothing left for him except to go back where he was known, where under no provocation were such things said to white people as had been said to him here.

After breakfast a measure of his customary light-heartedness returned. He was a child of the South — brooding was alien to his nature. He could conjure up an injury only a certain number of times before it faded into the great vacancy of the past.

But when, from force of habit, he strolled over to his defunct establishment, already as obsolete as Snorkey’s late sanitarium, melancholy again dwelt in his heart. Hugo was there, a specter of despair, deep in the lugubrious blues amidst his master’s broken hopes.

Usually a few words from Jim were enough to raise him to an inarticulate ecstasy, but this morning there were no words to utter. For two months Hugo had lived on a pinnacle of which he had never dreamed. He had

enjoyed his work simply and passionately, arriving before school hours and lingering long after Mr. Powell's pupils had gone.

The day dragged toward a not-too-promising night. Amanthis did not appear and Jim wondered forlornly if she had not changed her mind about dining with him that night. Perhaps it would be better if she were not seen with them. But then, he reflected dismally, no one would see them anyhow — everybody was going to the big dance at the Harlans' house.

When twilight threw unbearable shadows into the school hall he locked it up for the last time, took down the sign "James Powell; J. M., Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar," and went back to his hotel. Looking over his scrawled accounts he saw that there was another month's rent to pay on his school and some bills for windows broken and new equipment that had hardly been used. Jim had lived in state, and he realized that financially he would have nothing to show for the summer after all.

When he had finished he took his new dress-suit out of its box and inspected it, running his hand over the satin of the lapels and lining. This, at least, he owned and perhaps in Tarleton somebody would ask him to a party where he could wear it.

"Shucks!" he said scoffingly. "It was just a no account old academy, anyhow. Some of those boys round the garage down home could of beat it all hollow."

Whistling "Jeanne of Jelly-bean Town" to a not-dispirited rhythm Jim encased himself in his first dress-suit and walked downtown.

"Orchids," he said to the clerk. He surveyed his purchase with some pride. He knew that no girl at the Harlan dance would wear anything lovelier than these exotic blossoms that leaned languorously backward against green ferns.

In a taxi-cab, carefully selected to look like a private car, he drove to Amanthis's boarding-house. She came down wearing a rose-colored evening dress into which the orchids melted like colors into a sunset.

“I reckon we’ll go to the Casino Hotel,” he suggested, “unless you got some other place — ”

At their table, looking out over the dark ocean, his mood became a contended sadness. The windows were shut against the cool but the orchestra played “Kalula” and “South Sea Moon” and for awhile, with her young loveliness opposite him, he felt himself to be a romantic participant in the life around him. They did not dance, and he was glad — it would have reminded him of that other brighter and more radiant dance to which they could not go.

After dinner they took a taxi and followed the sandy roads for an hour, glimpsing the now starry ocean through the casual trees.

“I want to thank you,” she said, “for all you’ve done for me, Jim.”

“That’s all right — we Powells ought to stick together.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to Tarleton tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “Are you going to drive down?”

“I got to. I got to get the car south because I couldn’t get what she was worth by sellin’ it. You don’t suppose anybody’s stole my car out of your barn?” he asked in sudden alarm.

She repressed a smile.

“No.”

“I’m sorry about this — about you,” he went on huskily, “and — and I would like to have gone to just one of their dances. You shouldn’t of stayed with me yesterday. Maybe it kept ’em from asking you.”

“Jim,” she suggested eagerly, “let’s go and stand outside and listen to their old music. We don’t care.”

“They’ll be coming out,” he objected.

“No, it’s too cold. Besides there’s nothing they could do to you any more than they *have* done.”

She gave the chauffeur a direction and a few minutes later they stopped in front of the heavy Georgian beauty of the Madison Harlan house whence the windows cast their gaiety in bright patches on the lawn. There was laughter inside and the plaintive wind of fashionable horns, and now and again the slow, mysterious shuffle of dancing feet.

“Let’s go up close,” whispered Amanthis in an ecstatic trance, “I want to hear.”

They walked toward the house, keeping in the shadow of the great trees. Jim proceeded with awe — suddenly he stopped and seized Amanthis’s arm.

“Man!” he cried in an excited whisper. “Do you know what that is?”

“A night watchman?” Amanthis cast a startled look around.

“It’s Rastus Muldoon’s Band from Savannah! I heard ’em once, and I know. It’s Rastus Muldoon’s Band!”

They moved closer till they could see first pompadours, then slicked male heads, and high coiffures and finally even bobbed hair pressed under black ties. They could distinguish chatter below the ceaseless laughter. Two figures appeared on the porch, gulped something quickly from flasks and returned inside. But the music had bewitched Jim Powell. His eyes were fixed and he moved his feet like a blind man.

Pressed in close behind some dark bushes they listened. The number ended. A breeze from the ocean blew over them and Jim shivered slightly. Then, in a wistful whisper:

“I’ve always wanted to lead that band. Just once.” His voice grew listless.

“Come on. Let’s go. I reckon I don’t belong around here.”

He held out his arm to her but instead of taking it she stepped suddenly out of the bushes and into a bright patch of light.

“Come on, Jim,” she said startingly. “Let’s go inside.”

“What —?”

She seized his arm and though he drew back in a sort of stupefied horror at her boldness she urged him persistently toward the great front door.

“Watch out!” he gasped. “Somebody’s coming out of that house and see us.”

“No, Jim,” she said firmly. “Nobody’s coming out of that house — but two people are going in.”

“Why?” he demanded wildly, standing in full glare of the porte-cochere lamps. “Why?”

“Why?” she mocked him. “Why, just because this dance happens to be given for me.”

He thought she was mad.

“Come home before they see us,” he begged her.

The great doors swung open and a gentleman stepped out on the porch. In horror Jim recognized Mr. Madison Harlan. He made a movement as though to break away and run. But the man walked down the steps holding out both hands to Amanthis.

“Hello at last,” he cried. “Where on earth have you two been? Cousin Amanthis —” He kissed her, and turned cordially to Jim. “And for you, Mr. Powell,” he went on, “to make up for being late you’ve got to promise that for just one number you’re going to lead that band.”

New Jersey was warm, all except the part that was under water, and that mattered only to the fishes. All the tourists who rode through the long green miles stopped their cars in front of a spreading old-fashioned country house and looked at the red swing on the lawn and the wide, shady porch, and sighed and drove on — swerving a little to avoid a jet-black body-servant in the road. The body-servant was applying a hammer and nails to a decayed flivver which flaunted from its rear the legend, “Tarleton, Ga.”

A girl with yellow hair and a warm color to her face was lying in the hammock looking as though she could fall asleep any moment. Near her sat

a gentleman in an extraordinarily tight suit. They had come down together the day before from the fashionable resort at Southampton.

“When you first appeared,” she was explaining, “I never thought I’d see you again so I made that up about the barber and all. As a matter of fact, I’ve been around quite a bit — with or without brassknuckles. I’m coming out this autumn.”

“I reckon I had a lot to learn,” said Jim.

“And you see,” went on Amanthis, looking at him rather anxiously, “I’d been invited up to Southampton to visit my cousins — and when you said you were going, I wanted to see what you’d do. I always slept at the Harlans’ but I kept a room at the boarding-house so you wouldn’t know. The reason I didn’t get there on the right train was because I had to come early and warn a lot of people to pretend not to know me.”

Jim got up, nodding his head in comprehension.

“I reckon I and Hugo had better be movin’ along. We got to make Baltimore by night.”

“That’s a long way.”

“I want to sleep south tonight,” he said simply.

Together they walked down the path and past the idiotic statue of Diana on the lawn.

“You see,” added Amanthis gently, “you don’t have to be rich up here in order to — to go around, any more than you do in Georgia — ” She broke off abruptly, “Won’t you come back next year and start another Academy?”

“No mamm, not me. That Mr. Harlan told me I could go on with the one I had but I told him no.”

“Haven’t you — didn’t you make money?”

“No mamm,” he answered. “I got enough of my own income to just get me home. I didn’t have my principal along. One time I was way ahead but I was livin’ high and there was my rent an’ apparatus and those musicians.

Besides, there at the end I had to pay what they'd advanced me for their lessons."

"You shouldn't have done that!" cried Amanthis indignantly.

"They didn't want me to, but I told 'em they'd have to take it."

He didn't consider it necessary to mention that Mr. Harlan had tried to present him with a check.

They reached the automobile just as Hugo drove in his last nail. Jim opened a pocket of the door and took from it an unlabeled bottle containing a whitish-yellow liquid.

"I intended to get you a present," he told her awkwardly, "but my money got away before I could, so I thought I'd send you something from Georgia. This here's just a personal remembrance. It won't do for you to drink but maybe after you come out into society you might want to show some of those young fellas what good old corn tastes like."

She took the bottle.

"Thank you, Jim."

"That's all right." He turned to Hugo. "I reckon we'll go along now. Give the lady the hammer."

"Oh, you can have the hammer," said Amanthis tearfully. "Oh, won't you promise to come back?"

"Someday — maybe."

He looked for a moment at her yellow hair and her blue eyes misty with sleep and tears. Then he got into his car and as his foot found the clutch his whole manner underwent a change.

"I'll say good-by mamm," he announced with impressive dignity, "we're goin' south for the winter."

The gesture of his straw hat indicated Palm Beach, St. Augustine, Miami. His body-servant spun the crank, gained his seat and became part of the intense vibration into which the automobile was thrown.

“South for the winter,” repeated Jim, and then he added softly, “You’re the prettiest girl I ever knew. You go back up there and lie down in that hammock, and sleep — sle-eeep — ”

It was almost a lullaby, as he said it. He bowed to her, magnificently, profoundly, including the whole North in the splendor of his obeisance —

Then they were gone down the road in quite a preposterous cloud of dust. Just before they reached the first bend Amanthis saw them come to a full stop, dismount and shove the top part of the car on to the bottom pan. They took their seats again without looking around. Then the bend — and they were out of sight, leaving only a faint brown mist to show that they had passed.

GRETCHEN'S FORTY WINKS

I

Saturday Evening Post (15 March 1924)

The sidewalks were scratched with brittle leaves, and the bad little boy next door froze his tongue to the iron mail-box. Snow before night, sure. Autumn was over. This, of course, raised the coal question and the Christmas question; but Roger Halsey, standing on his own front porch, assured the dead suburban sky that he hadn't time for worrying about the weather. Then he let himself hurriedly into the house, and shut the subject out into the cold twilight.

The hall was dark, but from above he heard the voices of his wife and the nursemaid and the baby in one of their interminable conversations, which consisted chiefly of 'Don't!' and 'Look out, Maxy!' and 'Oh, there hegoes!' punctuated by wild threats and vague bumpings and the recurrent sound of small, venturing feet.

Roger turned on the hall-light and walked into the living-room and turned on the red silk lamp. He put his bulging portfolio on the table, and sitting down rested his intense young face in his hand for a few minutes, shading his eyes carefully from the light. Then he lit a cigarette, squashed it out, and going to the foot of the stairs called for his wife.

'Gretchen!'

'Hello, dear.' Her voice was full of laughter. 'Come see baby.'

He swore softly.

'I can't see baby now,' he said aloud. 'How long 'fore you'll be down?'

There was a mysterious pause, and then a succession of 'Don'ts' and 'Look outs, Maxy' evidently meant to avert some threatened catastrophe.

'How long 'fore you'll be down?' repeated Roger, slightly irritated.

‘Oh, I’ll be right down.’

‘How soon?’ he shouted.

He had trouble every day at this hour in adapting his voice from the urgent key of the city to the proper casualness for a model home. But tonight he was deliberately impatient. It almost disappointed him when Gretchen came running down the stairs, three at a time, crying ‘What is it?’ in a rather surprised voice.

They kissed — lingered over it some moments. They had been married three years, and they were much more in love than that implies. It was seldom that they hated each other with that violent hate of which only young couples are capable, for Roger was still actively sensitive to her beauty.

‘Come in here,’ he said abruptly. ‘I want to talk to you.’

His wife, a bright-coloured, Titian-haired girl, vivid as a French rag doll, followed him into the living room.

‘Listen, Gretchen’ — he sat down at the end of the sofa — ‘beginning with tonight I’m going to — What’s the matter?’

‘Nothing. I’m just looking for a cigarette. Go on.’

She tiptoed breathlessly back to the sofa and settled at the other end.

‘Gretchen — ’ Again he broke off. Her hand, palm upward, was extended towards him. ‘Well, what is it?’ he asked wildly.

‘Matches.’

‘What?’

In his impatience it seemed incredible that she should ask for matches, but he fumbled automatically in his pocket.

‘Thank you,’ she whispered. ‘I didn’t mean to interrupt you. Go on.’

‘Gretch — ’

Scratch! The match flared. They exchanged a tense look.

Her fawn's eyes apologized mutely this time, and he laughed. After all, she had done no more than light a cigarette; but when he was in this mood her slightest positive action irritated him beyond measure.

'When you've got time to listen,' he said crossly, 'you might be interested in discussing the poorhouse question with me.'

'What poorhouse?' Her eyes were wide, startled; she sat quiet as a mouse.

'That was just to get your attention. But, beginning tonight, I start on what'll probably be the most important six weeks of my life — the six weeks that'll decide whether we're going on forever in this rotten little house in this rotten little suburban town.'

Boredom replaced alarm in Gretchen's black eyes. She was a Southern girl, and any question that had to do with getting ahead in the world always tended to give her a headache.

'Six months ago I left the New York Lithographic Company,' announced Roger, 'and went in the advertising business for myself.'

'I know,' interrupted Gretchen resentfully; 'and now instead of getting six hundred a month sure, we're living on a risky five hundred.'

'Gretchen,' said Roger sharply, 'if you'll just believe in me as hard as you can for six weeks more we'll be rich. I've got a chance now to get some of the biggest accounts in the country.' He hesitated. 'And for these six weeks we won't go out at all, and we won't have anyone here. I'm going to bring home work every night, and we'll pull down all the blinds and if anyone rings the doorbell we won't answer.'

He smiled airily as if it were a new game they were going to play. Then, as Gretchen was silent, his smile faded, and he looked at her uncertainly.

'Well, what's the matter?' she broke out finally. 'Do you expect me to jump up and sing? You do enough work as it is. If you try to do any more you'll end up with a nervous breakdown. I read about a —'

'Don't worry about me,' he interrupted; 'I'm all right. But you're going to be bored to death sitting here every evening.'

‘No, I won’t,’ she said without conviction — ‘except tonight.’

‘What about tonight?’

‘George Tompkins asked us to dinner.’

‘Did you accept?’

‘Of course I did,’ she said impatiently. ‘Why not? You’re always talking about what a terrible neighbourhood this is, and I thought maybe you’d like to go to a nicer one for a change.’

‘When I go to a nicer neighbourhood I want to go for good,’ he said grimly.

‘Well, can we go?’

‘I suppose we’ll have to if you’ve accepted.’

Somewhat to his annoyance the conversation abruptly ended. Gretchen jumped up and kissed him sketchily and rushed into the kitchen to light the hot water for a bath. With a sigh he carefully deposited his portfolio behind the bookcase — it contained only sketches and layouts for display advertising, but it seemed to him the first thing a burglar would look for. Then he went abstractedly upstairs, dropping into the baby’s room for a casual moist kiss, and began dressing for dinner.

They had no automobile, so George Tompkins called for them at 6.30. Tompkins was a successful interior decorator, a broad, rosy man with a handsome moustache and a strong odour of jasmine. He and Roger had once roomed side by side in a boarding-house in New York, but they had met only intermittently in the past five years.

‘We ought to see each other more,’ he told Roger tonight. ‘You ought to go out more often, old boy. Cocktail?’

‘No, thanks.’

‘No? Well, your fair wife will — won’t you, Gretchen?’

‘I love this house,’ she exclaimed, taking the glass and looking admiringly at ship models. Colonial whisky bottles, and other fashionable débris of 1925.

‘I like it,’ said Tompkins with satisfaction. ‘I did it to please myself, and I succeeded.’

Roger stared moodily around the stiff, plain room, wondering if they could have blundered into the kitchen by mistake.

‘You look like the devil, Roger,’ said his host. ‘Have a cocktail and cheer up.’

‘Have one,’ urged Gretchen.

‘What?’ Roger turned around absently. ‘Oh, no, thanks. I’ve got to work after I get home.’

‘Work!’ Tompkins smiled. ‘Listen, Roger, you’ll kill yourself with work. Why don’t you bring a little balance into your life — work a little, then play a little?’

‘That’s what I tell him,’ said Gretchen.

‘Do you know an average business man’s day?’ demanded Tompkins as they went in to dinner. ‘Coffee in the morning, eight hours’ work interrupted by a bolted luncheon, and then home again with dyspepsia and a bad temper to give the wife a pleasant evening.’

Roger laughed shortly.

‘You’ve been going to the movies too much,’ he said dryly.

‘What?’ Tompkins looked at him with some irritation. ‘Movies? I’ve hardly ever been to the movies in my life. I think the movies are atrocious. My opinions on life are drawn from my own observations. I believe in a balanced life.’

‘What’s that?’ demanded Roger.

‘Well’ — he hesitated — ‘probably the best way to tell you would be to describe my own day. Would that seem horribly egotistic?’

‘Oh, no!’ Gretchen looked at him with interest. ‘I’d love to hear about it.’

‘Well, in the morning I get up and go through a series of exercises. I’ve got one room fitted up as a little gymnasium, and I punch the bag and do

shadow-boxing and weight-pulling for an hour. Then after a cold bath — There's a thing now! Do you take a daily cold bath?'

'No,' admitted Roger, 'I take a hot bath in the evening three or four times a week.'

A horrified silence fell. Tompkins and Gretchen exchanged a glance as if something obscene had been said.

'What's the matter?' broke out Roger, glancing from one to the other in some irritation. 'You know I don't take a bath every day — I haven't got the time.'

Tompkins gave a prolonged sigh.

'After my bath,' he continued, drawing a merciful veil of silence over the matter, 'I have breakfast and drive to my office in New York, where I work until four. Then I lay off, and if it's summer I hurry out here for nine holes of golf, or if it's winter I play squash for an hour at my club. Then a good snappy game of bridge until dinner. Dinner is liable to have something to do with business, but in a pleasant way. Perhaps I've just finished a house for some customer, and he wants me to be on hand for his first party to see that the lighting is soft enough and all that sort of thing. Or maybe I sit down with a good book of poetry and spend the evening alone. At any rate, I do something every night to get me out of myself.'

'It must be wonderful,' said Gretchen enthusiastically. 'I wish we lived like that.'

Tompkins bent forward earnestly over the table.

'You can,' he said impressively. 'There's no reason why you shouldn't. Look here, if Roger'll play nine holes of golf every day it'll do wonders for him. He won't know himself. He'll do his work better, never get that tired, nervous feeling — What's the matter?'

He broke off. Roger had perceptibly yawned.

'Roger,' cried Gretchen sharply, 'there's no need to be so rude. If you did what George said, you'd be a lot better off.' She turned indignantly to their

host. 'The latest is that he's going to work at night for the next six weeks. He says he's going to pull down the blinds and shut us up like hermits in a cave. He's been doing it every Sunday for the last year; now he's going to do it every night for six weeks.'

Tompkins shook his head sadly.

'At the end of six weeks,' he remarked, 'he'll be starting for the sanatorium. Let me tell you, every private hospital in New York is full of cases like yours. You just strain the human nervous system a little too far, and bang! — you've broken something. And in order to save sixty hours you're laid up sixty weeks for repairs.' He broke off, changed his tone, and turned to Gretchen with a smile. 'Not to mention what happens to you. It seems to me it's the wife rather than the husband who bears the brunt of these insane periods of overwork.'

'I don't mind,' protested Gretchen loyally.

'Yes, she does,' said Roger grimly; 'she minds like the devil. She's a shortsighted little egg, and she thinks it's going to be forever until I get started and she can have some new clothes. But it can't be helped. The saddest thing about women is that, after all, their best trick is to sit down and fold their hands.'

'Your ideas on women are about twenty years out of date,' said Tompkins pityingly. 'Women won't sit down and wait any more.'

'Then they'd better marry men of forty,' insisted Roger stubbornly. 'If a girl marries a young man for love she ought to be willing to make any sacrifice within reason, so long as her husband keeps going ahead.'

'Let's not talk about it,' said Gretchen impatiently. 'Please, Roger, let's have a good time just this once.'

When Tompkins dropped them in front of their house at eleven Roger and Gretchen stood for a moment on the sidewalk looking at the winter moon. There was a fine, damp, dusty snow in the air, and Roger drew a long breath of it and put his arm around Gretchen exultantly.

‘I can make more money than he can,’ he said tensely. ‘And I’ll be doing it in just forty days.’

‘Forty days,’ she sighed. ‘It seems such a long time — when everybody else is always having fun. If I could only sleep for forty days.’

‘Why don’t you, honey? Just take forty winks, and when you wake up everything’ll be fine.’

She was silent for a moment.

‘Roger,’ she asked thoughtfully, ‘do you think George meant what he said about taking me horseback riding on Sunday?’

Roger frowned.

‘I don’t know. Probably not — I hope to Heaven he didn’t.’ He hesitated. ‘As a matter of fact, he made me sort of sore tonight — all that junk about his cold bath.’

With their arms about each other, they started up the walk to the house.

‘I’ll bet he doesn’t take a cold bath every morning,’ continued Roger ruminatively; ‘or three times a week, either.’ He fumbled in his pocket for the key and inserted it in the lock with savage precision. Then he turned around defiantly. ‘I’ll bet he hasn’t had a bath for a month.’

II

After a fortnight of intensive work, Roger Halsey’s days blurred into each other and passed by in blocks of twos and threes and fours. From eight until 5.30 he was in his office. Then a half-hour on the commuting train, where he scrawled notes on the backs of envelopes under the dull yellow light. By 7.30 his crayons, shears, and sheets of white cardboard were spread over the living-room table, and he laboured there with much grunting and sighing until midnight, while Gretchen lay on the sofa with a book, and the doorbell tinkled occasionally behind the drawn blinds. At twelve there was always an argument as to whether he would come to bed. He would agree to come after he had cleared up everything; but as he was invariably sidetracked by

half a dozen new ideas, he usually found Gretchen sound asleep when he tiptoed upstairs.

Sometimes it was three o'clock before Roger squashed his last cigarette into the overloaded ash-tray, and he would undress in the dark, disembodied with fatigue, but with a sense of triumph that he had lasted out another day.

Christmas came and went and he scarcely noticed that it was gone. He remembered it afterwards as the day he completed the window-cards for Garrod's shoes. This was one of the eight large accounts for which he was pointing in January — if he got half of them he was assured a quarter of a million dollars' worth of business during the year.

But the world outside his business became a chaotic dream. He was aware that on two cool December Sundays George Tompkins had taken Gretchen horseback riding, and that another time she had gone out with him in his automobile to spend the afternoon skiing on the country-club hill. A picture of Tompkins, in an expensive frame, had appeared one morning on their bedroom wall. And one night he was shocked into a startled protest when Gretchen went to the theatre with Tompkins in town.

But his work was almost done. Daily now his layouts arrived from the printers until seven of them were piled and docketed in his office safe. He knew how good they were. Money alone couldn't buy such work; more than he realized himself, it had been a labour of love.

December tumbled like a dead leaf from the calendar. There was an agonizing week when he had to give up coffee because it made his heart pound so. If he could hold on now for four days — three days —

On Thursday afternoon H. G. Garrod was to arrive in New York. On Wednesday evening Roger came home at seven to find Gretchen poring over the December bills with a strange expression in her eyes.

'What's the matter?'

She nodded at the bills. He ran through them, his brow wrinkling in a frown.

'Gosh!'

'I can't help it,' she burst out suddenly. 'They're terrible.'

'Well, I didn't marry you because you were a wonderful housekeeper. I'll manage about the bills some way. Don't worry your little head over it.'

She regarded him coldly.

'You talk as if I were a child.'

'I have to,' he said with sudden irritation.

'Well, at least I'm not a piece of bric-à-brac that you can just put somewhere and forget.'

He knelt down by her quickly, and took her arms in his hands.

'Gretchen, listen!' he said breathlessly. 'For God's sake, don't go to pieces now! We're both all stored up with malice and reproach, and if we had a quarrel it'd be terrible. I love you, Gretchen. Say you love me — quick!'

'You know I love you.'

The quarrel was averted, but there was an unnatural tenseness all through dinner. It came to a climax afterwards when he began to spread his working materials on the table.

'Oh, Roger,' she protested, 'I thought you didn't have to work tonight.'

'I didn't think I'd have to, but something came up.'

'I've invited George Tompkins over.'

'Oh, gosh!' he exclaimed. 'Well, I'm sorry, honey, but you'll have to phone him not to come.'

'He's left,' she said. 'He's coming straight from town. He'll be here any minute now.'

Roger groaned. It occurred to him to send them both to the movies, but somehow the suggestion stuck on his lips. He did not want her at the movies; he wanted her here, where he could look up and know she was by his side.

George Tompkins arrived breezily at eight o'clock. 'Aha!' he cried reprovingly, coming into the room. 'Still at it.'

Roger agreed coolly that he was.

'Better quit — better quit before you have to.' He sat down with a long sigh of physical comfort and lit a cigarette. 'Take it from a fellow who's looked into the question scientifically. We can stand so much, and then — bang!'

'If you'll excuse me' — Roger made his voice as polite as possible — 'I'm going upstairs and finish this work.'

'Just as you like, Roger.' George waved his hand carelessly. 'It isn't that I mind. I'm the friend of the family and I'd just as soon see the missus as the mister.' He smiled playfully. 'But if I were you, old boy, I'd put away my work and get a good night's sleep.'

When Roger had spread out his materials on the bed upstairs he found that he could still hear the rumble and murmur of their voices through the thin floor. He began wondering what they found to talk about. As he plunged deeper into his work his mind had a tendency to revert sharply to his question, and several times he arose and paced nervously up and down the room.

The bed was ill adapted to his work. Several times the paper slipped from the board on which it rested, and the pencil punched through. Everything was wrong tonight. Letters and figures blurred before his eyes, and as an accompaniment to the beating of his temples came those persistent murmuring voices.

At ten he realized that he had done nothing for more than an hour, and with a sudden exclamation he gathered together his papers, replaced them in his portfolio, and went downstairs. They were sitting together on the sofa when he came in.

'Oh, hello!' cried Gretchen, rather unnecessarily, he thought. 'We were just discussing you.'

'Thank you,' he answered ironically. 'What particular part of my anatomy was under the scalpel?'

‘Your health,’ said Tompkins jovially.

‘My health’s all right,’ answered Roger shortly.

‘But you look at it so selfishly, old fella,’ cried Tompkins. ‘You only consider yourself in the matter. Don’t you think Gretchen has any rights? If you were working on a wonderful sonnet or a — a portrait of some madonna or something’ — he glanced at Gretchen’s Titian hair — ‘why, then I’d say go ahead. But you’re not. It’s just some silly advertisement about how to sell Nobald’s hair tonic, and if all the hair tonic ever made was dumped into the ocean tomorrow the world wouldn’t be one bit the worse for it.’

‘Wait a minute,’ said Roger angrily: ‘that’s not quite fair. I’m not kidding myself about the importance of my work — it’s just as useless as the stuff you do. But to Gretchen and me it’s just about the most important thing in the world.’

‘Are you implying that my work is useless?’ demanded Tompkins incredulously.

‘No; not if it brings happiness to some poor sucker of a pants manufacturer who doesn’t know how to spend his money.’

Tompkins and Gretchen exchanged a glance.

‘Oh-h-h!’ exclaimed Tompkins ironically. ‘I didn’t realize that all these years I’ve just been wasting my time.’

‘You’re a loafer,’ said Roger rudely.

‘Me?’ cried Tompkins angrily. ‘You call me a loafer because I have a little balance in my life and find time to do interesting things? Because I play hard as well as work hard and don’t let myself get to be a dull, tiresome drudge?’

Both men were angry now, and their voices had risen, though on Tompkins’ face there still remained the semblance of a smile.

‘What I object to,’ said Roger steadily, ‘is that for the last six weeks you seem to have done all your playing around here.’

‘Roger!’ cried Gretchen. ‘What do you mean by talking like that?’

‘Just what I said.’

‘You’ve just lost your temper.’ Tompkins lit a cigarette with ostentatious coolness. ‘You’re so nervous from overwork you don’t know what you’re saying. You’re on the verge of a nervous break — ’

‘You get out of here!’ cried Roger fiercely. ‘You get out of here right now — before I throw you out!’

Tompkins got angrily to his feet.

‘You — you throw me out?’ he cried incredulously.

They were actually moving towards each other when Gretchen stepped between them, and grabbing Tompkins’ arm urged him towards the door.

‘He’s acting like a fool, George, but you better get out,’ she cried, groping in the hall for his hat.

‘He insulted me!’ shouted Tompkins. ‘He threatened to throw me out!’

‘Never mind, George,’ pleaded Gretchen. ‘He doesn’t know what he’s saying. Please go! I’ll see you at ten o’clock tomorrow.’

She opened the door.

‘You won’t see him at ten o’clock tomorrow,’ said Roger steadily. ‘He’s not coming to this house any more.’

Tompkins turned to Gretchen.

‘It’s his house,’ he suggested. ‘Perhaps we’d better meet at mine.’

Then he was gone, and Gretchen had shut the door behind him. Her eyes were full of angry tears.

‘See what you’ve done!’ she sobbed. ‘The only friend I had, the only person in the world who liked me enough to treat me decently, is insulted by my husband in my own house.’

She threw herself on the sofa and began to cry passionately into the pillows.

‘He brought it on himself,’ said Roger stubbornly, ‘I’ve stood as much as my self-respect will allow. I don’t want you going out with him any more.’

‘I will go out with him!’ cried Gretchen wildly. ‘I’ll go out with him all I want! Do you think it’s any fun living here with you?’

‘Gretchen,’ he said coldly, ‘get up and put on your hat and coat and go out that door and never come back!’

Her mouth fell slightly ajar.

‘But I don’t want to get out,’ she said dazedly.

‘Well, then, behave yourself.’ And he added in a gentler voice: ‘I thought you were going to sleep for this forty days.’

‘Oh, yes,’ she cried bitterly, ‘easy enough to say! But I’m tired of sleeping.’ She got up, faced him defiantly. ‘And what’s more, I’m going riding with George Tompkins tomorrow.’

‘You won’t go out with him if I have to take you to New York and sit you down in my office until I get through.’

She looked at him with rage in her eyes.

‘I hate you,’ she said slowly. ‘And I’d like to take all the work you’ve done and tear it up and throw it in the fire. And just to give you something to worry about tomorrow, I probably won’t be here when you get back.’

She got up from the sofa, and very deliberately looked at her flushed, tear-stained face in the mirror. Then she ran upstairs and slammed herself into the bedroom.

Automatically Roger spread out his work on the living-room table. The bright colours of the designs, the vivid ladies — Gretchen had posed for one of them — holding orange ginger ale or glistening silk hosiery, dazzled his mind into a sort of coma. His restless crayon moved here and there over the pictures, shifting a block of letters half an inch to the right, trying a dozen blues for a cool blue, and eliminating the word that made a phrase anaemic and pale. Half an hour passed — he was deep in the work now; there was no

sound in the room but the velvety scratch of the crayon over the glossy board.

After a long while he looked at his watch — it was after three. The wind had come up outside and was rushing by the house corners in loud, alarming swoops, like a heavy body falling through space. He stopped his work and listened. He was not tired now, but his head felt as if it was covered with bulging veins like those pictures that hang in doctors' offices showing a body stripped of decent skin. He put his hands to his head and felt it all over. It seemed to him that on his temple the veins were knotty and brittle around an old scar.

Suddenly he began to be afraid. A hundred warnings he had heard swept into his mind. People did wreck themselves with overwork, and his body and brain were of the same vulnerable and perishable stuff. For the first time he found himself envying George Tompkins' calm nerves and healthy routine. He arose and began pacing the room in a panic.

'I've got to sleep,' he whispered to himself tensely. 'Otherwise I'm going crazy.'

He rubbed his hand over his eyes, and returned to the table to put up his work, but his fingers were shaking so that he could scarcely grasp the board. The sway of a bare branch against the window made him start and cry out. He sat down on the sofa and tried to think.

'Stop! Stop! Stop!' the clock said. 'Stop! Stop! Stop!'

'I can't stop,' he answered aloud. 'I can't afford to stop.'

Listen! Why, there was the wolf at the door now! He could hear its sharp claws scrape along the varnished woodwork. He jumped up, and running to the front door flung it open; then started back with a ghastly cry. An enormous wolf was standing on the porch, glaring at him with red, malignant eyes. As he watched it the hair bristled on its neck; it gave a low growl and disappeared in the darkness. Then Roger realized with a silent, mirthless laugh that it was the police dog from over the way.

Dragging his limbs wearily into the kitchen, he brought the alarm-clock into the living-room and set it for seven. Then he wrapped himself in his overcoat, lay down on the sofa and fell immediately into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

When he awoke the light was still shining feebly, but the room was the grey colour of a winter morning. He got up, and looking anxiously at his hands found to his relief that they no longer trembled. He felt much better. Then he began to remember in detail the events of the night before, and his brow drew up again in three shallow wrinkles. There was work ahead of him, twenty-four hours of work; and Gretchen, whether she wanted to or not, must sleep for one more day.

Roger's mind glowed suddenly as if he had just thought of a new advertising idea. A few minutes later he was hurrying through the sharp morning air to Kingsley's drug-store.

'Is Mr Kingsley down yet?'

The druggist's head appeared around the corner of the prescription-room.

'I wonder if I can talk to you alone.'

At 7.30, back home again, Roger walked into his own kitchen. The general housework girl had just arrived and was taking off her hat.

'Bebé' — he was not on familiar terms with her; this was her name — 'I want you to cook Mrs Halsey's breakfast right away. I'll take it up myself.'

It struck Bébé that this was an unusual service for so busy a man to render his wife, but if she had seen his conduct when he had carried the tray from the kitchen she would have been even more surprised. For he set it down on the dining room table and put into the coffee half a teaspoonful of a white substance that was not powdered sugar. Then he mounted the stairs and opened the door of the bedroom.

Gretchen woke up with a start, glanced at the twin bed which had not been slept in, and bent on Roger a glance of astonishment, which changed to contempt when she saw the breakfast in his hand. She thought he was bringing it as a capitulation.

‘I don’t want any breakfast,’ she said coldly, and his heart sank, ‘except some coffee.’

‘No breakfast?’ Roger’s voice expressed disappointment

‘I said I’d take some coffee.’

Roger discreetly deposited the tray on a table beside the bed and returned quickly to the kitchen.

‘We’re going away until tomorrow afternoon,’ he told Bebé, ‘and I want to close up the house right now. So you just put on your hat and go home.’

He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to eight, and he wanted to catch the 8.10 train. He waited five minutes and then tiptoed softly upstairs and into Gretchen’s room. She was sound asleep. The coffee cup was empty save for black dregs and a film of thin brown paste on the bottom. He looked at her rather anxiously, but her breathing was regular and clear.

From the closet he took a suitcase and very quickly began filling it with her shoes — street shoes, evening slippers, rubber-soled oxfords — he had not realized that she owned so many pairs. When he closed the suitcase it was bulging.

He hesitated a minute, took a pair of sewing scissors from a box, and following the telephone-wire until it went out of sight behind the dresser, severed it in one neat clip. He jumped as there was a soft knock at the door. It was the nursemaid. He had forgotten her existence.

‘Mrs Halsey and I are going up to the city till tomorrow,’ he said glibly. ‘Take Maxy to the beach and have lunch there. Stay all day.’

Back in the room, a wave of pity passed over him. Gretchen seemed suddenly lovely and helpless, sleeping there. It was somehow terrible to rob her young life of a day. He touched her hair with his fingers, and as she murmured something in her dream he leaned over and kissed her bright cheek. Then he picked up the suitcase full of shoes, locked the door, and ran briskly down the stairs.

III

By five o'clock that afternoon the last package of cards for Garrod's shoes had been sent by messenger to H. G. Garrod at the Biltmore Hotel. He was to give a decision next morning. At 5.30 Roger's stenographer tapped him on the shoulder.

'Mr Golden, the superintendent of the building, to see you.'

Roger turned around dazedly.

'Oh, how do?'

Mr Golden came directly to the point. If Mr Halsey intended to keep the office any longer, the little oversight about the rent had better be remedied right away.

'Mr Golden,' said Roger wearily, 'everything'll be all right tomorrow. If you worry me now maybe you'll never get your money. After tomorrow nothing'll matter.'

Mr Golden looked at the tenant uneasily. Young men sometimes did away with themselves when business went wrong. Then his eye fell unpleasantly on the initialled suitcase beside the desk.

'Going on a trip?' he asked pointedly.

'What? Oh, no. That's just some clothes.'

'Clothes, eh? Well, Mr Halsey, just to prove that you mean what you say, suppose you let me keep that suitcase until tomorrow noon.'

'Help yourself.'

Mr Golden picked it up with a deprecatory gesture.

'Just a matter of form,' he remarked.

'I understand,' said Roger, swinging around to his desk. 'Good afternoon.'

Mr Golden seemed to feel that the conversation should close on a softer key.

‘And don’t work too hard, Mr Halsey. You don’t want to have a nervous break — ’

‘No,’ shouted Roger, ‘I don’t. But I will if you don’t leave me alone.’

As the door closed behind Mr Golden, Roger’s stenographer turned sympathetically around.

‘You shouldn’t have let him get away with that,’ she said. ‘What’s in there? Clothes?’

‘No,’ answered Roger absently. ‘Just all my wife’s shoes.’

He slept in the office that night on a sofa beside his desk. At dawn he awoke with a nervous start, rushed out into the street for coffee, and returned in ten minutes in a panic — afraid that he might have missed Mr Garrod’s telephone call. It was then 6.30.

By eight o’clock his whole body seemed to be on fire. When his two artists arrived he was stretched on the couch in almost physical pain. The phone rang imperatively at 9.30, and he picked up the receiver with trembling hands.

‘Hello.’

‘Is this the Halsey agency?’

‘Yes, this is Mr Halsey speaking.’

‘This is Mr H. G. Garrod.’

Roger’s heart stopped beating.

‘I called up, young fellow, to say that this is wonderful work you’ve given us here. We want all of it and as much more as your office can do.’

‘Oh, God!’ cried Roger into the transmitter.

‘What?’ Mr H. G. Garrod was considerably startled. ‘Say, wait a minute there!’

But he was talking to nobody. The phone had clattered to the floor, and Roger, stretched full length on the couch, was sobbing as if his heart would break.

IV

Three hours later, his face somewhat pale, but his eyes calm as a child's, Roger opened the door of his wife's bedroom with the morning paper under his arm. At the sound of his footsteps she started awake.

'What time is it?' she demanded.

He looked at his watch.

'Twelve o'clock.'

Suddenly she began to cry.

'Roger,' she said brokenly, 'I'm sorry I was so bad last night.'

He nodded coolly.

'Everything's all right now,' he answered. Then, after a pause: 'I've got the account — the biggest one.'

She turned towards him quickly.

'You have?' Then, after a minute's silence: 'Can I get a new dress?'

'Dress?' He laughed shortly. 'You can get a dozen. This account alone will bring us in forty thousand a year. It's one of the biggest in the West.'

She looked at him, startled.

'Forty thousand a year!'

'Yes.'

'Gosh' — and then faintly — 'I didn't know it'd really be anything like that.' Again she thought a minute. 'We can have a house like George Tompkins.'

'I don't want an interior-decoration shop.'

‘Forty thousand a year!’ she repeated again, and then added softly: ‘Oh, Roger — ’

‘Yes?’

‘I’m not going out with George Tompkins.’

‘I wouldn’t let you, even if you wanted to,’ he said shortly.

She made a show of indignation.

‘Why, I’ve had a date with him for this Thursday for weeks.’

‘It isn’t Thursday.’

‘It is.’

‘It’s Friday.’

‘Why, Roger, you must be crazy! Don’t you think I know what day it is?’

‘It isn’t Thursday,’ he said stubbornly. ‘Look!’ And he held out the morning paper.

‘Friday!’ she exclaimed. ‘Why, this is a mistake! This must be last week’s paper. Today’s Thursday.’

She closed her eyes and thought for a moment.

‘Yesterday was Wednesday,’ she said decisively. ‘The laundress came yesterday. I guess I know.’

‘Well,’ he said smugly, ‘look at the paper. There isn’t any question about it.’

With a bewildered look on her face she got out of bed and began searching for her clothes. Roger went into the bathroom to shave. A minute later he heard the springs creak again. Gretchen was getting back into bed.

‘What’s the matter?’ he inquired, putting his head around the corner of the bathroom.

‘I’m scared,’ she said in a trembling voice. ‘I think my nerves are giving way. I can’t find any of my shoes.’

‘Your shoes? Why, the closet’s full of them.’

‘I know, but I can’t see one.’ Her face was pale with fear. ‘Oh, Roger!’

Roger came to her bedside and put his arm around her.

‘Oh, Roger,’ she cried, ‘what’s the matter with me? First that newspaper, and now all my shoes. Take care of me, Roger.’

‘I’ll get the doctor,’ he said.

He walked remorselessly to the telephone and took up the receiver.

‘Phone seems to be out of order,’ he remarked after a minute; ‘I’ll send Bebé.’

The doctor arrived in ten minutes.

‘I think I’m on the verge of a collapse,’ Gretchen told him in a strained voice.

Doctor Gregory sat down on the edge of the bed and took her wrist in his hand.

‘It seems to be in the air this morning.’

‘I got up,’ said Gretchen in an awed voice, ‘and I found that I’d lost a whole day. I had an engagement to go riding with George Tompkins — ’

‘What?’ exclaimed the doctor in surprise. Then he laughed.

‘George Tompkins won’t go riding with anyone for many days to come.’

‘Has he gone away?’ asked Gretchen curiously.

‘He’s going West.’

‘Why?’ demanded Roger. ‘Is he running away with somebody’s wife?’

‘No,’ said Doctor Gregory. ‘He’s had a nervous breakdown.’

‘What?’ they exclaimed in unison.

‘He just collapsed like an opera-hat in his cold shower.’

‘But he was always talking about his — his balanced life,’ gasped Gretchen. ‘He had it on his mind.’

‘I know,’ said the doctor. ‘He’s been babbling about it all morning. I think it’s driven him a little mad. He worked pretty hard at it, you know.’

‘At what?’ demanded Roger in bewilderment.

‘At keeping his life balanced.’ He turned to Gretchen. ‘Now all I’ll prescribe for this lady here is a good rest. If she’ll just stay around the house for a few days and take forty winks of sleep she’ll be as fit as ever. She’s been under some strain.’

‘Doctor,’ exclaimed Roger hoarsely, ‘don’t you think I’d better have a rest or something? I’ve been working pretty hard lately.’

‘You!’ Doctor Gregory laughed, slapped him violently on the back. ‘My boy, I never saw you looking better in your life.’

Roger turned away quickly to conceal his smile — winked forty times, or almost forty times, at the autographed picture of Mr George Tompkins, which hung slightly askew on the bedroom wall.

ABSOLUTION

I

The American Mercury, June 1924

There was once a priest with cold, watery eyes, who, in the still of the night, wept cold tears. He wept because the afternoons were warm and long, and he was unable to attain a complete mystical union with our Lord.

Sometimes, near four o'clock, there was a rustle of Swede girls along the path by his window, and in their shrill laughter he found a terrible dissonance that made him pray aloud for the twilight to come. At twilight the laughter and the voices were quieter, but several times he had walked past Romberg's Drug Store when it was dusk and the yellow lights shone inside and the nickel taps of the soda-fountain were gleaming, and he had found the scent of cheap toilet soap desperately sweet upon the air. He passed that way when he returned from hearing confessions on Saturday nights, and he grew careful to walk on the other side of the street so that the smell of the soap would float upward before it reached his nostrils as it drifted, rather like incense, toward the summer moon.

But there was no escape from the hot madness of four o'clock. From his window, as far as he could see, the Dakota wheat thronged the valley of the Red River. The wheat was terrible to look upon and the carpet pattern to which in agony he bent his eyes sent his thought brooding through grotesque labyrinths, open always to the unavoidable sun.

One afternoon when he had reached the point where the mind runs down like an old clock, his housekeeper brought into his study a beautiful, intense little boy of eleven named Rudolph Miller. The little boy sat down in a patch of sunshine, and the priest, at his walnut desk, pretended to be very busy. This was to conceal his relief that some one had come into his haunted room.

Presently he turned around and found himself staring into two enormous, staccato eyes, lit with gleaming points of cobalt light. For a moment their

expression startled him — then he saw that his visitor was in a state of abject fear.

“Your mouth is trembling,” said Father Schwartz, in a haggard voice.

The little boy covered his quivering mouth with his hand.

“Are you in trouble?” asked Father Schwartz, sharply. “Take your hand away from your mouth and tell me what’s the matter.”

The boy — Father Schwartz recognized him now as the son of a parishioner, Mr. Miller, the freight-agent — moved his hand reluctantly off his mouth and became articulate in a despairing whisper.

“Father Schwartz — I’ve committed a terrible sin.”

“A sin against purity?”

“No, Father . . . worse.”

Father Schwartz’s body jerked sharply.

“Have you killed somebody?”

“No — but I’m afraid — ” the voice rose to a shrill whimper.

“Do you want to go to confession?”

The little boy shook his head miserably. Father Schwartz cleared his throat so that he could make his voice soft and say some quiet, kind thing. In this moment he should forget his own agony, and try to act like God. He repeated to himself a devotional phrase, hoping that in return God would help him to act correctly.

“Tell me what you’ve done,” said his new soft voice.

The little boy looked at him through his tears, and was reassured by the impression of moral resiliency which the distraught priest had created. Abandoning as much of himself as he was able to this man, Rudolph Miller began to tell his story.

“On Saturday, three days ago, my father he said I had to go to confession, because I hadn’t been for a month, and the family they go every week, and I

hadn't been. So I just as leave go, I didn't care. So I put it off till after supper because I was playing with a bunch of kids and father asked me if I went, and I said 'no,' and he took me by the neck and he said 'You go now,' so I said 'All right,' so I went over to church. And he yelled after me: 'Don't come back till you go.' .."

II

"On Saturday, Three Days Ago."

The plush curtain of the confessional rearranged its dismal creases, leaving exposed only the bottom of an old man's old shoe. Behind the curtain an immortal soul was alone with God and the Reverend Adolphus Schwartz, priest of the parish. Sound began, a labored whispering, sibilant and discreet, broken at intervals by the voice of the priest in audible question.

Rudolph Miller knelt in the pew beside the confessional and waited, straining nervously to hear, and yet not to hear what was being said within. The fact that the priest was audible alarmed him. His own turn came next, and the three or four others who waited might listen unscrupulously while he admitted his violations of the Sixth and Ninth Commandments.

Rudolph had never committed adultery, nor even coveted his neighbor's wife — but it was the confession of the associate sins that was particularly hard to contemplate. In comparison he relished the less shameful fallings away — they formed a grayish background which relieved the ebony mark of sexual offenses upon his soul.

He had been covering his ears with his hands, hoping that his refusal to hear would be noticed, and a like courtesy rendered to him in turn, when a sharp movement of the penitent in the confessional made him sink his face precipitately into the crook of his elbow. Fear assumed solid form, and pressed out a lodging between his heart and his lungs. He must try now with all his might to be sorry for his sins — not because he was afraid, but because he had offended God. He must convince God that he was sorry and to do so he must first convince himself. After a tense emotional struggle he achieved a tremulous self-pity, and decided that he was now ready. If, by

allowing no other thought to enter his head, he could preserve this state of emotion unimpaired until he went into that large coffin set on end, he would have survived another crisis in his religious life.

For some time, however, a demoniac notion had partially possessed him. He could go home now, before his turn came, and tell his mother that he had arrived too late, and found the priest gone. This, unfortunately, involved the risk of being caught in a lie. As an alternative he could say that he *had* gone to confession, but this meant that he must avoid communion next day, for communion taken upon an uncleansed soul would turn to poison in his mouth, and he would crumple limp and damned from the altar-rail.

Again Father Schwartz's voice became audible.

“And for your — ”

The words blurred to a husky mumble, and Rudolph got excitedly to his feet. He felt that it was impossible for him to go to confession this afternoon. He hesitated tensely. Then from the confessional came a tap, a creak, and a sustained rustle. The slide had fallen and the plush curtain trembled. Temptation had come to him too late. . . .

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. . . . I confess to Almighty God and to you, Father, that I have sinned. . . . Since my last confession it has been one month and three days. . . . I accuse myself of — taking the Name of the Lord in vain”

This was an easy sin. His curses had been but bravado — telling of them was little less than a brag.

“ . . . of being mean to an old lady.”

The wan shadow moved a little on the latticed slat.

“How, my child?”

“Old lady Swenson,” Rudolph's murmur soared jubilantly. “She got our baseball that we knocked in her window, and she wouldn't give it back, so we yelled ‘Twenty-three, Skidoo,’ at her all afternoon. Then about five o'clock she had a fit, and they had to have the doctor.”

“Go on, my child.”

“Of — of not believing I was the son of my parents.”

“What?” The interrogation was distinctly startled.

“Of not believing that I was the son of my parents.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, just pride,” answered the penitent airily.

“You mean you thought you were too good to be the son of your parents?”

“Yes, Father.” On a less jubilant note.

“Go on.”

“Of being disobedient and calling my mother names. Of slandering people behind my back. Of smoking — ”

Rudolph had now exhausted the minor offenses, and was approaching the sins it was agony to tell. He held his fingers against his face like bars as if to press out between them the shame in his heart.

“Of dirty words and immodest thoughts and desires,” he whispered very low.

“How often?”

“I don’t know.”

“Once a week? Twice a week?”

“Twice a week.”

“Did you yield to these desires?”

“No, Father.”

“Were you alone when you had them?”

“No, Father. I was with two boys and a girl.”

“Don’t you know, my child, that you should avoid the occasions of sin as well as the sin itself? Evil companionship leads to evil desires and evil desires to evil actions. Where were you when this happened?”

“In a barn in back of — ”

“I don’t want to hear any names,” interrupted the priest sharply.

“Well, it was up in the loft of this barn and this girl and — a fella, they were saying things — saying immodest things, and I stayed.”

“You should have gone — you should have told the girl to go.”

He should have gone! He could not tell Father Schwartz how his pulse had bumped in his wrist, how a strange, romantic excitement had possessed him when those curious things had been said. Perhaps in the houses of delinquency among the dull and hard-eyed incorrigible girls can be found those for whom has burned the whitest fire.

“Have you anything else to tell me?”

“I don’t think so, Father.”

Rudolph felt a great relief. Perspiration had broken out under his tight-pressed fingers.

“Have you told any lies?”

The question startled him. Like all those who habitually and instinctively lie, he had an enormous respect and awe for the truth. Something almost exterior to himself dictated a quick, hurt answer.

“Oh, no, Father, I never tell lies.”

For a moment, like the commoner in the king’s chair, he tasted the pride of the situation. Then as the priest began to murmur conventional admonitions he realized that in heroically denying he had told lies, he had committed a terrible sin — he had told a lie in confession.

In automatic response to Father Schwartz’s “Make an act of contrition,” he began to repeat aloud meaninglessly:

“Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. . . .”

He must fix this now — it was a bad mistake — but as his teeth shut on the last words of his prayer there was a sharp sound, and the slat was closed.

A minute later when he emerged into the twilight the relief in coming from the muggy church into an open world of wheat and sky postponed the full realization of what he had done. Instead of worrying he took a deep breath of the crisp air and began to say over and over to himself the words “Blatchford Sarnemington, Blatchford Sarnemington!”

Blatchford Sarnemington was himself, and these words were in effect a lyric. When he became Blatchford Sarnemington a suave nobility flowed from him. Blatchford Sarnemington lived in great sweeping triumphs. When Rudolph half closed his eyes it meant that Blatchford had established dominance over him and, as he went by, there were envious mutters in the air: “Blatchford Sarnemington! There goes Blatchford Sarnemington.”

He was Blatchford now for a while as he strutted homeward along the staggering road, but when the road braced itself in macadam in order to become the main street of Ludwig, Rudolph’s exhilaration faded out and his mind cooled, and he felt the horror of his lie. God, of course, already knew of it — but Rudolph reserved a corner of his mind where he was safe from God, where he prepared the subterfuges with which he often tricked God. Hiding now in this corner he considered how he could best avoid the consequences of his misstatement.

At all costs he must avoid communion next day. The risk of angering God to such an extent was too great. He would have to drink water “by accident” in the morning, and thus, in accordance with a church law, render himself unfit to receive communion that day. In spite of its flimsiness this subterfuge was the most feasible that occurred to him. He accepted its risks and was concentrating on how best to put it into effect, as he turned the corner by Romberg’s Drug Store and came in sight of his father’s house.

Rudolph's father, the local freight-agent, had floated with the second wave of German and Irish stock to the Minnesota-Dakota country. Theoretically, great opportunities lay ahead of a young man of energy in that day and place, but Carl Miller had been incapable of establishing either with his superiors or his subordinates the reputation for approximate immutability which is essential to success in a hierarchic industry. Somewhat gross, he was, nevertheless, insufficiently hard-headed and unable to take fundamental relationships for granted, and this inability made him suspicious, unrestful, and continually dismayed.

His two bonds with the colorful life were his faith in the Roman Catholic Church and his mystical worship of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill. Hill was the apotheosis of that quality in which Miller himself was deficient — the sense of things, the feel of things, the hint of rain in the wind on the cheek. Miller's mind worked late on the old decisions of other men, and he had never in his life felt the balance of any single thing in his hands. His weary, sprightly, undersized body was growing old in Hill's gigantic shadow. For twenty years he had lived alone with Hill's name and God.

On Sunday morning Carl Miller awoke in the dustless quiet of six o'clock. Kneeling by the side of the bed he bent his yellow-gray hair and the full dapple bangs of his mustache into the pillow, and prayed for several minutes. Then he drew off his night-shirt — like the rest of his generation he had never been able to endure pajamas — and clothed his thin, white, hairless body in woollen underwear.

He shaved. Silence in the other bedroom where his wife lay nervously asleep. Silence from the screened-off corner of the hall where his son's cot stood, and his son slept among his Alger books, his collection of cigar-bands, his mothly pennants — "Cornell," "Hamlin," and "Greetings from Pueblo, New Mexico" — and the other possessions of his private life. From outside Miller could hear the shrill birds and the whirring movement of the poultry, and, as an undertone, the low, swelling click-a-tick of the six-fifteen through-train for Montana and the green coast beyond. Then as the cold water dripped from the wash-rag in his hand he raised his head suddenly — he had heard a furtive sound from the kitchen below.

He dried his razor hastily, slipped his dangling suspenders to his shoulder, and listened. Some one was walking in the kitchen, and he knew by the light footfall that it was not his wife. With his mouth faintly ajar he ran quickly down the stairs and opened the kitchen door.

Standing by the sink, with one hand on the still dripping faucet and the other clutching a full glass of water, stood his son. The boy's eyes, still heavy with sleep, met his father's with a frightened, reproachful beauty. He was barefooted, and his pajamas were rolled up at the knees and sleeves.

For a moment they both remained motionless — Carl Miller's brow went down and his son's went up, as though they were striking a balance between the extremes of emotion which filled them. Then the bangs of the parent's moustache descended portentously until they obscured his mouth, and he gave a short glance around to see if anything had been disturbed.

The kitchen was garnished with sunlight which beat on the pans and made the smooth boards of the floor and table yellow and clean as wheat. It was the center of the house where the fire burned and the tins fitted into tins like toys, and the steam whistled all day on a thin pastel note. Nothing was moved, nothing touched — except the faucet where beads of water still formed and dripped with a white flash into the sink below.

“What are you doing?”

“I got awful thirsty, so I thought I'd just come down and get — ”

“I thought you were going to communion.”

A look of vehement astonishment spread over his son's face.

“I forgot all about it.”

“Have you drunk any water?”

“No — ”

As the word left his mouth Rudolph knew it was the wrong answer, but the faded indignant eyes facing him had signalled up the truth before the boy's will could act. He realized, too, that he should never have come downstairs; some vague necessity for verisimilitude had made him want to leave a wet

glass as evidence by the sink; the honesty of his imagination had betrayed him.

“Pour it out,” commanded his father, “that water!”

Rudolph despairingly inverted the tumbler.

“What’s the matter with you, anyways?” demanded Miller angrily.

“Nothing.”

“Did you go to confession yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“Then why were you going to drink water?”

“I don’t know — I forgot.”

“Maybe you care more about being a little bit thirsty than you do about your religion.”

“I forgot.” Rudolph could feel the tears straining in his eyes.

“That’s no answer.”

“Well, I did.”

“You better look out!” His father held to a high, persistent, inquisitory note: “If you’re so forgetful that you can’t remember your religion something better be done about it.”

Rudolph filled a sharp pause with:

“I can remember it all right.”

“First you begin to neglect your religion,” cried his father, fanning his own fierceness, “the next thing you’ll begin to lie and steal, and the next thing is the *reform school!*”

Not even this familiar threat could deepen the abyss that Rudolph saw before him. He must either tell all now, offering his body for what he knew would be a ferocious beating, or else tempt the thunderbolts by receiving

the Body and Blood of Christ with sacrilege upon his soul. And of the two the former seemed more terrible — it was not so much the beating he dreaded as the savage ferocity, outlet of the ineffectual man, which would lie behind it.

“Put down that glass and go up-stairs and dress!” his father ordered, “and when we get to church, before you go to communion, you better kneel down and ask God to forgive you for your carelessness.”

Some accidental emphasis in the phrasing of this command acted like a catalytic agent on the confusion and terror of Rudolph’s mind. A wild, proud anger rose in him, and he dashed the tumbler passionately into the sink.

His father uttered a strained, husky sound, and sprang for him. Rudolph dodged to the side, tipped over a chair, and tried to get beyond the kitchen table. He cried out sharply when a hand grasped his pajama shoulder, then he felt the dull impact of a fist against the side of his head, and glancing blows on the upper part of his body. As he slipped here and there in his father’s grasp, dragged or lifted when he clung instinctively to an arm, aware of sharp smarts and strains, he made no sound except that he laughed hysterically several times. Then in less than a minute the blows abruptly ceased. After a lull during which Rudolph was tightly held, and during which they both trembled violently and uttered strange, truncated words, Carl Miller half dragged, half threatened his son up-stairs.

“Put on your clothes!”

Rudolph was now both hysterical and cold. His head hurt him, and there was a long, shallow scratch on his neck from his father’s finger-nail, and he sobbed and trembled as he dressed. He was aware of his mother standing at the doorway in a wrapper, her wrinkled face compressing and squeezing and opening out into new series of wrinkles which floated and eddied from neck to brow. Despising her nervous ineffectuality and avoiding her rudely when she tried to touch his neck with witch-hazel, he made a hasty, choking toilet. Then he followed his father out of the house and along the road toward the Catholic church.

IV

They walked without speaking except when Carl Miller acknowledged automatically the existence of passers-by. Rudolph's uneven breathing alone ruffled the hot Sunday silence.

His father stopped decisively at the door of the church.

"I've decided you'd better go to confession again. Go in and tell Father Schwartz what you did and ask God's pardon."

"You lost your temper, too!" said Rudolph quickly.

Carl Miller took a step toward his son, who moved cautiously backward.

"All right, I'll go."

"Are you going to do what I say?" cried his father in a hoarse whisper.

"All right."

Rudolph walked into the church, and for the second time in two days entered the confessional and knelt down. The slat went up almost at once.

"I accuse myself of missing my morning prayers."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

A maudlin exultation filled him. Not easily ever again would he be able to put an abstraction before the necessities of his ease and pride. An invisible line had been crossed, and he had become aware of his isolation — aware that it applied not only to those moments when he was Blatchford Sarnemington but that it applied to all his inner life. Hitherto such phenomena as "crazy" ambitions and petty shames and fears had been but private reservations, unacknowledged before the throne of his official soul. Now he realized unconsciously that his private reservations were himself — and all the rest a garnished front and a conventional flag. The pressure of his environment had driven him into the lonely secret road of adolescence.

He knelt in the pew beside his father. Mass began. Rudolph knelt up — when he was alone he slumped his posterior back against the seat — and tasted the consciousness of a sharp, subtle revenge. Beside him his father prayed that God would forgive Rudolph, and asked also that his own outbreak of temper would be pardoned. He glanced sidewise at his son, and was relieved to see that the strained, wild look had gone from his face and that he had ceased sobbing. The Grace of God, inherent in the Sacrament, would do the rest, and perhaps after Mass everything would be better. He was proud of Rudolph in his heart, and beginning to be truly as well as formally sorry for what he had done.

Usually, the passing of the collection box was a significant point for Rudolph in the services. If, as was often the case, he had no money to drop in he would be furiously ashamed and bow his head and pretend not to see the box, lest Jeanne Brady in the pew behind should take notice and suspect an acute family poverty. But to-day he glanced coldly into it as it skimmed under his eyes, noting with casual interest the large number of pennies it contained.

When the bell rang for communion, however, he quivered. There was no reason why God should not stop his heart. During the past twelve hours he had committed a series of mortal sins increasing in gravity, and he was now to crown them all with a blasphemous sacrilege.

“Domini, non sum dignus; ut interes sub tectum meum; sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea. . . .”

There was a rustle in the pews, and the communicants worked their ways into the aisle with downcast eyes and joined hands. Those of larger piety pressed together their finger-tips to form steeples. Among these latter was Carl Miller. Rudolph followed him toward the altar-rail and knelt down, automatically taking up the napkin under his chin. The bell rang sharply, and the priest turned from the altar with the white Host held above the chalice:

“Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam.”

A cold sweat broke out on Rudolph's forehead as the communion began. Along the line Father Schwartz moved, and with gathering nausea Rudolph felt his heart-valves weakening at the will of God. It seemed to him that the church was darker and that a great quiet had fallen, broken only by the inarticulate mumble which announced the approach of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He dropped his head down between his shoulders and waited for the blow.

Then he felt a sharp nudge in his side. His father was poking him to sit up, not to slump against the rail; the priest was only two places away.

"Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam."

Rudolph opened his mouth. He felt the sticky wax taste of the wafer on his tongue. He remained motionless for what seemed an interminable period of time, his head still raised, the wafer undissolved in his mouth. Then again he started at the pressure of his father's elbow, and saw that the people were falling away from the altar like leaves and turning with blind downcast eyes to their pews, alone with God.

Rudolph was alone with himself, drenched with perspiration and deep in mortal sin. As he walked back to his pew the sharp taps of his cloven hoofs were loud upon the floor, and he knew that it was a dark poison he carried in his heart.

V

"Sagitta Volante in Dei"

The beautiful little boy with eyes like blue stones, and lashes that sprayed open from them like flower-petals had finished telling his sin to Father Schwartz — and the square of sunshine in which he sat had moved forward half an hour into the room. Rudolph had become less frightened now; once eased of the story a reaction had set in. He knew that as long as he was in the room with this priest God would not stop his heart, so he sighed and sat quietly, waiting for the priest to speak.

Father Schwartz's cold watery eyes were fixed upon the carpet pattern on which the sun had brought out the swastikas and the flat bloomless vines and the pale echoes of flowers. The hall-clock ticked insistently toward sunset, and from the ugly room and from the afternoon outside the window arose a stiff monotony, shattered now and then by the reverberate clapping of a far-away hammer on the dry air. The priest's nerves were strung thin and the beads of his rosary were crawling and squirming like snakes upon the green felt of his table top. He could not remember now what it was he should say.

Of all the things in this lost Swede town he was most aware of this little boy's eyes — the beautiful eyes, with lashes that left them reluctantly and curved back as though to meet them once more.

For a moment longer the silence persisted while Rudolph waited, and the priest struggled to remember something that was slipping farther and farther away from him, and the clock ticked in the broken house. Then Father Schwartz stared hard at the little boy and remarked in a peculiar voice:

“When a lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering.”

Rudolph started and looked quickly at Father Schwartz's face.

“I said — ” began the priest, and paused, listening. “Do you hear the hammer and the clock ticking and the bees? Well, that's no good. The thing is to have a lot of people in the center of the world, wherever that happens to be. Then” — his watery eyes widened knowingly — “things go glimmering.”

“Yes, Father,” agreed Rudolph, feeling a little frightened.

“What are you going to be when you grow up?”

“Well, I was going to be a baseball-player for a while,” answered Rudolph nervously, “but I don't think that's a very good ambition, so I think I'll be an actor or a Navy officer.”

Again the priest stared at him.

“I see *exactly* what you mean,” he said, with a fierce air.

Rudolph had not meant anything in particular, and at the implication that he had, he became more uneasy.

“This man is crazy,” he thought, “and I’m scared of him. He wants me to help him out some way, and I don’t want to.”

“You look as if things went glimmering,” cried Father Schwartz wildly. “Did you ever go to a party?”

“Yes, Father.”

“And did you notice that everybody was properly dressed? That’s what I mean. Just as you went into the party there was a moment when everybody was properly dressed. Maybe two little girls were standing by the door and some boys were leaning over the banisters, and there were bowls around full of flowers.”

“I’ve been to a lot of parties,” said Rudolph, rather relieved that the conversation had taken this turn.

“Of course,” continued Father Schwartz triumphantly, “I knew you’d agree with me. But my theory is that when a whole lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering all the time.”

Rudolph found himself thinking of Blatchford Sarnemington.

“Please listen to me!” commanded the priest impatiently. “Stop worrying about last Saturday. Apostasy implies an absolute damnation only on the supposition of a previous perfect faith. Does that fix it?”

Rudolph had not the faintest idea what Father Schwartz was talking about, but he nodded and the priest nodded back at him and returned to his mysterious preoccupation.

“Why,” he cried, “they have lights now as big as stars — do you realize that? I heard of one light they had in Paris or somewhere that was as big as a star. A lot of people had it — a lot of gay people. They have all sorts of things now that you never dreamed of.”

“Look here — ” He came nearer to Rudolph, but the boy drew away, so Father Schwartz went back and sat down in his chair, his eyes dried out and hot. “Did you ever see an amusement park?”

“No, Father.”

“Well, go and see an amusement park.” The priest waved his hand vaguely. “It’s a thing like a fair, only much more glittering. Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it in a dark place — under dark trees. You’ll see a big wheel made of lights turning in the air, and a long slide shooting boats down into the water. A band playing somewhere, and a smell of peanuts — and everything will twinkle. But it won’t remind you of anything, you see. It will all just hang out there in the night like a colored balloon — like a big yellow lantern on a pole.”

Father Schwartz frowned as he suddenly thought of something.

“But don’t get up close,” he warned Rudolph, “because if you do you’ll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life.”

All this talking seemed particularly strange and awful to Rudolph, because this man was a priest. He sat there, half terrified, his beautiful eyes open wide and staring at Father Schwartz. But underneath his terror he felt that his own inner convictions were confirmed. There was something ineffably gorgeous somewhere that had nothing to do with God. He no longer thought that God was angry at him about the original lie, because He must have understood that Rudolph had done it to make things finer in the confessional, brightening up the dinginess of his admissions by saying a thing radiant and proud. At the moment when he had affirmed immaculate honor a silver pennon had flapped out into the breeze somewhere and there had been the crunch of leather and the shine of silver spurs and a troop of horsemen waiting for dawn on a low green hill. The sun had made stars of light on their breastplates like the picture at home of the German cuirassiers at Sedan.

But now the priest was muttering inarticulate and heart-broken words, and the boy became wildly afraid. Horror entered suddenly in at the open window, and the atmosphere of the room changed. Father Schwartz

collapsed precipitously down on his knees, and let his body settle back against a chair.

“Oh, my God!” he cried out, in a strange voice, and wilted to the floor.

Then a human oppression rose from the priest’s worn clothes, and mingled with the faint smell of old food in the corners. Rudolph gave a sharp cry and ran in a panic from the house — while the collapsed man lay there quite still, filling his room, filling it with voices and faces until it was crowded with echolalia, and rang loud with a steady, shrill note of laughter.

Outside the window the blue sirocco trembled over the wheat, and girls with yellow hair walked sensuously along roads that bounded the fields, calling innocent, exciting things to the young men who were working in the lines between the grain. Legs were shaped under starchless gingham, and rims of the necks of dresses were warm and damp. For five hours now hot fertile life had burned in the afternoon. It would be night in three hours, and all along the land there would be these blonde Northern girls and the tall young men from the farms lying out beside the wheat, under the moon.

RAGS MARTIN-JONES AND THE PRINCE OF WALES

I

McCall's (July 1924)

The *Majestic* came gliding into New York harbor on an April morning. She sniffed at the tugboats and turtle-gaited ferries, winked at a gaudy young yacht, and ordered a cattle-boat out of her way with a snarling whistle of steam. Then she parked at her private dock with all the fuss of a stout lady sitting down, and announced complacently that she had just come from Cherbourg and Southampton with a cargo of the very best people in the world.

The very best people in the world stood on the deck and waved idiotically to their poor relations who were waiting on the dock for gloves from Paris. Before long a great toboggan had connected the *Majestic* with the North American continent, and the ship began to disgorge these very best people in the world — who turned out to be Gloria Swanson, two buyers from Lord & Taylor, the financial minister from Graustark with a proposal for funding the debt, and an African king who had been trying to land somewhere all winter and was feeling violently seasick.

The photographers worked passionately as the stream of passengers flowed on to the dock. There was a burst of cheering at the appearance of a pair of stretchers laden with two Middle-Westerners who had drunk themselves delirious on the last night out.

The deck gradually emptied, but when the last bottle of Benedictine had reached shore the photographers still remained at their posts. And the officer in charge of debarkation still stood at the foot of the gangway, glancing first at his watch and then at the deck as if some important part of the cargo was still on board. At last from the watchers on the pier there arose a long-drawn “Ah-h-h!” as a final entourage began to stream down from deck B.

First came two French maids, carrying small, purple dogs, and followed by a squad of porters, blind and invisible under innumerable bunches and bouquets of fresh flowers. Another maid followed, leading a sad-eyed orphan child of a French flavor, and close upon its heels walked the second officer pulling along three neurasthenic wolfhounds, much to their reluctance and his own.

A pause. Then the captain, Sir Howard George Witchcraft, appeared at the rail, with something that might have been a pile of gorgeous silver-fox fur standing by his side.

Rags Martin-Jones, after five years in the capitals of Europe, was returning to her native land!

Rags Martin-Jones was not a dog. She was half a girl and half a flower, and as she shook hands with Captain Sir Howard George Witchcraft she smiled as if some one had told her the newest, freshest joke in the world. All the people who had not already left the pier felt that smile trembling on the April air and turned around to see.

She came slowly down the gangway. Her hat, an expensive, inscrutable experiment, was crushed under her arm, so that her scant boy's hair, convict's hair, tried unsuccessfully to toss and flop a little in the harbor wind. Her face was like seven o'clock on a wedding morning save where she had slipped a preposterous monocle into an eye of clear childish blue. At every few steps her long lashes would tilt out the monocle, and she would laugh, a bored, happy laugh, and replace the supercilious spectacle in the other eye.

Tap! Her one hundred and five pounds reached the pier and it seemed to sway and bend from the shock of her beauty. A few porters fainted. A large, sentimental shark which had followed the ship across made a despairing leap to see her once more, and then dove, broken-hearted, back into the deep sea. Rags Martin-Jones had come home.

There was no member of her family there to meet her, for the simple reason that she was the only member of her family left alive. In 1913 her parents had gone down on the *Titanic* together rather than be separated in this world, and so the Martin-Jones fortune of seventy-five millions had been inherited

by a very little girl on her tenth birthday. It was what the consumer always refers to as a “shame.”

Rags Martin-Jones (everybody had forgotten her real name long ago) was now photographed from all sides. The monocle persistently fell out, and she kept laughing and yawning and replacing it, so no very clear picture of her was taken — except by the motion-picture camera. All the photographs, however, included a flustered, handsome young man, with an almost ferocious love-light burning in his eyes, who had met her on the dock. His name was John M. Chestnut, he had already written the story of his success for the *American Magazine*, and he had been hopelessly in love with Rags ever since the time when she, like the tides, had come under the influence of the summer moon.

When Rags became really aware of his presence they were walking down the pier, and she looked at him blankly as though she had never seen him before in this world.

“Rags,” he began, “Rags — ”

“John M. Chestnut?” she inquired, inspecting him with great interest.

“Of course!” he exclaimed angrily. “Are you trying to pretend you don’t know me? That you didn’t write me to meet you here?”

She laughed. A chauffeur appeared at her elbow, and she twisted out of her coat, revealing a dress made in great splashy checks of sea-blue and gray. She shook herself like a wet bird.

“I’ve got a lot of junk to declare,” she remarked absently.

“So have I,” said Chestnut anxiously, “and the first thing I want to declare is that I’ve loved you, Rags, every minute since you’ve been away.”

She stopped him with a groan.

“Please! There were some young Americans on the boat. The subject has become a bore.”

“My God!” cried Chestnut, “do you mean to say that you class *my* love with what was said to you on a *boat*?”

His voice had risen, and several people in the vicinity turned to hear.

“Sh!” she warned him, “I’m not giving a circus. If you want me to even see you while I’m here, you’ll have to be less violent.”

But John M. Chestnut seemed unable to control his voice.

“Do you mean to say” — it trembled to a carrying pitch — “that you’ve forgotten what you said on this very pier five years ago last Thursday?”

Half the passengers from the ship were now watching the scene on the dock, and another little eddy drifted out of the customs-house to see.

“John” — her displeasure was increasing — “if you raise your voice again I’ll arrange it so you’ll have plenty of chance to cool off. I’m going to the Ritz. Come and see me there this afternoon.”

“But, Rags!” he protested hoarsely. “Listen to me. Five years ago — ”

Then the watchers on the dock were treated to a curious sight. A beautiful lady in a checkered dress of sea-blue and gray took a brisk step forward so that her hands came into contact with an excited young man by her side. The young man retreating instinctively reached back with his foot, but, finding nothing, relapsed gently off the thirty-foot dock and plopped, after a not ungraceful revolution, into the Hudson River.

A shout of alarm went up, and there was a rush to the edge just as his head appeared above water. He was swimming easily, and, perceiving this, the young lady who had apparently been the cause of the accident leaned over the pier and made a megaphone of her hands.

“I’ll be in at half past four,” she cried.

And with a cheerful wave of her hand, which the engulfed gentleman was unable to return, she adjusted her monocle, threw one haughty glance at the gathered crowd, and walked leisurely from the scene.

The five dogs, the three maids, and the French orphan were installed in the largest suite at the Ritz, and Rags tumbled lazily into a steaming bath, fragrant with herbs, where she dozed for the greater part of an hour. At the end of that time she received business calls from a masseuse, a manicure, and finally a Parisian hair-dresser, who restored her hair-cut to criminal's length. When John M. Chestnut arrived at four he found half a dozen lawyers and bankers, the administrators of the Martin-Jones trust fund, waiting in the hall. They had been there since half past one, and were now in a state of considerable agitation.

After one of the maids had subjected him to a severe scrutiny, possibly to be sure that he was thoroughly dry, John was conducted immediately into the presence of m'selle. M'selle was in her bedroom reclining on the chaise-longue among two dozen silk pillows that had accompanied her from the other side. John came into the room somewhat stiffly and greeted her with a formal bow.

"You look better," she said, raising herself from her pillows and staring at him appraisingly. "It gave you a color."

He thanked her coldly for the compliment.

"You ought to go in every morning." And then she added irrelevantly: "I'm going back to Paris tomorrow."

John Chestnut gasped.

"I wrote you that I didn't intend to stay more than a week anyhow," she added.

"But, Rags — "

"Why should I? There isn't an amusing man in New York."

"But listen, Rags, won't you give me a chance? Won't you stay for, say, ten days and get to know me a little?"

"Know you!" Her tone implied that he was already a far too open book. "I want a man who's capable of a gallant gesture."

"Do you mean you want me to express myself entirely in pantomime?"

Rags uttered a disgusted sigh.

“I mean you haven’t any imagination,” she explained patiently. “No Americans have any imagination. Paris is the only large city where a civilized woman can breathe.”

“Don’t you care for me at all any more?”

“I wouldn’t have crossed the Atlantic to see you if I didn’t. But as soon as I looked over the Americans on the boat, I knew I couldn’t marry one. I’d just hate you, John, and the only fun I’d have out of it would be the fun of breaking your heart.”

She began to twist herself down among the cushions until she almost disappeared from view.

“I’ve lost my monocle,” she explained.

After an unsuccessful search in the silken depths she discovered the illusive glass hanging down the back of her neck.

“I’d love to be in love,” she went on, replacing the monocle in her childish eye. “Last spring in Sorrento I almost eloped with an Indian rajah, but he was half a shade too dark, and I took an intense dislike to one of his other wives.”

“Don’t talk that rubbish!” cried John, sinking his face into his hands.

“Well, I didn’t marry him,” she protested. “But in one way he had a lot to offer. He was the third richest subject of the British Empire. That’s another thing — are you rich?”

“Not as rich as you.”

“There you are. What have you to offer me?”

“Love.”

“Love!” She disappeared again among the cushions. “Listen, John. Life to me is a series of glistening bazaars with a merchant in front of each one rubbing his hands together and saying ‘Patronize this place here. Best bazaar in the world.’ So I go in with my purse full of beauty and money and

youth, all prepared to buy. ‘What have you got for sale?’ I ask him, and he rubs his hands together and says: ‘Well, Mademoiselle, to-day we have some perfectly be-oo-tiful love.’ Sometimes he hasn’t even got that in stock, but he sends out for it when he finds I have so much money to spend. Oh, he always gives me love before I go — and for nothing. That’s the one revenge I have.”

John Chestnut rose despairingly to his feet and took a step toward the window.

“Don’t throw yourself out,” Rags exclaimed quickly.

“All right.” He tossed his cigarette down into Madison Avenue.

“It isn’t just you,” she said in a softer voice. “Dull and uninspired as you are, I care for you more than I can say. But life’s so endless here. Nothing ever comes off.”

“Loads of things come off,” he insisted. “Why, to-day there was an intellectual murder in Hoboken and a suicide by proxy in Maine. A bill to sterilize agnostics is before Congress — ”

“I have no interest in humor,” she objected, “but I have an almost archaic predilection for romance. Why, John, last month I sat at a dinner-table while two men flipped a coin for the kingdom of Schwartzberg-Rhineminster. In Paris I knew a man named Blutchdak who really started the war, and has a new one planned for year after next.”

“Well, just for a rest you come out with me tonight,” he said doggedly.

“Where to?” demanded Rags with scorn. “Do you think I still thrill at a night-club and a bottle of sugary mousseaux? I prefer my own gaudy dreams.”

“I’ll take you to the most highly-strung place in the city.”

“What’ll happen? You’ve got to tell me what’ll happen.”

John Chestnut suddenly drew a long breath and looked cautiously around as if he were afraid of being overheard.

“Well, to tell you the truth,” he said in a low, worried tone, “if everything was known, something pretty awful would be liable to happen to me.”

She sat upright and the pillows tumbled about her like leaves.

“Do you mean to imply that there’s anything shady in your life?” she cried, with laughter in her voice. “Do you expect me to believe that? No, John, you’ll have your fun by plugging ahead on the beaten path — just plugging ahead.”

Her mouth, a small insolent rose, dropped the words on him like thorns. John took his hat and coat from the chair and picked up his cane.

“For the last time — will you come along with me to-night and see what you will see?”

“See what? See who? Is there anything in this country worth seeing?”

“Well,” he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, “for one thing you’ll see the Prince of Wales.”

“What?” She left the chaise-longue at a bound. “Is he back in New York?”

“He will be to-night. Would you care to see him?”

“Would I? I’ve never seen him. I’ve missed him everywhere. I’d give a year of my life to see him for an hour.” Her voice trembled with excitement.

“He’s been in Canada. He’s down here incognito for the big prize-fight this afternoon. And I happen to know where he’s going to be to-night.”

Rags gave a sharp ecstatic cry:

“Dominic! Louise! Germaine!”

The three maids came running. The room filled suddenly with vibrations of wild, startled light.

“Dominic, the car!” cried Rags in French. “St. Raphael, my gold dress and the slippers with the real gold heels. The big pearls too — all the pearls, and the egg-diamond and the stockings with the sapphire clocks. Germaine — send for a beauty-parlor on the run. My bath again — ice cold and half full of

almond cream. Dominic — Tiffany's, like lightning, before they close. Find me a brooch, a pendant, a tiara, anything — it doesn't matter — with the arms of the house of Windsor.”

She was fumbling at the buttons of her dress — and as John turned quickly to go, it was already sliding from her shoulders.

“Orchids!” she called after him, “orchids, for the love of heaven! Four dozen, so I can choose four.”

And then maids flew here and there about the room like frightened birds. “Perfume, St. Raphael, open the perfume trunk, and my rose-colored sables, and my diamond garters, and the sweet-oil for my hands! Here, take these things! This too — and this — ouch! — and this!”

With becoming modesty John Chestnut closed the outside door. The six trustees in various postures of fatigue, of ennui, of resignation, of despair, were still cluttering up the outer hall.

“Gentlemen,” announced John Chestnut, “I fear that Miss Martin-Jones is much too weary from her trip to talk to you this afternoon.”

III

“This place, for no particular reason, is called the Hole in the Sky.”

Rags looked around her. They were on a roof-garden wide open to the April night. Overhead the true stars winked cold, and there was a lunar sliver of ice in the dark west. But where they stood it was warm as June, and the couples dining or dancing on the opaque glass floor were unconcerned with the forbidding sky.

“What makes it so warm?” she whispered as they moved toward a table.

“It's some new invention that keeps the warm air from rising. I don't know the principle of the thing, but I know that they can keep it open like this even in the middle of winter — ”

“Where's the Prince of Wales?” she demanded tensely.

John looked around.

“He hasn’t arrived yet. He won’t be here for about half an hour.”

She sighed profoundly.

“It’s the first time I’ve been excited in four years.”

Four years — one year less than he had loved her. He wondered if when she was sixteen, a wild lovely child, sitting up all night in restaurants with officers who were to leave for Brest next day, losing the glamour of life too soon in the old, sad, poignant days of the war, she had ever been so lovely as under these amber lights and this dark sky. From her excited eyes to her tiny slipper heels, which were striped with layers of real silver and gold, she was like one of those amazing ships that are carved complete in a bottle. She was finished with that delicacy, with that care; as though the long lifetime of some worker in fragility had been used to make her so. John Chestnut wanted to take her up in his hands, turn her this way and that, examine the tip of a slipper or the tip of an ear or squint closely at the fairy stuff from which her lashes were made.

“Who’s that?” She pointed suddenly to a handsome Latin at a table over the way.

“That’s Roderigo Minerlino, the movie and face-cream star. Perhaps he’ll dance after a while.”

Rags became suddenly aware of the sound of violins and drums, but the music seemed to come from far away, seemed to float over the crisp night and on to the floor with the added remoteness of a dream.

“The orchestra’s on another roof,” explained John. “It’s a new idea — Look, the entertainment’s beginning.”

A negro girl, thin as a reed, emerged suddenly from a masked entrance into a circle of harsh barbaric light, startled the music to a wild minor, and commenced to sing a rhythmic, tragic song. The pipe of her body broke abruptly and she began a slow incessant step, without progress and without hope, like the failure of a savage insufficient dream. She had lost Papa Jack, she cried over and over with a hysterical monotony at once despairing and

unreconciled. One by one the loud horns tried to force her from the steady beat of madness but she listened only to the mutter of the drums which were isolating her in some lost place in time, among many thousand forgotten years. After the failure of the piccolo, she made herself again into a thin brown line, wailed once with sharp and terrible intensity, then vanished into sudden darkness.

“If you lived in New York you wouldn’t need to be told who she is,” said John when the amber light flashed on. “The next fella is Sheik B. Smith, a comedian of the fatuous, garrulous sort — ”

He broke off. Just as the lights went down for the second number Rags had given a long sigh, and leaned forward tensely in her chair. Her eyes were rigid like the eyes of a pointer dog, and John saw that they were fixed on a party that had come through a side entrance, and were arranging themselves around a table in the half-darkness.

The table was shielded with palms, and Rags at first made out only three dim forms. Then she distinguished a fourth who seemed to be placed well behind the other three — a pale oval of a face topped with a glimmer of dark-yellow hair.

“Hello!” ejaculated John. “There’s his majesty now.”

Her breath seemed to die murmurously in her throat. She was dimly aware that the comedian was now standing in a glow of white light on the dancing floor, that he had been talking for some moments, and that there was a constant ripple of laughter in the air. But her eyes remained motionless, enchanted. She saw one of the party bend and whisper to another, and after the low glitter of a match the bright button of a cigarette end gleamed in the background. How long it was before she moved she did not know. Then something seemed to happen to her eyes, something white, something terribly urgent, and she wrenched about sharply to find herself full in the center of a baby spot-light from above. She became aware that words were being said to her from somewhere, and that a quick trail of laughter was circling the roof, but the light blinded her, and instinctively she made a half-movement from her chair.

“Sit still!” John was whispering across the table. “He picks somebody out for this every night.”

Then she realized — it was the comedian, Sheik B. Smith. He was talking to her, arguing with her — about something that seemed incredibly funny to every one else, but came to her ears only as a blur of muddled sound. Instinctively she had composed her face at the first shock of the light and now she smiled. It was a gesture of rare self-possession. Into this smile she insinuated a vast impersonality, as if she were unconscious of the light, unconscious of his attempt to play upon her loveliness — but amused at an infinitely removed *him*, whose darts might have been thrown just as successfully at the moon. She was no longer a “lady” — a lady would have been harsh or pitiful or absurd; Rags stripped her attitude to a sheer consciousness of her own impervious beauty, sat there glittering until the comedian began to feel alone as he had never felt alone before. At a signal from him the spot-light was switched suddenly out. The moment was over.

The moment was over, the comedian left the floor, and the far-away music began. John leaned toward her.

“I’m sorry. There really wasn’t anything to do. You were wonderful.”

She dismissed the incident with a casual laugh — then she started, there were now only two men sitting at the table across the floor.

“He’s gone!” she exclaimed in quick distress.

“Don’t worry — he’ll be back. He’s got to be awfully careful, you see, so he’s probably waiting outside with one of his aides until it gets dark again.”

“Why has he got to be careful?”

“Because he’s not supposed to be in New York. He’s even under one of his second-string names.”

The lights dimmed again, and almost immediately a tall man appeared out of the darkness and approached their table.

“May I introduce myself?” he said rapidly to John in a supercilious British voice. “Lord Charles Este, of Baron Marchbanks’ party.” He glanced at John closely as if to be sure that he appreciated the significance of the name.

John nodded.

“That is between ourselves, you understand.”

“Of course.”

Rags groped on the table for her untouched champagne, and tipped the glassful down her throat.

“Baron Marchbanks requests that your companion will join his party during this number.”

Both men looked at Rags. There was a moment’s pause.

“Very well,” she said, and glanced back again interrogatively at John. Again he nodded. She rose and with her heart beating wildly threaded the tables, making the half-circuit of the room; then melted, a slim figure in shimmering gold, into the table set in half-darkness.

IV

The number drew to a close, and John Chestnut sat alone at his table, stirring auxiliary bubbles in his glass of champagne. Just before the lights went on, there was a soft rasp of gold cloth, and Rags, flushed and breathing quickly, sank into her chair. Her eyes were shining with tears.

John looked at her moodily.

“Well, what did he say?”

“He was very quiet.”

“Didn’t he say a word?”

Her hand trembled as she took up her glass of champagne.

“He just looked at me while it was dark. And he said a few conventional things. He was like his pictures, only he looks very bored and tired. He didn’t even ask my name.”

“Is he leaving New York to-night?”

“In half an hour. He and his aides have a car outside, and they expect to be over the border before dawn.”

“Did you find him — fascinating?”

She hesitated and then slowly nodded her head.

“That’s what everybody says,” admitted John glumly. “Do they expect you back there?”

“I don’t know.” She looked uncertainly across the floor but the celebrated personage had again withdrawn from his table to some retreat outside. As she turned back an utterly strange young man who had been standing for a moment in the main entrance came toward them hurriedly. He was a deathly pale person in a dishevelled and inappropriate business suit, and he had laid a trembling hand on John Chestnut’s shoulder.

“Monte!” exclaimed John, starting up so suddenly that he upset his champagne. “What is it? What’s the matter?”

“They’ve picked up the trail!” said the young man in a shaken whisper. He looked around. “I’ve got to speak to you alone.”

John Chestnut jumped to his feet, and Rags noticed that his face too had become white as the napkin in his hand. He excused himself and they retreated to an unoccupied table a few feet away. Rags watched them curiously for a moment, then she resumed her scrutiny of the table across the floor. Would she be asked to come back? The prince had simply risen and bowed and gone outside. Perhaps she should have waited until he returned, but though she was still tense with excitement she had, to some extent, become Rags Martin-Jones again. Her curiosity was satisfied — any new urge must come from him. She wondered if she had really felt an intrinsic charm — she wondered especially if he had in any marked way responded to her beauty.

The pale person called Monte disappeared and John returned to the table. Rags was startled to find that a tremendous change had come over him. He lurched into his chair like a drunken man.

“John! What’s the matter?”

Instead of answering, he reached for the champagne bottle, but his fingers were trembling so that the splattered wine made a wet yellow ring around his glass.

“Are you sick?”

“Rags,” he said unsteadily, “I’m all through.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m all through, I tell you.” He managed a sickly smile. “There’s been a warrant out for me for over an hour.”

“What have you done?” she demanded in a frightened voice. “What’s the warrant for?”

The lights went out for the next number, and he collapsed suddenly over the table.

“What is it?” she insisted, with rising apprehension. She leaned forward — his answer was barely audible.

“Murder?” She could feel her body grow cold as ice.

He nodded. She took hold of both arms and tried to shake him upright, as one shakes a coat into place. His eyes were rolling in his head.

“Is it true? Have they got proof?”

Again he nodded drunkenly.

“Then you’ve got to get out of the country now! Do you understand, John? You’ve got to get out *now*, before they come looking for you here!”

He loosed a wild glance of terror toward the entrance.

“Oh, God!” cried Rags, “why don’t you do something?” Her eyes strayed here and there in desperation, became suddenly fixed. She drew in her breath sharply, hesitated, and then whispered fiercely into his ear.

“If I arrange it, will you go to Canada tonight?”

“How?”

“I’ll arrange it — if you’ll pull yourself together a little. This is Rags talking to you, don’t you understand, John? I want you to sit here and not move until I come back!”

A minute later she had crossed the room under cover of the darkness.

“Baron Marchbanks,” she whispered softly, standing just behind his chair.

He motioned her to sit down.

“Have you room in your car for two more passengers to-night?”

One of the aides turned around abruptly.

“His lordship’s car is full,” he said shortly.

“It’s terribly urgent.” Her voice was trembling.

“Well,” said the prince hesitantly, “I don’t know.”

Lord Charles Este looked at the prince and shook his head.

“I don’t think it’s advisable. This is a ticklish business anyhow with contrary orders from home. You know we agreed there’d be no complications.”

The prince frowned.

“This isn’t a complication,” he objected.

Este turned frankly to Rags.

“Why is it urgent?”

Rags hesitated.

“Why” — she flushed suddenly — “it’s a runaway marriage.”

The prince laughed.

“Good!” he exclaimed. “That settles it. Este is just being official. Bring him over right away. We’re leaving shortly, what?”

Este looked at his watch.

“Right now!”

Rags rushed away. She wanted to move the whole party from the roof while the lights were still down.

“Hurry!” she cried in John’s ear. “We’re going over the border — with the Prince of Wales. You’ll be safe by morning.”

He looked up at her with dazed eyes. She hurriedly paid the check, and seizing his arm piloted him as inconspicuously as possible to the other table, where she introduced him with a word. The prince acknowledged his presence by shaking hands — the aides nodded, only faintly concealing their displeasure.

“We’d better start,” said Este, looking impatiently at his watch.

They were on their feet when suddenly an exclamation broke from all of them — two policemen and a red-haired man in plain clothes had come in at the main door.

“Out we go,” breathed Este, impelling the party toward the side entrance. “There’s going to be some kind of riot here.” He swore — two more blue-coats barred the exit there. They paused uncertainly. The plain-clothes man was beginning a careful inspection of the people at the tables.

Este looked sharply at Rags and then at John, who shrank back behind the palms.

“Is that one of your revenue fellas out there?” demanded Este.

“No,” whispered Rags. “There’s going to be trouble. Can’t we get out this entrance?”

The prince with rising impatience sat down again in his chair.

“Let me know when you chaps are ready to go.” He smiled at Rags. “Now just suppose we all get in trouble just for that jolly face of yours.”

Then suddenly the lights went up. The plain-clothes man whirled around quickly and sprang to the middle of the cabaret floor.

“Nobody try to leave this room!” he shouted. “Sit down, that party behind the palms! Is John M. Chestnut in this room?”

Rags gave a short involuntary cry.

“Here!” cried the detective to the policeman behind him. “Take a look at that funny bunch across over there. Hands up, you men!”

“My God!” whispered Este, “we’ve got to get out of here!” He turned to the prince. “This won’t do, Ted. You can’t be seen here. I’ll stall them off while you get down to the car.”

He took a step toward the side entrance.

“Hands up, there!” shouted the plain-clothes man. “And when I say hands up I mean it! Which one of you’s Chestnut?”

“You’re mad!” cried Este. “We’re British subjects. We’re not involved in this affair in any way!”

A woman screamed somewhere, and there was a general movement toward the elevator, a movement which stopped short before the muzzles of two automatic pistols. A girl next to Rags collapsed in a dead faint to the floor, and at the same moment the music on the other roof began to play.

“Stop that music!” bellowed the plain-clothes man. “And get some earrings on that whole bunch — quick!”

Two policemen advanced toward the party, and simultaneously Este and the other aides drew their revolvers, and, shielding the prince as they best could, began to edge toward the side. A shot rang out and then another, followed by a crash of silver and china as half a dozen diners overturned their tables and dropped quickly behind.

The panic became general. There were three shots in quick succession, and then a fusillade. Rags saw Este firing coolly at the eight amber lights above, and a thick fume of gray smoke began to fill the air. As a strange undertone to the shouting and screaming came the incessant clamor of the distant jazz band.

Then in a moment it was all over. A shrill whistle rang out over the roof, and through the smoke Rags saw John Chestnut advancing toward the plain-clothes man, his hands held out in a gesture of surrender. There was a last nervous cry, a chill clatter as some one inadvertently stepped into a pile of dishes, and then a heavy silence fell on the roof — even the band seemed to have died away.

“It’s all over!” John Chestnut’s voice rang out wildly on the night air. “The party’s over. Everybody who wants to can go home!”

Still there was silence — Rags knew it was the silence of awe — the strain of guilt had driven John Chestnut insane.

“It was a great performance,” he was shouting. “I want to thank you one and all. If you can find any tables still standing, champagne will be served as long as you care to stay.”

It seemed to Rags that the roof and the high stars suddenly began to swim round and round. She saw John take the detective’s hand and shake it heartily, and she watched the detective grin and pocket his gun. The music had recommenced, and the girl who had fainted was suddenly dancing with Lord Charles Este in the corner. John was running here and there patting people on the back, and laughing and shaking hands. Then he was coming toward her, fresh and innocent as a child.

“Wasn’t it wonderful?” he cried.

Rags felt a faintness stealing over her. She groped backward with her hand toward a chair.

“What was it?” she cried dazedly. “Am I dreaming?”

“Of course not! You’re wide awake. I made it up, Rags, don’t you see? I made up the whole thing for you. I had it invented! The only thing real about it was my name!”

She collapsed suddenly against his coat, clung to his lapels, and would have wilted to the floor if he had not caught her quickly in his arms.

“Some champagne — quick!” he called, and then he shouted at the Prince of Wales, who stood near by. “Order my car quick, you! Miss Martin-Jones has fainted from excitement.”

V

The skyscraper rose bulkily through thirty tiers of windows before it attenuated itself to a graceful sugar-loaf of shining white. Then it darted up again another hundred feet, thinned to a mere oblong tower in its last fragile aspiration toward the sky. At the highest of its high windows Rags Martin-Jones stood full in the stiff breeze, gazing down at the city.

“Mr. Chestnut wants to know if you’ll come right in to his private office.”

Obediently her slim feet moved along the carpet into a high, cool chamber overlooking the harbor and the wide sea.

John Chestnut sat at his desk, waiting, and Rags walked to him and put her arms around his shoulder.

“Are you sure you’re real?” she asked anxiously. “Are you absolutely sure?”

“You only wrote me a week before you came,” he protested modestly, “or I could have arranged a revolution.”

“Was the whole thing just *mine*?” she demanded. “Was it a perfectly useless, gorgeous thing, just for me?”

“Useless?” He considered. “Well, it started out to be. At the last minute I invited a big restaurant man to be there, and while you were at the other table I sold him the whole idea of the night-club.”

He looked at his watch.

“I’ve got one more thing to do — and then we’ve got just time to be married before lunch.” He picked up his telephone. “Jackson? . . . Send a triplicated cable to Paris, Berlin, and Budapest and have those two bogus dukes who tossed up for Schwartzberg-Rhineminster chased over the Polish border. If the Dutchy won’t act, lower the rate of exchange to point triple zero naught two. Also, that idiot Blutchdak is in the Balkans again, trying to start a new war. Put him on the first boat for New York or else throw him in a Greek jail.”

He rang off, turned to the startled cosmopolite with a laugh.

“The next stop is the City Hall. Then, if you like, we’ll run over to Paris.”

“John,” she asked him intently, “who was the Prince of Wales?”

He waited till they were in the elevator, dropping twenty floors at a swoop. Then he leaned forward and tapped the lift-boy on the shoulder.

“Not so fast, Cedric. This lady isn’t used to falls from high places.”

The elevator-boy turned around, smiled. His face was pale, oval, framed in yellow hair. Rags blushed like fire.

“Cedric’s from Wessex,” explained John. “The resemblance is, to say the least, amazing. Princes are not particularly discreet, and I suspect Cedric of being a Guelph in some left-handed way.”

Rags took the monocle from around her neck and threw the ribbon over Cedric’s head. “Thank you,” she said simply, “for the second greatest thrill of my life.”

John Chestnut began rubbing his hands together in a commercial gesture. “Patronize this place, lady,” he besought her. “Best bazaar in the city!”

“What have you got for sale?”

“Well, m’selle, to-day we have some perfectly bee-oo-tiful love.”

“Wrap it up, Mr. Merchant,” cried Rags Martin-Jones. “It looks like a bargain to me.”

“THE SENSIBLE THING”

I

Liberty, 15 July 1924

At the Great American Lunch Hour young George O’Kelly straightened his desk deliberately and with an assumed air of interest. No one in the office must know that he was in a hurry, for success is a matter of atmosphere, and it is not well to advertise the fact that your mind is separated from your work by a distance of seven hundred miles.

But once out of the building he set his teeth and began to run, glancing now and then at the gay noon of early spring which filled Times Square and loitered less than twenty feet over the heads of the crowd. The crowd all looked slightly upward and took deep March breaths, and the sun dazzled their eyes so that scarcely any one saw any one else but only their own reflection on the sky.

George O’Kelly, whose mind was over seven hundred miles away, thought that all outdoors was horrible. He rushed into the subway, and for ninety-five blocks bent a frenzied glance on a car-card which showed vividly how he had only one chance in five of keeping his teeth for ten years. At 137th Street he broke off his study of commercial art, left the subway, and began to run again, a tireless, anxious run that brought him this time to his home — one room in a high, horrible apartment-house in the middle of nowhere.

There it was on the bureau, the letter — in sacred ink, on blessed paper — all over the city, people, if they listened, could hear the beating of George O’Kelly’s heart. He read the commas, the blots, and the thumb-smudge on the margin — then he threw himself hopelessly upon his bed.

He was in a mess, one of those terrific messes which are ordinary incidents in the life of the poor, which follow poverty like birds of prey. The poor go under or go up or go wrong or even go on, somehow, in a way the poor

have — but George O’Kelly was so new to poverty that had any one denied the uniqueness of his case he would have been astounded.

Less than two years ago he had been graduated with honors from The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and had taken a position with a firm of construction engineers in southern Tennessee. All his life he had thought in terms of tunnels and skyscrapers and great squat dams and tall, three-towered bridges, that were like dancers holding hands in a row, with heads as tall as cities and skirts of cable strand. It had seemed romantic to George O’Kelly to change the sweep of rivers and the shape of mountains so that life could flourish in the old bad lands of the world where it had never taken root before. He loved steel, and there was always steel near him in his dreams, liquid steel, steel in bars, and blocks and beams and formless plastic masses, waiting for him, as paint and canvas to his hand. Steel inexhaustible, to be made lovely and austere in his imaginative fire . . .

At present he was an insurance clerk at forty dollars a week with his dream slipping fast behind him. The dark little girl who had made this mess, this terrible and intolerable mess, was waiting to be sent for in a town in Tennessee.

In fifteen minutes the woman from whom he sublet his room knocked and asked him with maddening kindness if, since he was home, he would have some lunch. He shook his head, but the interruption aroused him, and getting up from the bed he wrote a telegram.

“Letter depressed me have you lost your nerve you are foolish and just upset to think of breaking off why not marry me immediately sure we can make it all right — ”

He hesitated for a wild minute, and then added in a hand that could scarcely be recognized as his own: “In any case I will arrive to-morrow at six o’clock.”

When he finished he ran out of the apartment and down to the telegraph office near the subway stop. He possessed in this world not quite one hundred dollars, but the letter showed that she was “nervous” and this left him no choice. He knew what “nervous” meant — that she was emotionally

depressed, that the prospect of marrying into a life of poverty and struggle was putting too much strain upon her love.

George O'Kelly reached the insurance company at his usual run, the run that had become almost second nature to him, that seemed best to express the tension under which he lived. He went straight to the manager's office.

"I want to see you, Mr. Chambers," he announced breathlessly.

"Well?" Two eyes, eyes like winter windows, glared at him with ruthless impersonality.

"I want to get four days' vacation."

"Why, you had a vacation just two weeks ago!" said Mr. Chambers in surprise.

"That's true," admitted the distraught young man, "but now I've got to have another."

"Where'd you go last time? To your home?"

"No, I went to — a place in Tennessee."

"Well, where do you want to go this time?"

"Well, this time I want to go to — a place in Tennessee."

"You're consistent, anyhow," said the manager dryly. "But I didn't realize you were employed here as a travelling salesman."

"I'm not," cried George desperately, "but I've got to go."

"All right," agreed Mr. Chambers, "but you don't have to come back. So don't!"

"I won't." And to his own astonishment as well as Mr. Chambers' George's face grew pink with pleasure. He felt happy, exultant — for the first time in six months he was absolutely free. Tears of gratitude stood in his eyes, and he seized Mr. Chambers warmly by the hand.

"I want to thank you," he said with a rush of emotion. "I don't want to come back. I think I'd have gone crazy if you'd said that I could come back. Only I

couldn't quit myself, you see, and I want to thank you for — for quitting for me.”

He waved his hand magnanimously, shouted aloud, “You owe me three days' salary but you can keep it!” and rushed from the office. Mr. Chambers rang for his stenographer to ask if O'Kelly had seemed queer lately. He had fired many men in the course of his career, and they had taken it in many different ways, but none of them had thanked him — ever before.

II

Jonquil Cary was her name, and to George O'Kelly nothing had ever looked so fresh and pale as her face when she saw him and fled to him eagerly along the station platform. Her arms were raised to him, her mouth was half parted for his kiss, when she held him off suddenly and lightly and, with a touch of embarrassment, looked around. Two boys, somewhat younger than George, were standing in the background.

“This is Mr. Craddock and Mr. Holt,” she announced cheerfully. “You met them when you were here before.”

Disturbed by the transition of a kiss into an introduction and suspecting some hidden significance, George was more confused when he found that the automobile which was to carry them to Jonquil's house belonged to one of the two young men. It seemed to put him at a disadvantage. On the way Jonquil chattered between the front and back seats, and when he tried to slip his arm around her under cover of the twilight she compelled him with a quick movement to take her hand instead.

“Is this street on the way to your house?” he whispered. “I don't recognize it.”

“It's the new boulevard. Jerry just got this car to-day, and he wants to show it to me before he takes us home.”

When, after twenty minutes, they were deposited at Jonquil's house, George felt that the first happiness of the meeting, the joy he had recognized so surely in her eyes back in the station, had been dissipated by

the intrusion of the ride. Something that he had looked forward to had been rather casually lost, and he was brooding on this as he said good night stiffly to the two young men. Then his ill-humor faded as Jonquil drew him into a familiar embrace under the dim light of the front hall and told him in a dozen ways, of which the best was without words, how she had missed him. Her emotion reassured him, promised his anxious heart that everything would be all right.

They sat together on the sofa, overcome by each other's presence, beyond all except fragmentary endearments. At the supper hour Jonquil's father and mother appeared and were glad to see George. They liked him, and had been interested in his engineering career when he had first come to Tennessee over a year before. They had been sorry when he had given it up and gone to New York to look for something more immediately profitable, but while they deplored the curtailment of his career they sympathized with him and were ready to recognize the engagement. During dinner they asked about his progress in New York.

"Everything's going fine," he told them with enthusiasm. "I've been promoted — better salary."

He was miserable as he said this — but they were all so glad.

"They must like you," said Mrs. Cary, "that's certain — or they wouldn't let you off twice in three weeks to come down here."

"I told them they had to," explained George hastily; "I told them if they didn't I wouldn't work for them any more."

"But you ought to save your money," Mrs. Cary reproached him gently. "Not spend it all on this expensive trip."

Dinner was over — he and Jonquil were alone and she came back into his arms.

"So glad you're here," she sighed. "Wish you never were going away again, darling."

"Do you miss me?"

“Oh, so much, so much.”

“Do you — do other men come to see you often? Like those two kids?”

The question surprised her. The dark velvet eyes stared at him.

“Why, of course they do. All the time. Why — I’ve told you in letters that they did, dearest.”

This was true — when he had first come to the city there had been already a dozen boys around her, responding to her picturesque fragility with adolescent worship, and a few of them perceiving that her beautiful eyes were also sane and kind.

“Do you expect me never to go anywhere” — Jonquil demanded, leaning back against the sofa-pillows until she seemed to look at him from many miles away — “and just fold my hands and sit still — forever?”

“What do you mean?” he blurted out in a panic. “Do you mean you think I’ll never have enough money to marry you?”

“Oh, don’t jump at conclusions so, George.”

“I’m not jumping at conclusions. That’s what you said.”

George decided suddenly that he was on dangerous grounds. He had not intended to let anything spoil this night. He tried to take her again in his arms, but she resisted unexpectedly, saying:

“It’s hot. I’m going to get the electric fan.”

When the fan was adjusted they sat down again, but he was in a super-sensitive mood and involuntarily he plunged into the specific world he had intended to avoid.

“When will you marry me?”

“Are you ready for me to marry you?”

All at once his nerves gave way, and he sprang to his feet.

“Let’s shut off that damned fan,” he cried, “it drives me wild. It’s like a clock ticking away all the time I’ll be with you. I came here to be happy and forget everything about New York and time — ”

He sank down on the sofa as suddenly as he had risen. Jonquil turned off the fan, and drawing his head down into her lap began stroking his hair.

“Let’s sit like this,” she said softly, “just sit quiet like this, and I’ll put you to sleep. You’re all tired and nervous and your sweetheart’ll take care of you.”

“But I don’t want to sit like this,” he complained, jerking up suddenly, “I don’t want to sit like this at all. I want you to kiss me. That’s the only thing that makes me rest. And anyways I’m not nervous — it’s you that’s nervous. I’m not nervous at all.”

To prove that he wasn’t nervous he left the couch and plumped himself into a rocking-chair across the room.

“Just when I’m ready to marry you you write me the most nervous letters, as if you’re going to back out, and I have to come rushing down here — ”

“You don’t have to come if you don’t want to.”

“But I do want to!” insisted George.

It seemed to him that he was being very cool and logical and that she was putting him deliberately in the wrong. With every word they were drawing farther and farther apart — and he was unable to stop himself or to keep worry and pain out of his voice.

But in a minute Jonquil began to cry sorrowfully and he came back to the sofa and put his arm around her. He was the comforter now, drawing her head close to his shoulder, murmuring old familiar things until she grew calmer and only trembled a little, spasmodically, in his arms. For over an hour they sat there, while the evening pianos thumped their last cadences into the street outside. George did not move, or think, or hope, lulled into numbness by the premonition of disaster. The clock would tick on, past eleven, past twelve, and then Mrs. Cary would call down gently over the banister — beyond that he saw only to-morrow and despair.

III

In the heat of the next day the breaking-point came. They had each guessed the truth about the other, but of the two she was the more ready to admit the situation.

“There’s no use going on,” she said miserably, “you know you hate the insurance business, and you’ll never do well in it.”

“That’s not it,” he insisted stubbornly; “I hate going on alone. If you’ll marry me and come with me and take a chance with me, I can make good at anything, but not while I’m worrying about you down here.”

She was silent a long time before she answered, not thinking — for she had seen the end — but only waiting, because she knew that every word would seem more cruel than the last. Finally she spoke:

“George, I love you with all my heart, and I don’t see how I can ever love any one else but you. If you’d been ready for me two months ago I’d have married you — now I can’t because it doesn’t seem to be the sensible thing.”

He made wild accusations — there was some one else — she was keeping something from him!

“No, there’s no one else.”

This was true. But reacting from the strain of this affair she had found relief in the company of young boys like Jerry Holt, who had the merit of meaning absolutely nothing in her life.

George didn’t take the situation well, at all. He seized her in his arms and tried literally to kiss her into marrying him at once. When this failed, he broke into a long monologue of self-pity, and ceased only when he saw that he was making himself despicable in her sight. He threatened to leave when he had no intention of leaving, and refused to go when she told him that, after all, it was best that he should.

For a while she was sorry, then for another while she was merely kind.

“You’d better go now,” she cried at last, so loud that Mrs. Cary came downstairs in alarm.

“Is something the matter?”

“I’m going away, Mrs. Cary,” said George brokenly. Jonquil had left the room.

“Don’t feel so badly, George.” Mrs. Cary blinked at him in helpless sympathy — sorry and, in the same breath, glad that the little tragedy was almost done. “If I were you I’d go home to your mother for a week or so. Perhaps after all this is the sensible thing — ”

“Please don’t talk,” he cried. “Please don’t say anything to me now!”

Jonquil came into the room again, her sorrow and her nervousness alike tucked under powder and rouge and hat.

“I’ve ordered a taxicab,” she said impersonally. “We can drive around until your train leaves.”

She walked out on the front porch. George put on his coat and hat and stood for a minute exhausted in the hall — he had eaten scarcely a bite since he had left New York. Mrs. Cary came over, drew his head down and kissed him on the cheek, and he felt very ridiculous and weak in his knowledge that the scene had been ridiculous and weak at the end. If he had only gone the night before — left her for the last time with a decent pride.

The taxi had come, and for an hour these two that had been lovers rode along the less-frequented streets. He held her hand and grew calmer in the sunshine, seeing too late that there had been nothing all along to do or say.

“I’ll come back,” he told her.

“I know you will,” she answered, trying to put a cheery faith into her voice. “And we’ll write each other — sometimes.”

“No,” he said, “we won’t write. I couldn’t stand that. Some day I’ll come back.”

“I’ll never forget you, George.”

They reached the station, and she went with him while he bought his ticket.

...

“Why, George O’Kelly and Jonquil Cary!”

It was a man and a girl whom George had known when he had worked in town, and Jonquil seemed to greet their presence with relief. For an interminable five minutes they all stood there talking; then the train roared into the station, and with ill-concealed agony in his face George held out his arms toward Jonquil. She took an uncertain step toward him, faltered, and then pressed his hand quickly as if she were taking leave of a chance friend.

“Good-by, George,” she was saying, “I hope you have a pleasant trip.

“Good-by, George. Come back and see us all again.”

Dumb, almost blind with pain, he seized his suitcase, and in some dazed way got himself aboard the train.

Past clanging street-crossings, gathering speed through wide suburban spaces toward the sunset. Perhaps she too would see the sunset and pause for a moment, turning, remembering, before he faded with her sleep into the past. This night’s dusk would cover up forever the sun and the trees and the flowers and laughter of his young world.

IV

On a damp afternoon in September of the following year a young man with his face burned to a deep copper glow got off a train at a city in Tennessee. He looked around anxiously, and seemed relieved when he found that there was no one in the station to meet him. He taxied to the best hotel in the city where he registered with some satisfaction as George O’Kelly, Cuzco, Peru.

Up in his room he sat for a few minutes at the window looking down into the familiar street below. Then with his hand trembling faintly he took off the telephone receiver and called a number.

“Is Miss Jonquil in?”

“This is she.”

“Oh — ” His voice after overcoming a faint tendency to waver went on with friendly formality.

“This is George O’Kelly. Did you get my letter?”

“Yes. I thought you’d be in to-day.”

Her voice, cool and unmoved, disturbed him, but not as he had expected. This was the voice of a stranger, unexcited, pleasantly glad to see him — that was all. He wanted to put down the telephone and catch his breath.

“I haven’t seen you for — a long time.” He succeeded in making this sound offhand. “Over a year.”

He knew how long it had been — to the day.

“It’ll be awfully nice to talk to you again.”

“I’ll be there in about an hour.”

He hung up. For four long seasons every minute of his leisure had been crowded with anticipation of this hour, and now this hour was here. He had thought of finding her married, engaged, in love — he had not thought she would be unstirred at his return.

There would never again in his life, he felt, be another ten months like these he had just gone through. He had made an admittedly remarkable showing for a young engineer — stumbled into two unusual opportunities, one in Peru, whence he had just returned, and another, consequent upon it, in New York, whither he was bound. In this short time he had risen from poverty into a position of unlimited opportunity.

He looked at himself in the dressing-table mirror. He was almost black with tan, but it was a romantic black, and in the last week, since he had had time to think about it, it had given him considerable pleasure. The hardness of his frame, too, he appraised with a sort of fascination. He had lost part of an eyebrow somewhere, and he still wore an elastic bandage on his knee, but he was too young not to realize that on the steamer many women had looked at him with unusual tributary interest.

His clothes, of course, were frightful. They had been made for him by a Greek tailor in Lima — in two days. He was young enough, too, to have explained this sartorial deficiency to Jonquil in his otherwise laconic note. The only further detail it contained was a request that he should not be met at the station.

George O'Kelly, of Cuzco, Peru, waited an hour and a half in the hotel, until, to be exact, the sun had reached a midway position in the sky. Then, freshly shaven and talcum-powdered toward a somewhat more Caucasian hue, for vanity at the last minute had overcome romance, he engaged a taxicab and set out for the house he knew so well.

He was breathing hard — he noticed this but he told himself that it was excitement, not emotion. He was here; she was not married — that was enough. He was not even sure what he had to say to her. But this was the moment of his life that he felt he could least easily have dispensed with. There was no triumph, after all, without a girl concerned, and if he did not lay his spoils at her feet he could at least hold them for a passing moment before her eyes.

The house loomed up suddenly beside him, and his first thought was that it had assumed a strange unreality. There was nothing changed — only everything was changed. It was smaller and it seemed shabbier than before — there was no cloud of magic hovering over its roof and issuing from the windows of the upper floor. He rang the door-bell and an unfamiliar colored maid appeared. Miss Jonquil would be down in a moment. He wet his lips nervously and walked into the sitting-room — and the feeling of unreality increased. After all, he saw, this was only a room, and not the enchanted chamber where he had passed those poignant hours. He sat in a chair, amazed to find it a chair, realizing that his imagination had distorted and colored all these simple familiar things.

Then the door opened and Jonquil came into the room — and it was as though everything in it suddenly blurred before his eyes. He had not remembered how beautiful she was, and he felt his face grow pale and his voice diminish to a poor sigh in his throat.

She was dressed in pale green, and a gold ribbon bound back her dark, straight hair like a crown. The familiar velvet eyes caught his as she came through the door, and a spasm of fright went through him at her beauty's power of inflicting pain.

He said "Hello," and they each took a few steps forward and shook hands. Then they sat in chairs quite far apart and gazed at each other across the room.

"You've come back," she said, and he answered just as tritely: "I wanted to stop in and see you as I came through."

He tried to neutralize the tremor in his voice by looking anywhere but at her face. The obligation to speak was on him, but, unless he immediately began to boast, it seemed that there was nothing to say. There had never been anything casual in their previous relations — it didn't seem possible that people in this position would talk about the weather.

"This is ridiculous," he broke out in sudden embarrassment. "I don't know exactly what to do. Does my being here bother you?"

"No." The answer was both reticent and impersonally sad. It depressed him.

"Are you engaged?" he demanded.

"No."

"Are you in love with some one?"

She shook her head.

"Oh." He leaned back in his chair. Another subject seemed exhausted — the interview was not taking the course he had intended.

"Jonquil," he began, this time on a softer key, "after all that's happened between us, I wanted to come back and see you. Whatever I do in the future I'll never love another girl as I've loved you."

This was one of the speeches he had rehearsed. On the steamer it had seemed to have just the right note — a reference to the tenderness he would always feel for her combined with a non-committal attitude toward

his present state of mind. Here with the past around him, beside him, growing minute by minute more heavy on the air, it seemed theatrical and stale.

She made no comment, sat without moving, her eyes fixed on him with an expression that might have meant everything or nothing.

“You don’t love me any more, do you?” he asked her in a level voice.

“No.”

When Mrs. Cary came in a minute later, and spoke to him about his success — there had been a half-column about him in the local paper — he was a mixture of emotions. He knew now that he still wanted this girl, and he knew that the past sometimes comes back — that was all. For the rest he must be strong and watchful and he would see.

“And now,” Mrs. Cary was saying, “I want you two to go and see the lady who has the chrysanthemums. She particularly told me she wanted to see you because she’d read about you in the paper.”

They went to see the lady with the chrysanthemums. They walked along the street, and he recognized with a sort of excitement just how her shorter footsteps always fell in between his own. The lady turned out to be nice, and the chrysanthemums were enormous and extraordinarily beautiful. The lady’s gardens were full of them, white and pink and yellow, so that to be among them was a trip back into the heart of summer. There were two gardens full, and a gate between them; when they strolled toward the second garden the lady went first through the gate.

And then a curious thing happened. George stepped aside to let Jonquil pass, but instead of going through she stood still and stared at him for a minute. It was not so much the look, which was not a smile, as it was the moment of silence. They saw each other’s eyes, and both took a short, faintly accelerated breath, and then they went on into the second garden. That was all.

The afternoon waned. They thanked the lady and walked home slowly, thoughtfully, side by side. Through dinner too they were silent. George told

Mr. Cary something of what had happened in South America, and managed to let it be known that everything would be plain sailing for him in the future.

Then dinner was over, and he and Jonquil were alone in the room which had seen the beginning of their love affair and the end. It seemed to him long ago and inexpressibly sad. On that sofa he had felt agony and grief such as he would never feel again. He would never be so weak or so tired and miserable and poor. Yet he knew that that boy of fifteen months before had had something, a trust, a warmth that was gone forever. The sensible thing — they had done the sensible thing. He had traded his first youth for strength and carved success out of despair. But with his youth, life had carried away the freshness of his love.

“You won’t marry me, will you?” he said quietly.

Jonquil shook her dark head.

“I’m never going to marry,” she answered.

He nodded.

“I’m going on to Washington in the morning,” he said.

“Oh — ”

“I have to go. I’ve got to be in New York by the first, and meanwhile I want to stop off in Washington.”

“Business!”

“No-o,” he said as if reluctantly. “There’s some one there I must see who was very kind to me when I was so — down and out.”

This was invented. There was no one in Washington for him to see — but he was watching Jonquil narrowly, and he was sure that she winced a little, that her eyes closed and then opened wide again.

“But before I go I want to tell you the things that happened to me since I saw you, and, as maybe we won’t meet again, I wonder if — if just this once

you'd sit in my lap like you used to. I wouldn't ask except since there's no one else — yet — perhaps it doesn't matter.”

She nodded, and in a moment was sitting in his lap as she had sat so often in that vanished spring. The feel of her head against his shoulder, of her familiar body, sent a shock of emotion over him. His arms holding her had a tendency to tighten around her, so he leaned back and began to talk thoughtfully into the air.

He told her of a despairing two weeks in New York which had terminated with an attractive if not very profitable job in a construction plant in Jersey City. When the Peru business had first presented itself it had not seemed an extraordinary opportunity. He was to be third assistant engineer on the expedition, but only ten of the American party, including eight rodmen and surveyors, had ever reached Cuzco. Ten days later the chief of the expedition was dead of yellow fever. That had been his chance, a chance for anybody but a fool, a marvellous chance —

“A chance for anybody but a fool?” she interrupted innocently.

“Even for a fool,” he continued. “It was wonderful. Well, I wired New York — ”

“And so,” she interrupted again, “they wired that you ought to take a chance?”

“Ought to!” he exclaimed, still leaning back. “That I *had* to. There was no time to lose — ”

“Not a minute?”

“Not a minute.”

“Not even time for — ” she paused.

“For what?”

“Look.”

He bent his head forward suddenly, and she drew herself to him in the same moment, her lips half open like a flower.

“Yes,” he whispered into her lips. “There’s all the time in the world. . . .”

All the time in the world — his life and hers. But for an instant as he kissed her he knew that though he search through eternity he could never recapture those lost April hours. He might press her close now till the muscles knotted on his arms — she was something desirable and rare that he had fought for and made his own — but never again an intangible whisper in the dusk, or on the breeze of night. . . .

Well, let it pass, he thought; April is over, April is over. There are all kinds of love in the world, but never the same love twice.

THE BABY PARTY

Hearst's International (February 1925)

When John Andros felt old he found solace in the thought of life continuing through his child. The dark trumpets of oblivion were less loud at the patter of his child's feet or at the sound of his child's voice babbling mad non sequiturs to him over the telephone. The latter incident occurred every afternoon at three when his wife called the office from the country, and he came to look forward to it as one of the vivid minutes of his day.

He was not physically old, but his life had been a series of struggles up a series of rugged hills, and here at thirty-eight having won his battles against ill-health and poverty he cherished less than the usual number of illusions. Even his feeling about his little girl was qualified. She had interrupted his rather intense love-affair with his wife, and she was the reason for their living in a suburban town, where they paid for country air with endless servant troubles and the weary merry-go-round of the commuting train.

It was little Ede as a definite piece of youth that chiefly interested him. He liked to take her on his lap and examine minutely her fragrant, downy scalp and her eyes with their irises of morning blue. Having paid this homage John was content that the nurse should take her away. After ten minutes the very vitality of the child irritated him; he was inclined to lose his temper when things were broken, and one Sunday afternoon when she had disrupted a bridge game by permanently hiding up the ace of spades, he had made a scene that had reduced his wife to tears.

This was absurd and John was ashamed of himself. It was inevitable that such things would happen, and it was impossible that little Ede should spend all her indoor hours in the nursery upstairs when she was becoming, as her mother said, more nearly a 'real person' every day.

She was two and a half, and this afternoon, for instance, she was going to a baby party. Grown-up Edith, her mother, had telephoned the information to

the office, and little Ede had confirmed the business by shouting 'I yam going to a *pantry!*' into John's unsuspecting left ear.

'Drop in at the Markeys' when you get home, won't you, dear?' resumed her mother. 'It'll be funny. Ede's going to be all dressed up in her new pink dress —'

The conversation terminated abruptly with a squawk which indicated that the telephone had been pulled violently to the floor. John laughed and decided to get an early train out; the prospect of a baby party in someone else's house amused him.

'What a peach of a mess!' he thought humorously. 'A dozen mothers, and each one looking at nothing but her own child. All the babies breaking things and grabbing at the cake, and each mama going home thinking about the subtle superiority of her own child to every other child there.'

He was in a good humour today — all the things in his life were going better than they had ever gone before. When he got off the train at his station he shook his head at an importunate taxi man, and began to walk up the long hill towards his house through the crisp December twilight. It was only six o'clock but the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin sugary snow that lay over the lawns.

As he walked along drawing his lungs full of cold air his happiness increased, and the idea of a baby party appealed to him more and more. He began to wonder how Ede compared to other children of her own age, and if the pink dress she was to wear was something radical and mature. Increasing his gait he came in sight of his own house, where the lights of a defunct Christmas-tree still blossomed in the window, but he continued on past the walk. The party was at the Markeys' next door.

As he mounted the brick step and rang the bell he became aware of voices inside, and he was glad he was not too late. Then he raised his head and listened — the voices were not children's voices, but they were loud and pitched high with anger; there were at least three of them and one, which rose as he listened to a hysterical sob, he recognized immediately as his wife's.

‘There’s been some trouble,’ he thought quickly.

Trying the door, he found it unlocked and pushed it open.

The baby party started at half past four, but Edith Andros, calculating shrewdly that the new dress would stand out more sensationally against vestments already rumped, planned the arrival of herself and little Ede for five. When they appeared it was already a flourishing affair. Four baby girls and nine baby boys, each one curled and washed and dressed with all the care of a proud and jealous heart, were dancing to the music of a phonograph. Never more than two or three were dancing at once, but as all were continually in motion running to and from their mothers for encouragement, the general effect was the same.

As Edith and her daughter entered, the music was temporarily drowned out by a sustained chorus, consisting largely of the word *cute* and directed towards little Ede, who stood looking timidly about and fingering the edges of her pink dress. She was not kissed — this is the sanitary age — but she was passed along a row of mamas each one of whom said ‘cu-u-ute’ to her and held her pink little hand before passing her on to the next. After some encouragement and a few mild pushes she was absorbed into the dance, and became an active member of the party.

Edith stood near the door talking to Mrs Markey, and keeping an eye on the tiny figure in the pink dress. She did not care for Mrs Markey; she considered her both snippy and common, but John and Joe Markey were congenial and went in together on the commuting train every morning, so the two women kept up an elaborate pretence of warm amity. They were always reproaching each other for ‘not coming to see me’, and they were always planning the kind of parties that began with ‘You’ll have to come to dinner with us soon, and we’ll go to the theatre,’ but never matured further.

‘Little Ede looks perfectly darling,’ said Mrs Markey, smiling and moistening her lips in a way that Edith found particularly repulsive.’ *Sogrown-up* — I can’t *believe* it!’

Edith wondered if ‘little Ede’ referred to the fact that Billy Markey, though several months younger, weighed almost five pounds more. Accepting a cup

of tea she took a seat with two other ladies on a divan and launched into the real business of the afternoon, which of course lay in relating the recent accomplishments and insouciances of her child.

An hour passed. Dancing palled and the babies took to sterner sport. They ran into the dining-room, rounded the big table, and essayed the kitchen door, from which they were rescued by an expeditionary force of mothers. Having been rounded up they immediately broke loose, and rushing back to the dining-room tried the familiar swinging door again. The word 'overheated' began to be used, and small white brows were dried with small white handkerchiefs. A general attempt to make the babies sit down began, but the babies squirmed off laps with peremptory cries of 'Down! Down!' and the rush into the fascinating dining-room began anew.

This phase of the party came to an end with the arrival of refreshments, a large cake with two candles, and saucers of vanilla ice-cream. Billy Markey, a stout laughing baby with red hair and legs somewhat bowed, blew out the candles, and placed an experimental thumb on the white frosting. The refreshments were distributed, and the children ate, greedily but without confusion — they had behaved remarkably well all afternoon. They were modern babies who ate and slept at regular hours, so their dispositions were good, and their faces healthy and pink — such a peaceful party would not have been possible thirty years ago.

After the refreshments a gradual exodus began. Edith glanced anxiously at her watch — it was almost six, and John had not arrived. She wanted him to see Ede with the other children — to see how dignified and polite and intelligent she was, and how the only ice-cream spot on her dress was some that had dropped from her chin when she was juggled from behind.

'You're a darling,' she whispered to her child, drawing her suddenly against her knee. 'Do you know you're a darling? Do you know you're a darling?'

Ede laughed. 'Bow-wow,' she said suddenly.

'Bow-wow?' Edith looked around. 'There isn't any bow-wow.'

'Bow-wow,' repeated Ede. 'I want a bow-wow.'

Edith followed the small pointing finger.

‘That isn’t a bow-wow, dearest, that’s a teddy-bear.’

‘Bear?’

‘Yes, that’s a teddy-bear, and it belongs to Billy Markey. You don’t want Billy Markey’s teddy-bear, do you?’

Ede did want it.

She broke away from her mother and approached Billy Markey, who held the toy closely in his arms. Ede stood regarding him with inscrutable eyes, and Billy laughed.

Grown-up Edith looked at her watch again, this time impatiently.

The party had dwindled until, besides Ede and Billy, there were only two babies remaining — and one of the two remained only by virtue of having hidden himself under the dining-room table. It was selfish of John not to come. It showed so little pride in the child. Other fathers had come, half a dozen of them, to call for their wives, and they had stayed for a while and looked on.

There was a sudden wail. Ede had obtained Billy’s teddy-bear by pulling it forcibly from his arms, and on Billy’s attempt to recover it, she had pushed him casually to the floor.

‘Why, Ede!’ cried her mother, repressing an inclination to laugh.

Joe Markey, a handsome, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five, picked up his son and set him on his feet. ‘You’re a fine fellow,’ he said jovially. ‘Let a girl knock you over! You’re a fine fellow.’

‘Did he bump his head?’ Mrs Markey returned anxiously from bowing the next to last remaining mother out of the door.

‘No-o-o-o,’ exclaimed Markey. ‘He bumped something else, didn’t you, Billy? He bumped something else.’

Billy had so far forgotten the bump that he was already making an attempt to recover his property. He seized a leg of the bear which projected from Ede's enveloping arms and tugged at it but without success.

'No,' said Ede emphatically.

Suddenly, encouraged by the success of her former half-accidental manoeuvre, Ede dropped the teddy-bear, placed her hands on Billy's shoulders and pushed him backward off his feet.

This time he landed less harmlessly; his head hit the bare floor just off the rug with a dull hollow sound, whereupon he drew in his breath and delivered an agonized yell.

Immediately the room was in confusion. With an exclamation Markey hurried to his son, but his wife was first to reach the injured baby and catch him up into her arms.

'Oh, *Billy*,' she cried, 'what a terrible bump! She ought to be spanked.'

Edith, who had rushed immediately to her daughter, heard this remark, and her lips came sharply together.

'Why, Ede,' she whispered perfunctorily, 'you bad girl!'

Ede put back her little head suddenly and laughed. It was a loud laugh, a triumphant laugh with victory in it and challenge and contempt. Unfortunately it was also an infectious laugh. Before her mother realized the delicacy of the situation, she too had laughed, an audible, distinct laugh not unlike the baby's, and partaking of the same overtones.

Then, as suddenly, she stopped.

Mrs Markey's face had grown red with anger, and Markey, who had been feeling the back of the baby's head with one finger, looked at her, frowning.

'It's swollen already,' he said with a note of reproof in his voice. 'I'll get some witch-hazel.'

But Mrs Markey had lost her temper. 'I don't see anything funny about a child being hurt!' she said in a trembling voice.

Little Ede meanwhile had been looking at her mother curiously. She noted that her own laugh had produced her mother's and she wondered if the same cause would always produce the same effect. So she chose this moment to throw back her head and laugh again.

To her mother the additional mirth added the final touch of hysteria to the situation. Pressing her handkerchief to her mouth she giggled irrepressibly. It was more than nervousness — she felt that in a peculiar way she was laughing with her child — they were laughing together.

It was in a way a defiance — those two against the world.

While Markey rushed upstairs to the bathroom for ointment, his wife was walking up and down rocking the yelling boy in her arms.

'Please go home!' she broke out suddenly. 'The child's badly hurt, and if you haven't the decency to be quiet, you'd better go home.'

'Very well,' said Edith, her own temper rising. 'I've never seen anyone make such a mountain out of —'

'Get out!' cried Mrs Markey frantically. 'There's the door, get out — I never want to see you in our house again. You or your brat either!'

Edith had taken her daughter's hand and was moving quickly towards the door, but at this remark she stopped and turned around, her face contracting with indignation.

'Don't you dare call her that!'

Mrs Markey did not answer but continued walking up and down, muttering to herself and to Billy in an inaudible voice.

Edith began to cry.

'I will get out!' she sobbed. 'I've never heard anybody so rude and common in my life. I'm glad your baby did get pushed down — he's nothing but a f-fat little fool anyhow.'

Joe Markey reached the foot of the stairs just in time to hear this remark.

‘Why, Mrs Andros,’ he said sharply, ‘can’t you see the child’s hurt. You really ought to control yourself.’

‘Control m-myself!’ exclaimed Edith brokenly. ‘You better ask her to c-control herself. I’ve never heard anybody so c-common in my life.’

‘She’s insulting me!’ Mrs Markey was now livid with rage. ‘Did you hear what she said, Joe? I wish you’d put her out. If she won’t go, just take her by the shoulders and put her out!’

‘Don’t you dare touch me!’ cried Edith. ‘I’m going just as quick as I can find my c-coat!’

Blind with tears she took a step towards the hall. It was just at this moment that the door opened and John Andros walked anxiously in.

‘John!’ cried Edith, and fled to him wildly.

‘What’s the matter? Why, what’s the matter?’

‘They’re — they’re putting me out!’ she wailed, collapsing against him. ‘He’d just started to take me by the shoulders and put me out. I want my coat!’

‘That’s not true,’ objected Markey hurriedly. ‘Nobody’s going to put you out.’ He turned to John. ‘Nobody’s going to put her out,’ he repeated. ‘She’s —’

‘What do you mean “put her out”?’ demanded John abruptly. ‘What’s all this talk, anyhow?’

‘Oh, let’s go!’ cried Edith. ‘I want to go. They’re so common, John!’

‘Look here!’ Markey’s face darkened. ‘You’ve said that about enough. You’re acting sort of crazy.’

‘They called Ede a brat!’

For the second time that afternoon little Ede expressed emotion at an inopportune moment. Confused and frightened at the shouting voices, she began to cry, and her tears had the effect of conveying that she felt the insult in her heart.

‘What’s the idea of this?’ broke out John. ‘Do you insult your guests in your own house?’

‘It seems to me it’s your wife that’s done the insulting!’ answered Markey crisply. ‘In fact, your baby there started all the trouble.’

John gave a contemptuous snort. ‘Are you calling names at a little baby?’ he inquired. ‘That’s a fine manly business!’

‘Don’t talk to him, John,’ insisted Edith. ‘Find my coat!’

‘You must be in a bad way,’ went on John angrily, ‘if you have to take out your temper on a helpless little baby.’

‘I never heard anything so damn twisted in my life,’ shouted Markey. ‘If that wife of yours would shut her mouth for a minute — ’

‘Wait a minute! You’re not talking to a woman and child now — ’

There was an incidental interruption. Edith had been fumbling on a chair for her coat, and Mrs Markey had been watching her with hot, angry eyes. Suddenly she laid Billy down on the sofa, where he immediately stopped crying and pulled himself upright, and coming into the hall she quickly found Edith’s coat and handed it to her without a word. Then she went back to the sofa, picked up Billy, and rocking him in her arms looked again at Edith with hot, angry eyes. The interruption had taken less than half a minute.

‘Your wife comes in here and begins shouting around about how common we are!’ burst out Markey violently. ‘Well, if we’re so damn common, you’d better stay away! And what’s more, you’d better get out now!’

Again John gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

‘You’re not only common,’ he returned, ‘you’re evidently an awful bully — when there’s any helpless women and children around.’ He felt for the knob and swung the door open. ‘Come on, Edith.’

Taking up her daughter in her arms, his wife stepped outside and John, still looking contemptuously at Markey, started to follow.

‘Wait a minute!’ Markey took a step forward; he was trembling slightly, and two large veins on his temples were suddenly full of blood. ‘You don’t think you can get away with that, do you? With me?’

Without a word John walked out the door, leaving it open.

Edith, still weeping, had started for home. After following her with his eyes until she reached her own walk, John turned back towards the lighted doorway where Markey was slowly coming down the slippery steps. He took off his overcoat and hat, tossed them off the path onto the snow. Then, sliding a little on the iced walk, he took a step forward.

At the first blow, they both slipped and fell heavily to the sidewalk, half rising then, and again pulled each other to the ground. They found a better foothold in the thin snow to the side of the walk and rushed at each other, both swinging wildly and pressing out the snow into a pasty mud underfoot.

The street was deserted, and except for their short tired gasps and the padded sound as one or the other slipped down into the slushy mud, they fought in silence, clearly defined to each other by the full moonlight as well as by the amber glow that shone out of the open door. Several times they both slipped down together, and then for a while the conflict threshed about wildly on the lawn.

For ten, fifteen, twenty minutes they fought there senselessly in the moonlight. They had both taken off coats and vests at some silently agreed upon interval and now their shirts dripped from their backs in wet pulpy shreds. Both were torn and bleeding and so exhausted that they could stand only when by their position they mutually supported each other — the impact, the mere effort of a blow, would send them both to their hands and knees.

But it was not weariness that ended the business, and the very meaninglessness of the fight was a reason for not stopping. They stopped because once when they were straining at each other on the ground, they heard a man’s footsteps coming along the sidewalk. They had rolled somehow into the shadow, and when they heard these footsteps they stopped fighting, stopped moving, stopped breathing, lay huddled together

like two boys playing Indian until the footsteps had passed. Then, staggering to their feet, they looked at each other like two drunken men.

‘I’ll be damned if I’m going on with this thing any more,’ cried Markey thickly.

‘I’m not going on any more, either,’ said John Andros. ‘I’ve had enough of this thing.’

Again they looked at each other, sulkily this time, as if each suspected the other of urging him to a renewal of the fight. Markey spat out a mouthful of blood from a cut lip; then he cursed softly, and picking up his coat and vest, shook off the snow from them in a surprised way, as if their comparative dampness was his only worry in the world.

‘Want to come in and wash up?’ he asked suddenly.

‘No, thanks,’ said John. ‘I ought to be going home — my wife’ll be worried.’

He too picked up his coat and vest and then his overcoat and hat. Soaking wet and dripping with perspiration, it seemed absurd that less than half an hour ago he had been wearing all these clothes.

‘Well — good night,’ he said hesitantly.

Suddenly they walked towards each other and shook hands. It was no perfunctory hand-shake: John Andros’s arm went around Markey’s shoulder, and he patted him softly on the back for a little while.

‘No harm done,’ he said brokenly.

‘No — you?’

‘No, no harm done.’

‘Well,’ said John Andros after a minute, ‘I guess I’ll say good night.’

Limping slightly and with his clothes over his arm, John Andros turned away. The moonlight was still bright as he left the dark patch of trampled ground and walked over the intervening lawn. Down at the station, half a mile away, he could hear the rumble of the seven o’clock train.

‘But you must have been crazy,’ cried Edith brokenly. ‘I thought you were going to fix it all up there and shake hands. That’s why I went away.’

‘Did you want us to fix it up?’

‘Of course not, I never want to see them again. But I thought of course that was what you were going to do.’ She was touching the bruises on his neck and back with iodine as he sat placidly in a hot bath. ‘I’m going to get the doctor,’ she said insistently. ‘You may be hurt internally.’

He shook his head. ‘Not a chance,’ he answered. ‘I don’t want this to get all over the town.’

‘I don’t understand yet how it all happened.’

‘Neither do I.’ He smiled grimly. ‘I guess these baby parties are pretty rough affairs.’

‘Well, one thing — ’ suggested Edith hopefully, ‘I’m certainly glad we have beef steak in the house for tomorrow’s dinner.’

‘Why?’

‘For your eye, of course. Do you know I came within an ace of ordering veal? Wasn’t that the luckiest thing?’

Half an hour later, dressed except that his neck would accommodate no collar, John moved his limbs experimentally before the glass. ‘I believe I’ll get myself in better shape,’ he said thoughtfully. ‘I must be getting old.’

‘You mean so that next time you can beat him?’

‘I did beat him,’ he announced. ‘At least, I beat him as much as he beat me. And there isn’t going to be any next time. Don’t you go calling people common any more. If you get in any trouble, you just take your coat and go home. Understand?’

‘Yes, dear,’ she said meekly. ‘I was very foolish and now I understand.’

Out in the hall, he paused abruptly by the baby’s door.

‘Is she asleep?’

‘Sound asleep. But you can go in and peek at her — just to say good night.’

They tiptoed in and bent together over the bed. Little Ede, her cheeks flushed with health, her pink hands clasped tight together, was sleeping soundly in the cool, dark room. John reached over the railing of the bed and passed his hand lightly over the silken hair.

‘She’s asleep,’ he murmured in a puzzled way.

‘Naturally, after such an afternoon.’

‘Miz Andros,’ the coloured maid’s stage whisper floated in from the hall. ‘Mr and Miz Markey downstairs an’ want to see you. Mr Markey he’s all cut up in pieces, mam’n. His face look like a roast beef. An’ Miz Markey she ‘pear mighty mad.’

‘Why, what incomparable nerve!’ exclaimed Edith. ‘Just tell them we’re not home. I wouldn’t go down for anything in the world.’

‘You most certainly will.’ John’s voice was hard and set.

‘What?’

‘You’ll go down right now, and, what’s more, whatever that other woman does, you’ll apologize for what you said this afternoon. After that you don’t ever have to see her again.’

‘Why — John, I can’t.’

‘You’ve got to. And just remember that she probably hated to come over here twice as much as you hate to go downstairs.’

‘Aren’t you coming? Do I have to go alone?’

‘I’ll be down — in just a minute.’

John Andros waited until she had closed the door behind her; then he reached over into the bed, and picking up his daughter, blankets and all, sat down in the rocking-chair holding her tightly in his arms. She moved a little, and he held his breath, but she was sleeping soundly, and in a moment she was resting quietly in the hollow of his elbow. Slowly he bent his head until

his cheek was against her bright hair. 'Dear little girl,' he whispered. 'Dear little girl, dear little girl.'

John Andros knew at length what it was he had fought for so savagely that evening. He had it now, he possessed it forever, and for some time he sat there rocking very slowly to and fro in the darkness.

LOVE IN THE NIGHT

I

Saturday Evening Post (14 March 1925)

The words thrilled Val. They had come into his mind sometime during the fresh gold April afternoon and he kept repeating them to himself over and over: "Love in the night; love in the night." He tried them in three languages — Russian, French and English — and decided that they were best in English. In each language they meant a different sort of love and a different sort of night — the English night seemed the warmest and softest with a thinnest and most crystalline sprinkling of stars. The English love seemed the most fragile and romantic — a white dress and a dim face above it and eyes that were pools of light. And when I add that it was a French night he was thinking about, after all, I see I must go back and begin over.

Val was half Russian and half American. His mother was the daughter of that Morris Hasyilton who helped finance the Chicago World's Fair in 1892, and his father was — see the Almanach de Gotha, issue of 1910 — Prince Paul Serge Boris Rostoff, son of Prince Vladimir Rostoff, grandson of a grand duke — 'Jimber-jawed Serge' — and third-cousin-once-removed to the czar. It was all very impressive, you see, on that side — house in St. Petersburg, shooting lodge near Riga, and swollen villa, more like a palace, overlooking the Mediterranean. It was at this villa in Cannes that the Rostoffs passed the winter — and it wasn't at all the thing to remind Princess Rostoff that this Riviera villa, from the marble fountain — after Bernini — to the gold cordial glasses — after dinner — was paid for with American gold.

The Russians, of course, were gay people on the Continent in the gala days before the war. Of the three races that used Southern France for a pleasure ground they were easily the most adept at the grand manner. The English were too practical, and the Americans, though they spent freely, had no tradition of romantic conduct. But the Russians — there was a people as gallant as the Latins, and rich besides! When the Rostoffs arrived at Cannes

late in January the restaurateurs telegraphed north for the Prince's favorite labels to paste on their champagne, and the jewelers put incredibly gorgeous articles aside to show to him — but not to the princess — and the Russian Church was swept and garnished for the season that the Prince might beg orthodox forgiveness for his sins. Even the Mediterranean turned obligingly to a deep wine color in the spring evenings, and fishing boats with robin-breasted sails loitered exquisitely offshore.

In a vague way young Val realized that this was all for the benefit of him and his family. It was a privileged paradise, this white little city on the water, in which he was free to do what he liked because he was rich and young and the blood of Peter the Great ran indigo in his veins. He was only seventeen in 1914, when this history begins, but he had already fought a duel with a young man four years his senior, and he had a small hairless scar to show for it on top of his handsome head.

But the question of love in the night was the thing nearest his heart. It was a vague pleasant dream he had, something that was going to happen to him some day that would be unique and incomparable. He could have told no more about it than that there was a lovely unknown girl concerned in it, and that it ought to take place beneath the Riviera moon.

The odd thing about all this was not that he had this excited and yet almost spiritual hope of romance, for all boys of any imagination have just such hopes, but that it actually came true. And when it happened, it happened so unexpectedly; it was such a jumble of impressions and emotions, of curious phrases that sprang to his lips, of sights and sounds and moments that were here, were lost, were past, that he scarcely understood it at all. Perhaps its very vagueness preserved it in his heart and made him forever unable to forget.

There was an atmosphere of love all about him that spring — his father's loves, for instance, which were many and indiscreet, and which Val became aware of gradually from overhearing the gossip of servants, and definitely from coming on his American mother unexpectedly one afternoon, to find her storming hysterically at his father's picture on the salon wall. In the picture his father wore a white uniform with a furred dolman and looked

back impassively at his wife as if to say “Were you under the impression, my dear, that you were marrying into a family of clergymen?”

Val tiptoed away, surprised, confused — and excited. It didn’t shock him as it would have shocked an American boy of his age. He had known for years what life was among the Continental rich, and he condemned his father only for making his mother cry.

Love went on around him — reproachless love and illicit love alike. As he strolled along the seaside promenade at nine o’clock, when the stars were bright enough to compete with the bright lamps, he was aware of love on every side. From the open-air cafés, vivid with dresses just down from Paris, came a sweet pungent odor of flowers and chartreuse and fresh black coffee and cigarettes — and mingled with them all he caught another scent, the mysterious thrilling scent of love. Hands touched jewel-sparkling hands upon the white tables. Gay dresses and white shirt fronts swayed together, and matches were held, trembling a little, for slow-lighting cigarettes. On the other side of the boulevard lovers less fashionable, young Frenchmen who worked in the stores of Cannes, sauntered with their fiancées under the dim trees, but Val’s young eyes seldom turned that way. The luxury of music and bright colors and low voices — they were all part of his dream. They were the essential trappings of Love in the night.

But assume as he might the rather fierce expression that was expected from a young Russian gentleman who walked the streets alone, Val was beginning to be unhappy. April twilight had succeeded March twilight, the season was almost over, and he had found no use to make of the warm spring evenings. The girls of sixteen and seventeen whom he knew, were chaperoned with care between dusk and bedtime — this, remember, was before the war — and the others who might gladly have walked beside him were an affront to his romantic desire. So April passed by — one week, two weeks, three weeks —

He had played tennis until seven and loitered at the courts for another hour, so it was half-past eight when a tired cab horse accomplished the hill on which gleamed the façade of the Rostoff villa. The lights of his mother’s limousine were yellow in the drive, and the princess, buttoning her gloves,

was just coming out the glowing door. Val tossed two francs to the cabman and went to kiss her on the cheek.

“Don’t touch me,” she said quickly. “You’ve been handling money.”

“But not in my mouth, mother,” he protested humorously.

The princess looked at him impatiently.

“I’m angry,” she said. “Why must you be so late tonight? We’re dining on a yacht and you were to have come along too.”

“What yacht?”

“Americans.” There was always a faint irony in her voice when she mentioned the land of her nativity. Her America was the Chicago of the nineties which she still thought of as the vast upstairs to a butcher shop. Even the irregularities of Prince Paul were not too high a price to have paid for her escape.

“Two yachts,” she continued; “in fact we don’t know which one. The note was very indefinite. Very careless indeed.”

Americans. Val’s mother had taught him to look down on Americans, but she hadn’t succeeded in making him dislike them. American men noticed you, even if you were seventeen. He liked Americans. Although he was thoroughly Russian he wasn’t immaculately so — the exact proportion, like that of a celebrated soap, was about ninety-nine and three-quarters per cent.

“I want to come,” he said, “I’ll hurry up, mother. I’ll — ”

“We’re late now.” The princess turned as her husband appeared in the door. “Now Val says he wants to come.”

“He can’t,” said Prince Paul shortly. “He’s too outrageously late.”

Val nodded. Russian aristocrats, however indulgent about themselves, were always admirably Spartan with their children. There were no arguments.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Prince Paul grunted. The footman, in red and silver livery, opened the limousine door. But the grunt decided the matter for Val, because Princess Rostoff at that day and hour had certain grievances against her husband which gave her command of the domestic situation.

“On second thought you’d better come, Val,” she announced coolly. “It’s too late now, but come after dinner. The yacht is either the Minnehaha or the Privateer.” She got into the limousine. “The one to come to will be the gayer one, I suppose — the Jacksons’ yacht — ”

“Find got sense,” muttered the Prince cryptically, conveying that Val would find it if he had any sense. “Have my man take a look at you ‘fore you start. Wear tie of mine ‘stead of that outrageous string you affected in Vienna. Grow up. High time.”

As the limousine crawled crackling down the pebbled drive Val’s face was burning.

II

It was dark in Cannes harbor, rather it seemed dark after the brightness of the promenade that Val had just left behind. Three frail dock lights glittered dimly upon innumerable fishing boats heaped like shells along the beach. Farther out in the water there were other lights where a fleet of slender yachts rode the tide with slow dignity, and farther still a full ripe moon made the water bosom into a polished dancing floor. Occasionally there was a swish! creak! drip! as a rowboat moved about in the shallows, and its blurred shape threaded the labyrinth of hobbled fishing skiffs and launches. Val, descending the velvet slope of sand, stumbled over a sleeping boatman and caught the rank savor of garlic and plain wine. Taking the man by the shoulders he shook open his startled eyes.

“Do you know where the Minnehaha is anchored, and the Privateer?”

As they slid out into the bay he lay back in the stern and stared with vague discontent at the Riviera moon. That was the right moon, all right.

Frequently, five nights out of seven, there was the right moon. And here

was the soft air, aching with enchantment, and here was the music, many strains of music from many orchestras, drifting out from the shore. Eastward lay the dark Cape of Antibes, and then Nice, and beyond that Monte Carlo, where the night rang chinking full of gold. Some day he would enjoy all that, too, know its every pleasure and success — when he was too old and wise to care.

But tonight — tonight, that stream of silver that waved like a wide strand of curly hair toward the moon; those soft romantic lights of Cannes behind him, the irresistible ineffable love in this air — that was to be wasted forever.

“Which one?” asked the boatman suddenly.

“Which what?” demanded Val, sitting up.

“Which boat?”

He pointed. Val turned; above hovered the gray, sword-like prow of a yacht. During the sustained longing of his wish they had covered half a mile.

He read the brass letters over his head. It was the Privateer, but there were only dim lights on board, and no music and no voices, only a murmurous splash at intervals as the small waves leaped at the sides.

“The other one,” said Val; “the Minnehaha.”

“Don’t go yet.”

Val started. The voice, low and soft, had dropped down from the darkness overhead.

“What’s the hurry?” said the soft voice. “Thought maybe somebody was coming to see me, and have suffered terrible disappointment.”

The boatman lifted his oars and looked hesitatingly at Val. But Val was silent, so the man let the blades fall into the water and swept the boat out into the moonlight.

“Wait a minute!” cried Val sharply.

“Good-by,” said the voice. “Come again when you can stay longer.”

“But I am going to stay now,” he answered breathlessly.

He gave the necessary order and the rowboat swung back to the foot of the small companionway. Someone young, someone in a misty white dress, someone with a lovely low voice, had actually called to him out of the velvet dark. “If she has eyes!” Val murmured to himself. He liked the romantic sound of it and repeated it under his breath — “If she has eyes.”

“What are you?” She was directly above him now; she was looking down and he was looking up as he climbed the ladder, and as their eyes met they both began to laugh.

She was very young, slim, almost frail, with a dress that accentuated her youth by its blanched simplicity. Two wan dark spots on her cheeks marked where the color was by day.

“What are you?” she repeated, moving back and laughing again as his head appeared on the level of the deck. “I’m frightened now and I want to know.”

“I am a gentleman,” said Val, bowing.

“What sort of a gentleman? There are all sorts of gentlemen. There was a — there was a colored gentleman at the table next to ours in Paris, and so — ” She broke off. “You’re not American, are you?”

“I’m Russian,” he said, as he might have announced himself to be an archangel. He thought quickly and then added, “And I am the most fortunate of Russians. All this day, all this spring I have dreamed of falling in love on such a night, and now I see that heaven has sent me to you.”

“Just one moment!” she said, with a little gasp. “I’m sure now that this visit is a mistake. I don’t go in for anything like that. Please!”

“I beg your pardon.” He looked at her in bewilderment, unaware that he had taken too much for granted. Then he drew himself up formally.

“I have made an error. If you will excuse me I will say good night.”

He turned away. His hand was on the rail.

“Don’t go,” she said, pushing a strand of indefinite hair out of her eyes. “On second thoughts you can talk any nonsense you like if you’ll only not go. I’m miserable and I don’t want to be left alone.”

Val hesitated; there was some element in this that he failed to understand. He had taken it for granted that a girl who called to a strange man at night, even from the deck of a yacht, was certainly in a mood for romance. And he wanted intensely to stay. Then he remembered that this was one of the two yachts he had been seeking.

“I imagine that the dinner’s on the other boat,” he said.

“The dinner? Oh, yes, it’s on the Minnehaha. Were you going there?”

“I was going there — a long time ago.”

“What’s your name?”

He was on the point of telling her when something made him ask a question instead.

“And you? Why are you not at the party?”

“Because I preferred to stay here. Mrs. Jackson said there would be some Russians there — I suppose that’s you.” She looked at him with interest.

“You’re a very young man, aren’t you?”

“I am much older than I look,” said Val stiffly. “People always comment on it. It’s considered rather a remarkable thing.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-one,” he lied.

She laughed.

“What nonsense! You’re not more than nineteen.”

His annoyance was so perceptible that she hastened to reassure him. “Cheer up! I’m only seventeen myself. I might have gone to the party if I’d thought there’d be anyone under fifty there.”

He welcomed the change of subject.

“You preferred to sit and dream here beneath the moon.”

“I’ve been thinking of mistakes.” They sat down side by side in two canvas deck chairs. “It’s a most engrossing subject — the subject of mistakes. Women very seldom brood about mistakes — they’re much more willing to forget than men are. But when they do brood — ”

“You have made a mistake?” inquired Val.

She nodded.

“Is it something that cannot be repaired?”

“I think so,” she answered. “I can’t be sure. That’s what I was considering when you came along.”

“Perhaps I can help in some way,” said Val. “Perhaps your mistake is not irreparable, after all.”

“You can’t,” she said unhappily. “So let’s not think about it. I’m very tired of my mistake and I’d much rather you’d tell me about all the gay, cheerful things that are going on in Cannes tonight.”

They glanced shoreward at the line of mysterious and alluring lights, the big toy banks with candles inside that were really the great fashionable hotels, the lighted clock in the old town, the blurred glow of the Café de Paris, the pricked-out points of villa windows rising on slow hills toward the dark sky.

“What is everyone doing there?” she whispered. “It looks as though something gorgeous was going on, but what it is I can’t quite tell.”

“Everyone there is making love,” said Val quietly.

“Is that it?” She looked for a long time, with a strange expression in her eyes. “Then I want to go home to America,” she said. “There is too much love here. I want to go home tomorrow.”

“You are afraid of being in love then?”

She shook her head.

“It isn’t that. It’s just because — there is no love here for me.”

“Or for me either,” added Val quietly. “It is sad that we two should be at such a lovely place on such a lovely night and have — nothing.”

He was leaning toward her intently, with a sort of inspired and chaste romance in his eyes — and she drew back.

“Tell me more about yourself,” she inquired quickly. “If you are Russian where did you learn to speak such excellent English?”

“My mother was American,” he admitted. “My grandfather was American also, so she had no choice in the matter.”

“Then you’re American too!”

“I am Russian,” said Val with dignity.

She looked at him closely, smiled and decided not to argue. “Well then,” she said diplomatically, “I suppose you must have a Russian name.”

But he had no intention now of telling her his name. A name, even the Rostoff name, would be a desecration of the night. They were their own low voices, their two white faces — and that was enough. He was sure, without any reason for being sure but with a sort of instinct that sang triumphantly through his mind, that in a little while, a minute or an hour, he was going to undergo an initiation into the life of romance. His name had no reality beside what was stirring in his heart.

“You are beautiful,” he said suddenly.

“How do you know?”

“Because for women moonlight is the hardest light of all.”

“Am I nice in the moonlight?”

“You are the loveliest thing that I have ever known.”

“Oh.” She thought this over. “Of course I had no business to let you come on board. I might have known what we’d talk about — in this moon. But I can’t sit here and look at the shore — forever. I’m too young for that. Don’t you think I’m too young for that?”

“Much too young,” he agreed solemnly.

Suddenly they both became aware of new music that was close at hand, music that seemed to come out of the water not a hundred yards away.

“Listen!” she cried. “It’s from the Minnehaha. They’ve finished dinner.”

For a moment they listened in silence.

“Thank you,” said Val suddenly.

“For what?”

He hardly knew he had spoken. He was thanking the deep low horns for singing in the breeze, the sea for its warm murmurous complaint against the bow, the milk of the stars for washing over them until he felt buoyed up in a substance more taut than air.

“So lovely,” she whispered.

“What are we going to do about it?”

“Do we have to do something about it? I thought we could just sit and enjoy —”

“You didn’t think that,” he interrupted quietly. “You know that we must do something about it. I am going to make love to you — and you are going to be glad.”

“I can’t,” she said very low. She wanted to laugh now, to make some light cool remark that would bring the situation back into the safe waters of a casual flirtation. But it was too late now. Val knew that the music had completed what the moon had begun.

“I will tell you the truth,” he said. “You are my first love. I am seventeen — the same age as you, no more.”

There was something utterly disarming about the fact that they were the same age. It made her helpless before the fate that had thrown them together. The deck chairs creaked and he was conscious of a faint illusive perfume as they swayed suddenly and childishly together.

III

Whether he kissed her once or several times he could not afterward remember, though it must have been an hour that they sat there close together and he held her hand. What surprised him most about making love was that it seemed to have no element of wild passion — regret, desire, despair — but a delirious promise of such happiness in the world, in living, as he had never known. First love — this was only first love! What must love itself in its fullness, its perfection be. He did not know that what he was experiencing then, that unreal, undesirous medley of ecstasy and peace, would be unrecapturable forever.

The music had ceased for some time when presently the murmurous silence was broken by the sound of a rowboat disturbing the quiet waves. She sprang suddenly to her feet and her eyes strained out over the bay.

“Listen!” she said quickly. “I want you to tell me your name.”

“No.”

“Please,” she begged him. “I’m going away tomorrow.”

He didn’t answer.

“I don’t want you to forget me,” she said. “My name is — ”

“I won’t forget you. I will promise to remember you always. Whoever I may love I will always compare her to you, my first love. So long as I live you will always have that much freshness in my heart.”

“I want you to remember,” she murmured brokenly. “Oh, this has meant more to me than it has to you — much more.”

She was standing so close to him that he felt her warm young breath on his face. Once again they swayed together. He pressed her hands and wrists between his as it seemed right to do, and kissed her lips. It was the right kiss, he thought, the romantic kiss — not too little or too much. Yet there was a sort of promise in it of other kisses he might have had, and it was with

a slight sinking of his heart that he heard the rowboat close to the yacht and realized that her family had returned. The evening was over.

“And this is only the beginning,” he told himself. “All my life will be like this night.”

She was saying something in a low quick voice and he was listening tensely.

“You must know one thing — I am married. Three months ago. That was the mistake that I was thinking about when the moon brought you out here. In a moment you will understand.”

She broke off as the boat swung against the companionway and a man’s voice floated up out of the darkness.

“Is that you, my dear?”

“Yes.”

“What is this other rowboat waiting?”

“One of Mrs. Jackson’s guests came here by mistake and I made him stay and amuse me for an hour.”

A moment later the thin white hair and weary face of a man of sixty appeared above the level of the deck. And then Val saw and realized too late how much he cared.

IV

When the Riviera season ended in May the Rostoffs and all the other Russians closed their villas and went north for the summer. The Russian Orthodox Church was locked up and so were the bins of rarer wine, and the fashionable spring moonlight was put away, so to speak, to wait for their return.

“We’ll be back next season,” they said as a matter of course.

But this was premature, for they were never coming back any more. Those few who straggled south again after five tragic years were glad to get work

as chambermaids or *valets de chambre* in the great hotels where they had once dined. Many of them, of course, were killed in the war or in the revolution; many of them faded out as spongers and small cheats in the big capitals, and not a few ended their lives in a sort of stupefied despair.

When the Kerensky government collapsed in 1917, Val was a lieutenant on the eastern front, trying desperately to enforce authority in his company long after any vestige of it remained. He was still trying when Prince Paul Rostoff and his wife gave up their lives one rainy morning to atone for the blunders of the Romanoffs — and the enviable career of Morris Hasyilton's daughter ended in a city that bore even more resemblance to a butcher shop than had Chicago in 1892.

After that Val fought with Denikin's army for a while until he realized that he was participating in a hollow farce and the glory of Imperial Russia was over. Then he went to France and was suddenly confronted with the astounding problem of keeping his body and soul together.

It was, of course, natural that he should think of going to America. Two vague aunts with whom his mother had quarreled many years ago still lived there in comparative affluence. But the idea was repugnant to the prejudices his mother had implanted in him, and besides he hadn't sufficient money left to pay for his passage over. Until a possible counter-revolution should restore to him the Rostoff properties in Russia he must somehow keep alive in France.

So he went to the little city he knew best of all. He went to Cannes. His last two hundred francs bought him a third-class ticket and when he arrived he gave his dress suit to an obliging party who dealt in such things and received in return money for food and bed. He was sorry afterward that he had sold the dress suit, because it might have helped him to a position as a waiter. But he obtained work as a taxi driver instead and was quite as happy, or rather quite as miserable, at that.

Sometimes he carried Americans to look at villas for rent, and when the front glass of the automobile was up, curious fragments of conversation drifted out to him from within.

“ — heard this fellow was a Russian prince.” . . . “Sh!” . . . “No, this one right here.” . . . “Be quiet, Esther!” — followed by subdued laughter.

When the car stopped, his passengers would edge around to have a look at him. At first he was desperately unhappy when girls did this; after a while he didn't mind any more. Once a cheerfully intoxicated American asked him if it were true and invited him to lunch, and another time an elderly woman seized his hand as she got out of the taxi, shook it violently and then pressed a hundred-franc note into his hand.

“Well, Florence, now I can tell 'em back home I shook hands with a Russian prince.”

The inebriated American who had invited him to lunch thought at first that Val was a son of the czar, and it had to be explained to him that a prince in Russia was simply the equivalent of a British courtesy lord. But he was puzzled that a man of Val's personality didn't go out and make some real money.

“This is Europe,” said Val gravely. “Here money is not made. It is inherited or else it is slowly saved over a period of many years and maybe in three generations a family moves up into a higher class.”

“Think of something people want — like we do.”

“That is because there is more money to want with in America. Everything that people want here has been thought of long ago.”

But after a year and with the help of a young Englishman he had played tennis with before the war, Val managed to get into the Cannes branch of an English bank. He forwarded mail and bought railroad tickets and arranged tours for impatient sight-seers. Sometimes a familiar face came to his window; if Val was recognized he shook hands; if not he kept silence. After two years he was no longer pointed out as a former prince, for the Russians were an old story now — the splendor of the Rostoffs and their friends was forgotten.

He mixed with people very little. In the evenings he walked for a while on the promenade, took a slow glass of beer in a café, and went early to bed.

He was seldom invited anywhere because people thought that his sad, intent face was depressing — and he never accepted anyhow. He wore cheap French clothes now instead of the rich tweeds and flannels that had been ordered with his father's from England. As for women, he knew none at all. Of the many things he had been certain about at seventeen, he had been most certain about this — that his life would be full of romance. Now after eight years he knew that it was not to be. Somehow he had never had time for love — the war, the revolution and now his poverty had conspired against his expectant heart. The springs of his emotion which had first poured forth one April night had dried up immediately and only a faint trickle remained.

His happy youth had ended almost before it began. He saw himself growing older and more shabby, and living always more and more in the memories of his gorgeous boyhood. Eventually he would become absurd, pulling out an old heirloom of a watch and showing it to amused young fellow clerks who would listen with winks to his tales of the Rostoff name.

He was thinking these gloomy thoughts one April evening in 1922 as he walked beside the sea and watched the never-changing magic of the awakening lights. It was no longer for his benefit, that magic, but it went on, and he was somehow glad. Tomorrow he was going away on his vacation, to a cheap hotel farther down the shore where he could bathe and rest and read; then he would come back and work some more. Every year for three years he had taken his vacation during the last two weeks in April, perhaps because it was then that he felt the most need for remembering. It was in April that what was destined to be the best part of his life had come to a culmination under a romantic moonlight. It was sacred to him — for what he had thought of as an initiation and a beginning had turned out to be the end.

He paused now in front of the *Café des Étrangers* and after a moment crossed the street on impulse and sauntered down to the shore. A dozen yachts, already turned to a beautiful silver color, rode at anchor in the bay. He had seen them that afternoon, and read the names painted on their bows — but only from habit. He had done it for three years now, and it was almost a natural function of his eye.

“*Un beau soir,*” remarked a French voice at his elbow. It was a boatman who had often seen Val here before. “Monsieur finds the sea beautiful?”

“Very beautiful.”

“I too. But a bad living except in the season. Next week, though, I earn something special. I am paid well for simply waiting here and doing nothing more from eight o’clock until midnight.”

“That’s very nice,” said Val politely.

“A widowed lady, very beautiful, from America, whose yacht always anchors in the harbor for the last two weeks in April. If the Privateer comes tomorrow it will make three years.”

V

All night Val didn’t sleep — not because there was any question in his mind as to what he should do, but because his long stupefied emotions were suddenly awake and alive. Of course he must not see her — not he, a poor failure with a name that was now only a shadow — but it would make him a little happier always to know that she remembered. It gave his own memory another dimension, raised it like those stereopticon glasses that bring out a picture from the flat paper. It made him sure that he had not deceived himself — he had been charming once upon a time to a lovely woman, and she did not forget.

An hour before train time next day he was at the railway station with his grip, so as to avoid any chance encounter in the street. He found himself a place in a third-class carriage of the waiting train.

Somehow as he sat there he felt differently about life — a sort of hope, faint and illusory, that he hadn’t felt twenty-four hours before. Perhaps there was some way in those next few years in which he could make it possible to meet her once again — if he worked hard, threw himself passionately into whatever was at hand. He knew of at least two Russians in Cannes who had started over again with nothing except good manners and ingenuity and were now doing surprisingly well. The blood of Morris Hasyton began to

throb a little in Val's temples and made him remember something he had never before cared to remember — that Morris Hasyhton, who had built his daughter a palace in St. Petersburg, had also started from nothing at all.

Simultaneously another emotion possessed him, less strange, less dynamic but equally American — the emotion of curiosity. In case he did — well, in case life should ever make it possible for him to seek her out, he should at least know her name.

He jumped to his feet, fumbled excitedly at the carriage handle and jumped from the train. Tossing his valise into the check room he started at a run for the American consulate.

“A yacht came in this morning,” he said hurriedly to a clerk, “an American yacht — the Privateer. I want to know who owns it.”

“Just a minute,” said the clerk, looking at him oddly. “I'll try to find out.”

After what seemed to Val an interminable time he returned.

“Why, just a minute,” he repeated hesitantly. “We're — it seems we're finding out.”

“Did the yacht come?”

“Oh, yes — it's here all right. At least I think so. If you'll just wait in that chair.”

After another ten minutes Val looked impatiently at his watch. If they didn't hurry he'd probably miss his train. He made a nervous movement as if to get up from his chair.

“Please sit still,” said the clerk, glancing at him quickly from his desk. “I ask you. Just sit down in that chair.”

Val stared at him. How could it possibly matter to the clerk whether or not he waited?

“I'll miss my train,” he said impatiently. “I'm sorry to have given you all this bother — ”

“Please sit still! We’re glad to get it off our hands. You see, we’ve been waiting for your inquiry for — ah — three years.”

Val jumped to his feet and jammed his hat on his head.

“Why didn’t you tell me that?” he demanded angrily.

“Because we had to get word to our — our client. Please don’t go! It’s — ah, it’s too late.”

Val turned. Someone slim and radiant with dark frightened eyes was standing behind him, framed against the sunshine of the doorway.

“Why — ”

Val’s lips parted, but no words came through. She took a step toward him.

“I— ” She looked at him helplessly, her eyes filling with tears. “I just wanted to say hello,” she murmured. “I’ve come back for three years just because I wanted to say hello.”

Still Val was silent.

“You might answer,” she said impatiently. “You might answer when I’d — when I’d just about begun to think you’d been killed in the war.” She turned to the clerk. “Please introduce us!” she cried. “You see, I can’t say hello to him when we don’t even know each other’s names.”

It’s the thing to distrust these international marriages, of course.

It’s an American tradition that they always turn out badly, and we are accustomed to such headlines as: “Would Trade Coronet for True American Love, Says Duchess,” and “Claims Count Mendicant Tortured Toledo Wife.” The other sort of headlines are never printed, for who would want to read: “Castle is Love Nest, Asserts Former Georgia Belle,” or “Duke and Packer’s Daughter Celebrate Golden Honeymoon.”

So far there have been no headlines at all about the young Rostoffs. Prince Val is much too absorbed in that string of moonlight-blue taxicabs which he manipulates with such unusual efficiency, to give out interviews. He and his

wife only leave New York once a year — but there is still a boatman who rejoices when the Privateer steams into Cannes harbor on a mid-April night.

THE RICH BOY

I

Red Book (January and February 1926)

Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find that you have created a type; begin with a type, and you find that you have created — nothing. That is because we are all queer fish, queerer behind our faces and voices than we want any one to know or than we know ourselves. When I hear a man proclaiming himself an “average, honest, open fellow,” I feel pretty sure that he has some definite and perhaps terrible abnormality which he has agreed to conceal — and his protestation of being average and honest and open is his way of reminding himself of his misprision.

There are no types, no plurals. There is a rich boy, and this is his and not his brothers' story. All my life I have lived among his brothers but this one has been my friend. Besides, if I wrote about his brothers I should have to begin by attacking all the lies that the poor have told about the rich and the rich have told about themselves — such a wild structure they have erected that when we pick up a book about the rich, some instinct prepares us for unreality. Even the intelligent and impassioned reporters of life have made the country of the rich as unreal as fairy-land.

Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are. They are different. The only way I can describe young Anson Hunter is to approach him as if he were a foreigner and cling stubbornly to my point of view. If I accept his for a moment I am lost — I have nothing to show but a preposterous movie.

II

Anson was the eldest of six children who would some day divide a fortune of fifteen million dollars, and he reached the age of reason — is it seven? — at the beginning of the century when daring young women were already gliding along Fifth Avenue in electric “mobiles.” In those days he and his brother had an English governess who spoke the language very clearly and crisply and well, so that the two boys grew to speak as she did — their words and sentences were all crisp and clear and not run together as ours are. They didn’t talk exactly like English children but acquired an accent that is peculiar to fashionable people in the city of New York.

In the summer the six children were moved from the house on 71st Street to a big estate in northern Connecticut. It was not a fashionable locality — Anson’s father wanted to delay as long as possible his children’s knowledge of that side of life. He was a man somewhat superior to his class, which composed New York society, and to his period, which was the snobbish and formalized vulgarity of the Gilded Age, and he wanted his sons to learn habits of concentration and have sound constitutions and grow up into right-living and successful men. He and his wife kept an eye on them as well as they were able until the two older boys went away to school, but in huge establishments this is difficult — it was much simpler in the series of small and medium-sized houses in which my own youth was spent — I was never far out of the reach of my mother’s voice, of the sense of her presence, her approval or disapproval.

Anson’s first sense of his superiority came to him when he realized the half-grudging American deference that was paid to him in the Connecticut village. The parents of the boys he played with always inquired after his father and mother, and were vaguely excited when their own children were asked to the Hunters’ house. He accepted this as the natural state of things, and a sort of impatience with all groups of which he was not the center — in money, in position, in authority — remained with him for the rest of his life. He disdained to struggle with other boys for precedence — he expected it to be given him freely, and when it wasn’t he withdrew into his family. His

family was sufficient, for in the East money is still a somewhat feudal thing, a clan-forming thing. In the snobbish West, money separates families to form “sets.”

At eighteen, when he went to New Haven, Anson was tall and thick-set, with a clear complexion and a healthy color from the ordered life he had led in school. His hair was yellow and grew in a funny way on his head, his nose was beaked — these two things kept him from being handsome — but he had a confident charm and a certain brusque style, and the upper-class men who passed him on the street knew without being told that he was a rich boy and had gone to one of the best schools. Nevertheless, his very superiority kept him from being a success in college — the independence was mistaken for egotism, and the refusal to accept Yale standards with the proper awe seemed to belittle all those who had. So, long before he graduated, he began to shift the center of his life to New York.

He was at home in New York — there was his own house with “the kind of servants you can’t get any more” — and his own family, of which, because of his good humor and a certain ability to make things go, he was rapidly becoming the center, and the *débutante* parties, and the correct manly world of the men’s clubs, and the occasional wild spree with the gallant girls whom New Haven only knew from the fifth row. His aspirations were conventional enough — they included even the irreproachable shadow he would some day marry, but they differed from the aspirations of the majority of young men in that there was no mist over them, none of that quality which is variously known as “idealism” or “illusion.” Anson accepted without reservation the world of high finance and high extravagance, of divorce and dissipation, of snobbery and of privilege. Most of our lives end as a compromise — it was as a compromise that his life began.

He and I first met in the late summer of 1917 when he was just out of Yale, and, like the rest of us, was swept up into the systematized hysteria of the war. In the blue-green uniform of the naval aviation he came down to Pensacola, where the hotel orchestras played “I’m sorry, dear,” and we young officers danced with the girls. Every one liked him, and though he ran with the drinkers and wasn’t an especially good pilot, even the instructors treated him with a certain respect. He was always having long talks with

them in his confident, logical voice — talks which ended by his getting himself, or, more frequently, another officer, out of some impending trouble. He was convivial, bawdy, robustly avid for pleasure, and we were all surprised when he fell in love with a conservative and rather proper girl.

Her name was Paula Legendre, a dark, serious beauty from somewhere in California. Her family kept a winter residence just outside of town, and in spite of her primness she was enormously popular; there is a large class of men whose egotism can't endure humor in a woman. But Anson wasn't that sort, and I couldn't understand the attraction of her "sincerity" — that was the thing to say about her — for his keen and somewhat sardonic mind.

Nevertheless, they fell in love — and on her terms. He no longer joined the twilight gathering at the De Sota bar, and whenever they were seen together they were engaged in a long, serious dialogue, which must have gone on several weeks. Long afterward he told me that it was not about anything in particular but was composed on both sides of immature and even meaningless statements — the emotional content that gradually came to fill it grew up not out of the words but out of its enormous seriousness. It was a sort of hypnosis. Often it was interrupted, giving way to that emasculated humor we call fun; when they were alone it was resumed again, solemn, low-keyed, and pitched so as to give each other a sense of unity in feeling and thought. They came to resent any interruptions of it, to be unresponsive to facetiousness about life, even to the mild cynicism of their contemporaries. They were only happy when the dialogue was going on, and its seriousness bathed them like the amber glow of an open fire. Toward the end there came an interruption they did not resent — it began to be interrupted by passion.

Oddly enough, Anson was as engrossed in the dialogue as she was and as profoundly affected by it, yet at the same time aware that on his side much was insincere, and on hers much was merely simple. At first, too, he despised her emotional simplicity as well, but with his love her nature deepened and blossomed, and he could despise it no longer. He felt that if he could enter into Paula's warm safe life he would be happy. The long preparation of the dialogue removed any constraint — he taught her some of what he had learned from more adventurous women, and she responded

with a rapt holy intensity. One evening after a dance they agreed to marry, and he wrote a long letter about her to his mother. The next day Paula told him that she was rich, that she had a personal fortune of nearly a million dollars.

III

It was exactly as if they could say “Neither of us has anything: we shall be poor together” — just as delightful that they should be rich instead. It gave them the same communion of adventure. Yet when Anson got leave in April, and Paula and her mother accompanied him North, she was impressed with the standing of his family in New York and with the scale on which they lived. Alone with Anson for the first time in the rooms where he had played as a boy, she was filled with a comfortable emotion, as though she were pre-eminently safe and taken care of. The pictures of Anson in a skull cap at his first school, of Anson on horseback with the sweetheart of a mysterious forgotten summer, of Anson in a gay group of ushers and bridesmaid at a wedding, made her jealous of his life apart from her in the past, and so completely did his authoritative person seem to sum up and typify these possessions of his that she was inspired with the idea of being married immediately and returning to Pensacola as his wife.

But an immediate marriage wasn't discussed — even the engagement was to be secret until after the war. When she realized that only two days of his leave remained, her dissatisfaction crystallized in the intention of making him as unwilling to wait as she was. They were driving to the country for dinner and she determined to force the issue that night.

Now a cousin of Paula's was staying with them at the Ritz, a severe, bitter girl who loved Paula but was somewhat jealous of her impressive engagement, and as Paula was late in dressing, the cousin, who wasn't going to the party, received Anson in the parlor of the suite.

Anson had met friends at five o'clock and drunk freely and indiscreetly with them for an hour. He left the Yale Club at a proper time, and his mother's chauffeur drove him to the Ritz, but his usual capacity was not in evidence,

and the impact of the steam-heated sitting-room made him suddenly dizzy. He knew it, and he was both amused and sorry.

Paula's cousin was twenty-five, but she was exceptionally naïve, and at first failed to realize what was up. She had never met Anson before, and she was surprised when he mumbled strange information and nearly fell off his chair, but until Paula appeared it didn't occur to her that what she had taken for the odor of a dry-cleaned uniform was really whiskey. But Paula understood as soon as she appeared; her only thought was to get Anson away before her mother saw him, and at the look in her eyes the cousin understood too.

When Paula and Anson descended to the limousine they found two men inside, both asleep; they were the men with whom he had been drinking at the Yale Club, and they were also going to the party. He had entirely forgotten their presence in the car. On the way to Hempstead they awoke and sang. Some of the songs were rough, and though Paula tried to reconcile herself to the fact that Anson had few verbal inhibitions, her lips tightened with shame and distaste.

Back at the hotel the cousin, confused and agitated, considered the incident, and then walked into Mrs. Legendre's bedroom, saying: "Isn't he funny?"

"Who is funny?"

"Why — Mr. Hunter. He seemed so funny."

Mrs. Legendre looked at her sharply.

"How is he funny?"

"Why, he said he was French. I didn't know he was French."

"That's absurd. You must have misunderstood." She smiled: "It was a joke."

The cousin shook her head stubbornly.

"No. He said he was brought up in France. He said he couldn't speak any English, and that's why he couldn't talk to me. And he couldn't!"

Mrs. Legendre looked away with impatience just as the cousin added thoughtfully, "Perhaps it was because he was so drunk," and walked out of the room.

This curious report was true. Anson, finding his voice thick and uncontrollable, had taken the unusual refuge of announcing that he spoke no English. Years afterward he used to tell that part of the story, and he invariably communicated the uproarious laughter which the memory aroused in him.

Five times in the next hour Mrs. Legendre tried to get Hempstead on the phone. When she succeeded, there was a ten-minute delay before she heard Paula's voice on the wire.

"Cousin Jo told me Anson was intoxicated."

"Oh, no. . . ."

"Oh, yes. Cousin Jo says he was intoxicated. He told her he was French, and fell off his chair and behaved as if he was very intoxicated. I don't want you to come home with him."

"Mother, he's all right! Please don't worry about —"

"But I do worry. I think it's dreadful. I want you to promise me not to come home with him."

"I'll take care of it, mother. . . ."

"I don't want you to come home with him."

"All right, mother. Good-by."

"Be sure now, Paula. Ask some one to bring you."

Deliberately Paula took the receiver from her ear and hung it up. Her face was flushed with helpless annoyance. Anson was stretched asleep out in a bedroom up-stairs, while the dinner-party below was proceeding lamely toward conclusion.

The hour's drive had sobered him somewhat — his arrival was merely hilarious — and Paula hoped that the evening was not spoiled, after all, but

two imprudent cocktails before dinner completed the disaster. He talked boisterously and somewhat offensively to the party at large for fifteen minutes, and then slid silently under the table; like a man in an old print — but, unlike an old print, it was rather horrible without being at all quaint. None of the young girls present remarked upon the incident — it seemed to merit only silence. His uncle and two other men carried him up-stairs, and it was just after this that Paula was called to the phone.

An hour later Anson awoke in a fog of nervous agony, through which he perceived after a moment the figure of his uncle Robert standing by the door.

“ . . . I said are you better?”

“What?”

“Do you feel better, old man?”

“Terrible,” said Anson.

“I’m going to try you on another bromo-seltzer. If you can hold it down, it’ll do you good to sleep.”

With an effort Anson slid his legs from the bed and stood up.

“I’m all right,” he said dully.

“Take it easy.”

“I thin’ if you gave me a glassbrandy I could go down-stairs.”

“Oh, no — ”

“Yes, that’s the only thin’. I’m all right now. . . . I suppose I’m in Dutch dow’ there.”

“They know you’re a little under the weather,” said his uncle deprecatingly. “But don’t worry about it. Schuyler didn’t even get here. He passed away in the locker-room over at the Links.”

Indifferent to any opinion, except Paula’s, Anson was nevertheless determined to save the débris of the evening, but when after a cold bath he

made his appearance most of the party had already left. Paula got up immediately to go home.

In the limousine the old serious dialogue began. She had known that he drank, she admitted, but she had never expected anything like this — it seemed to her that perhaps they were not suited to each other, after all. Their ideas about life were too different, and so forth. When she finished speaking, Anson spoke in turn, very soberly. Then Paula said she'd have to think it over; she wouldn't decide to-night; she was not angry but she was terribly sorry. Nor would she let him come into the hotel with her, but just before she got out of the car she leaned and kissed him unhappily on the cheek.

The next afternoon Anson had a long talk with Mrs. Legendre while Paula sat listening in silence. It was agreed that Paula was to brood over the incident for a proper period and then, if mother and daughter thought it best, they would follow Anson to Pensacola. On his part he apologized with sincerity and dignity — that was all; with every card in her hand Mrs. Legendre was unable to establish any advantage over him. He made no promises, showed no humility, only delivered a few serious comments on life which brought him off with rather a moral superiority at the end. When they came South three weeks later, neither Anson in his satisfaction nor Paula in her relief at the reunion realized that the psychological moment had passed forever.

IV

He dominated and attracted her, and at the same time filled her with anxiety. Confused by his mixture of solidity and self-indulgence, of sentiment and cynicism — incongruities which her gentle mind was unable to resolve — Paula grew to think of him as two alternating personalities. When she saw him alone, or at a formal party, or with his casual inferiors, she felt a tremendous pride in his strong, attractive presence, the paternal, understanding stature of his mind. In other company she became uneasy when what had been a fine imperviousness to mere gentility showed its other face. The other face was gross, humorous, reckless of everything but

pleasure. It startled her mind temporarily away from him, even led her into a short covert experiment with an old beau, but it was no use — after four months of Anson's enveloping vitality there was an anæmic pallor in all other men.

In July he was ordered abroad, and their tenderness and desire reached a crescendo. Paula considered a last-minute marriage — decided against it only because there were always cocktails on his breath now, but the parting itself made her physically ill with grief. After his departure she wrote him long letters of regret for the days of love they had missed by waiting. In August Anson's plane slipped down into the North Sea. He was pulled onto a destroyer after a night in the water and sent to hospital with pneumonia; the armistice was signed before he was finally sent home.

Then, with every opportunity given back to them, with no material obstacle to overcome, the secret weavings of their temperaments came between them, drying up their kisses and their tears, making their voices less loud to one another, muffling the intimate chatter of their hearts until the old communication was only possible by letters, from far away. One afternoon a society reporter waited for two hours in the Hunters' house for a confirmation of their engagement. Anson denied it; nevertheless an early issue carried the report as a leading paragraph — they were “constantly seen together at Southampton, Hot Springs, and Tuxedo Park.” But the serious dialogue had turned a corner into a long-sustained quarrel, and the affair was almost played out. Anson got drunk flagrantly and missed an engagement with her, whereupon Paula made certain behavioristic demands. His despair was helpless before his pride and his knowledge of himself: the engagement was definitely broken.

“Dearest,” said their letters now, “Dearest, Dearest, when I wake up in the middle of the night and realize that after all it was not to be, I feel that I want to die. I can't go on living any more. Perhaps when we meet this summer we may talk things over and decide differently — we were so excited and sad that day, and I don't feel that I can live all my life without you. You speak of other people. Don't you know there are no other people for me, but only you. . . .”

But as Paula drifted here and there around the East she would sometimes mention her gaities to make him wonder. Anson was too acute to wonder. When he saw a man's name in her letters he felt more sure of her and a little disdainful — he was always superior to such things. But he still hoped that they would some day marry.

Meanwhile he plunged vigorously into all the movement and glitter of post-bellum New York, entering a brokerage house, joining half a dozen clubs, dancing late, and moving in three worlds — his own world, the world of young Yale graduates, and that section of the half-world which rests one end on Broadway. But there was always a thorough and infractible eight hours devoted to his work in Wall Street, where the combination of his influential family connection, his sharp intelligence, and his abundance of sheer physical energy brought him almost immediately forward. He had one of those invaluable minds with partitions in it; sometimes he appeared at his office refreshed by less than an hour's sleep, but such occurrences were rare. So early as 1920 his income in salary and commissions exceeded twelve thousand dollars.

As the Yale tradition slipped into the past he became more and more of a popular figure among his classmates in New York, more popular than he had ever been in college. He lived in a great house, and had the means of introducing young men into other great houses. Moreover, his life already seemed secure, while theirs, for the most part, had arrived again at precarious beginnings. They commenced to turn to him for amusement and escape, and Anson responded readily, taking pleasure in helping people and arranging their affairs.

There were no men in Paula's letters now, but a note of tenderness ran through them that had not been there before. From several sources he heard that she had "a heavy beau," Lowell Thayer, a Bostonian of wealth and position, and though he was sure she still loved him, it made him uneasy to think that he might lose her, after all. Save for one unsatisfactory day she had not been in New York for almost five months, and as the rumors multiplied he became increasingly anxious to see her. In February he took his vacation and went down to Florida.

Palm Beach sprawled plump and opulent between the sparkling sapphire of Lake Worth, flawed here and there by house-boats at anchor, and the great turquoise bar of the Atlantic Ocean. The huge bulks of the Breakers and the Royal Poinciana rose as twin paunches from the bright level of the sand, and around them clustered the Dancing Glade, Bradley's House of Chance, and a dozen modistes and milliners with goods at triple prices from New York. Upon the trellised veranda of the Breakers two hundred women stepped right, stepped left, wheeled, and slid in that then celebrated calisthenic known as the double-shuffle, while in half-time to the music two thousand bracelets clicked up and down on two hundred arms.

At the Everglades Club after dark Paula and Lowell Thayer and Anson and a casual fourth played bridge with hot cards. It seemed to Anson that her kind, serious face was wan and tired — she had been around now for four, five, years. He had known her for three.

“Two spades.”

“Cigarette? . . . Oh, I beg your pardon. By me.”

“By.”

“I'll double three spades.”

There were a dozen tables of bridge in the room, which was filling up with smoke. Anson's eyes met Paula's, held them persistently even when Thayer's glance fell between them. . . .

“What was bid?” he asked abstractedly.

“*Rose of Washington Square*”

sang the young people in the corners:

“*I'm withering there*

In basement air —”

The smoke banked like fog, and the opening of a door filled the room with blown swirls of ectoplasm. Little Bright Eyes streaked past the tables

seeking Mr. Conan Doyle among the Englishmen who were posing as Englishmen about the lobby.

“You could cut it with a knife.”

“ . . . cut it with a knife.”

“ . . . a knife.”

At the end of the rubber Paula suddenly got up and spoke to Anson in a tense, low voice. With scarcely a glance at Lowell Thayer, they walked out the door and descended a long flight of stone steps — in a moment they were walking hand in hand along the moonlit beach.

“Darling, darling. . . .” They embraced recklessly, passionately, in a shadow. . . . Then Paula drew back her face to let his lips say what she wanted to hear — she could feel the words forming as they kissed again. . . . Again she broke away, listening, but as he pulled her close once more she realized that he had said nothing — only “*Darling! Darling!*” in that deep, sad whisper that always made her cry. Humbly, obediently, her emotions yielded to him and the tears streamed down her face, but her heart kept on crying: “Ask me — oh, Anson, dearest, ask me!”

“Paula. . . . *Paula!*”

The words wrung her heart like hands, and Anson, feeling her tremble, knew that emotion was enough. He need say no more, commit their destinies to no practical enigma. Why should he, when he might hold her so, bidding his own time, for another year — forever? He was considering them both, her more than himself. For a moment, when she said suddenly that she must go back to her hotel, he hesitated, thinking, first, “This is the moment, after all,” and then: “No, let it wait — she is mine. . . .”

He had forgotten that Paula too was worn away inside with the strain of three years. Her mood passed forever in the night.

He went back to New York next morning filled with a certain restless dissatisfaction. There was a pretty *débutante* he knew in his car, and for two days they took their meals together. At first he told her a little about Paula and invented an esoteric incompatibility that was keeping them apart. The

girl was of a wild, impulsive nature, and she was flattered by Anson's confidences. Like Kipling's soldier, he might have possessed himself of most of her before he reached New York, but luckily he was sober and kept control. Late in April, without warning, he received a telegram from Bar Harbor in which Paula told him that she was engaged to Lowell Thayer, and that they would be married immediately in Boston. What he never really believed could happen had happened at last.

Anson filled himself with whiskey that morning, and going to the office, carried on his work without a break — rather with a fear of what would happen if he stopped. In the evening he went out as usual, saying nothing of what had occurred; he was cordial, humorous, unabstracted. But one thing he could not help — for three days, in any place, in any company, he would suddenly bend his head into his hands and cry like a child.

V

In 1922 when Anson went abroad with the junior partner to investigate some London loans, the journey intimated that he was to be taken into the firm. He was twenty-seven now, a little heavy without being definitely stout, and with a manner older than his years. Old people and young people liked him and trusted him, and mothers felt safe when their daughters were in his charge, for he had a way, when he came into a room, of putting himself on a footing with the oldest and most conservative people there. "You and I," he seemed to say, "we're solid. We understand."

He had an instinctive and rather charitable knowledge of the weaknesses of men and women, and, like a priest, it made him the more concerned for the maintenance of outward forms. It was typical of him that every Sunday morning he taught in a fashionable Episcopal Sunday-school — even though a cold shower and a quick change into a cutaway coat were all that separated him from the wild night before. Once, by some mutual instinct, several children got up from the front row and moved to the last. He told this story frequently, and it was usually greeted with hilarious laughter.

After his father's death he was the practical head of his family, and, in effect, guided the destinies of the younger children. Through a complication his authority did not extend to his father's estate, which was administered by his Uncle Robert, who was the horsey member of the family, a good-natured, hard-drinking member of that set which centers about Wheatley Hills.

Uncle Robert and his wife, Edna, had been great friends of Anson's youth, and the former was disappointed when his nephew's superiority failed to take a horsey form. He backed him for a city club which was the most difficult in America to enter — one could only join if one's family had "helped to build up New York" (or, in other words, were rich before 1880) — and when Anson, after his election, neglected it for the Yale Club, Uncle Robert gave him a little talk on the subject. But when on top of that Anson declined to enter Robert Hunter's own conservative and somewhat neglected brokerage house, his manner grew cooler. Like a primary teacher who has taught all he knew, he slipped out of Anson's life.

There were so many friends in Anson's life — scarcely one for whom he had not done some unusual kindness and scarcely one whom he did not occasionally embarrass by his bursts of rough conversation or his habit of getting drunk whenever and however he liked. It annoyed him when any one else blundered in that regard — about his own lapses he was always humorous. Odd things happened to him and he told them with infectious laughter.

I was working in New York that spring, and I used to lunch with him at the Yale Club, which my university was sharing until the completion of our own. I had read of Paula's marriage, and one afternoon, when I asked him about her, something moved him to tell me the story. After that he frequently invited me to family dinners at his house and behaved as though there was a special relation between us, as though with his confidence a little of that consuming memory had passed into me.

I found that despite the trusting mothers, his attitude toward girls was not indiscriminately protective. It was up to the girl — if she showed an inclination toward looseness, she must take care of herself, even with him.

“Life,” he would explain sometimes, “has made a cynic of me.”

By life he meant Paula. Sometimes, especially when he was drinking, it became a little twisted in his mind, and he thought that she had callously thrown him over.

This “cynicism,” or rather his realization that naturally fast girls were not worth sparing, led to his affair with Dolly Karger. It wasn't his only affair in those years, but it came nearest to touching him deeply, and it had a profound effect upon his attitude toward life.

Dolly was the daughter of a notorious “publicist” who had married into society. She herself grew up into the Junior League, came out at the Plaza, and went to the Assembly; and only a few old families like the Hunters could question whether or not she “belonged,” for her picture was often in the papers, and she had more enviable attention than many girls who undoubtedly did. She was dark-haired, with carmine lips and a high, lovely color, which she concealed under pinkish-gray powder all through the first year out, because high color was unfashionable — Victorian-pale was the thing to be. She wore black, severe suits and stood with her hands in her pockets leaning a little forward, with a humorous restraint on her face. She danced exquisitely — better than anything she liked to dance — better than anything except making love. Since she was ten she had always been in love, and, usually, with some boy who didn't respond to her. Those who did — and there were many — bored her after a brief encounter, but for her failures she reserved the warmest spot in her heart. When she met them she would always try once more — sometimes she succeeded, more often she failed.

It never occurred to this gypsy of the unattainable that there was a certain resemblance in those who refused to love her — they shared a hard intuition that saw through to her weakness, not a weakness of emotion but a weakness of rudder. Anson perceived this when he first met her, less than a month after Paula's marriage. He was drinking rather heavily, and he pretended for a week that he was falling in love with her. Then he dropped her abruptly and forgot — immediately he took up the commanding position in her heart.

Like so many girls of that day Dolly was slackly and indiscreetly wild. The unconventionality of a slightly older generation had been simply one facet of a post-war movement to discredit obsolete manners — Dolly's was both older and shabbier, and she saw in Anson the two extremes which the emotionally shiftless woman seeks, an abandon to indulgence alternating with a protective strength. In his character she felt both the sybarite and the solid rock, and these two satisfied every need of her nature.

She felt that it was going to be difficult, but she mistook the reason — she thought that Anson and his family expected a more spectacular marriage, but she guessed immediately that her advantage lay in his tendency to drink.

They met at the large *débutante* dances, but as her infatuation increased they managed to be more and more together. Like most mothers, Mrs. Karger believed that Anson was exceptionally reliable, so she allowed Dolly to go with him to distant country clubs and suburban houses without inquiring closely into their activities or questioning her explanations when they came in late. At first these explanations might have been accurate, but Dolly's worldly ideas of capturing Anson were soon engulfed in the rising sweep of her emotion. Kisses in the back of taxis and motor-cars were no longer enough; they did a curious thing:

They dropped out of their world for a while and made another world just beneath it where Anson's tipping and Dolly's irregular hours would be less noticed and commented on. It was composed, this world, of varying elements — several of Anson's Yale friends and their wives, two or three young brokers and bond salesmen and a handful of unattached men, fresh from college, with money and a propensity to dissipation. What this world lacked in spaciousness and scale it made up for by allowing them a liberty that it scarcely permitted itself. Moreover, it centered around them and permitted Dolly the pleasure of a faint condescension — a pleasure which Anson, whose whole life was a condescension from the certitudes of his childhood, was unable to share.

He was not in love with her, and in the long feverish winter of their affair he frequently told her so. In the spring he was weary — he wanted to renew his life at some other source — moreover, he saw that either he must break

with her now or accept the responsibility of a definite seduction. Her family's encouraging attitude precipitated his decision — one evening when Mr. Karger knocked discreetly at the library door to announce that he had left a bottle of old brandy in the dining-room, Anson felt that life was hemming him in. That night he wrote her a short letter in which he told her that he was going on his vacation, and that in view of all the circumstances they had better meet no more.

It was June. His family had closed up the house and gone to the country, so he was living temporarily at the Yale Club. I had heard about his affair with Dolly as it developed — accounts salted with humor, for he despised unstable women, and granted them no place in the social edifice in which he believed — and when he told me that night that he was definitely breaking with her I was glad. I had seen Dolly here and there, and each time with a feeling of pity at the hopelessness of her struggle, and of shame at knowing so much about her that I had no right to know. She was what is known as “a pretty little thing,” but there was a certain recklessness which rather fascinated me. Her dedication to the goddess of waste would have been less obvious had she been less spirited — she would most certainly throw herself away, but I was glad when I heard that the sacrifice would not be consummated in my sight.

Anson was going to leave the letter of farewell at her house next morning. It was one of the few houses left open in the Fifth Avenue district, and he knew that the Kargers, acting upon erroneous information from Dolly, had foregone a trip abroad to give their daughter her chance. As he stepped out the door of the Yale Club into Madison Avenue the postman passed him, and he followed back inside. The first letter that caught his eye was in Dolly's hand.

He knew what it would be — a lonely and tragic monologue, full of the reproaches he knew, the invoked memories, the “I wonder if's” — all the immemorial intimacies that he had communicated to Paula Legendre in what seemed another age. Thumbing over some bills, he brought it on top again and opened it. To his surprise it was a short, somewhat formal note, which said that Dolly would be unable to go to the country with him for the weekend, because Perry Hull from Chicago had unexpectedly come to town.

It added that Anson had brought this on himself: “ — if I felt that you loved me as I love you I would go with you at any time, any place, but Perry is so nice, and he so much wants me to marry him — ”

Anson smiled contemptuously — he had had experience with such decoy epistles. Moreover, he knew how Dolly had labored over this plan, probably sent for the faithful Perry and calculated the time of his arrival — even labored over the note so that it would make him jealous without driving him away. Like most compromises, it had neither force nor vitality but only a timorous despair.

Suddenly he was angry. He sat down in the lobby and read it again. Then he went to the phone, called Dolly and told her in his clear, compelling voice that he had received her note and would call for her at five o'clock as they had previously planned. Scarcely waiting for the pretended uncertainty of her “Perhaps I can see you for an hour,” he hung up the receiver and went down to his office. On the way he tore his own letter into bits and dropped it in the street.

He was not jealous — she meant nothing to him — but at her pathetic ruse everything stubborn and self-indulgent in him came to the surface. It was a presumption from a mental inferior and it could not be overlooked. If she wanted to know to whom she belonged she would see.

He was on the door-step at quarter past five. Dolly was dressed for the street, and he listened in silence to the paragraph of “I can only see you for an hour,” which she had begun on the phone.

“Put on your hat, Dolly,” he said, “we’ll take a walk.”

They strolled up Madison Avenue and over to Fifth while Anson’s shirt dampened upon his portly body in the deep heat. He talked little, scolding her, making no love to her, but before they had walked six blocks she was his again, apologizing for the note, offering not to see Perry at all as an atonement, offering anything. She thought that he had come because he was beginning to love her.

“I’m hot,” he said when they reached 71st Street. “This is a winter suit. If I stop by the house and change, would you mind waiting for me downstairs? I’ll only be a minute.”

She was happy; the intimacy of his being hot, of any physical fact about him, thrilled her. When they came to the iron-grated door and Anson took out his key she experienced a sort of delight.

Down-stairs it was dark, and after he ascended in the lift Dolly raised a curtain and looked out through opaque lace at the houses over the way. She heard the lift machinery stop, and with the notion of teasing him pressed the button that brought it down. Then on what was more than an impulse she got into it and sent it up to what she guessed was his floor.

“Anson,” she called, laughing a little.

“Just a minute,” he answered from his bedroom . . . then after a brief delay: “Now you can come in.”

He had changed and was buttoning his vest. “This is my room,” he said lightly. “How do you like it?”

She caught sight of Paula’s picture on the wall and stared at it in fascination, just as Paula had stared at the pictures of Anson’s childish sweethearts five years before. She knew something about Paula — sometimes she tortured herself with fragments of the story.

Suddenly she came close to Anson, raising her arms. They embraced. Outside the area window a soft artificial twilight already hovered, though the sun was still bright on a back roof across the way. In half an hour the room would be quite dark. The uncalculated opportunity overwhelmed them, made them both breathless, and they clung more closely. It was eminent, inevitable. Still holding one another, they raised their heads — their eyes fell together upon Paula’s picture, staring down at them from the wall.

Suddenly Anson dropped his arms, and sitting down at his desk tried the drawer with a bunch of keys.

“Like a drink?” he asked in a gruff voice.

“No, Anson.”

He poured himself half a tumbler of whiskey, swallowed it, and then opened the door into the hall.

“Come on,” he said.

Dolly hesitated.

“Anson — I’m going to the country with you tonight, after all. You understand that, don’t you?”

“Of course,” he answered brusquely.

In Dolly’s car they rode on to Long Island, closer in their emotions than they had ever been before. They knew what would happen — not with Paula’s face to remind them that something was lacking, but when they were alone in the still, hot Long Island night they did not care.

The estate in Port Washington where they were to spend the week-end belonged to a cousin of Anson’s who had married a Montana copper operator. An interminable drive began at the lodge and twisted under imported poplar saplings toward a huge, pink, Spanish house. Anson had often visited there before.

After dinner they danced at the Linx Club. About midnight Anson assured himself that his cousins would not leave before two — then he explained that Dolly was tired; he would take her home and return to the dance later. Trembling a little with excitement, they got into a borrowed car together and drove to Port Washington. As they reached the lodge he stopped and spoke to the night-watchman.

“When are you making a round, Carl?”

“Right away.”

“Then you’ll be here till everybody’s in?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. Listen: if any automobile, no matter whose it is, turns in at this gate, I want you to phone the house immediately.” He put a five-dollar bill into Carl’s hand. “Is that clear?”

“Yes, Mr. Anson.” Being of the Old World, he neither winked nor smiled. Yet Dolly sat with her face turned slightly away.

Anson had a key. Once inside he poured a drink for both of them — Dolly left hers untouched — then he ascertained definitely the location of the phone, and found that it was within easy hearing distance of their rooms, both of which were on the first floor.

Five minutes later he knocked at the door of Dolly’s room.

“Anson?” He went in, closing the door behind him. She was in bed, leaning up anxiously with elbows on the pillow; sitting beside her he took her in his arms.

“Anson, darling.”

He didn’t answer.

“Anson. . . . Anson! I love you. . . . Say you love me. Say it now — can’t you say it now? Even if you don’t mean it?”

He did not listen. Over her head he perceived that the picture of Paula was hanging here upon this wall.

He got up and went close to it. The frame gleamed faintly with thrice-reflected moonlight — within was a blurred shadow of a face that he saw he did not know. Almost sobbing, he turned around and stared with abomination at the little figure on the bed.

“This is all foolishness,” he said thickly. “I don’t know what I was thinking about. I don’t love you and you’d better wait for somebody that loves you. I don’t love you a bit, can’t you understand?”

His voice broke, and he went hurriedly out. Back in the salon he was pouring himself a drink with uneasy fingers, when the front door opened suddenly, and his cousin came in.

“Why, Anson, I hear Dolly’s sick,” she began solicitously. “I hear she’s sick. . . .”

“It was nothing,” he interrupted, raising his voice so that it would carry into Dolly’s room. “She was a little tired. She went to bed.”

For a long time afterward Anson believed that a protective God sometimes interfered in human affairs. But Dolly Karger, lying awake and staring at the ceiling, never again believed in anything at all.

VI

When Dolly married during the following autumn, Anson was in London on business. Like Paula’s marriage, it was sudden, but it affected him in a different way. At first he felt that it was funny, and had an inclination to laugh when he thought of it. Later it depressed him — it made him feel old.

There was something repetitive about it — why, Paula and Dolly had belonged to different generations. He had a foretaste of the sensation of a man of forty who hears that the daughter of an old flame has married. He wired congratulations and, as was not the case with Paula, they were sincere — he had never really hoped that Paula would be happy.

When he returned to New York, he was made a partner in the firm, and, as his responsibilities increased, he had less time on his hands. The refusal of a life-insurance company to issue him a policy made such an impression on him that he stopped drinking for a year, and claimed that he felt better physically, though I think he missed the convivial recounting of those Cellinesque adventures which, in his early twenties, had played such a part of his life. But he never abandoned the Yale Club. He was a figure there, a personality, and the tendency of his class, who were now seven years out of college, to drift away to more sober haunts was checked by his presence.

His day was never too full nor his mind too weary to give any sort of aid to any one who asked it. What had been done at first through pride and superiority had become a habit and a passion. And there was always something — a younger brother in trouble at New Haven, a quarrel to be

patched up between a friend and his wife, a position to be found for this man, an investment for that. But his specialty was the solving of problems for young married people. Young married people fascinated him and their apartments were almost sacred to him — he knew the story of their love-affair, advised them where to live and how, and remembered their babies' names. Toward young wives his attitude was circumspect: he never abused the trust which their husbands — strangely enough in view of his unconcealed irregularities — invariably reposed in him.

He came to take a vicarious pleasure in happy marriages, and to be inspired to an almost equally pleasant melancholy by those that went astray. Not a season passed that he did not witness the collapse of an affair that perhaps he himself had fathered. When Paula was divorced and almost immediately remarried to another Bostonian, he talked about her to me all one afternoon. He would never love any one as he had loved Paula, but he insisted that he no longer cared.

“I’ll never marry,” he came to say; “I’ve seen too much of it, and I know a happy marriage is a very rare thing. Besides, I’m too old.”

But he did believe in marriage. Like all men who spring from a happy and successful marriage, he believed in it passionately — nothing he had seen would change his belief, his cynicism dissolved upon it like air. But he did really believe he was too old. At twenty-eight he began to accept with equanimity the prospect of marrying without romantic love; he resolutely chose a New York girl of his own class, pretty, intelligent, congenial, above reproach — and set about falling in love with her. The things he had said to Paula with sincerity, to other girls with grace, he could no longer say at all without smiling, or with the force necessary to convince.

“When I’m forty,” he told his friends, “I’ll be ripe. I’ll fall for some chorus girl like the rest.”

Nevertheless, he persisted in his attempt. His mother wanted to see him married, and he could now well afford it — he had a seat on the Stock Exchange, and his earned income came to twenty-five thousand a year. The idea was agreeable: when his friends — he spent most of his time with the set he and Dolly had evolved — closed themselves in behind domestic doors

at night, he no longer rejoiced in his freedom. He even wondered if he should have married Dolly. Not even Paula had loved him more, and he was learning the rarity, in a single life, of encountering true emotion.

Just as this mood began to creep over him a disquieting story reached his ear. His aunt Edna, a woman just this side of forty, was carrying on an open intrigue with a dissolute, hard-drinking young man named Cary Sloane. Every one knew of it except Anson's Uncle Robert, who for fifteen years had talked long in clubs and taken his wife for granted.

Anson heard the story again and again with increasing annoyance. Something of his old feeling for his uncle came back to him, a feeling that was more than personal, a reversion toward that family solidarity on which he had based his pride. His intuition singled out the essential point of the affair, which was that his uncle shouldn't be hurt. It was his first experiment in unsolicited meddling, but with his knowledge of Edna's character he felt that he could handle the matter better than a district judge or his uncle.

His uncle was in Hot Springs. Anson traced down the sources of the scandal so that there should be no possibility of mistake and then he called Edna and asked her to lunch with him at the Plaza next day. Something in his tone must have frightened her, for she was reluctant, but he insisted, putting off the date until she had no excuse for refusing.

She met him at the appointed time in the Plaza lobby, a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable. Five great rings, cold with diamonds and emeralds, sparkled on her slender hands. It occurred to Anson that it was his father's intelligence and not his uncle's that had earned the fur and the stones, the rich brilliance that buoyed up her passing beauty.

Though Edna scented his hostility, she was unprepared for the directness of his approach.

"Edna, I'm astonished at the way you've been acting," he said in a strong, frank voice. "At first I couldn't believe it."

"Believe what?" she demanded sharply.

“You needn’t pretend with me, Edna. I’m talking about Cary Sloane. Aside from any other consideration, I didn’t think you could treat Uncle Robert — ”

“Now look here, Anson — ” she began angrily, but his peremptory voice broke through hers:

“ — and your children in such a way. You’ve been married eighteen years, and you’re old enough to know better.”

“You can’t talk to me like that! You — ”

“Yes, I can. Uncle Robert has always been my best friend.” He was tremendously moved. He felt a real distress about his uncle, about his three young cousins.

Edna stood up, leaving her crab-flake cocktail untasted.

“This is the silliest thing — ”

“Very well, if you won’t listen to me I’ll go to Uncle Robert and tell him the whole story — he’s bound to hear it sooner or later. And afterward I’ll go to old Moses Sloane.”

Edna faltered back into her chair.

“Don’t talk so loud,” she begged him. Her eyes blurred with tears. “You have no idea how your voice carries. You might have chosen a less public place to make all these crazy accusations.”

He didn’t answer.

“Oh, you never liked me, I know,” she went on. “You’re just taking advantage of some silly gossip to try and break up the only interesting friendship I’ve ever had. What did I ever do to make you hate me so?”

Still Anson waited. There would be the appeal to his chivalry, then to his pity, finally to his superior sophistication — when he had shouldered his way through all these there would be admissions, and he could come to grips with her. By being silent, by being impervious, by returning constantly to his main weapon, which was his own true emotion, he bullied her into frantic

despair as the luncheon hour slipped away. At two o'clock she took out a mirror and a handkerchief, shined away the marks of her tears and powdered the slight hollows where they had lain. She had agreed to meet him at her own house at five.

When he arrived she was stretched on a chaise-longue which was covered with cretonne for the summer, and the tears he had called up at luncheon seemed still to be standing in her eyes. Then he was aware of Cary Sloane's dark anxious presence upon the cold hearth.

"What's this idea of yours?" broke out Sloane immediately. "I understand you invited Edna to lunch and then threatened her on the basis of some cheap scandal."

Anson sat down.

"I have no reason to think it's only scandal."

"I hear you're going to take it to Robert Hunter, and to my father."

Anson nodded.

"Either you break it off — or I will," he said.

"What God damned business is it of yours, Hunter?"

"Don't lose your temper, Cary," said Edna nervously. "It's only a question of showing him how absurd — "

"For one thing, it's my name that's being handed around," interrupted Anson. "That's all that concerns you, Cary."

"Edna isn't a member of your family."

"She most certainly is!" His anger mounted. "Why — she owes this house and the rings on her fingers to my father's brains. When Uncle Robert married her she didn't have a penny."

They all looked at the rings as if they had a significant bearing on the situation. Edna made a gesture to take them from her hand.

"I guess they're not the only rings in the world," said Sloane.

“Oh, this is absurd,” cried Edna. “Anson, will you listen to me? I’ve found out how the silly story started. It was a maid I discharged who went right to the Chilicheffs — all these Russians pump things out of their servants and then put a false meaning on them.” She brought down her fist angrily on the table: “And after Tom lent them the limousine for a whole month when we were South last winter — ”

“Do you see?” demanded Sloane eagerly. “This maid got hold of the wrong end of the thing. She knew that Edna and I were friends, and she carried it to the Chilicheffs. In Russia they assume that if a man and a woman — ”

He enlarged the theme to a disquisition upon social relations in the Caucasus.

“If that’s the case it better be explained to Uncle Robert,” said Anson dryly, “so that when the rumors do reach him he’ll know they’re not true.”

Adopting the method he had followed with Edna at luncheon he let them explain it all away. He knew that they were guilty and that presently they would cross the line from explanation into justification and convict themselves more definitely than he could ever do. By seven they had taken the desperate step of telling him the truth — Robert Hunter’s neglect, Edna’s empty life, the casual dalliance that had flamed up into passion — but like so many true stories it had the misfortune of being old, and its enfeebled body beat helplessly against the armor of Anson’s will. The threat to go to Sloane’s father sealed their helplessness, for the latter, a retired cotton broker out of Alabama, was a notorious fundamentalist who controlled his son by a rigid allowance and the promise that at his next vagary the allowance would stop forever.

They dined at a small French restaurant, and the discussion continued — at one time Sloane resorted to physical threats, a little later they were both imploring him to give them time. But Anson was obdurate. He saw that Edna was breaking up, and that her spirit must not be refreshed by any renewal of their passion.

At two o’clock in a small night-club on 53d Street, Edna’s nerves suddenly collapsed, and she cried to go home. Sloane had been drinking heavily all

evening, and he was faintly maudlin, leaning on the table and weeping a little with his face in his hands. Quickly Anson gave them his terms. Sloane was to leave town for six months, and he must be gone within forty-eight hours. When he returned there was to be no resumption of the affair, but at the end of a year Edna might, if she wished, tell Robert Hunter that she wanted a divorce and go about it in the usual way.

He paused, gaining confidence from their faces for his final word.

“Or there’s another thing you can do,” he said slowly, “if Edna wants to leave her children, there’s nothing I can do to prevent your running off together.”

“I want to go home!” cried Edna again. “Oh, haven’t you done enough to us for one day?”

Outside it was dark, save for a blurred glow from Sixth Avenue down the street. In that light those two who had been lovers looked for the last time into each other’s tragic faces, realizing that between them there was not enough youth and strength to avert their eternal parting. Sloane walked suddenly off down the street and Anson tapped a dozing taxi-driver on the arm.

It was almost four; there was a patient flow of cleaning water along the ghostly pavement of Fifth Avenue, and the shadows of two night women flitted over the dark façade of St. Thomas’s church. Then the desolate shrubbery of Central Park where Anson had often played as a child, and the mounting numbers, significant as names, of the marching streets. This was his city, he thought, where his name had flourished through five generations. No change could alter the permanence of its place here, for change itself was the essential substratum by which he and those of his name identified themselves with the spirit of New York. Resourcefulness and a powerful will — for his threats in weaker hands would have been less than nothing — had beaten the gathering dust from his uncle’s name, from the name of his family, from even this shivering figure that sat beside him in the car.

Cary Sloane's body was found next morning on the lower shelf of a pillar of Queensboro Bridge. In the darkness and in his excitement he had thought that it was the water flowing black beneath him, but in less than a second it made no possible difference — unless he had planned to think one last thought of Edna, and call out her name as he struggled feebly in the water.

VII

Anson never blamed himself for his part in this affair — the situation which brought it about had not been of his making. But he just suffer with the unjust, and he found that his oldest and somehow his most precious friendship was over. He never knew what distorted story Edna told, but he was welcome in his uncle's house no longer.

Just before Christmas Mrs. Hunter retired to a select Episcopal heaven, and Anson became the responsible head of his family. An unmarried aunt who had lived with them for years ran the house, and attempted with helpless inefficiency to chaperone the younger girls. All the children were less self-reliant than Anson, more conventional both in their virtues and in their shortcomings. Mrs. Hunter's death had postponed the début of one daughter and the wedding of another. Also it had taken something deeply material from all of them, for with her passing the quiet, expensive superiority of the Hunters came to an end.

For one thing, the estate, considerably diminished by two inheritance taxes and soon to be divided among six children, was not a notable fortune any more. Anson saw a tendency in his youngest sisters to speak rather respectfully of families that hadn't "existed" twenty years ago. His own feeling of precedence was not echoed in them — sometimes they were conventionally snobbish, that was all. For another thing, this was the last summer they would spend on the Connecticut estate; the clamor against it was too loud: "Who wants to waste the best months of the year shut up in that dead old town?" Reluctantly he yielded — the house would go into the market in the fall, and next summer they would rent a smaller place in Westchester County. It was a step down from the expensive simplicity of his father's idea, and, while he sympathized with the revolt, it also annoyed

him; during his mother's lifetime he had gone up there at least every other week-end — even in the gayest summers.

Yet he himself was part of this change, and his strong instinct for life had turned him in his twenties from the hollow obsequies of that abortive leisure class. He did not see this clearly — he still felt that there was a norm, a standard of society. But there was no norm, it was doubtful if there had ever been a true norm in New York. The few who still paid and fought to enter a particular set succeeded only to find that as a society it scarcely functioned — or, what was more alarming, that the Bohemia from which they fled sat above them at table.

At twenty-nine Anson's chief concern was his own growing loneliness. He was sure now that he would never marry. The number of weddings at which he had officiated as best man or usher was past all counting — there was a drawer at home that bulged with the official neckties of this or that wedding-party, neckties standing for romances that had not endured a year, for couples who had passed completely from his life. Scarf-pins, gold pencils, cuff-buttons, presents from a generation of grooms had passed through his jewel-box and been lost — and with every ceremony he was less and less able to imagine himself in the groom's place. Under his hearty good-will toward all those marriages there was despair about his own.

And as he neared thirty he became not a little depressed at the inroads that marriage, especially lately, had made upon his friendships. Groups of people had a disconcerting tendency to dissolve and disappear. The men from his own college — and it was upon them he had expended the most time and affection — were the most elusive of all. Most of them were drawn deep into domesticity, two were dead, one lived abroad, one was in Hollywood writing continuities for pictures that Anson went faithfully to see.

Most of them, however, were permanent commuters with an intricate family life centering around some suburban country club, and it was from these that he felt his estrangement most keenly.

In the early days of their married life they had all needed him; he gave them advice about their slim finances, he exorcised their doubts about the advisability of bringing a baby into two rooms and a bath, especially he

stood for the great world outside. But now their financial troubles were in the past and the fearfully expected child had evolved into an absorbing family. They were always glad to see old Anson, but they dressed up for him and tried to impress him with their present importance, and kept their troubles to themselves. They needed him no longer.

A few weeks before his thirtieth birthday the last of his early and intimate friends was married. Anson acted in his usual rôle of best man, gave his usual silver tea-service, and went down to the usual *Homeric* to say good-by. It was a hot Friday afternoon in May, and as he walked from the pier he realized that Saturday closing had begun and he was free until Monday morning.

“Go where?” he asked himself.

The Yale Club, of course; bridge until dinner, then four or five raw cocktails in somebody’s room and a pleasant confused evening. He regretted that this afternoon’s groom wouldn’t be along — they had always been able to cram so much into such nights: they knew how to attach women and how to get rid of them, how much consideration any girl deserved from their intelligent hedonism. A party was an adjusted thing — you took certain girls to certain places and spent just so much on their amusement; you drank a little, not much, more than you ought to drink, and at a certain time in the morning you stood up and said you were going home. You avoided college boys, sponges, future engagements, fights, sentiment, and indiscretions. That was the way it was done. All the rest was dissipation.

In the morning you were never violently sorry — you made no resolutions, but if you had overdone it and your heart was slightly out of order, you went on the wagon for a few days without saying anything about it, and waited until an accumulation of nervous boredom projected you into another party.

The lobby of the Yale Club was unpopulated. In the bar three very young alumni looked up at him, momentarily and without curiosity.

“Hello there, Oscar,” he said to the bartender. “Mr. Cahill been around this afternoon?”

“Mr. Cahill’s gone to New Haven.”

“Oh . . . that so?”

“Gone to the ball game. Lot of men gone up.”

Anson looked once again into the lobby, considered for a moment, and then walked out and over to Fifth Avenue. From the broad window of one of his clubs — one that he had scarcely visited in five years — a gray man with watery eyes stared down at him. Anson looked quickly away — that figure sitting in vacant resignation, in supercilious solitude, depressed him. He stopped and, retracing his steps, started over 47th Street toward Teak Warden’s apartment. Teak and his wife had once been his most familiar friends — it was a household where he and Dolly Karger had been used to go in the days of their affair. But Teak had taken to drink, and his wife had remarked publicly that Anson was a bad influence on him. The remark reached Anson in an exaggerated form — when it was finally cleared up, the delicate spell of intimacy was broken, never to be renewed.

“Is Mr. Warden at home?” he inquired.

“They’ve gone to the country.”

The fact unexpectedly cut at him. They were gone to the country and he hadn’t known. Two years before he would have known the date, the hour, come up at the last moment for a final drink, and planned his first visit to them. Now they had gone without a word.

Anson looked at his watch and considered a week-end with his family, but the only train was a local that would jolt through the aggressive heat for three hours. And to-morrow in the country, and Sunday — he was in no mood for porch-bridge with polite undergraduates, and dancing after dinner at a rural roadhouse, a diminutive of gaiety which his father had estimated too well.

“Oh, no,” he said to himself. . . . “No.”

He was a dignified, impressive young man, rather stout now, but otherwise unmarked by dissipation. He could have been cast for a pillar of something — at times you were sure it was not society, at others nothing else — for the law, for the church. He stood for a few minutes motionless on the

sidewalk in front of a 47th Street apartment-house; for almost the first time in his life he had nothing whatever to do.

Then he began to walk briskly up Fifth Avenue, as if he had just been reminded of an important engagement there. The necessity of dissimulation is one of the few characteristics that we share with dogs, and I think of Anson on that day as some well-bred specimen who had been disappointed at a familiar back door. He was going to see Nick, once a fashionable bartender in demand at all private dances, and now employed in cooling non-alcoholic champagne among the labyrinthine cellars of the Plaza Hotel.

“Nick,” he said, “what’s happened to everything?”

“Dead,” Nick said.

“Make me a whiskey sour.” Anson handed a pint bottle over the counter. “Nick, the girls are different; I had a little girl in Brooklyn and she got married last week without letting me know.”

“That a fact? Ha-ha-ha,” responded Nick diplomatically. “Slipped it over on you.”

“Absolutely,” said Anson. “And I was out with her the night before.”

“Ha-ha-ha,” said Nick, “ha-ha-ha!”

“Do you remember the wedding, Nick, in Hot Springs where I had the waiters and the musicians singing ‘God save the King’?”

“Now where was that, Mr. Hunter?” Nick concentrated doubtfully. “Seems to me that was — ”

“Next time they were back for more, and I began to wonder how much I’d paid them,” continued Anson.

“ — seems to me that was at Mr. Trenholm’s wedding.”

“Don’t know him,” said Anson decisively. He was offended that a strange name should intrude upon his reminiscences; Nick perceived this.

“Naw — aw — ” he admitted, “I ought to know that. It was one of your crowd — Brakins. . . . Baker — ”

“Bicker Baker,” said Anson responsively. “They put me in a hearse after it was over and covered me up with flowers and drove me away.”

“Ha-ha-ha,” said Nick. “Ha-ha-ha.”

Nick’s simulation of the old family servant paled presently and Anson went up-stairs to the lobby. He looked around — his eyes met the glance of an unfamiliar clerk at the desk, then fell upon a flower from the morning’s marriage hesitating in the mouth of a brass cuspidor. He went out and walked slowly toward the blood-red sun over Columbus Circle. Suddenly he turned around and, retracing his steps to the Plaza, immured himself in a telephone-booth.

Later he said that he tried to get me three times that afternoon, that he tried every one who might be in New York — men and girls he had not seen for years, an artist’s model of his college days whose faded number was still in his address book — Central told him that even the exchange existed no longer. At length his quest roved into the country, and he held brief disappointing conversations with emphatic butlers and maids. So-and-so was out, riding, swimming, playing golf, sailed to Europe last week. Who shall I say phoned?

It was intolerable that he should pass the evening alone — the private reckonings which one plans for a moment of leisure lose every charm when the solitude is enforced. There were always women of a sort, but the ones he knew had temporarily vanished, and to pass a New York evening in the hired company of a stranger never occurred to him — he would have considered that that was something shameful and secret, the diversion of a travelling salesman in a strange town.

Anson paid the telephone bill — the girl tried unsuccessfully to joke with him about its size — and for the second time that afternoon started to leave the Plaza and go he knew not where. Near the revolving door the figure of a woman, obviously with child, stood sideways to the light — a sheer beige cape fluttered at her shoulders when the door turned and, each time, she looked impatiently toward it as if she were weary of waiting. At the first sight of her a strong nervous thrill of familiarity went over him, but not until he was within five feet of her did he realize that it was Paula.

“Why, Anson Hunter!”

His heart turned over.

“Why, Paula — ”

“Why, this is wonderful. I can’t believe it, Anson!”

She took both his hands, and he saw in the freedom of the gesture that the memory of him had lost poignancy to her. But not to him — he felt that old mood that she evoked in him stealing over his brain, that gentleness with which he had always met her optimism as if afraid to mar its surface.

“We’re at Rye for the summer. Pete had to come East on business — you know of course I’m Mrs. Peter Hagerty now — so we brought the children and took a house. You’ve got to come out and see us.”

“Can I?” he asked directly. “When?”

“When you like. Here’s Pete.” The revolving door functioned, giving up a fine tall man of thirty with a tanned face and a trim mustache. His immaculate fitness made a sharp contrast with Anson’s increasing bulk, which was obvious under the faintly tight cut-away coat.

“You oughtn’t to be standing,” said Hagerty to his wife. “Let’s sit down here.” He indicated lobby chairs, but Paula hesitated.

“I’ve got to go right home,” she said. “Anson, why don’t you — why don’t you come out and have dinner with us to-night? We’re just getting settled, but if you can stand that — ”

Hagerty confirmed the invitation cordially.

“Come out for the night.”

Their car waited in front of the hotel, and Paula with a tired gesture sank back against silk cushions in the corner.

“There’s so much I want to talk to you about,” she said, “it seems hopeless.”

“I want to hear about you.”

“Well” — she smiled at Hagerty — “that would take a long time too. I have three children — by my first marriage. The oldest is five, then four, then three.” She smiled again. “I didn’t waste much time having them, did I?”

“Boys?”

“A boy and two girls. Then — oh, a lot of things happened, and I got a divorce in Paris a year ago and married Pete. That’s all — except that I’m awfully happy.”

In Rye they drove up to a large house near the Beach Club, from which there issued presently three dark, slim children who broke from an English governess and approached them with an esoteric cry. Abstractedly and with difficulty Paula took each one into her arms, a caress which they accepted stiffly, as they had evidently been told not to bump into Mummy. Even against their fresh faces Paula’s skin showed scarcely any weariness — for all her physical languor she seemed younger than when he had last seen her at Palm Beach seven years ago.

At dinner she was preoccupied, and afterward, during the homage to the radio, she lay with closed eyes on the sofa, until Anson wondered if his presence at this time were not an intrusion. But at nine o’clock, when Hagerty rose and said pleasantly that he was going to leave them by themselves for a while, she began to talk slowly about herself and the past.

“My first baby,” she said — “the one we call Darling, the biggest little girl — I wanted to die when I knew I was going to have her, because Lowell was like a stranger to me. It didn’t seem as though she could be my own. I wrote you a letter and tore it up. Oh, you were so bad to me, Anson.”

It was the dialogue again, rising and falling. Anson felt a sudden quickening of memory.

“Weren’t you engaged once?” she asked — “a girl named Dolly something?”

“I wasn’t ever engaged. I tried to be engaged, but I never loved anybody but you, Paula.”

“Oh,” she said. Then after a moment: “This baby is the first one I ever really wanted. You see, I’m in love now — at last.”

He didn't answer, shocked at the treachery of her remembrance. She must have seen that the "at last" bruised him, for she continued:

"I was infatuated with you, Anson — you could make me do anything you liked. But we wouldn't have been happy. I'm not smart enough for you. I don't like things to be complicated like you do." She paused. "You'll never settle down," she said.

The phrase struck at him from behind — it was an accusation that of all accusations he had never merited.

"I could settle down if women were different," he said. "If I didn't understand so much about them, if women didn't spoil you for other women, if they had only a little pride. If I could go to sleep for a while and wake up into a home that was really mine — why, that's what I'm made for, Paula, that's what women have seen in me and liked in me. It's only that I can't get through the preliminaries any more."

Hagerty came in a little before eleven; after a whiskey Paula stood up and announced that she was going to bed. She went over and stood by her husband.

"Where did you go, dearest?" she demanded.

"I had a drink with Ed Saunders."

"I was worried. I thought maybe you'd run away."

She rested her head against his coat.

"He's sweet, isn't he, Anson?" she demanded.

"Absolutely," said Anson, laughing.

She raised her face to her husband.

"Well, I'm ready," she said. She turned to Anson: "Do you want to see our family gymnastic stunt?"

"Yes," he said in an interested voice.

"All right. Here we go!"

Hagerty picked her up easily in his arms.

“This is called the family acrobatic stunt,” said Paula. “He carries me upstairs. Isn’t it sweet of him?”

“Yes,” said Anson.

Hagerty bent his head slightly until his face touched Paula’s.

“And I love him,” she said. “I’ve just been telling you, haven’t I, Anson?”

“Yes,” he said.

“He’s the dearest thing that ever lived in this world; aren’t you, darling? . . . Well, good night. Here we go. Isn’t he strong?”

“Yes,” Anson said.

“You’ll find a pair of Pete’s pajamas laid out for you. Sweet dreams — see you at breakfast.”

“Yes,” Anson said.

VIII

The older members of the firm insisted that Anson should go abroad for the summer. He had scarcely had a vacation in seven years, they said. He was stale and needed a change. Anson resisted.

“If I go,” he declared, “I won’t come back any more.”

“That’s absurd, old man. You’ll be back in three months with all this depression gone. Fit as ever.”

“No.” He shook his head stubbornly. “If I stop, I won’t go back to work. If I stop, that means I’ve given up — I’m through.”

“We’ll take a chance on that. Stay six months if you like — we’re not afraid you’ll leave us. Why, you’d be miserable if you didn’t work.”

They arranged his passage for him. They liked Anson — every one liked Anson — and the change that had been coming over him cast a sort of pall over the office. The enthusiasm that had invariably signalled up business, the consideration toward his equals and his inferiors, the lift of his vital presence — within the past four months his intense nervousness had melted down these qualities into the fussy pessimism of a man of forty. On every transaction in which he was involved he acted as a drag and a strain.

“If I go I’ll never come back,” he said.

Three days before he sailed Paula Legendre Hagerty died in childbirth. I was with him a great deal then, for we were crossing together, but for the first time in our friendship he told me not a word of how he felt, nor did I see the slightest sign of emotion. His chief preoccupation was with the fact that he was thirty years old — he would turn the conversation to the point where he could remind you of it and then fall silent, as if he assumed that the statement would start a chain of thought sufficient to itself. Like his partners, I was amazed at the change in him, and I was glad when the *Paris* moved off into the wet space between the worlds, leaving his principality behind.

“How about a drink?” he suggested.

We walked into the bar with that defiant feeling that characterizes the day of departure and ordered four Martinis. After one cocktail a change came over him — he suddenly reached across and slapped my knee with the first joviality I had seen him exhibit for months.

“Did you see that girl in the red tam?” he demanded, “the one with the high color who had the two police dogs down to bid her good-by.”

“She’s pretty,” I agreed.

“I looked her up in the purser’s office and found out that she’s alone. I’m going down to see the steward in a few minutes. We’ll have dinner with her to-night.”

After a while he left me, and within an hour he was walking up and down the deck with her, talking to her in his strong, clear voice. Her red tam was a

bright spot of color against the steel-green sea, and from time to time she looked up with a flashing bob of her head, and smiled with amusement and interest, and anticipation. At dinner we had champagne, and were very joyous — afterward Anson ran the pool with infectious gusto, and several people who had seen me with him asked me his name. He and the girl were talking and laughing together on a lounge in the bar when I went to bed.

I saw less of him on the trip than I had hoped. He wanted to arrange a foursome, but there was no one available, so I saw him only at meals. Sometimes, though, he would have a cocktail in the bar, and he told me about the girl in the red tam, and his adventures with her, making them all bizarre and amusing, as he had a way of doing, and I was glad that he was himself again, or at least the self that I knew, and with which I felt at home. I don't think he was ever happy unless some one was in love with him, responding to him like filings to a magnet, helping him to explain himself, promising him something. What it was I do not know. Perhaps they promised that there would always be women in the world who would spend their brightest, freshest, rarest hours to nurse and protect that superiority he cherished in his heart.

JACOB'S LADDER

I

Saturday Evening Post (20 August 1927)

It was a particularly sordid and degraded murder trial, and Jacob Booth, writhing quietly on a spectators' bench, felt that he had childishly gobbled something without being hungry, simply because it was there. The newspapers had humanized the case, made a cheap, neat problem play out of an affair of the jungle, so passes that actually admitted one to the court room were hard to get. Such a pass had been tendered him the evening before.

Jacob looked around at the doors, where a hundred people, inhaling and exhaling with difficulty, generated excitement by their eagerness, their breathless escape from their own private lives. The day was hot and there was sweat upon the crowd — obvious sweat in large dewy beads that would shake off on Jacob if he fought his way through to the doors. Someone behind him guessed that the jury wouldn't be out half an hour.

With the inevitability of a compass needle, his head swung toward the prisoner's table and he stared once more at the murderess' huge blank face garnished with red button eyes. She was Mrs. Choynski, *née* Delehanty, and fate had ordained that she should one day seize a meat ax and divide her sailor lover. The puffy hands that had swung the weapon turned an ink bottle about endlessly; several times she glanced at the crowd with a nervous smile.

Jacob frowned and looked around quickly; he had found a pretty face and lost it again. The face had edged sideways into his consciousness when he was absorbed in a mental picture of Mrs. Choynski in action; now it was faded back into the anonymity of the crowd. It was the face of a dark saint with tender, luminous eyes and a skin pale and fair. Twice he searched the room, then he forgot and sat stiffly and uncomfortably, waiting.

The jury brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree; Mrs. Choynski squeaked, "Oh, my God!" The sentence was postponed until next day. With a slow rhythmic roll, the crowd pushed out into the August afternoon.

Jacob saw the face again, realizing why he hadn't seen it before. It belonged to a young girl beside the prisoner's table and it had been hidden by the full moon of Mrs. Choynski's head. Now the clear, luminous eyes were bright with tears, and an impatient young man with a squashed nose was trying to attract the attention of the shoulder.

"Oh, get out!" said the girl, shaking the hand off impatiently. "Le' me alone, will you? Le' me alone. Geeze!"

The man sighed profoundly and stepped back. The girl embraced the dazed Mrs. Choynski and another lingerer remarked to Jacob that they were sisters. Then Mrs. Choynski was taken off the scene — her expression absurdly implied an important appointment — and the girl sat down at the desk and began to powder her face. Jacob waited; so did the young man with the squashed nose. The sergeant came up brusquely and Jacob gave him five dollars.

"Geeze!" cried the girl to the young man. "Can't you le' me alone?" She stood up. Her presence, the obscure vibrations of her impatience, filled the court room. "Every day itsa same!"

Jacob moved nearer. The other man spoke to her rapidly:

"Miss Delehanty, we've been more than liberal with you and your sister and I'm only asking you to carry out your share of the contract. Our paper goes to press at — "

Miss Delehanty turned despairingly to Jacob. "Can you beat it?" she demanded. "Now he wants a pitcher of my sister when she was a baby, and it's got my mother in it too."

"We'll take your mother out."

"I want my mother though. It's the only one I got of her."

"I'll promise to give you the picture back tomorrow."

“Oh, I’m sicka the whole thing.” Again she was speaking to Jacob, but without seeing him except as some element of the vague, omnipresent public. “It gives me a pain in the eye.” She made a clicking sound in her teeth that comprised the essence of all human scorn.

“I have a car outside, Miss Delehanty,” said Jacob suddenly. “Don’t you want me to run you home?”

“All right,” she answered indifferently.

The newspaper man assumed a previous acquaintance between them; he began to argue in a low voice as the three moved toward the door.

“Every day it’s like this,” said Miss Delehanty bitterly. “These newspaper guys!” Outside, Jacob signaled for his car and as it drove up, large, open and bright, and the chauffeur jumped out and opened the door, the reporter, on the verge of tears, saw the picture slipping away and launched into a peroration of pleading.

“Go jump in the river!” said Miss Delehanty, sitting in Jacob’s car. “Go — jump — in — the — river!”

The extraordinary force of her advice was such that Jacob regretted the limitations of her vocabulary. Not only did it evoke an image of the unhappy journalist hurling himself into the Hudson but it convinced Jacob that it was the only fitting and adequate way of disposing of the man. Leaving him to face his watery destiny, the car moved off down the street.

“You dealt with him pretty well,” Jacob said.

“Sure,” she admitted. “I get sore after a while and then I can deal with anybody no matter who. How old would you think I was?”

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

She looked at him gravely, inviting him to wonder. Her face, the face of a saint, an intense little Madonna, was lifted fragily out of the mortal dust of the afternoon. On the pure parting of her lips no breath hovered; he had never seen a texture pale and immaculate as her skin, lustrous and garish as

her eyes. His own well-ordered person seemed for the first time in his life gross and well worn to him as he knelt suddenly at the heart of freshness.

“Where do you live?” he asked. The Bronx, perhaps Yonkers, Albany — Baffin’s Bay. They could curve over the top of the world, drive on forever.

Then she spoke, and as the toad words vibrated with life in her voice, the moment passed: “Eas’ Hun’erd thuyty-thuyd. Stayin’ with a girl friend there.”

They were waiting for a traffic light to change and she exchanged a haughty glance with a flushed man peering from a flanking taxi. The man took off his hat hilariously. “Somebody’s stenog,” he cried. “And oh, what a stenog!”

An arm and hand appeared in the taxi window and pulled him back into the darkness of the cab.

Miss Delehanty turned to Jacob, a frown, the shadow of a hair in breadth, appearing between her eyes. “A lot of ’em know me,” she said. “We got a lot of publicity and pictures in the paper.”

“I’m sorry it turned out badly.”

She remembered the event of the afternoon, apparently for the first time in half an hour. “She had it comin’ to her, mister. She never had a chance. But they’ll never send no woman to the chair in New York State.”

“No; that’s sure.”

“She’ll get life.” Surely it was not she who had spoken. The tranquillity of her face made her words separate themselves from her as soon as they were uttered and take on a corporate existence of their own.

“Did you use to live with her?”

“Me? Say, read the papers! I didn’t even know she was my sister till they come and told me. I hadn’t seen her since I was a baby.” She pointed suddenly at one of the world’s largest department stores. “There’s where I work. Back to the old pick and shovel day after tomorrow.”

“It’s going to be a hot night,” said Jacob. “Why don’t we ride out into the country and have dinner?”

She looked at him. His eyes were polite and kind. “All right,” she said.

Jacob was thirty-three. Once he had possessed a tenor voice with destiny in it, but laryngitis had despoiled him of it in one feverish week ten years before. In despair that concealed not a little relief, he bought a plantation in Florida and spent five years turning it into a golf course. When the land boom came in 1924 he sold his real estate for eight hundred thousand dollars.

Like so many Americans, he valued things rather than cared about them. His apathy was neither fear of life nor was it an affectation; it was the racial violence grown tired. It was a humorous apathy. With no need for money, he had tried — tried hard — for a year and a half to marry one of the richest women in America. If he had loved her, or pretended to, he could have had her; but he had never been able to work himself up to more than the formal lie.

In person, he was short, trim and handsome. Except when he was overcome by a desperate attack of apathy, he was unusually charming; he went with a crowd of men who were sure that they were the best of New York and had by far the best time. During a desperate attack of apathy he was like a gruff white bird, ruffled and annoyed, and disliking mankind with all his heart.

He liked mankind that night under the summer moonshine of the Borghese Gardens. The moon was a radiant egg, smooth and bright as Jenny Delehanty’s face across the table; a salt wind blew in over the big estates collecting flower scents from their gardens and bearing them to the road-house lawn. The waiters hopped here and there like pixies through the hot night, their black backs disappearing into the gloom, their white shirt fronts gleaming startlingly out of an unfamiliar patch of darkness.

They drank a bottle of champagne and he told Jenny Delehanty a story. “You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen,” he said, “but as it happens you are not my type and I have no designs on you at all. Nevertheless, you can’t go back to that store. Tomorrow I’m going to

arrange a meeting between you and Billy Farrelly, who's directing a picture on Long Island. Whether he'll see how beautiful you are I don't know, because I've never introduced anybody to him before."

There was no shadow, no ripple of a change in her expression, but there was irony in her eyes. Things like that had been said to her before, but the movie director was never available next day. Or else she had been tactful enough not to remind men of what they had promised last night.

"Not only are you beautiful," continued Jacob, "but you are somehow on the grand scale. Everything you do — yes, like reaching for that glass, or pretending to be self-conscious, or pretending to despair of me — gets across. If somebody's smart enough to see it, you might be something of an actress."

"I like Norma Shearer the best. Do you?"

Driving homeward through the soft night, she put up her face quietly to be kissed. Holding her in the hollow of his arm, Jacob rubbed his cheek against her cheek's softness and then looked down at her for a long moment.

"Such a lovely child," he said gravely.

She smiled back at him; her hands played conventionally with the lapels of his coat. "I had a wonderful time," she whispered. "Geeze! I hope I never have to go to court again."

"I hope you don't."

"Aren't you going to kiss me good night?"

"This is Great Neck," he said, "that we're passing through. A lot of moving-picture stars live here."

"You're a card, handsome."

"Why?"

She shook her head from side to side and smiled. "You're a card."

She saw then that he was a type with which she was not acquainted. He was surprised, not flattered, that she thought him droll. She saw that whatever

his eventual purpose he wanted nothing of her now. Jenny Delehanty learned quickly; she let herself become grave and sweet and quiet as the night, and as they rolled over Queensboro Bridge into the city she was half asleep against his shoulder.

II

He called up Billy Farrelly next day. "I want to see you," he said. "I found a girl I wish you'd take a look at."

"My gosh!" said Farrelly. "You're the third today."

"Not the third of this kind."

"All right. If she's white, she can have the lead in a picture I'm starting Friday."

"Joking aside, will you give her a test?"

"I'm not joking. She can have the lead, I tell you. I'm sick of these lousy actresses. I'm going out to the Coast next month. I'd rather be Constance Talmadge's water boy than own most of these young —" His voice was bitter with Irish disgust. "Sure, bring her over, Jake. I'll take a look at her."

Four days later, when Mrs. Choynski, accompanied by two deputy sheriffs, had gone to Auburn to pass the remainder of her life, Jacob drove Jenny over the bridge to Astoria, Long Island.

"You've got to have a new name," he said; "and remember you never had a sister."

"I thought of that," she answered. "I thought of a name too — Tootsie Defoe."

"That's rotten," he laughed; "just rotten."

"Well, you think of one if you're so smart."

"How about Jenny — Jenny — oh, anything — Jenny Prince?"

"All right, handsome."

Jenny Prince walked up the steps of the motion-picture studio, and Billy Farrelly, in a bitter Irish humor, in contempt for himself and his profession, engaged her for one of the three leads in his picture.

“They’re all the same,” he said to Jacob. “Shucks! Pick ’em up out of the gutter today and they want gold plates tomorrow. I’d rather be Constance Talmadge’s water boy than own a harem full of them.”

“Do you like this girl?”

“She’s all right. She’s got a good side face. But they’re all the same.”

Jacob bought Jenny Prince an evening dress for a hundred and eighty dollars and took her to the Lido that night. He was pleased with himself, and excited. They both laughed a lot and were happy.

“Can you believe you’re in the movies?” he demanded.

“They’ll probably kick me out tomorrow. It was too easy.”

“No, it wasn’t. It was very good — psychologically. Billy Farrelly was in just the one mood — ”

“I liked him.”

“He’s fine,” agreed Jacob. But he was reminded that already another man was helping to open doors for her success. “He’s a wild Irishman, look out for him.”

“I know. You can tell when a guy wants to make you.”

“What?”

“I don’t mean he wanted to make me, handsome. But he’s got that look about him, if you know what I mean.” She distorted her lovely face with a wise smile. “He likes ’em; you could tell that this afternoon.”

They drank a bottle of charged and very alcoholic grape juice.

Presently the head waiter came over to their table.

“This is Miss Jenny Prince,” said Jacob. “You’ll see a lot of her, Lorenzo, because she’s just signed a big contract with the pictures. Always treat her with the greatest possible respect.”

When Lorenzo had withdrawn, Jenny said, “You got the nicest eyes I ever seen.” It was her effort, the best she could do. Her face was serious and sad. “Honest,” she repeated herself, “the nicest eyes I ever seen. Any girl would be glad to have eyes like yours.”

He laughed, but he was touched. His hand covered her arm lightly. “Be good,” he said. “Work hard and I’ll be so proud of you — and we’ll have some good times together.”

“I always have a good time with you.” Her eyes were full on his, in his, held there like hands. Her voice was clear and dry. “Honest, I’m not kidding about your eyes. You always think I’m kidding. I want to thank you for all you’ve done for me.”

“I haven’t done anything, you lunatic. I saw your face and I was — I was beholden to it — everybody ought to be beholden to it.”

Entertainers appeared and her eyes wandered hungrily away from him.

She was so young — Jacob had never been so conscious of youth before. He had always considered himself on the young side until tonight.

Afterward, in the dark cave of the taxicab, fragrant with the perfume he had bought for her that day, Jenny came close to him, clung to him. He kissed her, without enjoying it. There was no shadow of passion in her eyes or on her mouth; there was a faint spray of champagne on her breath. She clung nearer, desperately. He took her hands and put them in her lap.

She leaned away from him resentfully.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you like me?”

“I shouldn’t have let you have so much champagne.”

“Why not? I’ve had a drink before. I was tight once.”

“Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. And if I hear of your taking any more drinks, you’ll hear from me.”

“You sure have got your nerve, haven’t you?”

“What do you do? Let all the corner soda jerkers maul you around whenever they want?”

“Oh, shut up!”

For a moment they rode in silence. Then her hand crept across to his. “I like you better than any guy I ever met, and I can’t help that, can I?”

“Dear little Jenny.” He put his arm around her again.

Hesitating tentatively, he kissed her and again he was chilled by the innocence of her kiss, the eyes that at the moment of contact looked beyond him out into the darkness of the night, the darkness of the world. She did not know yet that splendor was something in the heart; at the moment when she should realize that and melt into the passion of the universe he could take her without question or regret.

“I like you enormously,” he said; “better than almost anyone I know. I mean that about drinking though. You mustn’t drink.”

“I’ll do anything you want,” she said; and she repeated, looking at him directly, “Anything.”

The car drew up in front of her flat and he kissed her good night.

He rode away in a mood of exultation, living more deeply in her youth and future than he had lived in himself for years. Thus, leaning forward a little on his cane, rich, young and happy, he was borne along dark streets and light toward a future of his own which he could not foretell.

III

A month later, climbing into a taxicab with Farrelly one night, he gave the latter’s address to the driver. “So you’re in love with this baby,” said Farrelly pleasantly. “Very well, I’ll get out of your way.”

Jacob experienced a vast displeasure. “I’m not in love with her,” he said slowly. “Billy, I want you to leave her alone.”

“Sure! I’ll leave her alone,” agreed Farrelly readily. “I didn’t know you were interested — she told me she couldn’t make you.”

“The point is you’re not interested either,” said Jacob. “If I thought that you two really cared about each other, do you think I’d be fool enough to try to stand in the way? But you don’t give a darn about her, and she’s impressed and a little fascinated.”

“Sure,” agreed Farrelly, bored. “I wouldn’t touch her for anything.”

Jacob laughed. “Yes, you would. Just for something to do. That’s what I object to — anything — anything casual happening to her.”

“I see what you mean. I’ll let her alone.”

Jacob was forced to be content with that. He had no faith in Billy Farrelly, but he guessed that Farrelly liked him and wouldn’t offend him unless stronger feelings were involved. But the holding hands under the table tonight had annoyed him. Jenny lied about it when he reproached her; she offered to let him take her home immediately, offered not to speak to Farrelly again all evening. Then he had seemed silly and pointless to himself. It would have been easier, when Farrelly said “So you’re in love with this baby,” to have been able to answer simply, “I am.”

But he wasn’t. He valued her now more than he had ever thought possible. He watched in her the awakening of a sharply individual temperament. She liked quiet and simple things. She was developing the capacity to discriminate and shut the trivial and the unessential out of her life. He tried giving her books; then wisely he gave up that and brought her into contact with a variety of men. He made situations and then explained them to her, and he was pleased, as appreciation and politeness began to blossom before his eyes. He valued, too, her utter trust in him and the fact that she used him as a standard for judgments on other men.

Before the Farrelly picture was released, she was offered a two-year contract on the strength of her work in it — four hundred a week for six

months and an increase on a sliding scale. But she would have to go to the Coast.

“Wouldn’t you rather have me wait?” she said, as they drove in from the country one afternoon. “Wouldn’t you rather have me stay here in New York — near you?”

“You’ve got to go where your work takes you. You ought to be able to look out for yourself. You’re seventeen.”

Seventeen — she was as old as he; she was ageless. Her dark eyes under a yellow straw hat were as full of destiny as though she had not just offered to toss destiny away.

“I wonder if you hadn’t come along, someone else would of,” she said — “to make me do things, I mean.”

“You’d have done them yourself. Get it out of your head that you’re dependent on me.”

“I am. Everything is, thanks to you.”

“It isn’t, though,” he said emphatically, but he brought no reasons; he liked her to think that.

“I don’t know what I’ll do without you. You’re my only friend” — and she added — “that I care about. You see? You understand what I mean?”

He laughed at her, enjoying the birth of her egotism implied in her right to be understood. She was lovelier that afternoon than he had ever seen her, delicate, resonant and, for him, undesirable. But sometimes he wondered if that sexlessness wasn’t for him alone, wasn’t a side that, perhaps purposely, she turned toward him. She was happiest of all with younger men, though she pretended to despise them. Billy Farrelly, obligingly and somewhat to her mild chagrin, had left her alone.

“When will you come out to Hollywood?”

“Soon,” he promised. “And you’ll be coming back to New York.”

She began to cry. “Oh, I’ll miss you so much! I’ll miss you so much!” Large tears of distress ran down her warm ivory cheeks. “Oh, geeze!” she cried softly. “You been good to me! Where’s your hand? Where’s your hand? You been the best friend anybody ever had. Where am I ever going to find a friend like you?”

She was acting now, but a lump arose in his throat and for a moment a wild idea ran back and forth in his mind, like a blind man, knocking over its solid furniture — to marry her. He had only to make the suggestion, he knew, and she would become close to him and know no one else, because he would understand her forever.

Next day, in the station, she was pleased with her flowers, her compartment, with the prospect of a longer trip than she had ever taken before. When she kissed him good-by her deep eyes came close to his again and she pressed against him as if in protest against the separation. Again she cried, but he knew that behind her tears lay the happiness of adventure in new fields. As he walked out of the station, New York was curiously empty. Through her eyes he had seen old colors once more; now they had faded back into the gray tapestry of the past. The next day he went to an office high in a building on Park Avenue and talked to a famous specialist he had not visited for a decade.

“I want you to examine the larynx again,” he said. “There’s not much hope, but something might have changed the situation.”

He swallowed a complicated system of mirrors. He breathed in and out, made high and low sounds, coughed at a word of command. The specialist fussed and touched. Then he sat back and took out his eyeglass. “There’s no change,” he said. “The cords are not diseased — they’re simply worn out. It isn’t anything that can be treated.”

“I thought so,” said Jacob, humbly, as if he had been guilty of an impertinence. “That’s practically what you told me before. I wasn’t sure how permanent it was.”

He had lost something when he came out of the building on Park Avenue — a half hope, the love child of a wish, that some day —

“New York desolate,” he wired her. “The night clubs all closed. Black wreaths on the Statue of Civic Virtue. Please work hard and be remarkably happy.”

“Dear Jacob,” she wired back, “miss you so. You are the nicest man that ever lived and I mean it, dear. Please don’t forget me. Love from Jenny.”

Winter came. The picture Jenny had made in the East was released, together with preliminary interviews and articles in the fan magazines. Jacob sat in his apartment, playing the Kreutzer Sonata over and over on his new phonograph, and read her meager and stilted but affectionate letters and the articles which said she was a discovery of Billy Farrelly’s. In February he became engaged to an old friend, now a widow.

They went to Florida and were suddenly snarling at each other in hotel corridors and over bridge games, so they decided not to go through with it after all. In the spring he took a stateroom on the Paris, but three days before sailing he disposed of it and went to California.

IV

Jenny met him at the station, kissed him and clung to his arm in the car all the way to the Ambassador Hotel. “Well, the man came,” she cried. “I never thought I’d get him to come. I never did.”

Her accent betrayed an effort at control. The emphatic “Geeze!” with all the wonder, horror, disgust or admiration she could put in it was gone, but there was no mild substitute, no “swell” or “grand.” If her mood required expletives outside her repertoire, she kept silent.

But at seventeen, months are years and Jacob perceived a change in her; in no sense was she a child any longer. There were fixed things in her mind — not distractions, for she was instinctively too polite for that, but simply things there. No longer was the studio a lark and a wonder and a divine accident; no longer “for a nickel I wouldn’t turn up tomorrow.” It was part of her life. Circumstances were stiffening into a career which went on independently of her casual hours.

“If this picture is as good as the other — I mean if I make a personal hit again, Hecksher’ll break the contract. Everybody that’s seen the rushes says it’s the first one I’ve had sex appeal in.”

“What are the rushes?”

“When they run off what they took the day before. They say it’s the first time I’ve had sex appeal.”

“I don’t notice it,” he teased her.

“You wouldn’t. But I have.”

“I know you have,” he said, and, moved by an ill-considered impulse, he took her hand.

She glanced quickly at him. He smiled — half a second too late. Then she smiled and her glowing warmth veiled his mistake.

“Jake,” she cried, “I could bawl, I’m so glad you’re here! I got you a room at the Ambassador. They were full, but they kicked out somebody because I said I had to have a room. I’ll send my car back for you in half an hour. It’s good you came on Sunday, because I got all day free.”

They had luncheon in the furnished apartment she had leased for the winter. It was 1920 Moorish, taken over complete from a favorite of yesterday. Someone had told her it was horrible, for she joked about it; but when he pursued the matter he found that she didn’t know why.

“I wish they had more nice men out here,” she said once during luncheon. “Of course there’s a lot of nice ones, but I mean — Oh, you know, like in New York — men that know even more than a girl does, like you.”

After luncheon he learned that they were going to tea. “Not today,” he objected. “I want to see you alone.”

“All right,” she agreed doubtfully. “I suppose I could telephone. I thought — It’s a lady that writes for a lot of newspapers and I’ve never been asked there before. Still, if you don’t want to — ”

Her face had fallen a little and Jacob assured her that he couldn't be more willing. Gradually he found that they were going not to one party but to three.

“In my position, it's sort of the thing to do,” she explained. “Otherwise you don't see anybody except the people on your own lot, and that's narrow.” He smiled. “Well, anyhow,” she finished — “anyhow, you smart Aleck, that's what everybody does on Sunday afternoon.”

At the first tea, Jacob noticed that there was an enormous preponderance of women over men, and of supernumeraries — lady journalists, cameramen's daughters, cutters' wives — over people of importance. A young Latin named Raffino appeared for a brief moment, spoke to Jenny and departed; several stars passed through, asking about children's health with a domesticity that was somewhat overpowering. Another group of celebrities posed immobile, statue-like, in a corner. There was a somewhat inebriated and very much excited author apparently trying to make engagements with one girl after another. As the afternoon waned, more people were suddenly a little tight; the communal voice was higher in pitch and greater in volume as Jacob and Jenny went out the door.

At the second tea, young Raffino — he was an actor, one of innumerable hopeful Valentinos — appeared again for a minute, talked to Jenny a little longer, a little more attentively this time, and went out. Jacob gathered that this party was not considered to have quite the swagger of the other. There was a bigger crowd around the cocktail table. There was more sitting down.

Jenny, he saw, drank only lemonade. He was surprised and pleased at her distinction and good manners. She talked to one person, never to everyone within hearing; then she listened, without finding it necessary to shift her eyes about. Deliberate or not on her part, he noticed that at both teas she was sooner or later talking to the guest of most consequence. Her seriousness, her air of saying “This is my opportunity of learning something,” beckoned their egotism imperatively near.

When they left to drive to the last party, a buffet supper, it was dark and the electric legends of hopeful real-estate brokers were gleaming to some

vague purpose on Beverly Hills. Outside Grauman's Theater a crowd was already gathered in the thin, warm rain.

"Look! Look!" she cried. It was the picture she had finished a month before.

They slid out of the thin Rialto of Hollywood Boulevard and into the deep gloom of a side street; he put his arm about her and kissed her.

"Dear Jake." She smiled up at him.

"Jenny, you're so lovely; I didn't know you were so lovely."

She looked straight ahead, her face mild and quiet. A wave of annoyance passed over him and he pulled her toward him urgently, just as the car stopped at a lighted door.

They went into a bungalow crowded with people and smoke. The impetus of the formality which had begun the afternoon was long exhausted; everything had become at once vague and strident.

"This is Hollywood," explained an alert talkative lady who had been in his vicinity all day. "No airs on Sunday afternoon." She indicated the hostess. "Just a plain, simple, sweet girl." She raised her voice: "Isn't that so, darling — just a plain, simple, sweet girl?"

The hostess said, "Yeah. Who is?" And Jacob's informant lowered her voice again: "But that little girl of yours is the wisest one of the lot."

The totality of the cocktails Jacob had swallowed was affecting him pleasantly, but try as he might, the plot of the party — the key on which he could find ease and tranquillity — eluded him. There was something tense in the air — something competitive and insecure. Conversations with the men had a way of becoming empty and overjovial or else melting off into a sort of suspicion. The women were nicer. At eleven o'clock, in the pantry, he suddenly realized that he hadn't seen Jenny for an hour. Returning to the living room, he saw her come in, evidently from outside, for she tossed a raincoat from her shoulders. She was with Raffino. When she came up, Jacob saw that she was out of breath and her eyes were very bright. Raffino smiled at Jacob pleasantly and negligently; a few moments later, as he

turned to go, he bent and whispered in Jenny's ear and she looked at him without smiling as she said good night.

"I got to be on the lot at eight o'clock," she told Jacob presently. "I'll look like an old umbrella unless I go home. Do you mind, dear?"

"Heavens, no!"

Their car drove over one of the interminable distances of the thin, stretched city.

"Jenny," he said, "you've never looked like you were tonight. Put your head on my shoulder."

"I'd like to. I'm tired."

"I can't tell you how radiant you've got to be."

"I'm just the same."

"No, you're not." His voice suddenly became a whisper, trembling with emotion. "Jenny, I'm in love with you."

"Jacob, don't be silly."

"I'm in love with you. Isn't it strange, Jenny? It happened just like that."

"You're not in love with me."

"You mean the fact doesn't interest you." He was conscious of a faint twinge of fear.

She sat up out of the circle of his arm. "Of course it interests me; you know I care more about you than anything in the world."

"More than about Mr. Raffino?"

"Oh — my — gosh!" she protested scornfully. "Raffino's nothing but a baby."

"I love you, Jenny."

"No, you don't."

He tightened his arm. Was it his imagination or was there a small instinctive resistance in her body? But she came close to him and he kissed her.

“You know that’s crazy about Raffino.”

“I suppose I’m jealous.” Feeling insistent and unattractive, he released her. But the twinge of fear had become an ache. Though he knew that she was tired and that she felt strange at this new mood in him, he was unable to let the matter alone. “I didn’t realize how much a part of my life you were. I didn’t know what it was I missed — but I know now. I wanted you near.”

“Well, here I am.”

He took her words as an invitation, but this time she relaxed wearily in his arms. He held her thus for the rest of the way, her eyes closed, her short hair falling straight back, like a girl drowned.

“The car’ll take you to the hotel,” she said when they reached the apartment. “Remember, you’re having lunch with me at the studio tomorrow.”

Suddenly they were in a discussion that was almost an argument, as to whether it was too late for him to come in. Neither could yet appreciate the change that his declaration had made in the other. Abruptly they had become like different people, as Jacob tried desperately to turn back the clock to that night in New York six months before, and Jenny watched this mood, which was more than jealousy and less than love, snow under, one by one, the qualities of consideration and understanding which she knew in him and with which she felt at home.

“But I don’t love you like that,” she cried. “How can you come to me all at once and ask me to love you like that?”

“You love Raffino like that!”

“I swear I don’t! I never even kissed him — not really!”

“H’m!” He was a gruff white bird now. He could scarcely credit his own unpleasantness, but something illogical as love itself urged him on. “An actor!”

“Oh, Jake,” she cried, “please lemme go. I never felt so terrible and mixed up in my life.”

“I’ll go,” he said suddenly. “I don’t know what’s the matter, except that I’m so mad about you that I don’t know what I’m saying. I love you and you don’t love me. Once you did, or thought you did, but that’s evidently over.”

“But I do love you.” She thought for a moment; the red-and-green glow of a filling station on the corner lit up the struggle in her face. “If you love me that much, I’ll marry you tomorrow.”

“Marry me!” he exclaimed. She was so absorbed in what she had just said that she did not notice.

“I’ll marry you tomorrow,” she repeated. “I like you better than anybody in the world and I guess I’ll get to love you the way you want me to.” She uttered a single half-broken sob. “But — I didn’t know this was going to happen. Please let me alone tonight.”

Jacob didn’t sleep. There was music from the Ambassador grill till late and a fringe of working girls hung about the carriage entrance waiting for their favorites to come out. Then a long-protracted quarrel between a man and a woman began in the hall outside, moved into the next room and continued as a low two-toned mumble through the intervening door. He went to the window sometime toward three o’clock and stared out into the clear splendor of the California night. Her beauty rested outside on the grass, on the damp, gleaming roofs of the bungalows, all around him, borne up like music on the night. It was in the room, on the white pillow, it rustled ghostlike in the curtains. His desire recreated her until she lost all vestiges of the old Jenny, even of the girl who had met him at the train that morning. Silently, as the night hours went by, he molded her over into an image of love — an image that would endure as long as love itself, or even longer — not to perish till he could say, “I never really loved her.” Slowly he created it with this and that illusion from his youth, this and that sad old yearning, until she stood before him identical with her old self only by name.

Later, when he drifted off into a few hours’ sleep, the image he had made stood near him, lingering in the room, joined in mystic marriage to his heart.

V

“I won’t marry you unless you love me,” he said, driving back from the studio. She waited, her hands folded tranquilly in her lap. “Do you think I’d want you if you were unhappy and unresponsive, Jenny — knowing all the time you didn’t love me?”

“I do love you. But not that way.”

“What’s ‘that way’?”

She hesitated, her eyes were far off. “You don’t — thrill me, Jake. I don’t know — there have been some men that sort of thrilled me when they touched me, dancing or anything. I know it’s crazy, but — ”

“Does Raffino thrill you?”

“Sort of, but not so much.”

“And I don’t at all?”

“I just feel comfortable and happy with you.”

He should have urged her that that was best, but he couldn’t say it, whether it was an old truth or an old lie.

“Anyhow, I told you I’ll marry you; perhaps you might thrill me later.”

He laughed, stopped suddenly. “If I didn’t thrill you, as you call it, why did you seem to care so much last summer?”

“I don’t know. I guess I was young. You never know how you once felt, do you?”

She had become elusive to him, with that elusiveness that gives a hidden significance to the least significant remarks. And with the clumsy tools of jealousy and desire, he was trying to create the spell that is ethereal and delicate as the dust on a moth’s wing.

“Listen, Jake,” she said suddenly. “That lawyer my sister had — that Scharnhorst — called up the studio this afternoon.”

“Your sister’s all right,” he said absently, and he added: “So a lot of men thrill you.”

“Well, if I’ve felt it with a lot of men, it couldn’t have anything to do with real love, could it?” she said hopefully.

“But your theory is that love couldn’t come without it.”

“I haven’t got any theories or anything. I just told you how I felt. You know more than me.”

“I don’t know anything at all.”

There was a man waiting in the lower hall of the apartment house. Jenny went up and spoke to him; then, turning back to Jake, said in a low voice: “It’s Scharnhorst. Would you mind waiting downstairs while he talks to me? He says it won’t take half an hour.”

He waited, smoking innumerable cigarettes. Ten minutes passed. Then the telephone operator beckoned him.

“Quick!” she said. “Miss Prince wants you on the telephone.”

Jenny’s voice was tense and frightened. “Don’t let Scharnhorst get out,” she said. “He’s on the stairs, maybe in the elevator. Make him come back here.”

Jacob put down the receiver just as the elevator clicked. He stood in front of the elevator door, barring the man inside. “Mr. Scharnhorst?”

“Yeah.” The face was keen and suspicious.

“Will you come up to Miss Prince’s apartment again? There’s something she forgot to say.”

“I can see her later.” He attempted to push past Jacob. Seizing him by the shoulders, Jacob shoved him back into the cage, slammed the door and pressed the button for the eighth floor.

“I’ll have you arrested for this!” Scharnhorst remarked. “Put into jail for assault!”

Jacob held him firmly by the arms. Upstairs, Jenny, with panic in her eyes, was holding open her door. After a slight struggle, the lawyer went inside.

“What is it?” demanded Jacob.

“Tell him, you,” she said. “Oh, Jake, he wants twenty thousand dollars!”

“What for?”

“To get my sister a new trial.”

“But she hasn’t a chance!” exclaimed Jacob. He turned to Scharnhorst. “You ought to know she hasn’t a chance.”

“There are some technicalities,” said the lawyer uneasily — “things that nobody but an attorney would understand. She’s very unhappy there, and her sister so rich and successful. Mrs. Choynski thought she ought to get another chance.”

“You’ve been up there working on her, heh?”

“She sent for me.”

“But the blackmail idea was your own. I suppose if Miss Prince doesn’t feel like supplying twenty thousand to retain your firm, it’ll come out that she’s the sister of the notorious murderess.”

Jenny nodded. “That’s what he said.”

“Just a minute!” Jacob walked to the phone. “Western Union, please. Western Union? Please take a telegram.” He gave the name and address of a man high in the political world of New York. “Here’s the message:

The convict Choynski threatening her sister, who is a picture actress, with exposure of relationship stop Can you arrange it with warden that she be cut off from visitors until I can get East and explain the situation stop Also wire me if two witnesses to an attempted blackmailing scene are enough to disbar a lawyer in New York if charges proceed from such a quarter as Read, Van Tyne, Biggs & Company, or my uncle the surrogate stop Answer Ambassador Hotel, Los Angeles.

Jacob C. K. Booth”

He waited until the clerk had repeated the message. "Now, Mr. Scharnhorst," he said, "the pursuit of art should not be interrupted by such alarms and excursions. Miss Prince, as you see, is considerably upset. It will show in her work tomorrow and a million people will be just a little disappointed. So we won't ask her for any decisions. In fact you and I will leave Los Angeles on the same train tonight."

VI

The summer passed. Jacob went about his useless life, sustained by the knowledge that Jenny was coming East in the fall. By fall there would have been many Raffinos, he supposed, and she would find that the thrill of their hands and eyes — and lips — was much the same. They were the equivalent, in a different world, of the affairs at a college house party, the undergraduates of a casual summer. And if it was still true that her feeling for him was less than romantic, then he would take her anyway, letting romance come after marriage as — so he had always heard — it had come to many wives before.

Her letters fascinated and baffled him. Through the ineptitude of expression he caught gleams of emotion — an ever-present gratitude, a longing to talk to him, and a quick, almost frightened reaction toward him, from — he could only imagine — some other man. In August she went on location; there were only post cards from some lost desert in Arizona, then for a while nothing at all. He was glad of the break. He had thought over all the things that might have repelled her — of his portentousness, his jealousy, his manifest misery. This time it would be different. He would keep control of the situation. She would at least admire him again, see in him the incomparably dignified and well adjusted life.

Two nights before her arrival Jacob went to see her latest picture in a huge nightbound vault on Broadway. It was a college story. She walked into it with her hair knotted on the crown of her head — a familiar symbol for dowdiness — inspired the hero to a feat of athletic success and faded out of it, always subsidiary to him, in the shadow of the cheering stands. But there was something new in her performance; for the first time the arresting

quality he had noticed in her voice a year before had begun to get over on the screen. Every move she made, every gesture, was poignant and important. Others in the audience saw it too. He fancied he could tell this by some change in the quality of their breathing, by a reflection of her clear, precise expression in their casual and indifferent faces. Reviewers, too, were aware of it, though most of them were incapable of any precise definition of a personality.

But his first real consciousness of her public existence came from the attitude of her fellow passengers disembarking from the train. Busy as they were with friends or baggage, they found time to stare at her, to call their friends' attention, to repeat her name.

She was radiant. A communicative joy flowed from her and around her, as though her perfumer had managed to imprison ecstasy in a bottle. Once again there was a mystical transfusion, and blood began to course again through the hard veins of New York — there was the pleasure of Jacob's chauffeur when she remembered him, the respectful frisking of the bell boys at the Plaza, the nervous collapse of the head waiter at the restaurant where they dined. As for Jacob, he had control of himself now. He was gentle, considerate and polite, as it was natural for him to be — but as, in this case, he had found it necessary to plan. His manner promised and outlined an ability to take care of her, a will to be leaned on.

After dinner, their corner of the restaurant cleared gradually of the theater crowd and the sense of being alone settled over them. Their faces became grave, their voices very quiet.

"It's been five months since I saw you." He looked down at his hands thoughtfully. "Nothing has changed with me, Jenny. I love you with all my heart. I love your face and your faults and your mind and everything about you. The one thing I want in this world is to make you happy."

"I know," she whispered. "Gosh, I know!"

"Whether there's still only affection in your feeling toward me, I don't know. If you'll marry me, I think you'll find that the other things will come, will be

there before you know it — and what you called a thrill will seem a joke to you, because life isn't for boys and girls, Jenny, but for men and women.”

“Jacob,” she whispered, “you don't have to tell me. I know.”

He raised his eyes for the first time. “What do you mean — you know?”

“I get what you mean. Oh, this is terrible! Jacob, listen! I want to tell you. Listen, dear, don't say anything. Don't look at me. Listen, Jacob, I fell in love with a man.”

“What?” he asked blankly.

“I fell in love with somebody. That's what I mean about understanding about a silly thrill.”

“You mean you're in love with me?”

“No.”

The appalling monosyllable floated between them, danced and vibrated over the table: “No — no — no — no — no!”

“Oh, this is awful!” she cried. “I fell in love with a man I met on location this summer. I didn't mean to — I tried not to, but first thing I knew there I was in love and all the wishing in the world couldn't help it. I wrote you and asked you to come, but I didn't send the letter, and there I was, crazy about this man and not daring to speak to him, and bawling myself to sleep every night.”

“An actor?” he heard himself saying in a dead voice. “Raffino?”

“Oh, no, no, no! Wait a minute, let me tell you. It went on for three weeks and I honestly wanted to kill myself, Jake. Life wasn't worth while unless I could have him. And one night we got in a car by accident alone and he just caught me and made me tell him I loved him. He knew — he couldn't help knowing.”

“It just — swept over you,” said Jacob steadily. “I see.”

“Oh, I knew you'd understand, Jake! You understand everything. You're the best person in the world, Jake, and don't I know it?”

“You’re going to marry him?”

Slowly she nodded her head. “I said I’d have to come East first and see you.” As her fear lessened, the extent of his grief became more apparent to her and her eyes filled with tears. “It only comes once, Jake, like that. That’s what kept in my mind all those weeks I didn’t hardly speak to him — if you lose it once, it’ll never come like that again and then what do you want to live for? He was directing the picture — he was the same about me.”

“I see.”

As once before, her eyes held his like hands. “Oh, Ja-a-ake!” In that sudden croon of compassion, all-comprehending and deep as a song, the first force of the shock passed off. Jacob’s teeth came together again and he struggled to conceal his misery. Mustering his features into an expression of irony, he called for the check. It seemed an hour later they were in a taxi going toward the Plaza Hotel.

She clung to him. “Oh, Jake, say it’s all right! Say you understand! Darling Jake, my best friend, my only friend, say you understand!”

“Of course I do, Jenny.” His hand patted her back automatically.

“Oh-h-h, Jake, you feel just awful, don’t you?”

“I’ll survive.”

“Oh-h-h, Jake!”

They reached the hotel. Before they got out Jenny glanced at her face in her vanity mirror and turned up the collar of her fur cape. In the lobby, Jacob ran into several people and said, “Oh, I’m so sorry,” in a strained, unconvincing voice. The elevator waited. Jenny, her face distraught and tearful, stepped in and held out her hand toward him with the fist clenched helplessly.

“Jake,” she said once more.

“Good night, Jenny.”

She turned her face to the wire wall of the cage. The gate clanged.

“Hold on!” he almost said. “Do you realize what you’re doing, starting that car like that?”

He turned and went out the door blindly. “I’ve lost her,” he whispered to himself, awed and frightened. “I’ve lost her!”

He walked over Fifty-ninth Street to Columbus Circle and then down Broadway. There were no cigarettes in his pocket — he had left them at the restaurant — so he went into a tobacco store. There was some confusion about the change and someone in the store laughed.

When he came out he stood for a moment puzzled. Then the heavy tide of realization swept over him and beyond him, leaving him stunned and exhausted. It swept back upon him and over him again. As one rereads a tragic story with the defiant hope that it will end differently, so he went back to the morning, to the beginning, to the previous year. But the tide came thundering back with the certainty that she was cut off from him forever in a high room at the Plaza Hotel.

He walked down Broadway. In great block letters over the porte-cochère of the Capitol Theater five words glittered out into the night: “Carl Barbour and Jenny Prince.”

The name startled him, as if a passer-by had spoken it. He stopped and stared. Other eyes rose to that sign, people hurried by him and turned in.

Jenny Prince.

Now that she no longer belonged to him, the name assumed a significance entirely its own.

It hung there, cool and impervious, in the night, a challenge, a defiance.

Jenny Prince.

“Come and rest upon my loveliness,” it said. “Fulfill your secret dreams in wedding me for an hour.”

Jenny Prince.

It was untrue — she was back at the Plaza Hotel, in love with somebody. But the name, with its bright insistence, rode high upon the night.

“I love my dear public. They are all so sweet to me.”

The wave appeared far off, sent up whitecaps, rolled toward him with the might of pain, washed over him. “Never any more. Never any more.” The wave beat upon him, drove him down, pounding with hammers of agony on his ears. Proud and impervious, the name on high challenged the night.

Jenny Prince.

She was there! All of her, the best of her — the effort, the power, the triumph, the beauty.

Jacob moved forward with a group and bought a ticket at the window.

Confused, he stared around the great lobby. Then he saw an entrance and walking in, found himself a place in the fast-throbbing darkness.

A SHORT TRIP HOME

I

Saturday Evening Post (17 December 1927)

Author's Note: In a moment of hasty misjudgment a whole paragraph of description was lifted out of this tale where it originated, and properly belongs, and applied to quite a different character in a novel of mine. I have ventured nonetheless to leave it here, even at the risk of seeming to serve warmed-over fare.

I was near her, for I had lingered behind in order to get the short walk with her from the living room to the front door. That was a lot, for she had flowered suddenly and I, being a man and only a year older, hadn't flowered at all, had scarcely dared to come near her in the week we'd been home. Nor was I going to say anything in that walk of ten feet, or touch her; but I had a vague hope she'd do something, give a gay little performance of some sort, personal only in so far as we were alone together.

She had bewitchment suddenly in the twinkle of short hairs on her neck, in the sure, clear confidence that at about eighteen begins to deepen and sing in attractive American girls. The lamp light shopped in the yellow strands of her hair.

Already she was sliding into another world — the world of Joe Jelke and Jim Cathcart waiting for us now in the car. In another year she would pass beyond me forever.

As I waited, feeling the others outside in the snowy night, feeling the excitement of Christmas week and the excitement of Ellen here, blooming away, filling the room with "sex appeal" — a wretched phrase to express a quality that isn't like that at all — a maid came in from the dining room, spoke to Ellen quietly and handed her a note. Ellen read it and her eyes faded down, as when the current grows weak on rural circuits, and smouldered off into space. Then she gave me an odd look — in which I

probably didn't show — and without a word, followed the maid into the dining room and beyond. I sat turning over the pages of a magazine for a quarter of an hour.

Joe Jelke came in, red-faced from the cold, his white silk muffler gleaming at the neck of his fur coat. He was a senior at New Haven, I was a sophomore. He was prominent, a member of Scroll and Keys, and, in my eyes, very distinguished and handsome.

“Isn't Ellen coming?”

“I don't know,” I answered discreetly. “She was all ready.”

“Ellen!” he called. “Ellen!”

He had left the front door open behind him and a great cloud of frosty air rolled in from outside. He went halfway up the stairs — he was a familiar in the house — and called again, till Mrs. Baker came to the banister and said that Ellen was below. Then the maid, a little excited, appeared in the dining-room door.

“Mr. Jelke,” she called in a low voice.

Joe's face fell as he turned toward her, sensing bad news.

“Miss Ellen says for you to go on to the party. She'll come later.”

“What's the matter?”

“She can't come now. She'll come later.”

He hesitated, confused. It was the last big dance of vacation, and he was mad about Ellen. He had tried to give her a ring for Christmas, and failing that, got her to accept a gold mesh bag that must have cost two hundred dollars. He wasn't the only one — there were three or four in the same wild condition, and all in the ten days she'd been home — but his chance came first, for he was rich and gracious and at that moment the “desirable” boy of St. Paul. To me it seemed impossible that she could prefer another, but the rumor was she'd described Joe as much too perfect. I suppose he lacked mystery for her, and when a man is up against that with a young girl who isn't thinking of the practical side of marriage yet — well —

“She’s in the kitchen,” Joe said angrily.

“No, she’s not.” The maid was defiant and a little scared.

“She is.”

“She went out the back way, Mr. Jelke.”

“I’m going to see.”

I followed him. The Swedish servants washing dishes looked up sideways at our approach and an interested crashing of pans marked our passage through. The storm door, unbolted, was flapping in the wind and as we walked out into the snowy yard we saw the tail light of a car turn the corner at the end of the back alley.

“I’m going after her,” Joe said slowly. “I don’t understand this at all.”

I was too awed by the calamity to argue. We hurried to his car and drove in a fruitless, despairing zigzag all over the residence section, peering into every machine on the streets. It was half an hour before the futility of the affair began to dawn upon him — St. Paul is a city of almost three hundred thousand people — and Jim Cathcart reminded him that we had another girl to stop for. Like a wounded animal he sank into a melancholy mass of fur in the corner, from which position he jerked upright every few minutes and waved himself backward and forward a little in protest and despair.

Jim’s girl was ready and impatient, but after what had happened her impatience didn’t seem important. She looked lovely though. That’s one thing about Christmas vacation — the excitement of growth and change and adventure in foreign parts transforming the people you’ve known all your life. Joe Jelke was polite to her in a daze — he indulged in one burst of short, loud, harsh laughter by way of conversation — and we drove to the hotel.

The chauffeur approached it on the wrong side — the side on which the line of cars was not putting forth guests — and because of that we came suddenly upon Ellen Baker just getting out of a small coupé. Even before we came to a stop, Joe Jelke had jumped excitedly from the car.

Ellen turned toward us, a faintly distracted look — perhaps of surprise, but certainly not of alarm — in her face; in fact, she didn't seem very aware of us. Joe approached her with a stern, dignified, injured and, I thought, just exactly correct reproof in his expression. I followed.

Seated in the coupé — he had not dismounted to help Ellen out — was a hard thin-faced man of about thirty-five with an air of being scarred, and a slight sinister smile. His eyes were a sort of taunt to the whole human family — they were the eyes of an animal, sleepy and quiescent in the presence of another species. They were helpless yet brutal, unhopeful yet confident. It was as if they felt themselves powerless to originate activity, but infinitely capable of profiting by a single gesture of weakness in another.

Vaguely I placed him as one of the sort of men whom I had been conscious of from my earliest youth as “hanging around” — leaning with one elbow on the counters of tobacco stores, watching, through heaven knows what small chink of the mind, the people who hurried in and out. Intimate to garages, where he had vague business conducted in undertones, to barber shops and to the lobbies of theatres — in such places, anyhow, I placed the type, if type it was, that he reminded me of. Sometimes his face bobbed up in one of Tad's more savage cartoons, and I had always from earliest boyhood thrown a nervous glance toward the dim borderland where he stood, and seen him watching me and despising me. Once, in a dream, he had taken a few steps toward me, jerking his head back and muttering: “Say, kid” in what was intended to be a reassuring voice, and I had broken for the door in terror. This was that sort of man.

Joe and Ellen faced each other silently; she seemed, as I have said, to be in a daze. It was cold, but she didn't notice that her coat had blown open; Joe reached out and pulled it together, and automatically she clutched it with her hand.

Suddenly the man in the coupé, who had been watching them silently, laughed. It was a bare laugh, done with the breath — just a noisy jerk of the head — but it was an insult if I had ever heard one; definite and not to be passed over. I wasn't surprised when Joe, who was quick tempered, turned to him angrily and said:

“What’s your trouble?”

The man waited a moment, his eyes shifting and yet staring, and always seeing. Then he laughed again in the same way. Ellen stirred uneasily.

“Who is this — this — ” Joe’s voice trembled with annoyance.

“Look out now,” said the man slowly.

Joe turned to me.

“Eddie, take Ellen and Catherine in, will you?” he said quickly. . . . “Ellen, go with Eddie.”

“Look out now,” the man repeated.

Ellen made a little sound with her tongue and teeth, but she didn’t resist when I took her arm and moved her toward the side door of the hotel. It struck me as odd that she should be so helpless, even to the point of acquiescing by her silence in this imminent trouble.

“Let it go, Joe!” I called back over my shoulder. “Come inside!”

Ellen, pulling against my arm, hurried us on. As we were caught up into the swinging doors I had the impression that the man was getting out of his coupé.

Ten minutes later, as I waited for the girls outside the women’s dressing-room, Joe Jelke and Jim Cathcart stepped out of the elevator. Joe was very white, his eyes were heavy and glazed, there was a trickle of dark blood on his forehead and on his white muffler. Jim had both their hats in his hand.

“He hit Joe with brass knuckles,” Jim said in a low voice. “Joe was out cold for a minute or so. I wish you’d send a bell boy for some witch-hazel and court-plaster.”

It was late and the hall was deserted; brassy fragments of the dance below reached us as if heavy curtains were being blown aside and dropping back into place. When Ellen came out I took her directly downstairs. We avoided the receiving line and went into a dim room set with scraggly hotel palms

where couples sometimes sat out during the dance; there I told her what had happened.

“It was Joe’s own fault,” she said, surprisingly. “I told him not to interfere.”

This wasn’t true. She had said nothing, only uttered one curious little click of impatience.

“You ran out the back door and disappeared for almost an hour,” I protested. “Then you turned up with a hard-looking customer who laughed in Joe’s face.”

“A hard-looking customer,” she repeated, as if tasting the sound of the words.

“Well, wasn’t he? Where on earth did you get hold of him, Ellen?”

“On the train,” she answered. Immediately she seemed to regret this admission. “You’d better stay out of things that aren’t your business, Eddie. You see what happened to Joe.”

Literally I gasped. To watch her, seated beside me, immaculately glowing, her body giving off wave after wave of freshness and delicacy — and to hear her talk like that.

“But that man’s a thug!” I cried. “No girl could be safe with him. He used brass knuckles on Joe — brass knuckles!”

“Is that pretty bad?”

She asked this as she might have asked such a question a few years ago. She looked at me at last and really wanted an answer; for a moment it was as if she were trying to recapture an attitude that had almost departed; then she hardened again. I say “hardened,” for I began to notice that when she was concerned with this man her eyelids fell a little, shutting other things — everything else — out of view.

That was a moment I might have said something, I suppose, but in spite of everything, I couldn’t light into her. I was too much under the spell of her beauty and its success. I even began to find excuses for her — perhaps that man wasn’t what he appeared to be; or perhaps — more romantically —

she was involved with him against her will to shield some one else. At this point people began to drift into the room and come up to speak to us. We couldn't talk any more, so we went in and bowed to the chaperones. Then I gave her up to the bright restless sea of the dance, where she moved in an eddy of her own among the pleasant islands of colored favors set out on tables and the south winds from the brasses moaning across the hall. After a while I saw Joe Jelke sitting in a corner with a strip of court-plaster on his forehead watching Ellen as if she herself had struck him down, but I didn't go up to him. I felt queer myself — like I feel when I wake up after sleeping through an afternoon, strange and portentous, as if something had gone on in the interval that changed the values of everything and that I didn't see.

The night slipped on through successive phases of cardboard horns, amateur tableaux and flashlights for the morning papers. Then was the grand march and supper, and about two o'clock some of the committee dressed up as revenue agents pinched the party, and a facetious newspaper was distributed, burlesquing the events of the evening. And all the time out of the corner of my eye I watched the shining orchid on Ellen's shoulder as it moved like Stuart's plume about the room. I watched it with a definite foreboding until the last sleepy groups had crowded into the elevators, and then, bundled to the eyes in great shapeless fur coats, drifted out into the clear dry Minnesota night.

II

There is a sloping mid-section of our city which lies between the residence quarter on the hill and the business district on the level of the river. It is a vague part of town, broken by its climb into triangles and odd shapes — there are names like Seven Corners — and I don't believe a dozen people could draw an accurate map of it, though every one traversed it by trolley, auto or shoe leather twice a day. And though it was a busy section, it would be hard for me to name the business that comprised its activity. There were always long lines of trolley cars waiting to start somewhere; there was a big movie theatre and many small ones with posters of Hoot Gibson and Wonder Dogs and Wonder Horses outside; there were small stores with

“Old King Brady” and “The Liberty Boys of ‘76” in the windows, and marbles, cigarettes and candy inside; and — one definite place at least — a fancy costumer whom we all visited at least once a year. Some time during boyhood I became aware that one side of a certain obscure street there were bawdy houses, and all through the district were pawnshops, cheap jewellers, small athletic clubs and gymnasiums and somewhat too blatantly run-down saloons.

The morning after the Cotillion Club party, I woke up late and lazy, with the happy feeling that for a day or two more there was no chapel, no classes — nothing to do but wait for another party tonight. It was crisp and bright — one of those days when you forget how cold it is until your cheek freezes — and the events of the evening before seemed dim and far away. After luncheon I started downtown on foot through a light, pleasant snow of small flakes that would probably fall all afternoon, and I was about half through that halfway section of town — so far as I know, there’s no inclusive name for it — when suddenly whatever idle thought was in my head blew away like a hat and I began thinking hard of Ellen Baker. I began worrying about her as I’d never worried about anything outside myself before. I began to loiter, with an instinct to go up on the hill again and find her and talk to her; then I remembered that she was at a tea, and I went on again, but still thinking of her, and harder than ever. Right then the affair opened up again.

It was snowing, I said, and it was four o’clock on a December afternoon, when there is a promise of darkness in the air and the street lamps are just going on. I passed a combination pool parlor and restaurant, with a stove loaded with hot-dogs in the window, and a few loungers hanging around the door. The lights were on inside — not bright lights but just a few pale yellow high up on the ceiling — and the glow they threw out into the frosty dusk wasn’t bright enough to tempt you to stare inside. As I went past, thinking hard of Ellen all this time, I took in the quartet of loafers out of the corner of my eye. I hadn’t gone half a dozen steps down the street when one of them called to me, not by name but in a way clearly intended for my ear. I thought it was a tribute to my raccoon coat and paid no attention, but a moment later whoever it was called to me again in a peremptory voice. I was

annoyed and turned around. There, standing in the group not ten feet away and looking at me with the half-sneer on his face with which he'd looked at Joe Jelke, was the scarred, thin-faced man of the night before.

He had on a black fancy-cut coat, buttoned up to his neck as if he were cold. His hands were deep in his pockets and he wore a derby and high button shoes. I was startled, and for a moment I hesitated, but I was most of all angry, and knowing that I was quicker with my hands than Joe Jelke, I took a tentative step back toward him. The other men weren't looking at me — I don't think they saw me at all — but I knew that this one recognized me; there was nothing casual about his look, no mistake.

“Here I am. What are you going to do about it?” his eyes seemed to say.

I took another step toward him and he laughed soundlessly, but with active contempt, and drew back into the group. I followed. I was going to speak to him — I wasn't sure what I was going to say — but when I came up he had either changed his mind and backed off, or else he wanted me to follow him inside, for he had slipped off and the three men watched my intent approach without curiosity. They were the same kind — sporty, but, unlike him, smooth rather than truculent; I didn't find any personal malice in their collective glance.

“Did he go inside?” I asked.

They looked at one another in that cagy way; a wink passed between them, and after a perceptible pause, one said:

“Who go inside?”

“I don't know his name.”

There was another wink. Annoyed and determined, I walked past them and into the pool room. There were a few people at a lunch counter along one side and a few more playing billiards, but he was not among them.

Again I hesitated. If his idea was to lead me into any blind part of the establishment — there were some half-open doors farther back — I wanted more support. I went up to the man at the desk.

“What became of the fellow who just walked in here?”

Was he on his guard immediately, or was that my imagination?

“What fellow?”

“Thin face — derby hat.”

“How long ago?”

“Oh — a minute.”

He shook his head again. “Didn’t see him,” he said.

I waited. The three men from outside had come in and were lined up beside me at the counter. I felt that all of them were looking at me in a peculiar way. Feeling helpless and increasingly uneasy, I turned suddenly and went out. A little way down the street I turned again and took a good look at the place, so I’d know it and could find it again. On the next corner I broke impulsively into a run, found a taxicab in front of the hotel and drove back up the hill.

Ellen wasn’t home. Mrs. Baker came downstairs and talked to me. She seemed entirely cheerful and proud of Ellen’s beauty, and ignorant of anything being amiss or of anything unusual having taken place the night before. She was glad that vacation was almost over — it was a strain and Ellen wasn’t very strong. Then she said something that relieved my mind enormously. She was glad that I had come in, for of course Ellen would want to see me, and the time was so short. She was going back at half-past eight tonight.

“Tonight!” I exclaimed. “I thought it was the day after tomorrow.”

“She’s going to visit the Brokaws in Chicago,” Mrs. Baker said. “They want her for some party. We just decided it today. She’s leaving with the Ingersoll girls tonight.”

I was so glad I could barely restrain myself from shaking her hand. Ellen was safe. It had been nothing all along but a moment of the most casual adventure. I felt like an idiot, but I realized how much I cared about Ellen and how little I could endure anything terrible happening to her.

“She’ll be in soon?”

“Any minute now. She just phoned from the University Club.”

I said I’d be over later — I lived almost next door and I wanted to be alone. Outside I remembered I didn’t have a key, so I started up the Bakers’ driveway to take the old cut we used in childhood through the intervening yard. It was still snowing, but the flakes were bigger now against the darkness, and trying to locate the buried walk I noticed that the Bakers’ back door was ajar.

I scarcely know why I turned and walked into that kitchen. There was a time when I would have known the Bakers’ servants by name. That wasn’t true now, but they knew me, and I was aware of a sudden suspension as I came in — not only a suspension of talk but of some mood or expectation that had filled them. They began to go to work too quickly; they made unnecessary movements and clamor — those three. The parlor maid looked at me in a frightened way and I suddenly guessed she was waiting to deliver another message. I beckoned her into the pantry.

“I know all about this,” I said. “It’s a very serious business. Shall I go to Mrs. Baker now, or will you shut and lock that back door?”

“Don’t tell Mrs. Baker, Mr. Stinson!”

“Then I don’t want Miss Ellen disturbed. If she is — and if she is I’ll know of it — ” I delivered some outrageous threat about going to all the employment agencies and seeing she never got another job in the city. She was thoroughly intimidated when I went out; it wasn’t a minute before the back door was locked and bolted behind me.

Simultaneously I heard a big car drive up in front, chains crunching on the soft snow; it was bringing Ellen home, and I went in to say good-by.

Joe Jelke and two other boys were along, and none of the three could manage to take their eyes off her, even to say hello to me. She had one of those exquisite rose skins frequent in our part of the country, and beautiful until the little veins begin to break at about forty; now, flushed with the cold, it was a riot of lovely delicate pinks like many carnations. She and Joe

had reached some sort of reconciliation, or at least he was too far gone in love to remember last night; but I saw that though she laughed a lot she wasn't really paying any attention to him or any of them. She wanted them to go, so that there'd be a message from the kitchen, but I knew that the message wasn't coming — that she was safe. There was talk of the Pump and Slipper dance at New Haven and of the Princeton Prom, and then, in various moods, we four left and separated quickly outside. I walked home with a certain depression of spirit and lay for an hour in a hot bath thinking that vacation was all over for me now that she was gone; feeling, even more deeply than I had yesterday, that she was out of my life.

And something eluded me, some one more thing to do, something that I had lost amid the events of the afternoon, promising myself to go back and pick it up, only to find that it had escaped me. I associated it vaguely with Mrs. Baker, and now I seemed to recall that it had poked up its head somewhere in the stream of conversation with her. In my relief about Ellen I had forgotten to ask her a question regarding something she had said.

The Brokaws — that was it — where Ellen was to visit. I knew Bill Brokaw well; he was in my class at Yale. Then I remembered and sat bolt upright in the tub — the Brokaws weren't in Chicago this Christmas; they were at Palm Beach!

Dripping I sprang out of the tub, threw an insufficient union suit around my shoulders and sprang for the phone in my room. I got the connection quick, but Miss Ellen had already started for the train.

Luckily our car was in, and while I squirmed, still damp, into my clothes, the chauffeur brought it around to the door. The night was cold and dry, and we made good time to the station through the hard, crusty snow. I felt queer and insecure starting out this way, but somehow more confident as the station loomed up bright and new against the dark, cold air. For fifty years my family had owned the land on which it was built and that made my temerity seem all right somehow. There was always a possibility that I was rushing in where angels feared to tread, but that sense of having a solid foothold in the past made me willing to make a fool of myself. This business was all wrong — terribly wrong. Any idea I had entertained that it was

harmless dropped away now; between Ellen and some vague overwhelming catastrophe there stood me, or else the police and a scandal. I'm no moralist — there was another element here, dark and frightening, and I didn't want Ellen to go through it alone.

There are three competing trains from St. Paul to Chicago that all leave within a few minutes of half-past eight. Hers was the Burlington, and as I ran across the station I saw the grating being pulled over and the light above it go out. I knew, though, that she had a drawing-room with the Ingersoll girls, because her mother had mentioned buying the ticket, so she was, literally speaking, tucked in until tomorrow.

The C., M. & St. P. gate was down at the other end and I raced for it and made it. I had forgotten one thing, though, and that was enough to keep me awake and worried half the night. This train got into Chicago ten minutes after the other. Ellen had that much time to disappear into one of the largest cities in the world.

I gave the porter a wire to my family to send from Milwaukee, and at eight o'clock next morning I pushed violently by a whole line of passengers, clamoring over their bags parked in the vestibule, and shot out of the door with a sort of scramble over the porter's back. For a moment the confusion of a great station, the voluminous sounds and echoes and cross-currents of bells and smoke struck me helpless. Then I dashed for the exit and toward the only chance I knew of finding her.

I had guessed right. She was standing at the telegraph counter, sending off heaven knows what black lie to her mother, and her expression when she saw me had a sort of terror mixed up with its surprise. There was cunning in it too. She was thinking quickly — she would have liked to walk away from me as if I weren't there, and go about her own business, but she couldn't. I was too matter-of-fact a thing in her life. So we stood silently watching each other and each thinking hard.

"The Brokaws are in Florida," I said after a minute.

"It was nice of you to take such a long trip to tell me that."

"Since you've found it out, don't you think you'd better go on to school?"

“Please let me alone, Eddie,” she said.

“I’ll go as far as New York with you. I’ve decided to go back early myself.”

“You’d better let me alone.” Her lovely eyes narrowed and her face took on a look of dumb-animal-like resistance. She made a visible effort, the cunning flickered back into it, then both were gone, and in their stead was a cheerful reassuring smile that all but convinced me.

“Eddie, you silly child, don’t you think I’m old enough to take care of myself?” I didn’t answer. “I’m going to meet a man, you understand. I just want to see him today. I’ve got my ticket East on the five o’clock train. If you don’t believe it, here it is in my bag.”

“I believe you.”

“The man isn’t anybody that you know and — frankly, I think you’re being awfully fresh and impossible.”

“I know who the man is.”

Again she lost control of her face. That terrible expression came back into it and she spoke with almost a snarl:

“You’d better let me alone.”

I took the blank out of her hand and wrote out an explanatory telegram to her mother. Then I turned to Ellen and said a little roughly:

“We’ll take the five o’clock train East together. Meanwhile you’re going to spend the day with me.”

The mere sound of my own voice saying this so emphatically encouraged me, and I think it impressed her too; at any rate, she submitted — at least temporarily — and came along without protest while I bought my ticket.

When I start to piece together the fragments of that day a sort of confusion begins, as if my memory didn’t want to yield up any of it, or my consciousness let any of it pass through. There was a bright, fierce morning during which we rode about in a taxicab and went to a department store where Ellen said she wanted to buy something and then tried to slip away

from me by a back way. I had the feeling, for an hour, that someone was following us along Lake Shore Drive in a taxicab, and I would try to catch them by turning quickly or looking suddenly into the chauffeur's mirror; but I could find no one, and when I turned back I could see that Ellen's face was contorted with mirthless, unnatural laughter.

All morning there was a raw, bleak wind off the lake, but when we went to the Blackstone for lunch a light snow came down past the windows and we talked almost naturally about our friends, and about casual things. Suddenly her tone changed; she grew serious and looked me in the eye, straight and sincere.

"Eddie, you're the oldest friend I have," she said, "and you oughtn't to find it too hard to trust me. If I promise you faithfully on my word of honor to catch that five o'clock train, will you let me alone a few hours this afternoon?"

"Why?"

"Well" — she hesitated and hung her head a little — "I guess everybody has a right to say — good-by."

"You want to say good-by to that — "

"Yes, yes," she said hastily; "just a few hours, Eddie, and I promise faithfully that I'll be on that train."

"Well, I suppose no great harm could be done in two hours. If you really want to say good-by — "

I looked up suddenly, and surprised a look of such tense cunning in her face that I winced before it. Her lip was curled up and her eyes were slits again; there wasn't the faintest touch of fairness and sincerity in her whole face.

We argued. The argument was vague on her part and somewhat hard and reticent on mine. I wasn't going to be cajoled again into any weakness or be infected with any — and there was a contagion of evil in the air. She kept trying to imply, without any convincing evidence to bring forward, that everything was all right. Yet she was too full of the thing itself — whatever it was — to build up a real story, and she wanted to catch at any credulous

and acquiescent train of thought that might start in my head, and work that for all it was worth. After every reassuring suggestion she threw out, she stared at me eagerly, as if she hoped I'd launch into a comfortable moral lecture with the customary sweet at the end — which in this case would be her liberty. But I was wearing her away a little. Two or three times it needed just a touch of pressure to bring her to the point of tears — which, of course, was what I wanted — but I couldn't seem to manage it. Almost I had her — almost possessed her interior attention — then she would slip away.

I bullied her remorselessly into a taxi about four o'clock and started for the station. The wind was raw again, with a sting of snow in it, and the people in the streets, waiting for busses and street cars too small to take them all in, looked cold and disturbed and unhappy. I tried to think how lucky we were to be comfortably off and taken care of, but all the warm, respectable world I had been part of yesterday had dropped away from me. There was something we carried with us now that was the enemy and the opposite of all that; it was in the cabs beside us, the streets we passed through. With a touch of panic, I wondered if I wasn't slipping almost imperceptibly into Ellen's attitude of mind. The column of passengers waiting to go aboard the train were as remote from me as people from another world, but it was I that was drifting away and leaving them behind.

My lower was in the same car with her compartment. It was an old-fashioned car, its lights somewhat dim, its carpets and upholstery full of the dust of another generation. There were half a dozen other travellers, but they made no special impression on me, except that they shared the unreality that I was beginning to feel everywhere around me. We went into Ellen's compartment, shut the door and sat down.

Suddenly I put my arms around her and drew her over to me, just as tenderly as I knew how — as if she were a little girl — as she was. She resisted a little, but after a moment she submitted and lay tense and rigid in my arms.

“Ellen,” I said helplessly, “you asked me to trust you. You have much more reason to trust me. Wouldn't it help to get rid of all this, if you told me a little?”

“I can't,” she said, very low — “I mean, there's nothing to tell.”

“You met this man on the train coming home and you fell in love with him, isn’t that true?”

“I don’t know.”

“Tell me, Ellen. You fell in love with him?”

“I don’t know. Please let me alone.”

“Call it anything you want,” I went on, “he has some sort of hold over you. He’s trying to use you; he’s trying to get something from you. He’s not in love with you.”

“What does that matter?” she said in a weak voice.

“It does matter. Instead of trying to fight this — this thing — you’re trying to fight me. And I love you, Ellen. Do you hear? I’m telling you all of a sudden, but it isn’t new with me. I love you.”

She looked at me with a sneer on her gentle face; it was an expression I had seen on men who were tight and didn’t want to be taken home. But it was human. I was reaching her, faintly and from far away, but more than before.

“Ellen, I want you to answer me one question. Is he going to be on this train?”

She hesitated; then, an instant too late, she shook her head.

“Be careful, Ellen. Now I’m going to ask you one thing more, and I wish you’d try very hard to answer. Coming West, when did this man get on the train?”

“I don’t know,” she said with an effort.

Just at that moment I became aware, with the unquestionable knowledge reserved for facts, that he was just outside the door. She knew it, too; the blood left her face and that expression of low-animal perspicacity came creeping back. I lowered my face into my hands and tried to think.

We must have sat there, with scarcely a word, for well over an hour. I was conscious that the lights of Chicago, then of Englewood and of endless suburbs, were moving by, and then there were no more lights and we were

out on the dark flatness of Illinois. The train seemed to draw in upon itself; it took on an air of being alone. The porter knocked at the door and asked if he could make up the berth, but I said no and he went away.

After a while I convinced myself that the struggle inevitably coming wasn't beyond what remained of my sanity, my faith in the essential all-rightness of things and people. That this person's purpose was what we call "criminal," I took for granted, but there was no need of ascribing to him an intelligence that belonged to a higher plane of human, or inhuman, endeavor. It was still as a man that I considered him, and tried to get at his essence, his self-interest — what took the place in him of a comprehensible heart — but I suppose I more than half knew what I would find when I opened the door.

When I stood up Ellen didn't seem to see me at all. She was hunched into the corner staring straight ahead with a sort of film over her eyes, as if she were in a state of suspended animation of body and mind. I lifted her and put two pillows under her head and threw my fur coat over her knees. Then I knelt beside her and kissed her two hands, opened the door and went out into the hall.

I closed the door behind me and stood with my back against it for a minute. The car was dark save for the corridor lights at each end. There was no sound except the groaning of the couplers, the even click-a-click of the rails and someone's loud sleeping breath farther down the car. I became aware after a moment that the figure of a man was standing by the water cooler just outside the men's smoking room, his derby hat on his head, his coat collar turned up around his neck as if he were cold, his hands in his coat pockets. When I saw him, he turned and went into the smoking room, and I followed. He was sitting in the far corner of the long leather bench; I took the single armchair beside the door.

As I went in I nodded to him and he acknowledged my presence with one of those terrible soundless laughs of his. But this time it was prolonged, it seemed to go on forever, and mostly to cut it short, I asked: "Where are you from?" in a voice I tried to make casual.

He stopped laughing and looked at me narrowly, wondering what my game was. When he decided to answer, his voice was muffled as though he were speaking through a silk scarf, and it seemed to come from a long way off.

“I’m from St. Paul, Jack.”

“Been making a trip home?”

He nodded. Then he took a long breath and spoke in a hard, menacing voice:

“You better get off at Fort Wayne, Jack.”

He was dead. He was dead as hell — he had been dead all along, but what force had flowed through him, like blood in his veins, out to St. Paul and back, was leaving him now. A new outline — the outline of him dead — was coming through the palpable figure that had knocked down Joe Jelke.

He spoke again, with a sort of jerking effort:

“You get off at Fort Wayne, Jack, or I’m going to wipe you out.” He moved his hand in his coat pocket and showed me the outline of a revolver.

I shook my head. “You can’t touch me,” I answered. “You see, I know.” His terrible eyes shifted over me quickly, trying to determine whether or not I did know. Then he gave a snarl and made as though he were going to jump to his feet.

“You climb off here or else I’m going to get you, Jack!” he cried hoarsely. The train was slowing up for Fort Wayne and his voice rang loud in the comparative quiet, but he didn’t move from his chair — he was too weak, I think — and we sat staring at each other while workmen passed up and down outside the window banging the brakes and wheels, and the engine gave out loud mournful pants up ahead. No one got into our car. After a while the porter closed the vestibule door and passed back along the corridor, and we slid out of the murky yellow station light and into the long darkness.

What I remember next must have extended over a space of five or six hours, though it comes back to me as something without any existence in time — something that might have taken five minutes or a year. There began a slow,

calculated assault on me, wordless and terrible. I felt what I can only call a strangeness stealing over me — akin to the strangeness I had felt all afternoon, but deeper and more intensified. It was like nothing so much as the sensation of drifting away, and I gripped the arms of the chair convulsively, as if to hang onto a piece in the living world. Sometimes I felt myself going out with a rush. There would be almost a warm relief about it, a sense of not caring; then, with a violent wrench of the will, I'd pull myself back into the room.

Suddenly I realized that from a while back I had stopped hating him, stopped feeling violently alien to him, and with the realization, I went cold and sweat broke out all over my head. He was getting around my abhorrence, as he had got around Ellen coming West on the train; and it was just that strength he drew from preying on people that had brought him up to the point of concrete violence in St. Paul, and that, fading and flickering out, still kept him fighting now.

He must have seen that faltering in my heart, for he spoke at once, in a low, even, almost gentle voice: "You better go now."

"Oh, I'm not going," I forced myself to say.

"Suit yourself, Jack."

He was my friend, he implied. He knew how it was with me and he wanted to help. He pitied me. I'd better go away before it was too late. The rhythm of his attack was soothing as a song: I'd better go away — *and let him get at Ellen*. With a little cry I sat bolt upright.

"What do you want of this girl?" I said, my voice shaking. "To make a sort of walking hell of her."

His glance held a quality of dumb surprise, as if I were punishing an animal for a fault of which he was not conscious. For an instant I faltered; then I went on blindly:

"You've lost her; she's put her trust in me."

His countenance went suddenly black with evil, and he cried: "You're a liar!" in a voice that was like cold hands.

“She trusts me,” I said. “You can’t touch her. She’s safe!”

He controlled himself. His face grew bland, and I felt that curious weakness and indifference begin again inside me. What was the use of all this? What was the use?

“You haven’t got much time left,” I forced myself to say, and then, in a flash of intuition, I jumped at the truth. “You died, or you were killed, not far from here!” — Then I saw what I had not seen before — that his forehead was drilled with a small round hole like a larger picture nail leaves when it’s pulled from a plaster wall. “And now you’re sinking. You’ve only got a few hours. The trip home is over!”

His face contorted, lost all semblance of humanity, living or dead. Simultaneously the room was full of cold air and with a noise that was something between a paroxysm of coughing and a burst of horrible laughter, he was on his feet, reeking of shame and blasphemy.

“Come and look!” he cried. “I’ll show you — ”

He took a step toward me, then another and it was exactly as if a door stood open behind him, a door yawning out to an inconceivable abyss of darkness and corruption. There was a scream of mortal agony, from him or from somewhere behind, and abruptly the strength went out of him in a long husky sigh and he wilted to the floor. . . .

How long I sat there, dazed with terror and exhaustion, I don’t know. The next thing I remember is the sleepy porter shining shoes across the room from me, and outside the window the steel fires of Pittsburgh breaking the flat perspective also — something too faint for a man, too heavy for a shadow, of the night. There was something extended on the bench. Even as I perceived it it faded off and away.

Some minutes later I opened the door of Ellen’s compartment. She was asleep where I had left her. Her lovely cheeks were white and wan, but she lay naturally — her hands relaxed and her breathing regular and clear. What had possessed her had gone out of her, leaving her exhausted but her own dear self again.

I made her a little more comfortable, tucked a blanket around her, extinguished the light and went out.

III

When I came home for Easter vacation, almost my first act was to go down to the billiard parlor near Seven Corners. The man at the cash register quite naturally didn't remember my hurried visit of three months before.

"I'm trying to locate a certain party who, I think, came here a lot some time ago."

I described the man rather accurately, and when I had finished, the cashier called to a little jockeylike fellow who was sitting near with an air of having something very important to do that he couldn't quite remember.

"Hey, Shorty, talk to this guy, will you? I think he's looking for Joe Varland."

The little man gave me a tribal look of suspicion. I went and sat near him.

"Joe Varland's dead, fella," he said grudgingly. "He died last winter."

I described him again — his overcoat, his laugh, the habitual expression of his eyes.

"That's Joe Varland you're looking for all right, but he's dead."

"I want to find out something about him."

"What you want to find out?"

"What did he do, for instance?"

"How should I know?"

"Look here! I'm not a policeman. I just want some kind of information about his habits. He's dead now and it can't hurt him. And it won't go beyond me."

"Well" — he hesitated, looking me over — "he was a great one for travelling. He got in a row in the station in Pittsburgh and a dick got him."

I nodded. Broken pieces of the puzzle began to assemble in my head.

“Why was he a lot on trains?”

“How should I know, fella?”

“If you can use ten dollars, I’d like to know anything you may have heard on the subject.”

“Well,” said Shorty reluctantly, “all I know is they used to say he worked the trains.”

“Worked the trains?”

“He had some racket of his own he’d never loosen up about. He used to work the girls travelling alone on the trains. Nobody ever knew much about it — he was a pretty smooth guy — but sometimes he’d turn up here with a lot of dough and he let ’em know it was the janes he got it off of.”

I thanked him and gave him the ten dollars and went out, very thoughtful, without mentioning that part of Joe Varland had made a last trip home.

Ellen wasn’t West for Easter, and even if she had been I wouldn’t have gone to her with the information, either — at least I’ve seen her almost every day this summer and we’ve managed to talk about everything else. Sometimes, though, she gets silent about nothing and wants to be very close to me, and I know what’s in her mind.

Of course she’s coming out this fall, and I have two more years at New Haven; still, things don’t look so impossible as they did a few months ago. She belongs to me in a way — even if I lose her she belongs to me. Who knows? Anyhow, I’ll always be there.

THE BOWL

I

Saturday Evening Post (21 January 1928)

There was a man in my class at Princeton who never went to football games. He spent his Saturday afternoons delving for minutiae about Greek athletics and the somewhat fixed battles between Christians and wild beasts under the Antonines. Lately — several years out of college — he has discovered football players and is making etchings of them in the manner of the late George Bellows. But he was once unresponsive to the very spectacle at his door, and I suspect the originality of his judgments on what is beautiful, what is remarkable and what is fun.

I reveled in football, as audience, amateur statistician and foiled participant — for I had played in prep school, and once there was a headline in the school newspaper: “Deering and Mullins Star Against Taft in Stiff Game Saturday.” When I came in to lunch after the battle the school stood up and clapped and the visiting coach shook hands with me and prophesied — incorrectly — that I was going to be heard from. The episode is laid away in the most pleasant lavender of my past. That year I grew very tall and thin, and when at Princeton the following fall I looked anxiously over the freshman candidates and saw the polite disregard with which they looked back at me, I realized that that particular dream was over. Keene said he might make me into a very fair pole vaulter — and he did — but it was a poor substitute; and my terrible disappointment that I wasn’t going to be a great football player was probably the foundation of my friendship with Dolly Harlan. I want to begin this story about Dolly with a little rehashing of the Yale game up at New Haven, sophomore year.

Dolly was started at halfback; this was his first big game. I roomed with him and I had scented something peculiar about his state of mind, so I didn’t let him out of the corner of my eye during the whole first half. With field glasses I could see the expression on his face; it was strained and incredulous, as it

had been the day of his father's death, and it remained so, long after any nervousness had had time to wear off. I thought he was sick and wondered why Keene didn't see and take him out; it wasn't until later that I learned what was the matter.

It was the Yale Bowl. The size of it or the enclosed shape of it or the height of the sides had begun to get on Dolly's nerves when the team practiced there the day before. In that practice he dropped one or two punts, for almost the first time in his life, and he began thinking it was because of the Bowl.

There is a new disease called agoraphobia — afraid of crowds — and another called siderodromophobia — afraid of railroad traveling — and my friend Doctor Glock, the psychoanalyst, would probably account easily for Dolly's state of mind. But here's what Dolly told me afterward:

“Yale would punt and I'd look up. The minute I looked up, the sides of that damn pan would seem to go shooting up too. Then when the ball started to come down, the sides began leaning forward and bending over me until I could see all the people on the top seats screaming at me and shaking their fists. At the last minute I couldn't see the ball at all, but only the Bowl; every time it was just luck that I was under it and every time I juggled it in my hands.”

To go back to the game. I was in the cheering section with a good seat on the forty-yard line — good, that is, except when a very vague graduate, who had lost his friends and his hat, stood up in front of me at intervals and faltered, “Stob Ted Coy!” under the impression that we were watching a game played a dozen years before. When he realized finally that he was funny he began performing for the gallery and aroused a chorus of whistles and boos until he was dragged unwillingly under the stand.

It was a good game — what is known in college publications as a historic game. A picture of the team that played it now hangs in every barber shop in Princeton, with Captain Gottlieb in the middle wearing a white sweater, to show that they won a championship. Yale had had a poor season, but they had the breaks in the first quarter, which ended 3 to 0 in their favor.

Between quarters I watched Dolly. He walked around panting and sucking a water bottle and still wearing that strained stunned expression. Afterward he told me he was saying over and over to himself: "I'll speak to Roper. I'll tell him between halves. I'll tell him I can't go through this any more." Several times already he had felt an almost irresistible impulse to shrug his shoulders and trot off the field, for it was not only this unexpected complex about the Bowl; the truth was that Dolly fiercely and bitterly hated the game.

He hated the long, dull period of training, the element of personal conflict, the demand on his time, the monotony of the routine and the nervous apprehension of disaster just before the end. Sometimes he imagined that all the others detested it as much as he did, and fought down their aversion as he did and carried it around inside them like a cancer that they were afraid to recognize. Sometimes he imagined that a man here and there was about to tear off the mask and say, "Dolly, do you hate this lousy business as much as I do?"

His feeling had begun back at St. Regis' School and he had come up to Princeton with the idea that he was through with football forever. But upper classmen from St. Regis kept stopping him on the campus and asking him how much he weighed, and he was nominated for vice president of our class on the strength of his athletic reputation — and it was autumn, with achievement in the air. He wandered down to freshman practice one afternoon, feeling oddly lost and dissatisfied, and smelled the turf and smelled the thrilling season. In half an hour he was lacing on a pair of borrowed shoes and two weeks later he was captain of the freshman team.

Once committed, he saw that he had made a mistake; he even considered leaving college. For, with his decision to play, Dolly assumed a moral responsibility, personal to him, besides. To lose or to let down, or to be let down, was simply intolerable to him. It offended his Scotch sense of waste. Why sweat blood for an hour with only defeat at the end?

Perhaps the worst of it was that he wasn't really a star player. No team in the country could have spared using him, but he could do no spectacular thing superlatively well, neither run, pass nor kick. He was five-feet-eleven

and weighed a little more than a hundred and sixty; he was a first-rate defensive man, sure in interference, a fair line plunger and a fair punter. He never fumbled and he was never inadequate; his presence, his constant cold sure aggression, had a strong effect on other men. Morally, he captained any team he played on and that was why Roper had spent so much time trying to get length in his kicks all season — he wanted him in the game.

In the second quarter Yale began to crack. It was a mediocre team composed of flashy material, but uncoordinated because of injuries and impending changes in the Yale coaching system. The quarterback, Josh Logan, had been a wonder at Exeter — I could testify to that — where games can be won by the sheer confidence and spirit of a single man. But college teams are too highly organized to respond so simply and boyishly, and they recover less easily from fumbles and errors of judgment behind the line.

So, with nothing to spare, with much grunting and straining, Princeton moved steadily down the field. On the Yale twenty-yard line things suddenly happened. A Princeton pass was intercepted; the Yale man, excited by his own opportunity, dropped the ball and it bobbed leisurely in the general direction of the Yale goal. Jack Devlin and Dolly Harlan of Princeton and somebody — I forget who — from Yale were all about the same distance from it. What Dolly did in that split second was all instinct; it presented no problem to him. He was a natural athlete and in a crisis his nervous system thought for him. He might have raced the two others for the ball; instead, he took out the Yale man with savage precision while Devlin scooped up the ball and ran ten yards for a touchdown.

This was when the sports writers still saw games through the eyes of Ralph Henry Barbour. The press box was right behind me, and as Princeton lined up to kick goal I heard the radio man ask:

“Who’s Number 22?”

“Harlan.”

“Harlan is going to kick goal. Devlin, who made the touchdown, comes from Lawrenceville School. He is twenty years old. The ball went true between the bars.”

Between the halves, as Dolly sat shaking with fatigue in the locker room, Little, the back-field coach, came and sat beside him.

“When the ends are right on you, don’t be afraid to make a fair catch,” Little said. “That big Havemeyer is liable to jar the ball right out of your hands.”

Now was the time to say it: “I wish you’d tell Bill — ” But the words twisted themselves into a trivial question about the wind. His feeling would have to be explained, gone into, and there wasn’t time. His own self seemed less important in this room, redolent with the tired breath, the ultimate effort, the exhaustion of ten other men. He was shamed by a harsh sudden quarrel that broke out between an end and tackle; he resented the former players in the room — especially the graduate captain of two years before, who was a little tight and over-vehement about the referee’s favoritism. It seemed terrible to add one more jot to all this strain and annoyance. But he might have come out with it all the same if Little hadn’t kept saying in a low voice: “What a take-out, Dolly! What a beautiful take-out!” and if Little’s hand hadn’t rested there, patting his shoulder.

II

In the third quarter Joe Dougherty kicked an easy field goal from the twenty-yard line and we felt safe, until toward twilight a series of desperate forward passes brought Yale close to a score. But Josh Logan had exhausted his personality in sheer bravado and he was outguessed by the defense at the last. As the substitutes came running in, Princeton began a last march down the field. Then abruptly it was over and the crowd poured from the stands, and Gottlieb, grabbing the ball, leaped up in the air. For a while everything was confused and crazy and happy; I saw some freshmen try to carry Dolly, but they were shy and he got away.

We all felt a great personal elation. We hadn’t beaten Yale for three years and now everything was going to be all right. It meant a good winter at

college, something pleasant and slick to think back upon in the damp cold days after Christmas, when a bleak futility settles over a university town. Down on the field, an improvised and uproarious team ran through plays with a derby, until the snake dance rolled over them and blotted them out. Outside the Bowl, I saw two abysmally gloomy and disgusted Yale men get into a waiting taxi and in a tone of final abnegation tell the driver “New York.” You couldn’t find Yale men; in the manner of the vanquished, they had absolutely melted away.

I begin Dolly’s story with my memories of this game because that evening the girl walked into it. She was a friend of Josephine Pickman’s and the four of us were going to drive up to the Midnight Frolic in New York. When I suggested to him that he’d be too tired he laughed dryly — he’d have gone anywhere that night to get the feel and rhythm of football out of his head. He walked into the hall of Josephine’s house at half-past six, looking as if he’d spent the day in the barber shop save for a small and fetching strip of court plaster over one eye. He was one of the handsomest men I ever knew, anyhow; he appeared tall and slender in street clothes, his hair was dark, his eyes big and sensitive and dark, his nose aquiline and, like all his features, somehow romantic. It didn’t occur to me then, but I suppose he was pretty vain — not conceited, but vain — for he always dressed in brown or soft light gray, with black ties, and people don’t match themselves so successfully by accident.

He was smiling a little to himself as he came in. He shook my hand buoyantly and said, “Why, what a surprise to meet you here, Mr. Deering,” in a kidding way. Then he saw the two girls through the long hall, one dark and shining, like himself, and one with gold hair that was foaming and frothing in the firelight, and said in the happiest voice I’ve ever heard, “Which one is mine?”

“Either you want, I guess.”

“Seriously, which is Pickman?”

“She’s light.”

“Then the other one belongs to me. Isn’t that the idea?”

“I think I’d better warn them about the state you’re in.”

Miss Thorne, small, flushed and lovely, stood beside the fire. Dolly went right up to her.

“You’re mine,” he said; “you belong to me.”

She looked at him coolly, making up her mind; suddenly she liked him and smiled. But Dolly wasn’t satisfied. He wanted to do something incredibly silly or startling to express his untold jubilation that he was free.

“I love you,” he said. He took her hand, his brown velvet eyes regarding her tenderly, unseeingly, convincingly. “I love you.”

For a moment the corners of her lips fell as if in dismay that she had met someone stronger, more confident, more challenging than herself. Then, as she drew herself together visibly, he dropped her hand and the little scene in which he had expended the tension of the afternoon was over.

It was a bright cold November night and the rush of air past the open car brought a vague excitement, a sense that we were hurrying at top speed toward a brilliant destiny. The roads were packed with cars that came to long inexplicable halts while police, blinded by the lights, walked up and down the line giving obscure commands. Before we had been gone an hour New York began to be a distant hazy glow against the sky.

Miss Thorne, Josephine told me, was from Washington, and had just come down from a visit in Boston.

“For the game?” I said.

“No; she didn’t go to the game.”

“That’s too bad. If you’d let me know I could have picked up a seat — ”

“She wouldn’t have gone. Vienna never goes to games.”

I remembered now that she hadn’t even murmured the conventional congratulations to Dolly.

“She hates football. Her brother was killed in a prep-school game last year. I wouldn’t have brought her tonight, but when we got home from the game I saw she’d been sitting there holding a book open at the same page all

afternoon. You see, he was this wonderful kid and her family saw it happen and naturally never got over it.”

“But does she mind being with Dolly?”

“Of course not. She just ignores football. If anyone mentions it she simply changes the subject.”

I was glad that it was Dolly and not, say, Jack Devlin who was sitting back there with her. And I felt rather sorry for Dolly. However strongly he felt about the game, he must have waited for some acknowledgment that his effort had existed.

He was probably giving her credit for a subtle consideration, yet, as the images of the afternoon flashed into his mind he might have welcomed a compliment to which he could respond “What nonsense!” Neglected entirely, the images would become insistent and obtrusive.

I turned around and was somewhat startled to find that Miss Thorne was in Dolly’s arms; I turned quickly back and decided to let them take care of themselves.

As we waited for a traffic light on upper Broadway, I saw a sporting extra headlined with the score of the game. The green sheet was more real than the afternoon itself — succinct, condensed and clear:

PRINCETON CONQUERS YALE 10-3

SEVENTY THOUSAND WATCH TIGER TRIM

BULLDOG

DEVLIN SCORES ON YALE FUMBLE

There it was — not like the afternoon, muddled, uncertain, patchy and scrappy to the end, but nicely mounted now in the setting of the past:

PRINCETON, 10; YALE, 3

Achievement was a curious thing, I thought. Dolly was largely responsible for that. I wondered if all things that screamed in the headlines were simply arbitrary accents. As if people should ask, "What does it look like?"

"It looks most like a cat."

"Well, then, let's call it a cat."

My mind, brightened by the lights and the cheerful tumult, suddenly grasped the fact that all achievement was a placing of emphasis — a molding of the confusion of life into form.

Josephine stopped in front of the New Amsterdam Theater, where her chauffeur met us and took the car. We were early, but a small buzz of excitement went up from the undergraduates waiting in the lobby — "There's Dolly Harlan" — and as we moved toward the elevator several acquaintances came up to shake his hand. Apparently oblivious to these ceremonies, Miss Thorne caught my eye and smiled. I looked at her with curiosity; Josephine had imparted the rather surprising information that she was just sixteen years old. I suppose my return smile was rather patronizing, but instantly I realized that the fact could not be imposed on. In spite of all the warmth and delicacy of her face, the figure that somehow reminded me of an exquisite, romanticized little ballerina, there was a quality in her that was as hard as steel. She had been brought up in Rome, Vienna and Madrid, with flashes of Washington; her father was one of those charming American diplomats who, with fine obstinacy, try to re-create the Old World in their children by making their education rather more royal than that of princes. Miss Thorne was sophisticated. In spite of all the abandon of American young people, sophistication is still a Continental monopoly.

We walked in upon a number in which a dozen chorus girls in orange and black were racing wooden horses against another dozen dressed in Yale blue. When the lights went on, Dolly was recognized and some Princeton students set up a clatter of approval with the little wooden hammers given out for applause; he moved his chair unostentatiously into a shadow.

Almost immediately a flushed and very miserable young man appeared beside our table. In better form he would have been extremely

prepossessing; indeed, he flashed a charming and dazzling smile at Dolly, as if requesting his permission to speak to Miss Thorne.

Then he said, "I thought you weren't coming to New York tonight."

"Hello, Carl." She looked up at him coolly.

"Hello, Vienna. That's just it; 'Hello Vienna — Hello Carl.' But why? I thought you weren't coming to New York tonight."

Miss Thorne made no move to introduce the man, but we were conscious of his somewhat raised voice.

"I thought you promised me you weren't coming."

"I didn't expect to, child. I just left Boston this morning."

"And who did you meet in Boston — the fascinating Tunti?" he demanded.

"I didn't meet anyone, child."

"Oh, yes, you did! You met the fascinating Tunti and you discussed living on the Riviera." She didn't answer. "Why are you so dishonest, Vienna?" he went on. "Why did you tell me on the phone — "

"I am not going to be lectured," she said, her tone changing suddenly. "I told you if you took another drink I was through with you. I'm a person of my word and I'd be enormously happy if you went away."

"Vienna!" he cried in a sinking, trembling voice.

At this point I got up and danced with Josephine. When we came back there were people at the table — the men to whom we were to hand over Josephine and Miss Thorne, for I had allowed for Dolly being tired, and several others. One of them was Al Ratoní, the composer, who, it appeared, had been entertained at the embassy in Madrid. Dolly Harlan had drawn his chair aside and was watching the dancers. Just as the lights went down for a new number a man came up out of the darkness and leaning over Miss Thorne whispered in her ear. She started and made a motion to rise, but he put his hand on her shoulder and forced her down. They began to talk together in low excited voices.

The tables were packed close at the old Frolic. There was a man rejoining the party next to us and I couldn't help hearing what he said:

“A young fellow just tried to kill himself down in the wash room. He shot himself through the shoulder, but they got the pistol away before — ”

A minute later his voice again: “Carl Sanderson, they said.”

When the number was over I looked around. Vienna Thorne was staring very rigidly at Miss Lillian Lorraine, who was rising toward the ceiling as an enormous telephone doll. The man who had leaned over Vienna was gone and the others were obviously unaware that anything had happened. I turned to Dolly and suggested that he and I had better go, and after a glance at Vienna in which reluctance, weariness and then resignation were mingled, he consented. On the way to the hotel I told Dolly what had happened.

“Just some souse,” he remarked after a moment's fatigued consideration. “He probably tried to miss himself and get a little sympathy. I suppose those are the sort of things a really attractive girl is up against all the time.”

This wasn't my attitude. I could see that mussed white shirt front with very young blood pumping over it, but I didn't argue, and after a while Dolly said, “I suppose that sounds brutal, but it seems a little soft and weak, doesn't it? Perhaps that's just the way I feel tonight.”

When Dolly undressed I saw that he was a mass of bruises, but he assured me that none of them would keep him awake. Then I told him why Miss Thorne hadn't mentioned the game and he woke up suddenly; the familiar glitter came back into his eyes.

“So that was it! I wondered. I thought maybe you'd told her not to say anything about it.”

Later, when the lights had been out half an hour, he suddenly said “I see” in a loud clear voice. I don't know whether he was awake or asleep.

I've put down as well as I can everything I can remember about the first meeting between Dolly and Miss Vienna Thorne. Reading it over, it sounds casual and insignificant, but the evening lay in the shadow of the game and all that happened seemed like that. Vienna went back to Europe almost immediately and for fifteen months passed out of Dolly's life.

It was a good year — it still rings true in my memory as a good year. Sophomore year is the most dramatic at Princeton, just as junior year is at Yale. It's not only the elections to the upperclass clubs but also everyone's destiny begins to work itself out. You can tell pretty well who's going to come through, not only by their immediate success but by the way they survive failure. Life was very full for me. I made the board of the Princetonian, and our house burned down out in Dayton, and I had a silly half-hour fist fight in the gymnasium with a man who later became one of my closest friends, and in March Dolly and I joined the upperclass club we'd always wanted to be in. I fell in love, too, but it would be an irrelevancy to tell about that here.

April came and the first real Princeton weather, the lazy green-and-gold afternoons and the bright thrilling nights haunted with the hour of senior singing. I was happy, and Dolly would have been happy except for the approach of another football season. He was playing baseball, which excused him from spring practice, but the bands were beginning to play faintly in the distance. They rose to concert pitch during the summer, when he had to answer the question, "Are you going back early for football?" a dozen times a day. On the fifteenth of September he was down in the dust and heat of late-summer Princeton, crawling over the ground on all fours, trotting through the old routine and turning himself into just the sort of specimen that I'd have given ten years of my life to be.

From first to last, he hated it, and never let down for a minute. He went into the Yale game that fall weighing a hundred and fifty-three pounds, though that wasn't the weight printed in the paper, and he and Joe McDonald were the only men who played all through that disastrous game. He could have been captain by lifting his finger — but that involves some stuff that I know confidentially and can't tell. His only horror was that by some chance he'd have to accept it. Two seasons! He didn't even talk about it now. He left the

room or the club when the conversation veered around to football. He stopped announcing to me that he “wasn’t going through that business any more.” This time it took the Christmas holidays to drive that unhappy look from his eyes.

Then at the New Year Miss Vienna Thorne came home from Madrid and in February a man named Case brought her down to the Senior Prom.

IV

She was even prettier than she had been before, softer, externally at least, and a tremendous success. People passing her on the street jerked their heads quickly to look at her — a frightened look, as if they realized that they had almost missed something. She was temporarily tired of European men, she told me, letting me gather that there had been some sort of unfortunate love affair. She was coming out in Washington next fall.

Vienna and Dolly. She disappeared with him for two hours the night of the club dances, and Harold Case was in despair. When they walked in again at midnight I thought they were the handsomest pair I saw. They were both shining with that peculiar luminosity that dark people sometimes have. Harold Case took one look at them and went proudly home.

Vienna came back a week later, solely to see Dolly. Late that evening I had occasion to go up to the deserted club for a book and they called me from the rear terrace, which opens out to the ghostly stadium and to an unpeopled sweep of night. It was an hour of thaw, with spring voices in the warm wind, and wherever there was light enough you could see drops glistening and falling. You could feel the cold melting out of the stars and the bare trees and shrubbery toward Stony Brook turning lush in the darkness.

They were sitting together on a wicker bench, full of themselves and romantic and happy.

“We had to tell someone about it,” they said.

“Now can I go?”

“No, Jeff,” they insisted; “stay here and envy us. We’re in the stage where we want someone to envy us. Do you think we’re a good match?”

What could I say?

“Dolly’s going to finish at Princeton next year,” Vienna went on, “but we’re going to announce it after the season in Washington in the autumn.”

I was vaguely relieved to find that it was going to be a long engagement.

“I approve of you, Jeff,” Vienna said.

“I want Dolly to have more friends like you. You’re stimulating for him — you have ideas. I told Dolly he could probably find others like you if he looked around his class.”

Dolly and I both felt a little uncomfortable.

“She doesn’t want me to be a Babbitt,” he said lightly.

“Dolly’s perfect,” asserted Vienna. “He’s the most beautiful thing that ever lived, and you’ll find I’m very good for him, Jeff. Already I’ve helped him make up his mind about one important thing.” I guessed what was coming. “He’s going to speak a little piece if they bother him about playing football next autumn, aren’t you, child?”

“Oh, they won’t bother me,” said Dolly uncomfortably. “It isn’t like that — ”

“Well, they’ll try to bully you into it, morally.”

“Oh, no,” he objected. “It isn’t like that. Don’t let’s talk about it now, Vienna. It’s such a swell night.”

Such a swell night! When I think of my own love passages at Princeton, I always summon up that night of Dolly’s, as if it had been I and not he who sat there with youth and hope and beauty in his arms.

Dolly’s mother took a place on Ram’s Point, Long Island, for the summer, and late in August I went East to visit him. Vienna had been there a week when I arrived, and my impressions were: first, that he was very much in love; and, second, that it was Vienna’s party. All sorts of curious people used to drop in to see Vienna. I wouldn’t mind them now — I’m more

sophisticated — but then they seemed rather a blot on the summer. They were all slightly famous in one way or another, and it was up to you to find out how. There was a lot of talk, and especially there was much discussion of Vienna's personality. Whenever I was alone with any of the other guests we discussed Vienna's sparkling personality. They thought I was dull, and most of them thought Dolly was dull. He was better in his line than any of them were in theirs, but his was the only specialty that wasn't mentioned. Still, I felt vaguely that I was being improved and I boasted about knowing most of those people in the ensuing year, and was annoyed when people failed to recognize their names.

The day before I left, Dolly turned his ankle playing tennis, and afterward he joked about it to me rather somberly.

"If I'd only broken it things would be so much easier. Just a quarter of an inch more bend and one of the bones would have snapped. By the way, look here."

He tossed me a letter. It was a request that he report at Princeton for practice on September fifteenth and that meanwhile he begin getting himself in good condition.

"You're not going to play this fall?"

He shook his head.

"No. I'm not a child any more. I've played for two years and I want this year free. If I went through it again it'd be a piece of moral cowardice."

"I'm not arguing, but — would you have taken this stand if it hadn't been for Vienna?"

"Of course I would. If I let myself be bullied into it I'd never be able to look myself in the face again."

Two weeks later I got the following letter:

DEAR JEFF:

When you read this you'll be somewhat surprised. I have, actually, this time, broken my ankle playing tennis. I can't even walk with crutches at present; it's

on a chair in front of me swollen up and wrapped up as big as a house as I write. No one, not even Vienna, knows about our conversation on the same subject last summer and so let us both absolutely forget it. One thing, though — an ankle is a darn hard thing to break, though I never knew it before.

I feel happier than I have for years — no early-season practice, no sweat and suffer, a little discomfort and inconvenience, but free. I feel as if I've outwitted a whole lot of people, and it's nobody's business but that of your

Machiavellian (sic) friend,

DOLLY.

P.S. You might as well tear up this letter.

It didn't sound like Dolly at all.

V

Once down at Princeton I asked Frank Kane — who sells sporting goods on Nassau Street and can tell you offhand the name of the scrub quarterback in 1901 — what was the matter with Bob Tatnall's team senior year.

“Injuries and tough luck,” he said. “They wouldn't sweat after the hard games. Take Joe McDonald, for instance, All-American tackle the year before; he was slow and stale, and he knew it and didn't care. It's a wonder Bill got that outfit through the season at all.”

I sat in the stands with Dolly and watched them beat Lehigh 3-0 and tie Bucknell by a fluke. The next week we were trimmed 14-0 by Notre Dame. On the day of the Notre Dame game Dolly was in Washington with Vienna, but he was awfully curious about it when he came back next day. He had all the sporting pages of all the papers and he sat reading them and shaking his head. Then he stuffed them suddenly into the waste-paper basket.

“This college is football crazy,” he announced. “Do you know that English teams don't even train for sports?”

I didn't enjoy Dolly so much in those days. It was curious to see him with nothing to do. For the first time in his life he hung around — around the room, around the club, around casual groups — he who had always been going somewhere with dynamic indolence. His passage along a walk had once created groups — groups of classmates who wanted to walk with him, of underclassmen who followed with their eyes a moving shrine. He became democratic, he mixed around, and it was somehow not appropriate. He explained that he wanted to know more men in his class.

But people want their idols a little above them, and Dolly had been a sort of private and special idol. He began to hate to be alone, and that, of course, was most apparent to me. If I got up to go out and he didn't happen to be writing a letter to Vienna, he'd ask "Where are you going?" in a rather alarmed way and make an excuse to limp along with me.

"Are you glad you did it, Dolly?" I asked him suddenly one day.

He looked at me with reproach behind the defiance in his eyes.

"Of course I'm glad."

"I wish you were in that back field, all the same."

"It wouldn't matter a bit. This year's game's in the Bowl. I'd probably be dropping kicks for them."

The week of the Navy game he suddenly began going to all the practices. He worried; that terrible sense of responsibility was at work. Once he had hated the mention of football; now he thought and talked of nothing else. The night before the Navy game I woke up several times to find the lights burning brightly in his room.

We lost 7 to 3 on Navy's last-minute forward pass over Devlin's head. After the first half Dolly left the stands and sat down with the players on the field. When he joined me afterward his face was smudgy and dirty as if he had been crying.

The game was in Baltimore that year. Dolly and I were going to spend the night in Washington with Vienna, who was giving a dance. We rode over there in an atmosphere of sullen gloom and it was all I could do to keep him

from snapping out at two naval officers who were holding an exultant post mortem in the seat behind.

The dance was what Vienna called her second coming-out party. She was having only the people she liked this time, and these turned out to be chiefly importations from New York. The musicians, the playwrights, the vague supernumeraries of the arts, who had dropped in at Dolly's house on Ram's Point, were here in force. But Dolly, relieved of his obligations as host, made no clumsy attempt to talk their language that night. He stood moodily against the wall with some of that old air of superiority that had first made me want to know him. Afterward, on my way to bed, I passed Vienna's sitting room and she called me to come in. She and Dolly, both a little white, were sitting across the room from each other and there was tensivity in the air.

"Sit down, Jeff," said Vienna wearily. "I want you to witness the collapse of a man into a schoolboy." I sat down reluctantly. "Dolly's changed his mind," she said. "He prefers football to me."

"That's not it," said Dolly stubbornly.

"I don't see the point," I objected. "Dolly can't possibly play."

"But he thinks he can. Jeff, just in case you imagine I'm being pig-headed about it, I want to tell you a story. Three years ago, when we first came back to the United States, father put my young brother in school. One afternoon we all went out to see him play football. Just after the game started he was hurt, but father said, 'It's all right. He'll be up in a minute. It happens all the time.' But, Jeff, he never got up. He lay there, and finally they carried him off the field and put a blanket over him. Just as we got to him he died."

She looked from one to the other of us and began to sob convulsively. Dolly went over, frowning, and put his arm around her shoulder.

"Oh, Dolly," she cried, "won't you do this for me — just this one little thing for me?"

He shook his head miserably. "I tried, but I can't," he said.

“It’s my stuff, don’t you understand, Vienna? People have got to do their stuff.”

Vienna had risen and was powdering her tears at a mirror; now she flashed around angrily.

“Then I’ve been laboring under a misapprehension when I supposed you felt about it much as I did.”

“Let’s not go over all that. I’m tired of talking, Vienna; I’m tired of my own voice. It seems to me that no one I know does anything but talk any more.”

“Thanks. I suppose that’s meant for me.”

“It seems to me your friends talk a great deal. I’ve never heard so much jabber as I’ve listened to tonight. Is the idea of actually doing anything repulsive to you, Vienna?”

“It depends upon whether it’s worth doing.”

“Well, this is worth doing — to me.”

“I know your trouble, Dolly,” she said bitterly. “You’re weak and you want to be admired. This year you haven’t had a lot of little boys following you around as if you were Jack Dempsey, and it almost breaks your heart. You want to get out in front of them all and make a show of yourself and hear the applause.”

He laughed shortly. “If that’s your idea of how a football player feels — ”

“Have you made up your mind to play?” she interrupted.

“If I’m any use to them — yes.”

“Then I think we’re both wasting our time.”

Her expression was ruthless, but Dolly refused to see that she was in earnest. When I got away he was still trying to make her “be rational,” and next day on the train he said that Vienna had been “a little nervous.” He was deeply in love with her, and he didn’t dare think of losing her; but he was still in the grip of the sudden emotion that had decided him to play, and his confusion and exhaustion of mind made him believe vainly that everything

was going to be all right. But I had seen that look on Vienna's face the night she talked with Mr. Carl Sanderson at the Frolic two years before.

Dolly didn't get off the train at Princeton Junction, but continued on to New York. He went to two orthopedic specialists and one of them arranged a bandage braced with a whole little fence of whalebones that he was to wear day and night. The probabilities were that it would snap at the first brisk encounter, but he could run on it and stand on it when he kicked. He was out on University Field in uniform the following afternoon.

His appearance was a small sensation. I was sitting in the stands watching practice with Harold Case and young Daisy Cary. She was just beginning to be famous then, and I don't know whether she or Dolly attracted the most attention. In those times it was still rather daring to bring down a moving-picture actress; if that same young lady went to Princeton today she would probably be met at the station with a band.

Dolly limped around and everyone said, "He's limping!" He got under a punt and everyone said, "He did that pretty well!" The first team were laid off after the hard Navy game and everyone watched Dolly all afternoon. After practice I caught his eye and he came over and shook hands. Daisy asked him if he'd like to be in a football picture she was going to make. It was only conversation, but he looked at me with a dry smile.

When he came back to the room his ankle was swollen up as big as a stove pipe, and next day he and Keene fixed up an arrangement by which the bandage would be loosened and tightened to fit its varying size. We called it the balloon. The bone was nearly healed, but the little bruised sinews were stretched out of place again every day. He watched the Swarthmore game from the sidelines and the following Monday he was in scrimmage with the second team against the scrubs.

In the afternoons sometimes he wrote to Vienna. His theory was that they were still engaged, but he tried not to worry about it, and I think the very pain that kept him awake at night was good for that. When the season was over he would go and see.

We played Harvard and lost 7 to 3. Jack Devlin's collar bone was broken and he was out for the season, which made it almost sure that Dolly would play. Amid the rumors and fears of mid-November the news aroused a spark of hope in an otherwise morbid undergraduate body — hope all out of proportion to Dolly's condition. He came back to the room the Thursday before the game with his face drawn and tired.

“They're going to start me,” he said, “and I'm going to be back for punts. If they only knew — ”

“Couldn't you tell Bill how you feel about that?”

He shook his head and I had a sudden suspicion that he was punishing himself for his “accident” last August. He lay silently on the couch while I packed his suitcase for the team train.

The actual day of the game was, as usual, like a dream — unreal with its crowds of friends and relatives and the inessential trappings of a gigantic show. The eleven little men who ran out on the field at last were like bewitched figures in another world, strange and infinitely romantic, blurred by a throbbing mist of people and sound. One aches with them intolerably, trembles with their excitement, but they have no traffic with us now, they are beyond help, consecrated and unreachable — vaguely holy.

The field is rich and green, the preliminaries are over and the teams trickle out into position. Head guards are put on; each man claps his hands and breaks into a lonely little dance. People are still talking around you, arranging themselves, but you have fallen silent and your eye wanders from man to man. There's Jack Whitehead, a senior, at end; Joe McDonald, large and reassuring, at tackle; Toole, a sophomore, at guard; Red Hopman, center; someone you can't identify at the other guard — Bunker probably — he turns and you see his number — Bunker; Bean Gile, looking unnaturally dignified and significant at the other tackle; Poore, another sophomore at end. Back of them is Wash Sampson at quarter — imagine how he feels! But he runs here and there on light feet, speaking to this man and that, trying to communicate his alertness and his confidence of success. Dolly Harlan stands motionless, his hands on his hips, watching the Yale kicker tee up the ball; near him is Captain Bob Tatnall —

There's the whistle! The line of the Yale team sways ponderously forward from its balance and a split second afterward comes the sound of the ball. The field streams with running figures and the whole Bowl strains forward as if thrown by the current of an electric chair.

Suppose we fumbled right away.

Tatnall catches it, goes back ten yards, is surrounded and blotted out of sight. Spears goes through center for three. A short pass, Sampson to Tatnall, is completed, but for no gain. Harlan punts to Devereaux, who is downed in his tracks on the Yale forty-yard line.

Now we'll see what they've got.

It developed immediately that they had a great deal. Using an effective crisscross and a short pass over center, they carried the ball fifty-four yards to the Princeton six-yard line, where they lost it on a fumble, recovered by Red Hopman. After a trade of punts, they began another push, this time to the fifteen-yard line, where, after four hair-raising forward passes, two of them batted down by Dolly, we got the ball on downs. But Yale was still fresh and strong, and with a third onslaught the weaker Princeton line began to give way. Just after the second quarter began Devereaux took the ball over for a touchdown and the half ended with Yale in possession of the ball on our ten-yard line. Score, Yale, 7; Princeton, 0.

We hadn't a chance. The team was playing above itself, better than it had played all year, but it wasn't enough. Save that it was the Yale game, when anything could happen, anything *had* happened, the atmosphere of gloom would have been deeper than it was, and in the cheering section you could cut it with a knife.

Early in the game Dolly Harlan had fumbled Devereaux's high punt, but recovered without gain; toward the end of the half another kick slipped through his fingers, but he scooped it up, and slipping past the end, went back twelve yards. Between halves he told Roper he couldn't seem to get under the ball, but they kept him there. His own kicks were carrying well and he was essential in the only back-field combination that could hope to score.

After the first play of the game he limped slightly, moving around as little as possible to conceal the fact. But I knew enough about football to see that he was in every play, starting at that rather slow pace of his and finishing with a quick side lunge that almost always took out his man. Not a single Yale forward pass was finished in his territory, but toward the end of the third quarter he dropped another kick — backed around in a confused little circle under it, lost it and recovered on the five-yard line just in time to avert a certain score. That made the third time, and I saw Ed Kimball throw off his blanket and begin to warm up on the sidelines.

Just at that point our luck began to change. From a kick formation, with Dolly set to punt from behind our goal, Howard Bement, who had gone in for Wash Sampson at quarter, took the ball through the center of the line, got by the secondary defense and ran twenty-six yards before he was pulled down. Captain Tasker, of Yale, had gone out with a twisted knee, and Princeton began to pile plays through his substitute, between Bean Gile and Hopman, with George Spears and sometimes Bob Tatnall carrying the ball. We went up to the Yale forty-yard line, lost the ball on a fumble and recovered it on another as the third quarter ended. A wild ripple of enthusiasm ran through the Princeton stands. For the first time we had the ball in their territory with first down and the possibility of tying the score. You could hear the tenseness growing all around you in the intermission; it was reflected in the excited movements of the cheer leaders and the uncontrollable patches of sound that leaped out of the crowd, catching up voices here and there and swelling to an undisciplined roar.

I saw Kimball dash out on the field and report to the referee and I thought Dolly was through at last, and was glad, but it was Bob Tatnall who came out, sobbing, and brought the Princeton side cheering to its feet.

With the first play pandemonium broke loose and continued to the end of the game. At intervals it would swoon away to a plaintive humming; then it would rise to the intensity of wind and rain and thunder, and beat across the twilight from one side of the Bowl to the other like the agony of lost souls swinging across a gap in space.

The teams lined up on Yale's forty-one yard line and Spears immediately dashed off tackle for six yards. Again he carried the ball — he was a wild unpopular Southerner with inspired moments — going through the same hole for five more and a first down. Dolly made two on a cross buck and Spears was held at center. It was third down, with the ball on Yale's twenty-nine-yard line and eight to go.

There was some confusion immediately behind me, some pushing and some voices; a man was sick or had fainted — I never discovered which. Then my view was blocked out for a minute by rising bodies and then everything went definitely crazy. Substitutes were jumping around down on the field, waving their blankets, the air was full of hats, cushions, coats and a deafening roar. Dolly Harlan, who had scarcely carried the ball a dozen times in his Princeton career, had picked a long pass from Kimball out of the air and, dragging a tackler, struggled five yards to the Yale goal.

VI

Some time later the game was over. There was a bad moment when Yale began another attack, but there was no scoring and Bob Tatnall's eleven had redeemed a mediocre season by tying a better Yale team. For us there was the feel of victory about it, the exaltation if not the jubilation, and the Yale faces issuing from out the Bowl wore the look of defeat. It would be a good year, after all — a good fight at the last, a tradition for next year's team. Our class — those of us who cared — would go out from Princeton without the taste of final defeat. The symbol stood — such as it was; the banners blew proudly in the wind. All that is childish? Find us something to fill the niche of victory.

I waited for Dolly outside the dressing rooms until almost everyone had come out; then, as he still lingered, I went in. Someone had given him a little brandy, and since he never drank much, it was swimming in his head.

“Have a chair, Jeff.” He smiled, broadly and happily. “Rubber! Tony! Get the distinguished guest a chair. He's an intellectual and he wants to interview one of the bone-headed athletes. Tony, this is Mr. Deering. They've got

everything in this funny Bowl but armchairs. I love this Bowl. I'm going to build here."

He fell silent, thinking about all things happily. He was content. I persuaded him to dress — there were people waiting for us. Then he insisted on walking out upon the field, dark now, and feeling the crumbled turf with his shoe.

He picked up a divot from a cleat and let it drop, laughed, looked distracted for a minute, and turned away.

With Tad Davis, Daisy Cary and another girl, we drove to New York. He sat beside Daisy and was silly, charming and attractive. For the first time since I'd known him he talked about the game naturally, even with a touch of vanity.

"For two years I was pretty good and I was always mentioned at the bottom of the column as being among those who played. This year I dropped three punts and slowed up every play till Bob Tatnall kept yelling at me, 'I don't see why they won't take you out!' But a pass not even aimed at me fell in my arms and I'll be in the headlines tomorrow."

He laughed. Somebody touched his foot; he winced and turned white.

"How did you hurt it?" Daisy asked. "In football?"

"I hurt it last summer," he said shortly.

"It must have been terrible to play on it."

"It was."

"I suppose you had to."

"That's the way sometimes."

They understood each other. They were both workers; sick or well, there were things that Daisy also had to do. She spoke of how, with a vile cold, she had had to fall into an open-air lagoon out in Hollywood the winter before.

"Six times — with a fever of a hundred and two. But the production was costing ten thousand dollars a day."

“Couldn’t they use a double?”

“They did whenever they could — I only fell in when it had to be done.”

She was eighteen and I compared her background of courage and independence and achievement, of politeness based upon the realities of cooperation, with that of most society girls I had known. There was no way in which she wasn’t inestimably their superior — if she had looked for a moment my way — but it was Dolly’s shining velvet eyes that signaled to her own.

“Can’t you go out with me tonight?” I heard her ask him.

He was sorry, but he had to refuse. Vienna was in New York; she was going to see him. I didn’t know, and Dolly didn’t know, whether there was to be a reconciliation or a good-by.

When she dropped Dolly and me at the Ritz there was real regret, that lingering form of it, in both their eyes.

“There’s a marvelous girl,” Dolly said. I agreed. “I’m going up to see Vienna. Will you get a room for us at the Madison?”

So I left him. What happened between him and Vienna I don’t know; he has never spoken about it to this day. But what happened later in the evening was brought to my attention by several surprised and even indignant witnesses to the event.

Dolly walked into the Ambassador Hotel about ten o’clock and went to the desk to ask for Miss Cary’s room. There was a crowd around the desk, among them some Yale or Princeton undergraduates from the game. Several of them had been celebrating and evidently one of them knew Daisy and had tried to get her room by phone. Dolly was abstracted and he must have made his way through them in a somewhat brusque way and asked to be connected with Miss Cary.

One young man stepped back, looked at him unpleasantly and said, “You seem to be in an awful hurry. Just who are you?”

There was one of those slight silent pauses and the people near the desk all turned to look. Something happened inside Dolly; he felt as if life had arranged his role to make possible this particular question — a question that now he had no choice but to answer. Still, there was silence. The small crowd waited.

“Why, I’m Dolly Harlan,” he said deliberately. “What do you think of that?”

It was quite outrageous. There was a pause and then a sudden little flurry and chorus: “Dolly Harlan! What? What did he say?”

The clerk had heard the name; he gave it as the phone was answered from Miss Cary’s room.

“Mr. Harlan’s to go right up, please.”

Dolly turned away, alone with his achievement, taking it for once to his breast. He found suddenly that he would not have it long so intimately; the memory would outlive the triumph and even the triumph would outlive the glow in his heart that was best of all. Tall and straight, an image of victory and pride, he moved across the lobby, oblivious alike to the fate ahead of him or the small chatter behind.

MAGNETISM

I

The Saturday Evening Post (3 March 1928)

The pleasant, ostentatious boulevard was lined at prosperous intervals with New England Colonial houses — without ship models in the hall. When the inhabitants moved out here the ship models had at last been given to the children. The next street was a complete exhibit of the Spanish-bungalow phase of West Coast architecture; while two streets over, the cylindrical windows and round towers of 1897 — melancholy antiques which sheltered swamis, yogis, fortune tellers, dressmakers, dancing teachers, art academies and chiropractors — looked down now upon brisk buses and trolley cars. A little walk around the block could, if you were feeling old that day, be a discouraging affair.

On the green flanks of the modern boulevard children, with their knees marked by the red stains of the mercurochrome era, played with toys with a purpose — beams that taught engineering, soldiers that taught manliness, and dolls that taught motherhood. When the dolls were so banged up that they stopped looking like real babies and began to look like dolls, the children developed affection for them. Everything in the vicinity — even the March sunlight — was new, fresh, hopeful and thin, as you would expect in a city that had tripled its population in fifteen years.

Among the very few domestics in sight that morning was a handsome young maid sweeping the steps of the biggest house on the street. She was a large, simple Mexican girl with the large, simple ambitions of the time and the locality, and she was already conscious of being a luxury — she received one hundred dollars a month in return for her personal liberty. Sweeping, Dolores kept an eye on the stairs inside, for Mr Hannaford's car was waiting and he would soon be coming down to breakfast. The problem came first this morning, however — the problem as to whether it was a duty or a favour when she helped the English nurse down the steps with the

perambulator. The English nurse always said 'Please', and 'Thanks very much', but Dolores hated her and would have liked, without any special excitement, to beat her insensible. Like most Latins under the stimulus of American life, she had irresistible impulses towards violence.

The nurse escaped, however. Her blue cape faded haughtily into the distance just as Mr Hannaford, who had come quietly downstairs, stepped into the space of the front door.

'Good morning.' He smiled at Dolores; he was young and extraordinarily handsome. Dolores tripped on the broom and fell off the stoop. George Hannaford hurried down the steps, reached her as she was getting to her feet cursing volubly in Mexican, just touched her arm with a helpful gesture and said, 'I hope you didn't hurt yourself.'

'Oh, no.'

'I'm afraid it was my fault; I'm afraid I startled you, coming out like that.'

His voice had real regret in it; his brow was knit with solicitude.

'Are you sure you're all right?'

'Aw, sure.'

'Didn't turn your ankle?'

'Aw, no.'

'I'm terribly sorry about it.'

'Aw, it wasn't your fault.'

He was still frowning as she went inside, and Dolores, who was not hurt and thought quickly, suddenly contemplated having a love affair with him. She looked at herself several times in the pantry mirror and stood close to him as she poured his coffee, but he read the paper and she saw that that was all for the morning.

Hannaford entered his car and drove to Jules Rennard's house. Jules was a French Canadian by birth, and George Hannaford's best friend; they were fond of each other and spent much time together. Both of them were

simple and dignified in their tastes and in their way of thinking, instinctively gentle, and in a world of the volatile and the bizarre found in each other a certain quiet solidity.

He found Jules at breakfast.

‘I want to fish for barracuda,’ said George abruptly. ‘When will you be free? I want to take the boat and go down to Lower California.’

Jules had dark circles under his eyes. Yesterday he had closed out the greatest problem of his life by settling with his ex-wife for two hundred thousand dollars. He had married too young, and the former slavey from the Quebec slums had taken to drugs upon her failure to rise with him. Yesterday, in the presence of lawyers, her final gesture had been to smash his finger with the base of a telephone. He was tired of women for a while and welcomed the suggestion of a fishing trip.

‘How’s the baby?’ he asked.

‘The baby’s fine.’

‘And Kay?’

‘Kay’s not herself, but I don’t pay any attention. What did you do to your hand?’

‘I’ll tell you another time. What’s the matter with Kay, George?’

‘Jealous.’

‘Of who?’

‘Helen Avery. It’s nothing. She’s not herself, that’s all.’ He got up. ‘I’m late,’ he said. ‘Let me know as soon as you’re free. Any time after Monday will suit me.’

George left and drove out by an interminable boulevard which narrowed into a long, winding concrete road and rose into the hilly country behind. Somewhere in the vast emptiness a group of buildings appeared, a barnlike structure, a row of offices, a large but quick restaurant and half a dozen small bungalows. The chauffeur dropped Hannaford at the main entrance.

He went in and passed through various enclosures, each marked off by swinging gates and inhabited by a stenographer.

‘Is anybody with Mr Schroeder?’ he asked, in front of a door lettered with that name.

‘No, Mr Hannaford.’

Simultaneously his eye fell on a young lady who was writing at a desk aside, and he lingered a moment.

‘Hello, Margaret,’ he said. ‘How are you, darling?’

A delicate, pale beauty looked up, frowning a little, still abstracted in her work. It was Miss Donovan, the script girl, a friend of many years.

‘Hello. Oh, George, I didn’t see you come in. Mr Douglas wants to work on the book sequence this afternoon.’

‘All right.’

‘These are the changes we decided on Thursday night.’ She smiled up at him and George wondered for the thousandth time why she had never gone into pictures.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Will initials do?’

‘Your initials look like George Harris’s.’

‘Very well, darling.’

As he finished, Pete Schroeder opened his door and beckoned him. ‘George, come here!’ he said with an air of excitement. ‘I want you to listen to some one on the phone.’

Hannaford went in.

‘Pick up the phone and say “Hello”,’ directed Schroeder. ‘Don’t say who you are.’

‘Hello,’ said Hannaford obediently.

‘Who is this?’ asked a girl’s voice.

Hannaford put his hand over the mouthpiece. 'What am I supposed to do?'

Schroeder snickered and Hannaford hesitated, smiling and suspicious.

'Who do you want to speak to?' he temporized into the phone.

'To George Hannaford, I want to speak to. Is this him?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, George; it's me.'

'Who?'

'Me — Gwen. I had an awful time finding you. They told me —'

'Gwen who?'

'Gwen — can't you hear? From San Francisco — last Thursday night.'

'I'm sorry,' objected George. 'Must be some mistake.'

'Is this George Hannaford?'

'Yes.'

The voice grew slightly tart: 'Well, this is Gwen Becker you spent last Thursday evening with in San Francisco. There's no use pretending you don't know who I am, because you do.'

Schroeder took the apparatus from George and hung up the receiver.

'Somebody has been doubling for me up in Frisco,' said Hannaford.

'So that's where you were Thursday night!'

'Those things aren't funny to me — not since that crazy Zeller girl. You can never convince them they've been sold because the man always looks something like you. What's new, Pete?'

'Let's go over to the stage and see.'

Together they walked out a back entrance, along a muddy walk, and opening a little door in the big blank wall of the studio building entered into its half darkness.

Here and there figures spotted the dim twilight, figures that turned up white faces to George Hannaford, like souls in purgatory watching the passage of a half-god through. Here and there were whispers and soft voices and, apparently from afar, the gentle tremolo of a small organ. Turning the corner made by some flats, they came upon the white crackling glow of a stage with two people motionless upon it.

An actor in evening clothes, his shirt front, collar and cuffs tinted a brilliant pink, made as though to get chairs for them, but they shook their heads and stood watching. For a long while nothing happened on the stage — no one moved. A row of lights went off with a savage hiss, went on again. The plaintive tap of a hammer begged admission to nowhere in the distance; a blue face appeared among the blinding lights above and called something unintelligible into the upper blackness. Then the silence was broken by a low clear voice from the stage:

‘If you want to know why I haven’t got stockings on, look in my dressing-room. I spoiled four pairs yesterday and two already this morning . . . This dress weighs six pounds.’

A man stepped out of the group of observers and regarded the girl’s brown legs; their lack of covering was scarcely distinguishable, but, in any event, her expression implied that she would do nothing about it. The lady was annoyed, and so intense was her personality that it had taken only a fractional flexing of her eyes to indicate the fact. She was a dark, pretty girl with a figure that would be full-blown sooner than she wished. She was just eighteen.

Had this been the week before, George Hannaford’s heart would have stood still. Their relationship had been in just that stage. He hadn’t said a word to Helen Avery that Kay could have objected to, but something had begun between them on the second day of this picture that Kay had felt in the air. Perhaps it had begun even earlier, for he had determined, when he saw Helen Avery’s first release, that she should play opposite him. Helen Avery’s

voice and the dropping of her eyes when she finished speaking, like a sort of exercise in control, fascinated him. He had felt that they both tolerated something, that each knew half of some secret about people and life, and that if they rushed towards each other there would be a romantic communion of almost unbelievable intensity. It was this element of promise and possibility that had haunted him for a fortnight and was now dying away.

Hannaford was thirty, and he was a moving-picture actor only through a series of accidents. After a year in a small technical college he had taken a summer job with an electric company, and his first appearance in a studio was in the role of repairing a bank of Klieg lights. In an emergency he played a small part and made good, but for fully a year after that he thought of it as a purely transitory episode in his life. At first much of it had offended him — the almost hysterical egotism and excitability hidden under an extremely thin veil of elaborate good-fellowship. It was only recently, with the advent of such men as Jules Rennard into pictures, that he began to see the possibilities of a decent and secure private life, much as his would have been as a successful engineer. At last his success felt solid beneath his feet.

He met Kay Tomkins at the old Griffith Studios at Mamaroneck and their marriage was a fresh, personal affair, removed from most stage marriages. Afterwards they had possessed each other completely, had been pointed to: 'Look, there's one couple in pictures who manage to stay together.' It would have taken something out of many people's lives — people who enjoyed a vicarious security in the contemplation of their marriage — if they hadn't stayed together, and their love was fortified by a certain effort to live up to that.

He held women off by a polite simplicity that underneath was hard and watchful; when he felt a certain current being turned on he became emotionally stupid. Kay expected and took much more from men, but she, too, had a careful thermometer against her heart. Until the other night, when she reproached him for being interested in Helen Avery, there had been an absolute minimum of jealousy between them.

George Hannaford was still absorbed in the thought of Helen Avery as he left the studio and walked towards his bungalow over the way. There was in his mind, first, a horror that anyone should come between him and Kay, and second, a regret that he no longer carried that possibility in the forefront of his mind. It had given him a tremendous pleasure, like the things that had happened to him during his first big success, before he was so 'made' that there was scarcely anything better ahead; it was something to take out and look at — a new and still mysterious joy. It hadn't been love, for he was critical of Helen Avery as he had never been critical of Kay. But his feeling of last week had been sharply significant and memorable, and he was restless, now that it had passed.

Working that afternoon, they were seldom together, but he was conscious of her and he knew that she was conscious of him.

She stood a long time with her back to him at one point, and when she turned at length, their eyes swept past each other's, brushing like bird wings. Simultaneously he saw they had gone far, in their way; it was well that he had drawn back. He was glad that someone came for her when the work was almost over.

Dressed, he returned to the office wing, stopping in for a moment to see Schroeder. No one answered his knock, and, turning the knob, he went in. Helen Avery was there alone.

Hannaford shut the door and they stared at each other. Her face was young, frightened. In a moment in which neither of them spoke, it was decided that they would have some of this out now. Almost thankfully he felt the warm sap of emotion flow out of his heart and course through his body.

'Helen!'

She murmured 'What?' in an awed voice.

'I feel terribly about this.' His voice was shaking.

Suddenly she began to cry; painful, audible sobs shook her. 'Have you got a handkerchief?' she said.

He gave her a handkerchief. At that moment there were steps outside. George opened the door halfway just in time to keep Schroeder from entering on the spectacle of her tears.

‘Nobody’s in,’ he said facetiously. For a moment longer he kept his shoulder against the door. Then he let it open slowly.

Outside in his limousine, he wondered how soon Jules would be ready to go fishing.

II

From the age of twelve Kay Tompkins had worn men like rings on every finger. Her face was round, young, pretty and strong; a strength accentuated by the responsive play of brows and lashes around her clear, glossy, hazel eyes. She was the daughter of a senator from a Western state and she hunted unsuccessfully for glamour through a small Western city until she was seventeen, when she ran away from home and went on the stage. She was one of those people who are famous far beyond their actual achievement.

There was that excitement about her that seemed to reflect the excitement of the world. While she was playing small parts in Ziegfeld shows she attended proms at Yale, and during a temporary venture into pictures she met George Hannaford, already a star of the new ‘natural’ type then just coming into vogue. In him she found what she had been seeking.

She was at present in what is known as a dangerous state. For six months she had been helpless and dependent entirely upon George, and now that her son was the property of a strict and possessive English nurse, Kay, free again, suddenly felt the need of proving herself attractive. She wanted things to be as they had been before the baby was thought of. Also she felt that lately George had taken her too much for granted; she had a strong instinct that he was interested in Helen Avery.

When George Hannaford came home that night he had minimized to himself their quarrel of the previous evening and was honestly surprised at her perfunctory greeting.

‘What’s the matter, Kay?’ he asked after a minute. ‘Is this going to be another night like last night?’

‘Do you know we’re going out tonight?’ she said, avoiding an answer.

‘Where?’

‘To Katherine Davis’. I didn’t know whether you’d want to go — ’

‘I’d like to go.’

‘I didn’t know whether you’d want to go. Arthur Busch said he’d stop for me.’

They dined in silence. Without any secret thoughts to dip into like a child into a jam jar, George felt restless, and at the same time was aware that the atmosphere was full of jealousy, suspicion and anger. Until recently they had preserved between them something precious that made their house one of the pleasantest in Hollywood to enter. Now suddenly it might be any house; he felt common and he felt unstable. He had come near to making something bright and precious into something cheap and unkind. With a sudden surge of emotion, he crossed the room and was about to put his arm around her when the doorbell rang. A moment later Dolores announced Mr Arthur Busch.

Busch was an ugly, popular little man, a continuity writer and lately a director. A few years ago they had been hero and heroine to him, and even now, when he was a person of some consequence in the picture world, he accepted with equanimity Kay’s use of him for such purposes as tonight’s. He had been in love with her for years, but, because his love seemed hopeless, it had never caused him much distress.

They went on to the party. It was a housewarming, with Hawaiian musicians in attendance, and the guests were largely of the old crowd. People who had been in the early Griffith pictures, even though they were scarcely thirty, were considered to be of the old crowd; they were different from

those coming along now, and they were conscious of it. They had a dignity and straightforwardness about them from the fact that they had worked in pictures before pictures were bathed in a golden haze of success. They were still rather humble before their amazing triumph, and thus, unlike the new generation, who took it all for granted, they were constantly in touch with reality. Half a dozen or so of the women were especially aware of being unique. No one had come along to fill their places; here and there a pretty face had caught the public imagination for a year, but those of the old crowd were already legends, ageless and disembodied. With all this, they were still young enough to believe that they would go forever.

George and Kay were greeted affectionately: people moved over and made place for them. The Hawaiians performed and the Duncan sisters sang at the piano. From the moment George saw who was here he guessed that Helen Avery would be here, too, and the fact annoyed him. It was not appropriate that she should be part of this gathering through which he and Kay had moved familiarly and tranquilly for years.

He saw her first when someone opened the swinging door to the kitchen, and when, a little later, she came out and their eyes met, he knew absolutely that he didn't love her. He went up to speak to her, and at her first words he saw something had happened to her, too, that had dissipated the mood of the afternoon. She had got a big part.

'And I'm in a daze!' she cried happily. 'I didn't think there was a chance and I've thought of nothing else since I read the book a year ago.'

'It's wonderful. I'm awfully glad.'

He had the feeling, though, that he should look at her with a certain regret; one couldn't jump from such a scene as this afternoon to a plane of casual friendly interest. Suddenly she began to laugh.

'Oh, we're such actors, George — you and I.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know what I mean.'

'I don't.'

‘Oh, yes, you do. You did this afternoon. It was a pity we didn’t have a camera.’

Short of declaring then and there that he loved her, there was absolutely nothing more to say. He grinned acquiescently. A group formed around them and absorbed them, and George, feeling that the evening had settled something, began to think about going home. An excited and sentimental elderly lady — someone’s mother — came up and began telling him how much she believed in him, and he was polite and charming to her, as only he could be, for half an hour. Then he went to Kay, who had been sitting with Arthur Busch all evening, and suggested that they go.

She looked up unwillingly. She had had several highballs and the fact was mildly apparent. She did not want to go, but she got up after a mild argument and George went upstairs for his coat. When he came down Katherine Davis told him that Kay had already gone out to the car.

The crowd had increased; to avoid a general good-night he went out through the sun-parlour door to the lawn; less than twenty feet away from him he saw the figures of Kay and Arthur Busch against a bright street lamp; they were standing close together and staring into each other’s eyes. He saw that they were holding hands.

After the first start of surprise George instinctively turned about, retraced his steps, hurried through the room he had just left, and came noisily out the front door. But Kay and Arthur Busch were still standing close together, and it was lingeringly and with abstracted eyes that they turned around finally and saw him. Then both of them seemed to make an effort; they drew apart as if it was a physical ordeal. George said good-bye to Arthur Busch with special cordiality, and in a moment he and Kay were driving homeward through the clear California night.

He said nothing, Kay said nothing. He was incredulous. He suspected that Kay had kissed a man here and there, but he had never seen it happen or given it any thought. This was different; there had been an element of tenderness in it and there was something veiled and remote in Kay’s eyes that he had never seen there before.

Without having spoken, they entered the house; Kay stopped by the library door and looked in.

‘There’s someone there,’ she said, and she added without interest: ‘I’m going upstairs. Good night.’

As she ran up the stairs the person in the library stepped out into the hall.

‘Mr Hannaford — ’

He was a pale and hard young man; his face was vaguely familiar, but George didn’t remember where he had seen it before.

‘Mr Hannaford?’ said the young man. ‘I recognize you from your pictures.’ He looked at George, obviously a little awed.

‘What can I do for you?’

‘Well, will you come in here?’

‘What is it? I don’t know who you are.’

‘My name is Donovan. I’m Margaret Donovan’s brother.’ His face toughened a little.

‘Is anything the matter?’

Donovan made a motion towards the door. ‘Come in here.’ His voice was confident now, almost threatening.

George hesitated, then he walked into the library. Donovan followed and stood across the table from him, his legs apart, his hands in his pockets.

‘Hannaford,’ he said, in the tone of a man trying to whip himself up to anger, ‘Margaret wants fifty thousand dollars.’

‘What the devil are you talking about?’ exclaimed George incredulously.

‘Margaret wants fifty thousand dollars,’ repeated Donovan.

‘You’re Margaret Donovan’s brother?’

‘I am.’

'I don't believe it.' But he saw the resemblance now. 'Does Margaret know you're here?'

'She sent me here. She'll hand over those two letters for fifty thousand, and no questions asked.'

'What letters?' George chuckled irresistibly. 'This is some joke of Schroeder's, isn't it?'

'This ain't a joke, Hannaford. I mean the letters you signed your name to this afternoon.'

III

An hour later George went upstairs in a daze. The clumsiness of the affair was at once outrageous and astounding. That a friend of seven years should suddenly request his signature on papers that were not what they were purported to be made all his surroundings seem diaphanous and insecure. Even now the design engrossed him more than a defence against it, and he tried to re-create the steps by which Margaret had arrived at this act of recklessness or despair.

She had served as a script girl in various studios and for various directors for ten years; earning first twenty, now a hundred dollars a week. She was lovely-looking and she was intelligent; at any moment in those years she might have asked for a screen test, but some quality of initiative or ambition had been lacking. Not a few times had her opinion made or broken incipient careers. Still she waited at directors' elbows, increasingly aware that the years were slipping away.

That she had picked George as a victim amazed him most of all. Once, during the year before his marriage, there had been a momentary warmth; he had taken her to a Mayfair ball, and he remembered that he had kissed her going home that night in the car. The flirtation trailed along hesitatingly for a week. Before it could develop into anything serious he had gone East and met Kay.

Young Donovan had shown him a carbon of the letters he had signed.

They were written on the typewriter that he kept in his bungalow at the studio, and they were carefully and convincingly worded. They purported to be love letters, asserting that he was Margaret Donovan's lover, that he wanted to marry her, and that for that reason he was about to arrange a divorce. It was incredible. Someone must have seen him sign them that morning; someone must have heard her say: 'Your initials are like Mr Harris's.'

George was tired. He was training for a screen football game to be played next week, with the Southern California varsity as extras, and he was used to regular hours. In the middle of a confused and despairing sequence of thought about Margaret Donovan and Kay, he suddenly yawned. Mechanically he went upstairs, undressed and got into bed.

Just before dawn Kay came to him in the garden. There was a river that flowed past it now, and boats faintly lit with green and yellow lights moved slowly, remotely by. A gentle starlight fell like rain upon the dark, sleeping face of the world, upon the black mysterious bosoms of the trees, the tranquil gleaming water and the farther shore.

The grass was damp, and Kay came to him on hurried feet; her thin slippers were drenched with dew. She stood upon his shoes, nestling close to him, and held up her face as one shows a book open at a page.

'Think how you love me,' she whispered. 'I don't ask you to love me always like this, but I ask you to remember.'

'You'll always be like this to me.'

'Oh no; but promise me you'll remember.' Her tears were falling. 'I'll be different, but somewhere lost inside me there'll always be the person I am tonight.'

The scene dissolved slowly but George struggled into consciousness. He sat up in bed; it was morning. In the yard outside he heard the nurse instructing his son in the niceties of behaviour for two-month-old babies. From the yard next door a small boy shouted mysteriously: 'Who let that barrier through on me?'

Still in his pyjamas, George went to the phone and called his lawyers. Then he rang for his man, and while he was being shaved a certain order evolved from the chaos of the night before. First, he must deal with Margaret Donovan; second, he must keep the matter from Kay, who in her present state might believe anything; and third, he must fix things up with Kay. The last seemed the most important of all.

As he finished dressing he heard the phone ring downstairs and, with an instinct of danger, picked up the receiver.

‘Hello . . . Oh, yes.’ Looking up, he saw that both his doors were closed. ‘Good morning, Helen . . . It’s all right, Dolores. I’m taking it up here.’ He waited till he heard the receiver click downstairs.

‘How are you this morning, Helen?’

‘George, I called up about last night. I can’t tell you how sorry I am.’

‘Sorry? Why are you sorry?’

‘For treating you like that. I don’t know what was in me, George. I didn’t sleep all night thinking how terrible I’d been.’

A new disorder established itself in George’s already littered mind.

‘Don’t be silly,’ he said. To his despair he heard his own voice run on: ‘For a minute I didn’t understand, Helen. Then I thought it was better so.’

‘Oh, George,’ came her voice after a moment, very low.

Another silence. He began to put in a cuff button.

‘I had to call up,’ she said after a moment. ‘I couldn’t leave things like that.’

The cuff button dropped to the floor; he stooped to pick it up, and then said ‘Helen!’ urgently into the mouthpiece to cover the fact that he had momentarily been away.

‘What, George?’

At this moment the hall door opened and Kay, radiating a faint distaste, came into the room. She hesitated.

'Are you busy?'

'It's all right.' He stared into the mouthpiece for a moment.

'Well, good-bye,' he muttered abruptly and hung up the receiver. He turned to Kay: 'Good morning.'

'I didn't mean to disturb you,' she said distantly.

'You didn't disturb me.' He hesitated. 'That was Helen Avery.'

'It doesn't concern me who it was. I came to ask you if we're going to the Coconut Grove tonight.'

'Sit down, Kay.'

'I don't want to talk.'

'Sit down a minute,' he said impatiently. She sat down. 'How long are you going to keep this up?' he demanded.

'I'm not keeping up anything. We're simply through, George, and you know it as well as I do.'

'That's absurd,' he said. 'Why, a week ago —'

'It doesn't matter. We've been getting nearer to this for months, and now it's over.'

'You mean you don't love me?' He was not particularly alarmed. They had been through scenes like this before.

'I don't know. I suppose I'll always love you in a way.' Suddenly she began to sob. 'Oh, it's all so sad. He's cared for me so long.'

George stared at her. Face to face with what was apparently a real emotion, he had no words of any kind. She was not angry, not threatening or pretending, not thinking about him at all, but concerned entirely with her emotions towards another man.

'What is it?' he cried. 'Are you trying to tell me you're in love with this man?'

'I don't know,' she said helplessly.

He took a step towards her, then went to the bed and lay down on it, staring in misery at the ceiling. After a while a maid knocked to say that Mr Busch and Mr Castle, George's lawyer, were below. The fact carried no meaning to him. Kay went into her room and he got up and followed her.

'Let's send word we're out,' he said. 'We can go away somewhere and talk this over.'

'I don't want to go away.'

She was already away, growing more mysterious and remote with every minute. The things on her dressing-table were the property of a stranger.

He began to speak in a dry, hurried voice. 'If you're still thinking about Helen Avery, it's nonsense. I've never given a damn for anybody but you.'

They went downstairs and into the living-room. It was nearly noon — another bright emotionless California day. George saw that Arthur Busch's ugly face in the sunshine was wan and white; he took a step towards George and then stopped, as if he were waiting for something — a challenge, a reproach, a blow.

In a flash the scene that would presently take place ran itself off in George's mind. He saw himself moving through the scene, saw his part, an infinite choice of parts, but in every one of them Kay would be against him and with Arthur Busch. And suddenly he rejected them all.

'I hope you'll excuse me,' he said quickly to Mr Castle. 'I called you up because a script girl named Margaret Donovan wants fifty thousand dollars for some letters she claims I wrote her. Of course the whole thing is — ' He broke off. It didn't matter. 'I'll come to see you tomorrow.' He walked up to Kay and Arthur, so that only they could hear.

'I don't know about you two — what you want to do. But leave me out of it; you haven't any right to inflict any of it on me, for after all it's not my fault. I'm not going to be mixed up in your emotions.'

He turned and went out. His car was before the door and he said 'Go to Santa Monica' because it was the first name that popped into his head. The car drove off into the everlasting hazeless sunlight.

He rode for three hours, past Santa Monica and then along towards Long Beach by another road. As if it were something he saw out of the corner of his eye and with but a fragment of his attention, he imagined Kay and Arthur Busch progressing through the afternoon. Kay would cry a great deal and the situation would seem harsh and unexpected to them at first, but the tender closing of the day would draw them together. They would turn inevitably towards each other and he would slip more and more into the position of the enemy outside.

Kay had wanted him to get down in the dirt and dust of a scene and scramble for her. Not he; he hated scenes. Once he stooped to compete with Arthur Busch in pulling at Kay's heart, he would never be the same to himself. He would always be a little like Arthur Busch; they would always have that in common, like a shameful secret. There was little of the theatre about George; the millions before whose eyes the moods and changes of his face had flickered during ten years had not been deceived about that. From the moment when, as a boy of twenty, his handsome eyes had gazed off into the imaginary distance of a Griffith Western, his audience had been really watching the progress of a straightforward, slow-thinking, romantic man through an accidentally glamorous life.

His fault was that he had felt safe too soon. He realized suddenly that the two Fairbankses, in sitting side by side at table, were not keeping up a pose. They were giving hostages to fate. This was perhaps the most bizarre community in the rich, wild, bored empire, and for a marriage to succeed here, you must expect nothing or you must be always together. For a moment his glance had wavered from Kay and he stumbled blindly into disaster.

As he was thinking this and wondering where he would go and what he should do, he passed an apartment house that jolted his memory. It was on the outskirts of town, a pink horror built to represent something, somewhere, so cheaply and sketchily that whatever it copied the architect must have long since forgotten. And suddenly George remembered that he had once called for Margaret Donovan here the night of a Mayfair dance.

'Stop at this apartment!' he called through the speaking-tube.

He went in. The negro elevator boy stared open-mouthed at him as they rose in the cage. Margaret Donovan herself opened the door.

When she saw him she shrank away with a little cry. As he entered and closed the door she retreated before him into the front room. George followed.

It was twilight outside and the apartment was dusky and sad. The last light fell softly on the standardized furniture and the great gallery of signed photographs of moving-picture people that covered one wall. Her face was white, and as she stared at him she began nervously wringing her hands.

‘What’s this nonsense, Margaret?’ George said, trying to keep any reproach out of his voice. ‘Do you need money that bad?’

She shook her head vaguely. Her eyes were still fixed on him with a sort of terror; George looked at the floor.

‘I suppose this was your brother’s idea. At least I can’t believe you’d be so stupid.’ He looked up, trying to preserve the brusque masterly attitude of one talking to a naughty child, but at the sight of her face every emotion except pity left him. ‘I’m a little tired. Do you mind if I sit down?’

‘No.’

‘I’m a little confused today,’ said George after a minute. ‘People seem to have it in for me today.’

‘Why, I thought’ — her voice became ironic in mid-sentence — ‘I thought everybody loved you, George.’

‘They don’t.’

‘Only me?’

‘Yes,’ he said abstractedly.

‘I wish it had been only me. But then, of course, you wouldn’t have been you.’

Suddenly he realized that she meant what she was saying.

‘That’s just nonsense.’

‘At least you’re here,’ Margaret went on. ‘I suppose I ought to be glad of that. And I am. I most decidedly am. I’ve often thought of you sitting in that chair, just at this time when it was almost dark. I used to make up little one-act plays about what would happen then. Would you like to hear one of them? I’ll have to begin by coming over and sitting on the floor at your feet.’

Annoyed and yet spellbound, George kept trying desperately to seize upon a word or mood that would turn the subject.

‘I’ve seen you sitting there so often that you don’t look a bit more real than your ghost. Except that your hat has squashed your beautiful hair down on one side and you’ve got dark circles or dirt under your eyes. You look white, too, George. Probably you were on a party last night.’

‘I was. And I found your brother waiting for me when I got home.’

‘He’s a good waiter, George. He’s just out of San Quentin prison, where he’s been waiting the last six years.’

‘Then it was his idea?’

‘We cooked it up together. I was going to China on my share.’

‘Why was I the victim?’

‘That seemed to make it realer. Once I thought you were going to fall in love with me five years ago.’

The bravado suddenly melted out of her voice and it was still light enough to see that her mouth was quivering.

‘I’ve loved you for years,’ she said — ‘since the first day you came West and walked into the old Realart Studio. You were so brave about people, George. Whoever it was, you walked right up to them and tore something aside as if it was in your way and began to know them. I tried to make love to you, just like the rest, but it was difficult. You drew people right up close to you and held them there, not able to move either way.’

‘This is all entirely imaginary,’ said George, frowning uncomfortably, ‘and I can’t control —’

‘No, I know. You can’t control charm. It’s simply got to be used. You’ve got to keep your hand in if you have it, and go through life attaching people to you that you don’t want. I don’t blame you. If you only hadn’t kissed me the night of the Mayfair dance. I suppose it was the champagne.’

George felt as if a band which had been playing for a long time in the distance had suddenly moved up and taken a station beneath his window. He had always been conscious that things like this were going on around him. Now that he thought of it, he had always been conscious that Margaret loved him, but the faint music of these emotions in his ear had seemed to bear no relation to actual life. They were phantoms that he had conjured up out of nothing; he had never imagined their actual incarnations. At his wish they should die inconsequently away.

‘You can’t imagine what it’s been like,’ Margaret continued after a minute. ‘Things you’ve just said and forgotten, I’ve put myself asleep night after night remembering — trying to squeeze something more out of them. After that night you took me to the Mayfair other men didn’t exist for me any more. And there were others, you know — lots of them. But I’d see you walking along somewhere about the lot, looking at the ground and smiling a little, as if something very amusing had just happened to you, the way you do. And I’d pass you and you’d look up and really smile: “Hello, darling!” “Hello, darling” and my heart would turn over. That would happen four times a day.’

George stood up and she, too, jumped up quickly.

‘Oh, I’ve bored you,’ she cried softly. ‘I might have known I’d bore you. You want to go home. Let’s see — is there anything else? Oh, yes; you might as well have those letters.’

Taking them out of a desk, she took them to a window and identified them by a rift of lamplight.

‘They’re really beautiful letters. They’d do you credit. I suppose it was pretty stupid, as you say, but it ought to teach you a lesson about — about signing

things, or something.' She tore the letters small and threw them in the wastebasket: 'Now go on,' she said.

'Why must I go now?'

For the third time in twenty-four hours sad and uncontrollable tears confronted him.

'Please go!' she cried angrily — 'or stay if you like. I'm yours for the asking. You know it. You can have any woman you want in the world by just raising your hand. Would I amuse you?'

'Margaret — '

'Oh, go on then.' She sat down and turned her face away. 'After all you'll begin to look silly in a minute. You wouldn't like that, would you? So get out.'

George stood there helpless, trying to put himself in her place and say something that wouldn't be priggish, but nothing came.

He tried to force down his personal distress, his discomfort, his vague feeling of scorn, ignorant of the fact that she was watching him and understanding it all and loving the struggle in his face. Suddenly his own nerves gave way under the strain of the past twenty-four hours and he felt his eyes grow dim and his throat tighten. He shook his head helplessly. Then he turned away — still not knowing that she was watching him and loving him until she thought her heart would burst with it — and went out to the door.

IV

The car stopped before his house, dark save for small lights in the nursery and the lower hall. He heard the telephone ringing but when he answered it, inside, there was no one on the line. For a few minutes he wandered about in the darkness, moving from chair to chair and going to the window to stare out into the opposite emptiness of the night.

It was strange to be alone, to feel alone. In his overwrought condition the fact was not unpleasant. As the trouble of last night had made Helen Avery infinitely remote, so his talk with Margaret had acted as a catharsis to his own personal misery. It would swing back upon him presently, he knew, but for a moment his mind was too tired to remember, to imagine or to care.

Half an hour passed. He saw Dolores issue from the kitchen, take the paper from the front steps and carry it back to the kitchen for a preliminary inspection. With a vague idea of packing his grip, he went upstairs. He opened the door of Kay's room and found her lying down.

For a moment he didn't speak, but moved around the bathroom between. Then he went into her room and switched on the lights.

'What's the matter?' he asked casually. 'Aren't you feeling well?'

'I've been trying to get some sleep,' she said. 'George, do you think that girl's gone crazy?'

'What girl?'

'Margaret Donovan. I've never heard of anything so terrible in my life.'

For a moment he thought that there had been some new development.

'Fifty thousand dollars!' she cried indignantly. 'Why, I wouldn't give it to her even if it were true. She ought to be sent to jail.'

'Oh, it's not so terrible as that,' he said. 'She has a brother who's a pretty bad egg and it was his idea.'

'She's capable of anything,' Kay said solemnly. 'And you're just a fool if you don't see it. I've never liked her. She has dirty hair.'

'Well, what of it?' he demanded impatiently, and added: 'Where's Arthur Busch?'

'He went home right after lunch. Or rather I sent him home.'

'You decided you were not in love with him?'

She looked up almost in surprise. 'In love with him? Oh, you mean this morning. I was just mad at you; you ought to have known that. I was a little sorry for him last night, but I guess it was the highballs.'

'Well, what did you mean when you — ' He broke off. Wherever he turned he found a muddle, and he resolutely determined not to think.

'My heavens!' exclaimed Kay. 'Fifty thousand dollars!'

'Oh, drop it. She tore up the letters — she wrote them herself — and everything's all right.'

'George.'

'Yes.'

'Of course Douglas will fire her right away.'

'Of course he won't. He won't know anything about it.'

'You mean to say you're not going to let her go? After this?'

He jumped up. 'Do you suppose she thought that?' he cried.

'Thought what?'

'That I'd have them let her go?'

'You certainly ought to.'

He looked hastily through the phone book for her name.

'Oxford — ' he called.

After an unusually long time the switchboard operator answered: 'Bourbon Apartments.'

'Miss Margaret Donovan, please.'

'Why — ' The operator's voice broke off. 'If you'll just wait a minute, please.' He held the line; the minute passed, then another. Then the operator's voice: 'I couldn't talk to you then. Miss Donovan has had an accident. She's

shot herself. When you called they were taking her through the lobby to St Catherine's Hospital.'

'Is she — is it serious?' George demanded frantically.

'They thought so at first, but now they think she'll be all right. They're going to probe for the bullet.'

'Thank you.'

He got up and turned to Kay.

'She's tried to kill herself,' he said in a strained voice. 'I'll have to go around to the hospital. I was pretty clumsy this afternoon and I think I'm partly responsible for this.'

'George,' said Kay suddenly.

'What?'

'Don't you think it's sort of unwise to get mixed up in this? People might say —'

'I don't give a damn what they say,' he answered roughly.

He went to his room and automatically began to prepare for going out. Catching sight of his face in the mirror, he closed his eyes with a sudden exclamation of distaste, and abandoned the intention of brushing his hair.

'George,' Kay called from the next room, 'I love you.'

'I love you too.'

'Jules Rennard called up. Something about barracuda fishing. Don't you think it would be fun to get up a party? Men and girls both?'

'Somehow the idea doesn't appeal to me. The whole idea of barracuda fishing —'

The phone rang below and he started. Dolores was answering it.

It was a lady who had already called twice today.

'Is Mr Hannaford in?'

'No,' said Dolores promptly. She stuck out her tongue and hung up the phone just as George Hannaford came downstairs. She helped him into his coat, standing as close as she could to him, opened the door and followed a little way out on the porch.

'Meester Hannaford,' she said suddenly, 'that Miss Avery she call up five-six times today. I tell her you out and say nothing to missus.'

'What?' He stared at her, wondering how much she knew about his affairs.

'She call up just now and I say you out.'

'All right,' he said absently.

'Meester Hannaford.'

'Yes, Dolores.'

'I deedn't hurt myself thees morning when I fell off the porch.'

'That's fine. Good night, Dolores.'

'Good night, Meester Hannaford.'

George smiled at her, faintly, fleetingly, tearing a veil from between them, unconsciously promising her a possible admission to the thousand delights and wonders that only he knew and could command. Then he went to his waiting car and Dolores, sitting down on the stoop, rubbed her hands together in a gesture that might have expressed either ecstasy or strangulation, and watched the rising of the thin, pale California moon.

THE SCANDAL DETECTIVES

I

The Saturday Evening Post (28 April, 1928)

It was a hot afternoon in May and Mrs. Buckner thought that a pitcher of fruit lemonade might prevent the boys from filling up on ice cream at the drug store. She belonged to that generation, since retired, upon whom the great revolution in American family life was to be visited; but at that time she believed that her children's relation to her was as much as hers had been to her parents, for this was more than twenty years ago.

Some generations are close to those that succeed them; between others the gap is infinite and unbridgeable. Mrs. Buckner — a woman of character, a member of Society in a large Middle-Western city — carrying a pitcher of fruit lemonade through her own spacious back yard, was progressing across a hundred years. Her own thoughts would have been comprehensible to her great-grandmother; what was happening in a room above the stable would have been entirely unintelligible to them both. In what had once served as the coachman's sleeping apartment, her son and a friend were not behaving in a normal manner, but were, so to speak, experimenting in a void. They were making the first tentative combinations of the ideas and materials they found ready at their hand — ideas destined to become, in future years, first articulate, then startling and finally commonplace. At the moment when she called up to them they were sitting with disarming quiet upon the still unhatched eggs of the mid-twentieth century.

Riply Buckner descended the ladder and took the lemonade. Basil Duke Lee looked abstractedly down at the transaction and said, "Thank you very much, Mrs. Buckner."

"Are you sure it isn't too hot up there?"

"No, Mrs. Buckner. It's fine."

It was stifling; but they were scarcely conscious of the heat, and they drank two tall glasses each of the lemonade without knowing that they were thirsty. Concealed beneath a sawed-out trapdoor from which they presently took it was a composition book bound in imitation red leather which currently absorbed much of their attention. On its first page was inscribed, if you penetrated the secret of the lemon-juice ink: "The Book of Scandal, written by Riply Buckner, Jr., and Basil D. Lee, Scandal Detectives."

In this book they had set down such deviations from rectitude on the part of their fellow citizens as had reached their ears. Some of these false steps were those of grizzled men, stories that had become traditions in the city and were embalmed in the composition book by virtue of indiscreet exhumations at family dinner tables. Others were the more exciting sins, confirmed or merely rumored, of boys and girls their own age. Some of the entries would have been read by adults with bewilderment, others might have inspired wrath, and there were three or four contemporary reports that would have prostrated the parents of the involved children with horror and despair.

One of the mildest items, a matter they had hesitated about setting down, though it had shocked them only last year, was: "Elwood Leaming has been to the Burlesque Show three or four times at the Star."

Another, and perhaps their favorite, because of its uniqueness, set forth that "H. P. Cramner committed some theft in the East he could be imprisoned for and had to come here" — H. P. Cramner being now one of the oldest and "most substantial" citizens of the city.

The single defect in the book was that it could only be enjoyed with the aid of the imagination, for the invisible ink must keep its secrets until that day when, the pages being held close to the fire, the items would appear. Close inspection was necessary to determine which pages had been used — already a rather grave charge against a certain couple had been superimposed upon the dismal facts that Mrs. R. B. Cary had consumption and that her son, Walter Cary, had been expelled from Pawling School. The purpose of the work as a whole was not blackmail. It was treasured against the time when its protagonists should "do something" to Basil and Riply. Its

possession gave them a sense of power. Basil, for instance, had never seen Mr. H. P. Cramner make a single threatening gesture in Basil's direction but let him even hint that he was going to do something to Basil, and there preserved against him was the record of his past.

It is only fair to say that at this point the book passes entirely out of this story. Years later a janitor discovered it beneath the trapdoor, and finding it apparently blank, gave it to his little girl; so the misdeeds of Elwood Leaming and H. P. Cramner were definitely entombed at last beneath a fair copy of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The book was Basil's idea. He was more the imaginative and in most ways the stronger of the two. He was a shining-eyed, brown-haired boy of fourteen, rather small as yet, and bright and lazy at school. His favorite character in fiction was Arsène Lupin, the gentleman burglar, a romantic phenomenon lately imported from Europe and much admired in the first bored decades of the century.

Riply Buckner, also in short pants, contributed to the partnership a breathless practicality. His mind waited upon Basil's imagination like a hair trigger and no scheme was too fantastic for his immediate "Let's do it!" Since the school's third baseball team, on which they had been pitcher and catcher, decomposed after an unfortunate April season, they had spent their afternoons struggling to evolve a way of life which should measure up to the mysterious energies fermenting inside them. In the cache beneath the trapdoor were some "slouch" hats and bandanna handkerchiefs, some loaded dice, half of a pair of handcuffs, a rope ladder of a tenuous crochet persuasion for rear-window escapes into the alley, and a make-up box containing two old theatrical wigs and crêpe hair of various colors — all to be used when they decided what illegal enterprises to undertake.

Their lemonades finished, they lit Home Runs and held a desultory conversation which touched on crime, professional baseball, sex and the local stock company. This broke off at the sound of footsteps and familiar voices in the adjoining alley.

From the window, they investigated. The voices belonged to Margaret Torrence, Imogene Bissel and Connie Davies, who were cutting through the

alley from Imogene's back yard to Connie's at the end of the block. The young ladies were thirteen, twelve and thirteen years old respectively, and they considered themselves alone, for in time to their march they were rendering a mildly daring parody in a sort of whispering giggle and coming out strongly on the finale: "Oh, my *dar-ling Clemon-tine.*"

Basil and Riply leaned together from the window, then remembering their undershirts sank down behind the sill.

"We heard you!" they cried together.

The girls stopped and laughed. Margaret Torrence chewed exaggeratedly to indicate gum, and gum with a purpose. Basil immediately understood.

"Whereabouts?" he demanded.

"Over at Imogene's house."

They had been at Mrs. Bissel's cigarettes. The implied recklessness of their mood interested and excited the two boys and they prolonged the conversation. Connie Davies had been Riply's girl during dancing-school term; Margaret Torrence had played a part in Basil's recent past; Imogene Bissel was just back from a year in Europe. During the last month neither Basil nor Riply had thought about girls, and, thus refreshed, they become conscious that the centre of the world had shifted suddenly from the secret room to the little group outside.

"Come on up," they suggested.

"Come on out. Come on down to the Whartons' yard."

"All right."

Barely remembering to put away the Scandal Book and the box of disguises, the two boys hurried out, mounted their bicycles and rode up the alley.

The Whartons' own children had long grown up, but their yard was still one of those predestined places where young people gather in the afternoon. It had many advantages. It was large, open to other yards on both sides, and it could be entered upon skates or bicycles from the street. It contained an old seesaw, a swing and a pair of flying rings; but it had been a rendezvous

before these were put up, for it had a child's quality — the thing that makes young people huddle inextricably on uncomfortable steps and desert the houses of their friends to herd on the obscure premises of “people nobody knows.” The Whartons' yard had long been a happy compromise; there were deep shadows there all day long and ever something vague in bloom, and patient dogs around, and brown spots worn bare by countless circling wheels and dragging feet. In sordid poverty, below the bluff two hundred feet away, lived the “micks” — they had merely inherited the name, for they were now largely of Scandinavian descent — and when other amusements palled, a few cries were enough to bring a gang of them swarming up the hill, to be faced if numbers promised well, to be fled from into convenient houses if things went the other way.

It was five o'clock and there was a small crowd gathered there for that soft and romantic time before supper — a time surpassed only by the interim of summer dusk thereafter. Basil and Riply rode their bicycles around abstractedly, in and out of trees, resting now and then with a hand on someone's shoulder, shading their eyes from the glow of the late sun that, like youth itself, is too strong to face directly, but must be kept down to an undertone until it dies away.

Basil rode over to Imogene Bissel and balanced idly on his wheel before her. Something in his face then must have attracted her, for she looked up at him, looked at him really, and slowly smiled. She was to be a beauty and belle of many proms in a few years. Now her large brown eyes and large beautifully shaped mouth and the high flush over her thin cheek bones made her face gnome-like and offended those who wanted a child to look like a child. For a moment Basil was granted an insight into the future, and the spell of her vitality crept over him suddenly. For the first time in his life he realized a girl completely as something opposite and complementary to him, and he was subject to a warm chill of mingled pleasure and pain. It was a definite experience and he was immediately conscious of it. The summer afternoon became lost in her suddenly — the soft air, the shadowy hedges and banks of flowers, the orange sunlight, the laughter and voices, the tinkle of a piano over the way — the odor left all these things and went into Imogene's face as she sat there looking up at him with a smile.

For a moment it was too much for him. He let it go, incapable of exploiting it until he had digested it alone. He rode around fast in a circle on his bicycle, passing near Imogene without looking at her. When he came back after a while and asked if he could walk home with her, she had forgotten the moment, if it had ever existed for her, and was almost surprised. With Basil wheeling his bicycle beside her, they started down the street.

“Can you come out tonight?” he asked eagerly. “There’ll probably be a bunch in the Whartons’ yard.”

“I’ll ask mother.”

“I’ll telephone you. I don’t want to go unless you’ll be there.”

“Why?” She smiled at him again, encouraging him.

“Because I don’t want to.”

“But why don’t you want to?”

“Listen,” he said quickly, “what boys do you like better than me?”

“Nobody. I like you and Hubert Blair best.”

Basil felt no jealousy at the coupling of this name with his. There was nothing to do about Hubert Blair but accept him philosophically, as other boys did when dissecting the hearts of other girls.

“I like you better than anybody,” he said deliriously.

The weight of the pink dappled sky above him was not endurable. He was plunging along through air of ineffable loveliness while warm freshets sprang up in his blood and he turned them, and with them his whole life, like a stream toward this girl.

They reached the carriage door at the side of her house.

“Can’t you come in, Basil?”

“No.” He saw immediately that that was a mistake, but it was said now. The intangible present had eluded him. Still he lingered. “Do you want my school ring?”

“Yes, if you want to give it to me.”

“I’ll give it to you tonight.” His voice shook slightly as he added, “That is, I’ll trade.”

“What for?”

“Something.”

“What?” Her color spread; she knew.

“You know. Will you trade?”

Imogene looked around uneasily. In the honey-sweet silence that had gathered around the porch, Basil held his breath. “You’re awful,” she whispered. “Maybe. . . . Good-by.”

II

It was the best hour of the day now and Basil was terribly happy. This summer he and his mother and sister were going to the lakes and next fall he was starting away to school. Then he would go to Yale and be a great athlete, and after that — if his two dreams had fitted onto each other chronologically instead of existing independently side by side — he was due to become a gentleman burglar. Everything was fine. He had so many alluring things to think about that it was hard to fall asleep at night.

That he was now crazy about Imogene Bissel was not a distraction, but another good thing. It had as yet no poignancy, only a brilliant and dynamic excitement that was bearing him along toward the Whartons’ yard through the May twilight.

He wore his favorite clothes — white duck knickerbockers, pepper-and-salt Norfolk jacket, a Belmont collar and a gray knitted tie. With his black hair wet and shining, he made a handsome little figure as he turned in upon the familiar but now re-enchanted lawn and joined the voices in the gathering darkness. Three or four girls who lived in neighboring houses were present, and almost twice as many boys; and a slightly older group adorning the side veranda made a warm, remote nucleus against the lamps of the house and

contributed occasional mysterious ripples of laughter to the already overburdened night.

Moving from shadowy group to group, Basil ascertained that Imogene was not yet here. Finding Margaret Torrence, he spoke to her aside, lightly.

“Have you still got that old ring of mine?”

Margaret had been his girl all year at dancing school, signified by the fact that he had taken her to the cotillion which closed the season. The affair had languished toward the end; none the less, his question was undiplomatic.

“I’ve got it somewhere,” Margaret replied carelessly. “Why? Do you want it back?”

“Sort of.”

“All right. I never did want it. It was you that made me take it, Basil. I’ll give it back to you tomorrow.”

“You couldn’t give it to me tonight, could you?” His heart leaped as he saw a small figure come in at the rear gate. “I sort of want to get it tonight.”

“Oh, all right, Basil.”

She ran across the street to her house and Basil followed. Mr. and Mrs. Torrence were on the porch, and while Margaret went upstairs for the ring he overcame his excitement and impatience and answered those questions as to the health of his parents which are so meaningless to the young. Then a sudden stiffening came over him, his voice faded off and his glazed eyes fixed upon a scene that was materializing over the way.

From the shadows far up the street, a swift, almost flying figure emerged and floated into the patch of lamplight in front of the Whartons’ house. The figure wove here and there in a series of geometric patterns, now off with a flash of sparks at the impact of skates and pavement, now gliding miraculously backward, describing a fantastic curve, with one foot lifted gracefully in the air, until the young people moved forward in groups out of the darkness and crowded to the pavement to watch. Basil gave a quiet

little groan as he realized that of all possible nights, Hubert Blair had chosen this one to arrive.

“You say you’re going to the lakes this summer, Basil. Have you taken a cottage?”

Basil became aware after a moment that Mr. Torrence was making this remark for the third time.

“Oh, yes, sir,” he answered — “I mean, no. We’re staying at the club.”

“Won’t that be lovely?” said Mrs. Torrence.

Across the street, he saw Imogene standing under the lamp-post and in front of her Hubert Blair, his jaunty cap on the side of his head, maneuvering in a small circle. Basil winced as he heard his chuckling laugh. He did not perceive Margaret until she was beside him, pressing his ring into his hand like a bad penny. He muttered a strained hollow good-by to her parents, and weak with apprehension, followed her back across the street.

Hanging back in a shadow, he fixed his eyes not on Imogene but on Hubert Blair. There was undoubtedly something rare about Hubert. In the eyes of children less than fifteen, the shape of the nose is the distinguishing mark of beauty. Parents may call attention to lovely eyes, shining hair or gorgeous coloring, but the nose and its juxtaposition on the face is what the adolescent sees. Upon the lithe, stylish, athletic torso of Hubert Blair was set a conventional chubby face, and upon this face was chiseled the piquant, retroussé nose of a Harrison Fisher girl.

He was confident; he had personality, uninhibited by doubts or moods. He did not go to dancing school — his parents had moved to the city only a year ago — but already he was a legend. Though most of the boys disliked him, they did homage to his virtuosic athletic ability, and for the girls his every movement, his pleasantries, his very indifference, had a simply immeasurable fascination. Upon several previous occasions Basil had discovered this; now the discouraging comedy began to unfold once more.

Hubert took off his skates, rolled one down his arm and caught it by the strap before it reached the pavement; he snatched the ribbon from

Imogene's hair and made off with it, dodging from under her arms as she pursued him, laughing and fascinated, around the yard. He cocked one foot behind the other and pretended to lean an elbow against a tree, missed the tree on purpose and gracefully saved himself from falling. The boys watched him noncommittally at first. Then they, too, broke out into activity, doing stunts and tricks as fast as they could think of them until those on the porch craned their necks at the sudden surge of activity in the garden. But Hubert coolly turned his back on his own success. He took Imogene's hat and began setting it in various quaint ways upon his head. Imogene and the other girls were filled with delight.

Unable any longer to endure the nauseous spectacle, Basil went up to the group and said, "Why, hello, Hube," in as negligent a tone as he could command.

Hubert answered: "Why, hello, old — old Basil the Boozle," and set the hat a different way on his head, until Basil himself couldn't resist an unwilling chortle of laughter.

"Basil the Boozle! Hello, Basil the Boozle!" The cry circled the garden. Reproachfully he distinguished Riply's voice among the others.

"Hube the Boob!" Basil countered quickly; but his ill humor detracted from the effect, though several boys repeated it appreciatively.

Gloom settled upon Basil, and through the heavy dusk the figure of Imogene began to take on a new, unattainable charm. He was a romantic boy and already he had endowed her heavily from his fancy. Now he hated her for her indifference, but he must perversely linger near in the vain hope of recovering the penny of ecstasy so wantonly expended this afternoon.

He tried to talk to Margaret with decoy animation, but Margaret was not responsive. Already a voice had gone up in the darkness calling in a child. Panic seized upon him; the blessed hour of summer evening was almost over. At a spreading of the group to let pedestrians through, he maneuvered Imogene unwillingly aside.

"I've got it," he whispered. "Here it is. Can I take you home?"

She looked at him distractedly. Her hand closed automatically on the ring.

“What? Oh, I promised Hubert he could take me home.” At the sight of his face she pulled herself from her trance and forced a note of indignation. “I saw you going off with Margaret Torrence just as soon as I came into the yard.”

“I didn’t. I just went to get the ring.”

“Yes, you did! I saw you!”

Her eyes moved back to Hubert Blair. He had replaced his roller skates and was making little rhythmic jumps and twirls on his toes, like a witch doctor throwing a slow hypnosis over an African tribe. Basil’s voice, explaining and arguing, went on, but Imogene moved away. Helplessly he followed. There were other voices calling in the darkness now and unwilling responses on all sides.

“All right, mother!”

“I’ll be there in a second, mother.”

“Mother, can’t I please stay out five minutes more?”

“I’ve got to go,” Imogene cried. “It’s almost nine.”

Waving her hand and smiling absently at Basil, she started off down the street. Hubert pranced and stunted at her side, circled around her and made entrancing little figures ahead.

Only after a minute did Basil realize that another young lady was addressing him.

“What?” he demanded absently.

“Hubert Blair is the nicest boy in town and you’re the most conceited,” repeated Margaret Torrence with deep conviction.

He stared at her in pained surprise. Margaret wrinkled her nose at him and yielded up her person to the now-insistent demands coming from across the street. As Basil gazed stupidly after her and then watched the forms of Imogene and Hubert disappear around the corner, there was a low mutter

of thunder along the sultry sky and a moment later a solitary drop plunged through the lamplit leaves overhead and splattered on the sidewalk at his feet. The day was to close in rain.

III

It came quickly and he was drenched and running before he reached his house eight blocks away. But the change of weather had swept over his heart and he leaped up every few steps, swallowing the rain and crying “Yo-o-o!” aloud, as if he himself were a part of the fresh, violent disturbance of the night. Imogene was gone, washed out like the day’s dust on the sidewalk. Her beauty would come back into his mind in brighter weather, but here in the storm he was alone with himself. A sense of extraordinary power welled up in him, until to leave the ground permanently with one of his wild leaps would not have surprised him. He was a lone wolf, secret and untamed; a night prowler, demoniac and free. Only when he reached his own house did his emotion begin to turn, speculatively and almost without passion, against Hubert Blair.

He changed his clothes, and putting on pajamas and dressing-gown descended to the kitchen, where he happened upon a new chocolate cake. He ate a fourth of it and most of a bottle of milk. His elation somewhat diminished, he called up Riply Buckner on the phone.

“I’ve got a scheme,” he said.

“What about?”

“How to do something to H. B. with the S. D.”

Riply understood immediately what he meant. Hubert had been so indiscreet as to fascinate other girls besides Miss Bissel that evening.

“We’ll have to take in Bill Kampf,” Basil said.

“All right.”

“See you at recess tomorrow. . . . Good night!”

IV

Four days later, when Mr. and Mrs. George P. Blair were finishing dinner, Hubert was called to the telephone. Mrs. Blair took advantage of his absence to speak to her husband of what had been on her mind all day.

“George, those boys, or whatever they are, came again last night.”

He frowned.

“Did you see them?”

“Hilda did. She almost caught one of them. You see, I told her about the note they left last Tuesday, the one that said, ‘First warning, S. D.,’ so she was ready for them. They rang the back-door bell this time and she answered it straight from the dishes. If her hands hadn’t been soapy she could have caught one, because she grabbed him when he handed her a note, but her hands were soapy so he slipped away.”

“What did he look like?”

“She said he might have been a very little man, but she thought he was a boy in a false face. He dodged like a boy, she said, and she thought he had short pants on. The note was like the other. It said ‘Second warning, S. D.’”

“If you’ve got it, I’d like to see it after dinner.”

Hubert came back from the phone. “It was Imogene Bissel,” he said. “She wants me to come over to her house. A bunch are going over there tonight.”

“Hubert,” asked his father, “do you know any boy with the initials S. D.?”

“No, sir.”

“Have you thought?”

“Yeah, I thought. I knew a boy named Sam Davis, but I haven’t seen him for a year.”

“Who was he?”

“Oh, a sort of tough. He was at Number 44 School when I went there.”

“Did he have it in for you?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Who do you think could be doing this? Has anybody got it in for you that you know about?”

“I don’t know, papa; I don’t think so.”

“I don’t like the looks of this thing,” said Mr. Blair thoughtfully. “Of course it may be only some boys, but it may be — ”

He was silent. Later, he studied the note. It was in red ink and there was a skull and crossbones in the corner, but being printed, it told him nothing at all.

Meanwhile Hubert kissed his mother, set his cap jauntily on the side of his head, and passing through the kitchen stepped out on the back stoop, intending to take the usual short cut along the alley. It was a bright moonlit night and he paused for a moment on the stoop to tie his shoe. If he had but known that the telephone call just received had been a decoy, that it had not come from Imogene Bissel’s house, had not indeed been a girl’s voice at all, and that shadowy and grotesque forms were skulking in the alley just outside the gate, he would not have sprung so gracefully and lithely down the steps with his hands in his pockets or whistled the first bar of the Grizzly Bear into the apparently friendly night.

His whistle aroused varying emotions in the alley. Basil had given his daring and successful falsetto imitation over the telephone a little too soon, and though the Scandal Detectives had hurried, their preparations were not quite in order. They had become separated. Basil, got up like a Southern planter of the old persuasion, was just outside the Blairs’ gate; Bill Kampf, with a long Balkan mustache attached by a wire to the lower cartilage of his nose, was approaching in the shadow of the fence; but Riply Buckner, in a full rabbinical beard, was impeded by a length of rope he was trying to coil and was still a hundred feet away. The rope was an essential part of their plan; for, after much cogitation, they had decided what they were going to

do to Hubert Blair. They were going to tie him up, gag him and put him in his own garbage can.

The idea at first horrified them — it would ruin his suit, it was awfully dirty and he might smother. In fact the garbage can, symbol of all that was repulsive, won the day only because it made every other idea seem tame. They disposed of the objections — his suit could be cleaned, it was where he ought to be anyhow, and if they left the lid off he couldn't smother. To be sure of this they had paid a visit of inspection to the Buckners' garbage can and stared into it, fascinated, envisaging Hubert among the rinds and eggshells. Then two of them, at last, resolutely put that part out of their minds and concentrated upon the luring of him into the alley and the overwhelming of him there.

Hubert's cheerful whistle caught them off guard and each of the three stood stock-still, unable to communicate with the others. It flashed through Basil's mind that if he grabbed Hubert without Riply at hand to apply the gag as had been arranged, Hubert's cries might alarm the gigantic cook in the kitchen who had almost taken him the night before. The thought threw him into a state of indecision. At that precise moment Hubert opened the gate and came out into the alley.

The two stood five feet apart, staring at each other, and all at once Basil made a startling discovery. He discovered he liked Hubert Blair — liked him well as any boy he knew. He had absolutely no wish to lay hands on Hubert Blair and stuff him into a garbage can, jaunty cap and all. He would have fought to prevent that contingency. As his mind, unstrung by his situation, gave pasture to this inconvenient thought, he turned and dashed out of the alley and up the street.

For a moment the apparition had startled Hubert, but when it turned and made off he was heartened and gave chase. Out-distanced, he decided after fifty yards to let well enough alone; and returning to the alley, started rather precipitously down toward the other end — and came face to face with another small and hairy stranger.

Bill Kampf, being more simply organized than Basil, had no scruples of any kind. It had been decided to put Hubert into a garbage can, and though he

had nothing at all against Hubert, the idea had made a pattern on his brain which he intended to follow. He was a natural man — that is to say, a hunter — and once a creature took on the aspect of a quarry, he would pursue it without qualms until it stopped struggling.

But he had been witness to Basil's inexplicable flight, and supposing that Hubert's father had appeared and was now directly behind him, he, too, faced about and made off down the alley. Presently he met Riply Buckner, who, without waiting to inquire the cause of his flight, enthusiastically joined him. Again Hubert was surprised into pursuing a little way. Then, deciding once and for all to let well enough alone, he returned on a dead run to his house.

Meanwhile Basil had discovered that he was not pursued, and keeping in the shadows, made his way back to the alley. He was not frightened — he had simply been incapable of action. The alley was empty; neither Bill nor Riply was in sight. He saw Mr. Blair come to the back gate, open it, look up and down and go back into the house. He came closer. There was a great chatter in the kitchen — Hubert's voice, loud and boastful, and Mrs. Blair's, frightened, and the two Swedish domestics contributing bursts of hilarious laughter. Then through an open window he heard Mr. Blair's voice at the telephone:

“I want to speak to the chief of police. . . . Chief, this is George P. Blair. . . . Chief, there's a gang of toughs around here who — ”

Basil was off like a flash, tearing at his Confederate whiskers as he ran.

V

Imogene Bissel, having just turned thirteen, was not accustomed to having callers at night. She was spending a bored and solitary evening inspecting the month's bills which were scattered over her mother's desk, when she heard Hubert Blair and his father admitted into the front hall.

“I just thought I’d bring him over myself,” Mr. Blair was saying to her mother. “There seems to be a gang of toughs hanging around our alley tonight.”

Mrs. Bissel had not called upon Mrs. Blair and she was considerably taken aback by this unexpected visit. She even entertained the uncharitable thought that this was a crude overture, undertaken by Mr. Blair on behalf of his wife.

“Really!” she exclaimed. “Imogene will be delighted to see Hubert, I’m sure. . . . Imogene!”

“These toughs were evidently lying in wait for Hubert,” continued Mr. Blair. “But he’s a pretty spunky boy and he managed to drive them away. However, I didn’t want him to come down here alone.”

“Of course not,” she agreed. But she was unable to imagine why Hubert should have come at all. He was a nice enough boy, but surely Imogene had seen enough of him the last three afternoons. In fact, Mrs. Bissel was annoyed, and there was a minimum of warmth in her voice when she asked Mr. Blair to come in.

They were still in the hall, and Mr. Blair was just beginning to perceive that all was not as it should be, when there was another ring at the bell. Upon the door being opened, Basil Lee, red-faced and breathless, stood on the threshold.

“How do you do, Mrs. Bissel? Hello, Imogene!” he cried in an unnecessarily hearty voice. “Where’s the party?”

The salutation might have sounded to a dispassionate observer somewhat harsh and unnatural, but it fell upon the ears of an already disconcerted group.

“There isn’t any party,” said Imogene wonderingly.

“What?” Basil’s mouth dropped open in exaggerated horror, his voice trembled slightly. “You mean to say you didn’t call me up and tell me to come over here to a party?”

“Why, of course not, Basil!”

Imogene was excited by Hubert’s unexpected arrival and it occurred to her that Basil had invented this excuse to spoil it. Alone of those present, she was close to the truth; but she underestimated the urgency of Basil’s motive, which was not jealousy but mortal fear.

“You called *me* up, didn’t you, Imogene?” demanded Hubert confidently.

“Why, no, Hubert! I didn’t call up anybody.”

Amid a chorus of bewildered protestations, there was another ring at the doorbell and the pregnant night yielded up Riply Buckner, Jr., and William S. Kampf. Like Basil, they were somewhat ruffled and breathless, and they no less rudely and peremptorily demanded the whereabouts of the party, insisting with curious vehemence that Imogene had just now invited them over the phone.

Hubert laughed, the others began to laugh and the tensy relaxed. Imogene, because she believed Hubert, now began to believe them all. Unable to restrain himself any longer in the presence of this unhopd-for audience, Hubert burst out with his amazing adventure.

“I guess there’s a gang laying for us all!” he exclaimed. “There were some guys laying for me in our alley when I went out. There was a big fellow with gray whiskers, but when he saw me he ran away. Then I went along the alley and there was a bunch more, sort of foreigners or something, and I started after’m and they ran. I tried to catchem, but I guess they were good and scared, because they ran too fast for *me*.”

So interested were Hubert and his father in the story that they failed to perceive that three of his listeners were growing purple in the face or to mark the uproarious laughter that greeted Mr. Bissel’s polite proposal that they have a party, after all.

“Tell about the warnings, Hubert,” prompted Mr. Blair. “You see, Hubert had received these warnings. Did you boys get any warnings?”

“I did,” said Basil suddenly. “I got a sort of warning on a piece of paper about a week ago.”

For a moment, as Mr. Blair's worried eye fell upon Basil, a strong sense not precisely of suspicion but rather of obscure misgiving passed over him. Possibly that odd aspect of Basil's eyebrows, where wisps of crêpe hair still lingered, connected itself in his subconscious mind with what was bizarre in the events of the evening. He shook his head somewhat puzzled. Then his thoughts glided back restfully to Hubert's courage and presence of mind.

Hubert, meanwhile, having exhausted his facts, was making tentative leaps into the realms of imagination.

"I said, 'So you're the guy that's been sending these warnings,' and he swung his left at me, and I dodged and swung my right back at him. I guess I must have landed, because he gave a yell and ran. Gosh, he could run! You'd ought to of seen him, Bill — he could run as fast as you."

"Was he big?" asked Basil, blowing his nose noisily.

"Sure! About as big as father."

"Were the other ones big too?"

"Sure! They were pretty big. I didn't wait to see, I just yelled, 'You get out of here, you bunch of toughs, or I'll show you!' They started a sort of fight, but I swung my right at one of them and they didn't wait for any more."

"Hubert says he thinks they were Italians," interrupted Mr. Blair. "Didn't you, Hubert?"

"They were sort of funny-looking," Hubert said. "One fellow looked like an Italian."

Mrs. Bissel led the way to the dining room, where she had caused a cake and grape juice supper to be spread. Imogene took a chair by Hubert's side.

"Now tell me all about it, Hubert," she said, attentively folding her hands.

Hubert ran over the adventure once more. A knife now made its appearance in the belt of one conspirator; Hubert's parleys with them lengthened and grew in volume and virulence. He had told them just what they might expect if they fooled with him. They had started to draw knives, but had thought better of it and taken to flight.

In the middle of this recital there was a curious snorting sound from across the table, but when Imogene looked over, Basil was spreading jelly on a piece of coffee cake and his eyes were brightly innocent. A minute later, however, the sound was repeated, and this time she intercepted a specifically malicious expression upon his face.

“I wonder what you’d have done, Basil,” she said cuttingly. “I’ll bet you’d be running yet!”

Basil put the piece of coffee cake in his mouth and immediately choked on it — an accident which Bill Kampf and Riply Buckner found hilariously amusing. Their amusement at various casual incidents at table seemed to increase as Hubert’s story continued. The alley now swarmed with malefactors, and as Hubert struggled on against overwhelming odds, Imogene found herself growing restless — without in the least realizing that the tale was boring her. On the contrary, each time Hubert recollected new incidents and began again, she looked spitefully over at Basil, and her dislike for him grew.

When they moved into the library, Imogene went to the piano, where she sat alone while the boys gathered around Hubert on the couch. To her chagrin, they seemed quite content to listen indefinitely. Odd little noises squeaked out of them from time to time, but whenever the narrative slackened they would beg for more.

“Go on, Hubert. Which one did you say could run as fast as Bill Kampf?”

She was glad when, after half an hour, they all got up to go.

“It’s a strange affair from beginning to end,” Mr. Blair was saying. “I don’t like it. I’m going to have a detective look into the matter tomorrow. What did they want of Hubert? What were they going to do to him?”

No one offered a suggestion. Even Hubert was silent, contemplating his possible fate with certain respectful awe. During breaks in his narration the talk had turned to such collateral matters as murders and ghosts, and all the boys had talked themselves into a state of considerable panic. In fact each had come to believe, in varying degrees, that a band of kidnappers infested the vicinity.

“I don’t like it,” repeated Mr. Blair. “In fact I’m going to see all of you boys to your own homes.”

Basil greeted this offer with relief. The evening had been a mad success, but furies once aroused sometimes get out of hand. He did not feel like walking the streets alone tonight.

In the hall, Imogene, taking advantage of her mother’s somewhat fatigued farewell to Mr. Blair, beckoned Hubert back into the library. Instantly attuned to adversity, Basil listened. There was a whisper and a short scuffle, followed by an indiscreet but unmistakable sound. With the corners of his mouth falling, Basil went out the door. He had stacked the cards dexterously, but Life had played a trump from its sleeve at the last.

A moment later they all started off, clinging together in a group, turning corners with cautious glances behind and ahead. What Basil and Riply and Bill expected to see as they peered warily into the sinister mouths of alleys and around great dark trees and behind concealing fences they did not know — in all probability the same hairy and grotesque desperadoes who had lain in wait for Hubert Blair that night.

VI

A week later Basil and Riply heard that Hubert and his mother had gone to the seashore for the summer. Basil was sorry. He had wanted to learn from Hubert some of the graceful mannerisms that his contemporaries found so dazzling and that might come in so handy next fall when he went away to school. In tribute to Hubert’s passing, he practised leaning against a tree and missing it and rolling a skate down his arm, and he wore his cap in Hubert’s manner, set jauntily on the side of his head.

This was only for a while. He perceived eventually that though boys and girls would always listen to him while he talked, their mouths literally moving in response to his, they would never look at him as they had looked at Hubert. So he abandoned the loud chuckle that so annoyed his mother and set his cap straight upon his head once more.

But the change in him went deeper than that. He was no longer sure that he wanted to be a gentleman burglar, though he still read of their exploits with breathless admiration. Outside of Hubert's gate, he had for a moment felt morally alone; and he realized that whatever combinations he might make of the materials of life would have to be safely within the law. And after another week he found that he no longer grieved over losing Imogene. Meeting her, he saw only the familiar little girl he had always known. The ecstatic moment of that afternoon had been a premature birth, an emotion left over from an already fleeting spring.

He did not know that he had frightened Mrs. Blair out of town and that because of him a special policeman walked a placid beat for many a night. All he knew was that the vague and restless yearnings of three long spring months were somehow satisfied. They reached combustion in that last week — flared up, exploded and burned out. His face was turned without regret toward the boundless possibilities of summer.

A NIGHT AT THE FAIR

The Saturday Evening Post (July 21, 1928)

The two cities were separated only by a thin well-bridged river; their tails curling over the banks met and mingled, and at the juncture, under the jealous eye of each, lay, every fall, the State Fair. Because of this advantageous position, and because of the agricultural eminence of the state, the fair was one of the most magnificent in America. There were immense exhibits of grain, livestock and farming machinery; there were horse races and automobile races and, lately, aeroplanes that really left the ground; there was a tumultuous Midway with Coney Island thrillers to whirl you through space, and a whining, tinkling hoochie-coochie show. As a compromise between the serious and the trivial, a grand exhibition of fireworks, culminating in a representation of the Battle of Gettysburg, took place in the Grand Concourse every night.

At the late afternoon of a hot September day two boys of fifteen, somewhat replete with food and pop, and fatigued by eight hours of constant motion, issued from the Penny Arcade. The one with dark, handsome, eager eyes was, according to the cosmic inscription in his last year's Ancient History, "Basil Duke Lee, Holly Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota, United States, North America, Western Hemisphere, the World, the Universe." Though slightly shorter than his companion, he appeared taller, for he projected, so to speak, from short trousers, while Riply Buckner, Jr., had graduated into long ones the week before. This event, so simple and natural, was having a disrupting influence on the intimate friendship between them that had endured for several years.

During that time Basil, the imaginative member of the firm, had been the dominating partner, and the displacement effected by two feet of blue serge filled him with puzzled dismay — in fact, Riply Buckner had become noticeably indifferent to the pleasure of Basil's company in public. His own assumption of long trousers had seemed to promise a liberation from the restraints and inferiorities of boyhood, and the companionship of one who

was, in token of his short pants, still a boy was an unwelcome reminder of how recent was his own metamorphosis. He scarcely admitted this to himself, but a certain shortness of temper with Basil, a certain tendency to belittle him with superior laughter, had been in evidence all afternoon. Basil felt the new difference keenly. In August a family conference had decided that even though he was going East to school, he was too small for long trousers. He had countered by growing an inch and a half in a fortnight, which added to his reputation for unreliability, but led him to hope that his mother might be persuaded, after all.

Coming out of the stuffy tent into the glow of sunset, the two boys hesitated, glancing up and down the crowded highway with expressions compounded of a certain ennui and a certain inarticulate yearning. They were unwilling to go home before it became necessary, yet they knew they had temporarily glutted their appetite for sights; they wanted a change in the tone, the motif, of the day. Near them was the parking space, as yet a modest yard; and as they lingered indecisively, their eyes were caught and held by a small car, red in color and slung at that proximity to the ground which indicated both speed of motion and speed of life. It was a Blatz Wildcat, and for the next five years it represented the ambition of several million American boys. Occupying it, in the posture of aloof exhaustion exacted by the sloping seat, was a blonde, gay, baby-faced girl.

The two boys stared. She bent upon them a single cool glance and then returned to her avocation of reclining in a Blatz Wildcat and looking haughtily at the sky. The two boys exchanged a glance, but made no move to go. They watched the girl — when they felt that their stares were noticeable they dropped their eyes and gazed at the car.

After several minutes a young man with a very pink face and pink hair, wearing a yellow suit and hat and drawing on yellow gloves, appeared and got into the car. There was a series of frightful explosions; then, with a measured tup-tup-tup from the open cut-out, insolent, percussive and thrilling as a drum, the car and the girl and the young man whom they had recognized as Speed Paxton slid smoothly away.

Basil and Riply turned and strolled back thoughtfully toward the Midway. They knew that Speed Paxton was dimly terrible — the wild and pampered son of a local brewer — but they envied him — to ride off into the sunset in such a chariot, into the very hush and mystery of night, beside him the mystery of that baby-faced girl. It was probably this envy that made them begin to shout when they perceived a tall youth of their own age issuing from a shooting gallery.

“Oh, El! Hey, El! Wait a minute!”

Elwood Leaming turned around and waited. He was the dissipated one among the nice boys of the town — he had drunk beer, he had learned from chauffeurs, he was already thin from too many cigarettes. As they greeted him eagerly, the hard, wise expression of a man of the world met them in his half-closed eyes.

“Hello, Rip. Put it there, Rip. Hello, Basil, old boy. Put it there.”

“What you doing, El?” Riply asked.

“Nothing. What are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

Elwood Leaming narrowed his eyes still further, seemed to give thought, and then made a decisive clicking sound with his teeth.

“Well, what do you say we pick something up?” he suggested. “I saw some pretty good stuff around here this afternoon.”

Riply and Basil drew tense, secret breaths. A year before they had been shocked because Elwood went to the burlesque shows at the Star — now here he was holding the door open to his own speedy life.

The responsibility of his new maturity impelled Riply to appear most eager.

“All right with me,” he said heartily.

He looked at Basil.

“All right with me,” mumbled Basil.

Riply laughed, more from nervousness than from derision. "Maybe you better grow up first, Basil." He looked at Elwood, seeking approval. "You better stick around till you get to be a man."

"Oh, dry up!" retorted Basil. "How long have you had yours? Just a week!"

But he realized that there was a gap separating him from these two, and it was with a sense of tagging them that he walked along beside.

Glancing from right to left with the expression of a keen and experienced frontiersman, Elwood Leaming led the way. Several pairs of strolling girls met his mature glance and smiled encouragingly, but he found them unsatisfactory — too fat, too plain or too hard. All at once their eyes fell upon two who sauntered along a little ahead of them, and they increased their pace, Elwood with confidence, Riply with its nervous counterfeit and Basil suddenly in the grip of wild excitement.

They were abreast of them. Basil's heart was in his throat. He looked away as he heard Elwood's voice.

"Hello, girls! How are you this evening?"

Would they call for the police? Would his mother and Riply's suddenly turn the corner?

"Hello, yourself, kiddo!"

"Where you going, girls?"

"Nowhere."

"Well, let's all go together."

Then all of them were standing in a group and Basil was relieved to find that they were only girls his own age, after all. They were pretty, with clear skins and red lips and maturely piled up hair. One he immediately liked better than the other — her voice was quieter and she was shy. Basil was glad when Elwood walked on with the bolder one, leaving him and Riply to follow with the other, behind.

The first lights of the evening were springing into pale existence; the afternoon crowd had thinned a little, and the lanes, empty of people, were heavy with the rich various smells of pop corn and peanuts, molasses and dust and cooking Wienerwurst and a not-unpleasant overtone of animals and hay. The Ferris wheel, pricked out now in lights, revolved leisurely through the dusk; a few empty cars of the roller coaster rattled overhead. The heat had blown off and there was the crisp stimulating excitement of Northern autumn in the air.

They walked. Basil felt that there was some way of talking to this girl, but he could manage nothing in the key of Elwood Leaming's intense and confidential manner to the girl ahead — as if he had inadvertently discovered a kinship of tastes and of hearts. So to save the progression from absolute silence — for Riply's contribution amounted only to an occasional burst of silly laughter — Basil pretended an interest in the sights they passed and kept up a sort of comment thereon.

“There's the six-legged calf. Have you seen it?”

“No, I haven't.”

“There's where the man rides the motorcycle around. Did you go there?”

“No, I didn't.”

“Look! They're beginning to fill the balloon. I wonder what time they start the fireworks.”

“Have you been to the fireworks?”

“No, I'm going tomorrow night. Have you?”

“Yes, I been every night. My brother works there. He's one of them that helps set them off.”

“Oh!”

He wondered if her brother cared that she had been picked up by strangers. He wondered even more if she felt as silly as he. It must be getting late, and he had promised to be home by half-past seven on pain of not being allowed out tomorrow night. He walked up beside Elwood.

“Hey, El,” he asked, “where we going?”

Elwood turned to him and winked. “We’re going around the Old Mill.”

“Oh!”

Basil dropped back again — became aware that in his temporary absence Riply and the girl had linked arms. A twinge of jealousy went through him and he inspected the girl again and with more appreciation, finding her prettier than he had thought. Her eyes, dark and intimate, seemed to have wakened at the growing brilliance of the illumination overhead; there was the promise of excitement in them now, like the promise of the cooling night.

He considered taking her other arm, but it was too late; she and Riply were laughing together at something — rather, at nothing. She had asked him what he laughed at all the time and he had laughed again for an answer. Then they both laughed hilariously and sporadically together.

Basil looked disgustedly at Riply. “I never heard such a silly laugh in my life,” he said indignantly.

“Didn’t you?” chuckled Riply Buckner. “Didn’t you, little boy?”

He bent double with laughter and the girl joined in. The words “little boy” had fallen on Basil like a jet of cold water. In his excitement he had forgotten something, as a cripple might forget his limp only to discover it when he began to run.

“You think you’re so big!” he exclaimed. “Where’d you get the pants? Where’d you get the pants?” He tried to work this up with gusto and was about to add: “They’re your father’s pants,” when he remembered that Riply’s father, like his own, was dead.

The couple ahead reached the entrance to the Old Mill and waited for them. It was an off hour, and half a dozen scows bumped in the wooden offing, swayed by the mild tide of the artificial river. Elwood and his girl got into the front seat and he promptly put his arm around her. Basil helped the other girl into the rear seat, but, dispirited, he offered no resistance when Riply wedged in and sat down between.

They floated off, immediately entering upon a long echoing darkness. Somewhere far ahead a group in another boat were singing, their voices now remote and romantic, now nearer and yet more mysterious, as the canal doubled back and the boats passed close to each other with an invisible veil between.

The three boys yelled and called, Basil attempting by his vociferousness and variety to outdo Riply in the girl's eyes, but after a few moments there was no sound except his own voice and the continual bump-bump of the boat against the wooden sides, and he knew without looking that Riply had put his arm about the girl's shoulder.

They slid into a red glow — a stage set of hell, with grinning demons and lurid paper fires — he made out that Elwood and his girl sat cheek to cheek — then again into the darkness, with the gently lapping water and the passing of the singing boat now near, now far away. For a while Basil pretended that he was interested in this other boat, calling to them, commenting on their proximity. Then he discovered that the scow could be rocked and took to this poor amusement until Elwood Leaming turned around indignantly and cried:

“Hey! What are you trying to do?”

They came out finally to the entrance and the two couples broke apart. Basil jumped miserably ashore.

“Give us some more tickets,” Riply cried. “We want to go around again.”

“Not me,” said Basil with elaborate indifference. “I have to go home.”

Riply began to laugh in derision and triumph. The girl laughed too.

“Well, so long, little boy,” Riply cried hilariously.

“Oh, shut up! So long, Elwood.”

“So long, Basil.”

The boat was already starting off; arms settled again about the girls' shoulders.

“So long, little boy!”

“So long, you big cow!” Basil cried. “Where’d you get the pants? Where’d you get the pants?”

But the boat had already disappeared into the dark mouth of the tunnel, leaving the echo of Riply’s taunting laughter behind.

It is an ancient tradition that all boys are obsessed with the idea of being grown. This is because they occasionally give voice to their impatience with the restraints of youth, while those great stretches of time when they are more than content to be boys find expression in action and not in words. Sometimes Basil wanted to be just a little bit older, but no more. The question of long pants had not seemed vital to him — he wanted them, but as a costume they had no such romantic significance as, for example, a football suit or an officer’s uniform, or even the silk hat and opera cape in which gentlemen burglars were wont to prowl the streets of New York by night.

But when he awoke next morning they were the most important necessity in his life. Without them he was cut off from his contemporaries, laughed at by a boy whom he had hitherto led. The actual fact that last night some chickens had preferred Riply to himself was of no importance in itself, but he was fiercely competitive and he resented being required to fight with one hand tied behind his back. He felt that parallel situations would occur at school, and that was unbearable. He approached his mother at breakfast in a state of wild excitement.

“Why, Basil,” she protested in surprise, “I thought when we talked it over you didn’t especially care.”

“I’ve got to have them,” he declared. “I’d rather be dead than go away to school without them.”

“Well, there’s no need of being silly.”

“It’s true — I’d rather be dead. If I can’t have long trousers I don’t see any use in my going away to school.”

His emotion was such that the vision of his demise began actually to disturb his mother.

“Now stop that silly talk and come and eat your breakfast. You can go down and buy some at Barton Leigh’s this morning.”

Mollified, but still torn by the urgency of his desire, Basil strode up and down the room.

“A boy is simply helpless without them,” he declared vehemently. The phrase pleased him and he amplified it. “A boy is simply and utterly helpless without them. I’d rather be dead than go away to school — ”

“Basil, stop talking like that. Somebody has been teasing you about it.”

“Nobody’s been teasing me,” he denied indignantly — “nobody at all.”

After breakfast, the maid called him to the phone.

“This is Riply,” said a tentative voice. Basil acknowledged the fact coldly. “You’re not sore about last night, are you?” Riply asked.

“Me? No. Who said I was sore?”

“Nobody. Well, listen, you know about us going to the fireworks together tonight.”

“Yes.” Basil’s voice was still cold.

“Well, one of those girls — the one Elwood had — has got a sister that’s even nicer than she is, and she can come out tonight and you could have her. And we thought we could meet about eight, because the fireworks don’t start till nine.”

“What do?”

“Well, we could go on the Old Mill again. We went around three times more last night.”

There was a moment’s silence. Basil looked to see if his mother’s door was closed.

“Did you kiss yours?” he demanded into the transmitter.

“Sure I did!” Over the wire came the ghost of a silly laugh. “Listen, El thinks he can get his auto. We could call for you at seven.”

“All right,” agreed Basil gruffly, and he added, “I’m going down and get some long pants this morning.”

“Are you?” Again Basil detected ghostly laughter. “Well, you be ready at seven tonight.”

Basil’s uncle met him at Barton Leigh’s clothing store at ten, and Basil felt a touch of guilt at having put his family to all this trouble and expense. On his uncle’s advice, he decided finally on two suits — a heavy chocolate brown for every day and a dark blue for formal wear. There were certain alterations to be made but it was agreed that one of the suits was to be delivered without fail that afternoon.

His momentary contriteness at having been so expensive made him save carfare by walking home from downtown. Passing along Crest Avenue, he paused speculatively to vault the high hydrant in front of the Van Schellinger house, wondering if one did such things in long trousers and if he would ever do it again. He was impelled to leap it two or three times as a sort of ceremonial farewell, and was so engaged when the Van Schellinger limousine turned into the drive and stopped at the front door.

“Oh, Basil,” a voice called.

A fresh delicate face, half buried under a mass of almost white curls, was turned toward him from the granite portico of the city’s second largest mansion.

“Hello, Gladys.”

“Come here a minute, Basil.”

He obeyed. Gladys Van Schellinger was a year younger than Basil — a tranquil, carefully nurtured girl who, so local tradition had it, was being brought up to marry in the East. She had a governess and always played with a certain few girls at her house or theirs, and was not allowed the casual freedom of children in a Midwestern city. She was never present at

such rendezvous as the Whartons' yard, where the others played games in the afternoons.

"Basil, I wanted to ask you something — are you going to the State Fair tonight?"

"Why, yes, I am."

"Well, wouldn't you like to come and sit in our box and watch the fireworks?"

Momentarily he considered the matter. He wanted to accept, but he was mysteriously impelled to refuse — to forgo a pleasure in order to pursue a quest that in cold logic did not interest him at all.

"I can't. I'm awfully sorry."

A shadow of discontent crossed Gladys' face. "Oh? Well, come and see me sometime soon, Basil. In a few weeks I'm going East to school."

He walked on up the street in a state of dissatisfaction. Gladys Van Schellinger had never been his girl, nor indeed anyone's girl, but the fact that they were starting away to school at the same time gave him a feeling of kinship for her — as if they had been selected for the glamorous adventure of the East, chosen together for a high destiny that transcended the fact that she was rich and he was only comfortable. He was sorry that he could not sit with her in her box tonight.

By three o'clock, Basil, reading the Crimson Sweater up in his room, began giving attentive ear to every ring at the bell. He would go to the head of the stairs, lean over and call, "Hilda, was that a package for me?" And at four, dissatisfied with her indifference, her lack of feeling for important things, her slowness in going to and returning from the door, he moved downstairs and began attending to it himself. But nothing came. He phoned Barton Leigh's and was told by a busy clerk: "You'll get that suit. I'll guarantee that you'll get that suit." But he did not believe in the clerk's honor and he moved out on the porch and watched for Barton Leigh's delivery wagon.

His mother came home at five. "There were probably more alterations than they thought," she suggested helpfully. "You'll probably get it tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning!" he exclaimed incredulously. "I've got to have that suit tonight."

"Well, I wouldn't be too disappointed if I were you, Basil. The stores all close at half-past five."

Basil took one agitated look up and down Holly Avenue. Then he got his cap and started on a run for the street car at the corner. A moment later a cautious afterthought caused him to retrace his steps with equal rapidity.

"If they get here, keep them for me," he instructed his mother — a man who thought of everything.

"All right," she promised dryly, "I will."

It was later than he thought. He had to wait for a trolley, and when he reached Barton Leigh's he saw with horror that the doors were locked and the blinds drawn. He intercepted a last clerk coming out and explained vehemently that he had to have his suit tonight. The clerk knew nothing about the matter. . . . Was Basil Mr. Schwartze?

No, Basil was not Mr. Schwartze. After a vague argument wherein he tried to convince the clerk that whoever promised him the suit should be fired, Basil went dispiritedly home.

He would not go to the fair without his suit — he would not go at all. He would sit at home and luckier boys would go adventuring along its Great White Way. Mysterious girls, young and reckless, would glide with them through the enchanted darkness of the Old Mill, but because of the stupidity, selfishness and dishonesty of a clerk in a clothing store he would not be there. In a day or so the fair would be over — forever — those girls, of all living girls the most intangible, the most desirable, that sister, said to be nicest of all — would be lost out of his life. They would ride off in Blatz Wildcats into the moonlight without Basil having kissed them. No, all his life — though he would lose the clerk his position: "You see now what your act

did to me” — he would look back with infinite regret upon that irretrievable hour. Like most of us, he was unable to perceive that he would have any desires in the future equivalent to those that possessed him now.

He reached home; the package had not arrived. He moped dismally about the house, consenting at half-past six to sit silently at dinner with his mother, his elbows on the table.

“Haven’t you any appetite, Basil?”

“No, thanks,” he said absently, under the impression he had been offered something.

“You’re not going away to school for two more weeks. Why should it matter — ”

“Oh, that isn’t the reason I can’t eat. I had a sort of headache all afternoon.”

Toward the end of the meal his eye focused abstractedly on some slices of angel cake; with the air of a somnambulist, he ate three.

At seven he heard the sounds that should have ushered in a night of romantic excitement.

The Leaming car stopped outside, and a moment later Riply Buckner rang the bell. Basil rose gloomily.

“I’ll go,” he said to Hilda. And then to his mother, with vague impersonal reproach, “Excuse me a minute. I just want to tell them I can’t go to the fair tonight.”

“But of course you can go, Basil. Don’t be silly. Just because — ”

He scarcely heard her. Opening the door, he faced Riply on the steps. Beyond was the Leaming limousine, an old high car, quivering in silhouette against the harvest moon.

Clop-clop-clop! Up the street came the Barton Leigh delivery wagon. Clop-clop! A man jumped out, dumped an iron anchor to the pavement, hurried along the street, turned away, turned back again, came toward them with a long square box in his hand.

“You’ll have to wait a minute,” Basil was calling wildly. “It can’t make any difference. I’ll dress in the library. Look here, if you’re a friend of mine, you’ll wait a minute.” He stepped out on the porch. “Hey, El, I’ve just got my — got to change my clothes. You can wait a minute, can’t you?”

The spark of a cigarette flushed in the darkness as El spoke to the chauffeur; the quivering car came to rest with a sigh and the skies filled suddenly with stars.

Once again the fair — but differing from the fair of the afternoon as a girl in the daytime differs from her radiant presentation of herself at night. The substance of the cardboard booths and plaster palaces was gone, the forms remained. Outlined in lights, these forms suggested things more mysterious and entrancing than themselves, and the people strolling along the network of little Broadways shared this quality, as their pale faces singly and in clusters broke the half darkness.

The boys hurried to their rendezvous, finding the girls in the deep shadow of the Temple of Wheat. Their forms had scarcely merged into a group when Basil became aware that something was wrong. In growing apprehension, he glanced from face to face and, as the introductions were made, he realized the appalling truth — the younger sister was, in point of fact, a fright, squat and dingy, with a bad complexion brooding behind a mask of cheap pink powder and a shapeless mouth that tried ceaselessly to torture itself into the mold of charm.

In a daze he heard Riply’s girl say, “I don’t know whether I ought to go with you. I had a sort of date with another fellow I met this afternoon.”

Fidgeting, she looked up and down the street, while Riply, in astonishment and dismay, tried to take her arm.

“Come on,” he urged. “Didn’t I have a date with you first?”

“But I didn’t know whether you’d come or not,” she said perversely.

Elwood and the two sisters added their entreaties.

“Maybe I could go on the Ferris wheel,” she said grudgingly, “but not the Old Mill. This fellow would be sore.”

Riply's confidence reeled with the blow; his mouth fell ajar, his hand desperately pawed her arm. Basil stood glancing now with agonized politeness at his own girl, now at the others, with an expression of infinite reproach. Elwood alone was successful and content.

"Let's go on the Ferris wheel," he said impatiently. "We can't stand here all night."

At the ticket booth the recalcitrant Olive hesitated once more, frowning and glancing about as if she still hoped Riply's rival would appear.

But when the swooping cars came to rest she let herself be persuaded in, and the three couples, with their troubles, were hoisted slowly into the air.

As the car rose, following the imagined curve of the sky, it occurred to Basil how much he would have enjoyed it in other company, or even alone, the fair twinkling beneath him with new variety, the velvet quality of the darkness that is on the edge of light and is barely permeated by its last attenuations. But he was unable to hurt anyone whom he thought of as an inferior. After a minute he turned to the girl beside him.

"Do you live in St. Paul or Minneapolis?" he inquired formally.

"St. Paul. I go to Number 7 School." Suddenly she moved closer. "I bet you're not so slow," she encouraged him.

He put his arm around her shoulder and found it warm. Again they reached the top of the wheel and the sky stretched out overhead, again they lapsed down through gusts of music from remote calliopes. Keeping his eyes turned carefully away, Basil pressed her to him, and as they rose again into darkness, leaned and kissed her cheek.

The significance of the contact stirred him, but out of the corner of his eye he saw her face — he was thankful when a gong struck below and the machine settled slowly to rest.

The three couples were scarcely reunited outside when Olive uttered a yelp of excitement.

“There he is!” she cried. “That Bill Jones I met this afternoon — that I had the date with.”

A youth of their own age was approaching, stepping like a circus pony and twirling, with the deftness of a drum major, a small rattan cane. Under the cautious alias, the three boys recognized a friend and contemporary — none other than the fascinating Hubert Blair.

He came nearer. He greeted them all with a friendly chuckle. He took off his cap, spun it, dropped it, caught it, set it jauntily on the side of his head.

“You’re a nice one,” he said to Olive. “I waited here fifteen minutes this evening.”

He pretended to belabor her with the cane; she giggled with delight. Hubert Blair possessed the exact tone that all girls of fourteen, and a somewhat cruder type of grown women, find irresistible. He was a gymnastic virtuoso and his figure was in constant graceful motion; he had a jaunty piquant nose, a disarming laugh and a shrewd talent for flattery. When he took a piece of toffee from his pocket, placed it on his forehead, shook it off and caught it in his mouth, it was obvious to any disinterested observer that Riply was destined to see no more of Olive that night.

So fascinated were the group that they failed to see Basil’s eyes brighten with a ray of hope, his feet take four quick steps backward with all the guile of a gentleman burglar, his torso writhe through the parting of a tent wall into the deserted premises of the Harvester and Tractor Show. Once safe, Basil’s tensivity relaxed, and as he considered Riply’s unconsciousness of the responsibilities presently to devolve upon him, he bent double with hilarious laughter in the darkness.

Ten minutes later, in a remote part of the fairgrounds, a youth made his way briskly and cautiously toward the fireworks exhibit, swinging as he walked a recently purchased rattan cane. Several girls eyed him with interest, but he passed them haughtily; he was weary of people for a brief moment — a moment which he had almost mislaid in the bustle of life — he was enjoying his long pants.

He bought a bleacher seat and followed the crowd around the race track, seeking his section. A few Union troops were moving cannon about in preparation for the Battle of Gettysburg, and, stopping to watch them, he was hailed by Gladys Van Schellinger from the box behind.

“Oh, Basil, don’t you want to come and sit with us?”

He turned about and was absorbed. Basil exchanged courtesies with Mr. and Mrs. Van Schellinger and he was affably introduced to several other people as “Alice Riley’s boy,” and a chair was placed for him beside Gladys in front.

“Oh, Basil,” she whispered, glowing at him, “isn’t this fun?”

Distinctly, it was. He felt a vast wave of virtue surge through him. How anyone could have preferred the society of those common girls was at this moment incomprehensible.

“Basil, won’t it be fun to go East? Maybe we’ll be on the same train.”

“I can hardly wait,” he agreed gravely. “I’ve got on long pants. I had to have them to go away to school.”

One of the ladies in the box leaned toward him. “I know your mother very well,” she said. “And I know another friend of yours. I’m Riply Buckner’s aunt.”

“Oh, yes!”

“Riply’s such a nice boy,” beamed Mrs. Van Schillinger.

And then, as if the mention of his name had evoked him, Riply Buckner came suddenly into sight. Along the now empty and brightly illuminated race track came a short but monstrous procession, a sort of Lilliputian burlesque of the wild gay life. At its head marched Hubert Blair and Olive, Hubert prancing and twirling his cane like a drum major to the accompaniment of her appreciative screams of laughter. Next followed Elwood Leaming and his young lady, leaning so close together that they walked with difficulty, apparently wrapped in each other’s arms. And bringing up the rear without

glory were Riply Buckner and Basil's late companion, rivaling Olive in exhibitionist sound.

Fascinated, Basil stared at Riply, the expression of whose face was curiously mixed. At moments he would join in the general tone of the parade with silly guffaw, at others a pained expression would flit across his face, as if he doubted that, after all, the evening was a success.

The procession was attracting considerable notice — so much that not even Riply was aware of the particular attention focused upon him from this box, though he passed by it four feet away. He was out of hearing when a curious rustling sigh passed over its inhabitants and a series of discreet whispers began.

“What funny girls,” Gladys said. “Was that first boy Hubert Blair?”

“Yes.” Basil was listening to a fragment of conversation behind:

“His mother will certainly hear of this in the morning.”

As long as Riply had been in sight, Basil had been in an agony of shame for him, but now a new wave of virtue, even stronger than the first, swept over him. His memory of the incident would have reached actual happiness, save for the fact that Riply's mother might not let him go away to school. And a few minutes later, even that seemed endurable. Yet Basil was not a mean boy. The natural cruelty of his species toward the doomed was not yet disguised by hypocrisy — that was all.

In a burst of glory, to the alternate strains of Dixie and The Star-Spangled Banner, the Battle of Gettysburg ended. Outside by the waiting cars, Basil, on a sudden impulse, went up to Riply's aunt.

“I think it would be sort of a — a mistake to tell Riply's mother. He didn't do any harm. He — ”

Annoyed by the event of the evening, she turned on him cool, patronizing eyes.

“I shall do as I think best,” she said briefly.

He frowned. Then he turned and got into the Van Schellinger limousine.

Sitting beside Gladys in the little seats, he loved her suddenly. His hand swung gently against hers from time to time and he felt the warm bond that they were both going away to school tightened around them and pulling them together.

“Can’t you come and see me tomorrow?” she urged him. “Mother’s going to be away and she says I can have anybody I like.”

“All right.”

As the car slowed up for Basil’s house, she leaned toward him swiftly. “Basil — ”

He waited. Her breath was warm on his cheek. He wanted her to hurry, or, when the engine stopped, her parents, dozing in back, might hear what she said. She seemed beautiful to him then; that vague unexciting quality about her was more than compensated for by her exquisite delicacy, the fine luxury of her life.

“Basil — Basil, when you come tomorrow, will you bring that Hubert Blair?”

The chauffeur opened the door and Mr. and Mrs. Van Schellinger woke up with a start. When the car had driven off, Basil stood looking after it thoughtfully until it turned the corner of the street.

BASIL: THE FRESHEST BOY

I

The Saturday Evening Post (28 July 1928)

It was a hidden Broadway restaurant in the dead of the night, and a brilliant and mysterious group of society people, diplomats and members of the underworld were there. A few minutes ago the sparkling wine had been flowing and a girl had been dancing gaily upon a table, but now the whole crowd were hushed and breathless. All eyes were fixed upon the masked but well-groomed man in the dress suit and opera hat who stood nonchalantly in the door.

‘Don’t move, please,’ he said, in a well-bred, cultivated voice that had, nevertheless, a ring of steel in it. ‘This thing in my hand might — go off.’

His glance roved from table to table — fell upon the malignant man higher up with his pale saturnine face, upon Heatherly, the suave secret agent from a foreign power, then rested a little longer, a little more softly perhaps, upon the table where the girl with dark hair and dark tragic eyes sat alone.

‘Now that my purpose is accomplished, it might interest you to know who I am.’ There was a gleam of expectation in every eye. The breast of the dark-eyed girl heaved faintly and a tiny burst of subtle French perfume rose into the air. ‘I am none other than that elusive gentleman, Basil Lee, better known as the Shadow.’

Taking off his well-fitting opera hat, he bowed ironically from the waist. Then, like a flash, he turned and was gone into the night.

‘You get up to New York only once a month,’ Lewis Crum was saying, ‘and then you have to take a master along.’

Slowly, Basil Lee’s glazed eyes turned from the barns and billboards of the Indiana countryside to the interior of the Broadway Limited. The hypnosis of

the swift telegraph poles faded and Lewis Crum's stolid face took shape against the white slipcover of the opposite bench.

'I'd just duck the master when I got to New York,' said Basil.

'Yes, you would!'

'I bet I would.'

'You try it and you'll see.'

'What do you mean saying I'll see, all the time, Lewis? What'll I see?'

His very bright dark-blue eyes were at this moment fixed upon his companion with boredom and impatience. The two had nothing in common except their age, which was fifteen, and the lifelong friendship of their fathers — which is less than nothing. Also they were bound from the same Middle-Western city for Basil's first and Lewis's second year at the same Eastern school.

But, contrary to all the best traditions, Lewis the veteran was miserable and Basil the neophyte was happy. Lewis hated school. He had grown entirely dependent on the stimulus of a hearty vital mother, and as he felt her slipping farther and farther away from him, he plunged deeper into misery and homesickness. Basil, on the other hand, had lived with such intensity on so many stories of boarding-school life that, far from being homesick, he had a glad feeling of recognition and familiarity. Indeed, it was with some sense of doing the appropriate thing, having the traditional rough-house, that he had thrown Lewis's comb off the train at Milwaukee last night for no reason at all.

To Lewis, Basil's ignorant enthusiasm was distasteful — his instinctive attempt to dampen it had contributed to the mutual irritation.

'I'll tell you what you'll see,' he said ominously. 'They'll catch you smoking and put you on bounds.'

'No, they won't, because I won't be smoking. I'll be in training for football.'

'Football! Yeah! Football!'

‘Honestly, Lewis, you don’t like anything, do you?’

‘I don’t like football. I don’t like to go out and get a crack in the eye.’ Lewis spoke aggressively, for his mother had canonized all his timidities as common sense. Basil’s answer, made with what he considered kindly intent, was the sort of remark that creates lifelong enmities.

‘You’d probably be a lot more popular in school if you played football,’ — he suggested patronizingly.

Lewis did not consider himself unpopular. He did not think of it in that way at all. He was astounded.

‘You wait!’ he cried furiously. ‘They’ll take all that freshness out of you.’

‘Clam yourself,’ said Basil, coolly plucking at the creases of his first long trousers. ‘Just clam yourself.’

‘I guess everybody knows you were the freshest boy at the Country Day!’

‘Clam yourself,’ repeated Basil, but with less assurance. ‘Kindly clam yourself.’

‘I guess I know what they had in the school paper about you — ’

Basil’s own coolness was no longer perceptible.

‘If you don’t clam yourself,’ he said darkly, ‘I’m going to throw your brushes off the train too.’

The enormity of this threat was effective. Lewis sank back in his seat, snorting and muttering, but undoubtedly calmer. His reference had been to one of the most shameful passages in his companion’s life. In a periodical issued by the boys of Basil’s late school there had appeared under the heading Personals:

If someone will please poison young Basil, or find some other means to stop his mouth, the school at large and myself will be much obliged.

The two boys sat there fuming wordlessly at each other. Then, resolutely, Basil tried to re-enter this unfortunate souvenir of the past. All that was behind him now. Perhaps he had been a little fresh, but he was making a

new start. After a moment, the memory passed and with it the train and Lewis's dismal presence — the breath of the East came sweeping over him again with a vast nostalgia. A voice called him out of the fabled world; a man stood beside him with a hand on his sweater-clad shoulder.

'Lee!'

'Yes, sir.'

'It all depends on you now. Understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'All right,' the coach said, 'go in and win.'

Basil tore the sweater from his stripling form and dashed out on the field. There were two minutes to play and the score was 3 to 0 for the enemy, but at the sight of young Lee, kept out of the game all year by a malicious plan of Dan Haskins, the school bully, and Weasel Weems, his toady, a thrill of hope went over the St Regis stand.

'33-12-16-22!' barked Midget Brown, the diminutive little quarterback.

It was his signal —

'Oh, gosh!' Basil spoke aloud, forgetting the late unpleasantness. 'I wish we'd get there before tomorrow.'

II

St Regis School, Eastchester,

November 18, 19--

Dear Mother:

There is not much to say today, but I thought I would write you about my allowance. All the boys have a bigger allowance than me, because there are a lot of little things I have to get, such as shoe laces, etc. School is still very nice and am having a fine time, but football is over and there is not much to do. I am going to New York this week to see a show. I do not know yet what it will

be, but probably the Quacker Girl or little boy Blue as they are both very good. Dr Bacon is very nice and there's a good phycission in the village. No more now as I have to study Algebra.

Your affectionate Son,

Basil D. Lee.

As he put the letter in its envelope, a wizened little boy came into the deserted study hall where he sat and stood staring at him.

'Hello,' said Basil, frowning.

'I been looking for you,' said the little boy, slowly and judicially. 'I looked all over — up in your room and out in the gym, and they said you probably might of sneaked off in here.'

'What do you want?' Basil demanded.

'Hold your horses, Bossy.'

Basil jumped to his feet. The little boy retreated a step.

'Go on, hit me!' he chirped nervously. 'Go on, hit me, cause I'm just half your size — Bossy.'

Basil winced. 'You call me that again and I'll spank you.'

'No, you won't spank me. Brick Wales said if you ever touched any of us —'

'But I never did touch any of you.'

'Didn't you chase a lot of us one day and didn't Brick Wales —'

'Oh, what do you want?' Basil cried in desperation.

'Doctor Bacon wants you. They sent me after you and somebody said maybe you sneaked in here.'

Basil dropped his letter in his pocket and walked out — the little boy and his invective following him through the door. He traversed a long corridor, muggy with that odour best described as the smell of stale caramels that is

so peculiar to boys' schools, ascended a stairs and knocked at an unexceptional but formidable door.

Doctor Bacon was at his desk. He was a handsome, redheaded Episcopal clergyman of fifty whose original real interest in boys was now tempered by the flustered cynicism which is the fate of all headmasters and settles on them like green mould. There were certain preliminaries before Basil was asked to sit down — gold-rimmed glasses had to be hoisted up from nowhere by a black cord and fixed on Basil to be sure that he was not an impostor; great masses of paper on the desk had to be shuffled through, not in search of anything but as a man nervously shuffles a pack of cards.

'I had a letter from your mother this morning — ah — Basil.' The use of his first name had come to startle Basil. No one else in school had yet called him anything but Bossy or Lee. 'She feels that your marks have been poor. I believe you have been sent here at a certain amount of — ah — sacrifice and she expects —'

Basil's spirit writhed with shame, not at his poor marks but that his financial inadequacy should be so bluntly stated. He knew that he was one of the poorest boys in a rich boys' school.

Perhaps some dormant sensibility in Doctor Bacon became aware of his discomfort; he shuffled through the papers once more and began on a new note.

'However, that was not what I sent for you about this afternoon. You applied last week for permission to go to New York on Saturday, to a matinée. Mr Davis tells me that for almost the first time since school opened you will be off bounds tomorrow.'

'Yes, sir.'

'That is not a good record. However, I would allow you to go to New York if it could be arranged. Unfortunately, no masters are available this Saturday.'

Basil's mouth dropped ajar. 'Why, I— why, Doctor Bacon, I know two parties that are going. Couldn't I go with one of them?'

Doctor Bacon ran through all his papers very quickly. 'Unfortunately, one is composed of slightly older boys and the other group made arrangements some weeks ago.'

'How about the party that's going to the *Quaker Girl* with Mr Dunn?'

'It's that party I speak of. They feel that the arrangements are complete and they have purchased seats together.'

Suddenly Basil understood. At the look in his eye Doctor Bacon went on hurriedly.

'There's perhaps one thing I can do. Of course there must be several boys in the party so that the expenses of the master can be divided up among all. If you can find two other boys who would like to make up a party, and let me have their names by five o'clock, I'll send Mr Rooney with you.'

'Thank you,' Basil said.

Doctor Bacon hesitated. Beneath the cynical incrustations of many years an instinct stirred to look into the unusual case of this boy and find out what made him the most detested boy in school. Among boys and masters there seemed to exist an extraordinary hostility towards him, and though Doctor Bacon had dealt with many sorts of schoolboy crimes, he had neither by himself nor with the aid of trusted sixth-formers been able to lay his hands on its underlying cause. It was probably no single thing, but a combination of things; it was most probably one of those intangible questions of personality. Yet he remembered that when he first saw Basil he had considered him unusually prepossessing.

He sighed. Sometimes these things worked themselves out. He wasn't one to rush in clumsily. 'Let us have a better report to send home next month, Basil.'

'Yes, sir.'

Basil ran quickly downstairs to the recreation room. It was Wednesday and most of the boys had already gone into the village of Eastchester, whither Basil, who was still on bounds, was forbidden to follow. When he looked at those still scattered about the pool tables and piano, he saw that it was

going to be difficult to get anyone to go with him at all. For Basil was quite conscious that he was the most unpopular boy at school.

It had begun almost immediately. One day, less than a fortnight after he came, a crowd of the smaller boys, perhaps urged on to it, gathered suddenly around him and began calling him Bossy. Within the next week he had two fights, and both times the crowd was vehemently and eloquently with the other boy. Soon after, when he was merely shoving indiscriminately, like everyone else, to get into the dining-room, Carver, the captain of the football team, turned about and, seizing him by the back of the neck, held him and dressed him down savagely. He joined a group innocently at the piano and was told, 'Go on away. We don't want you around.'

After a month he began to realize the full extent of his unpopularity. It shocked him. One day after a particularly bitter humiliation he went up to his room and cried. He tried to keep out of the way for a while, but it didn't help. He was accused of sneaking off here and there, as if bent on a series of nefarious errands. Puzzled and wretched, he looked at his face in the glass, trying to discover there the secret of their dislike — in the expression of his eyes, his smile.

He saw now that in certain ways he had erred at the outset — he had boasted, he had been considered yellow at football, he had pointed out people's mistakes to them, he had showed off his rather extraordinary fund of general information in class. But he had tried to do better and couldn't understand his failure to atone. It must be too late. He was queered forever.

He had, indeed, become the scapegoat, the immediate villain, the sponge which absorbed all malice and irritability abroad — just as the most frightened person in a party seems to absorb all the others' fear, seems to be afraid for them all. His situation was not helped by the fact, obvious to all, that the supreme self-confidence with which he had come to St Regis in September was thoroughly broken. Boys taunted him with impunity who would not have dared raise their voices to him several months before.

This trip to New York had come to mean everything to him — surcease from the misery of his daily life as well as a glimpse into the long-awaited heaven of

romance. Its postponement for week after week due to his sins — he was constantly caught reading after lights, for example, driven by his wretchedness into such vicarious escapes from reality — had deepened his longing until it was a burning hunger. It was unbearable that he should not go, and he told over the short list of those whom he might get to accompany him. The possibilities were Fat Gaspar, Treadway, and Bugs Brown. A quick journey to their rooms showed that they had all availed themselves of the Wednesday permission to go into Eastchester for the afternoon.

Basil did not hesitate. He had until five o'clock and his only chance was to go after them. It was not the first time he had broken bounds, though the last attempt had ended in disaster and an extension of his confinement. In his room, he put on a heavy sweater — an overcoat was a betrayal of intent — replaced his jacket over it and hid a cap in his back pocket. Then he went downstairs and with an elaborate careless whistle struck out across the lawn for the gymnasium. Once there, he stood for a while as if looking in the windows, first the one close to the walk, then one near the corner of the building. From here he moved quickly, but not too quickly, into a grove of lilacs. Then he dashed around the corner, down a long stretch of lawn that was blind from all windows and, parting the strands of a wire fence, crawled through and stood upon the grounds of a neighbouring estate. For the moment he was free. He put on his cap against the chilly November wind, and set out along the half-mile road to town.

Eastchester was a suburban farming community, with a small shoe factory. The institutions which pandered to the factory workers were the ones patronized by the boys — a movie house, a quick-lunch wagon on wheels known as the Dog and the Bostonian Candy Kitchen. Basil tried the Dog first and happened immediately upon a prospect.

This was Bugs Brown, a hysterical boy, subject to fits and strenuously avoided. Years later he became a brilliant lawyer, but at that time he was considered by the boys of St Regis to be a typical lunatic because of the peculiar series of sounds with which he assuaged his nervousness all day long.

He consorted with boys younger than himself, who were without the prejudices of their elders, and was in the company of several when Basil came in.

‘Who-ee!’ he cried. ‘Ee-ee-ee!’ He put his hand over his mouth and bounced it quickly, making a wah-wah-wah sound. ‘It’s Bossy Lee! It’s Bossy Lee! It’s Boss-Boss-Boss-Boss-Bossy Lee!’

‘Wait a minute, Bugs,’ said Basil anxiously, half afraid that Bugs would go finally crazy before he could persuade him to come to town. ‘Say, Bugs, listen. Don’t, Bugs — wait a minute. Can you come up to New York Saturday afternoon?’

‘Whe-ee-ee!’ cried Bugs to Basil’s distress. ‘Wee-ee-ee!’

‘Honestly, Bugs, tell me, can you? We could go up together if you could go.’

‘I’ve got to see a doctor,’ said Bugs, suddenly calm. ‘He wants to see how crazy I am.’

‘Can’t you have him see about it some other day?’ said Basil without humour.

‘Whee-ee-ee!’ cried Bugs.

‘All right then,’ said Basil hastily. ‘Have you seen Fat Gaspar in town?’

Bugs was lost in shrill noise, but someone had seen Fat: Basil was directed to the Bostonian Candy Kitchen.

This was a gaudy paradise of cheap sugar. Its odour, heavy and sickly and calculated to bring out a sticky sweat upon an adult’s palms, hung suffocatingly over the whole vicinity and met one like a strong moral dissuasion at the door. Inside, beneath a pattern of flies, material as black point lace, a line of boys sat eating heavy dinners of banana splits, maple nut, and chocolate marshmallow nut sundaes. Basil found Fat Gaspar at a table on the side.

Fat Gaspar was at once Basil’s most unlikely and most ambitious quest. He was considered a nice fellow — in fact he was so pleasant that he had been courteous to Basil and had spoken to him politely all fall. Basil realized that

he was like that to everyone, yet it was just possible that Fat liked him, as people used to in the past, and he was driven desperately to take a chance. But it was undoubtedly a presumption, and as he approached the table and saw the stiffened faces which the other two boys turned towards him, Basil's hope diminished.

'Say, Fat — ' he said, and hesitated. Then he burst forth suddenly. 'I'm on bounds, but I ran off because I had to see you. Doctor Bacon told me I could go to New York Saturday if I could get two other boys to go. I asked Bugs Brown and he couldn't go, and I thought I'd ask you.'

He broke off, furiously embarrassed, and waited. Suddenly the two boys with Fat burst into a shout of laughter.

'Bugs wasn't crazy enough!'

Fat Gaspar hesitated. He couldn't go to New York Saturday and ordinarily he would have refused without offending. He had nothing against Basil; nor, indeed, against anybody; but boys have only a certain resistance to public opinion and he was influenced by the contemptuous laughter of the others.

'I don't want to go,' he said indifferently. 'Why do you want to ask me?'

Then, half in shame, he gave a deprecatory little laugh and bent over his ice cream.

'I just thought I'd ask you,' said Basil.

Turning quickly away, he went to the counter and in a hollow and unfamiliar voice ordered a strawberry sundae. He ate it mechanically, hearing occasional whispers and snickers from the table behind. Still in a daze, he started to walk out without paying his check, but the clerk called him back and he was conscious of more derisive laughter.

For a moment he hesitated whether to go back to the table and hit one of those boys in the face, but he saw nothing to be gained. They would say the truth — that he had done it because he couldn't get anybody to go to New York. Clenching his fists with impotent rage, he walked from the store.

He came immediately upon his third prospect, Treadway. Treadway had entered St Regis late in the year and had been put in to room with Basil the week before. The fact that Treadway hadn't witnessed his humiliations of the autumn encouraged Basil to behave naturally towards him, and their relations had been, if not intimate, at least tranquil.

'Hey, Treadway,' he called, still excited from the affair in the Bostonian, 'can you come up to New York to a show Saturday afternoon?'

He stopped, realizing that Treadway was in the company of Brick Wales, a boy he had had a fight with and one of his bitterest enemies. Looking from one to the other, Basil saw a look of impatience in Treadway's face and a faraway expression in Brick Wales's, and he realized what must have been happening. Treadway, making his way into the life of the school, had just been enlightened as to the status of his room-mate. Like Fat Gaspar, rather than acknowledge himself eligible to such an intimate request, he preferred to cut their friendly relations short.

'Not on your life,' he said briefly. 'So long.' The two walked past him into the Candy Kitchen.

Had these slights, so much the bitterer for their lack of passion, been visited upon Basil in September, they would have been unbearable.

But since then he had developed a shell of hardness which, while it did not add to his attractiveness, spared him certain delicacies of torture.

In misery enough, and despair and self-pity, he went the other way along the street for a little distance until he could control the violent contortions of his face. Then, taking a roundabout route, he started back to school.

He reached the adjoining estate, intending to go back the way he had come. Half-way through a hedge, he heard footsteps approaching along the sidewalk and stood motionless, fearing the proximity of masters.

Their voices grew nearer and louder; before he knew it he was listening with horrified fascination:

‘ — so, after he tried Bugs Brown, the poor nut asked Fat Gaspar to go with him and Fat said, “What do you ask me for?” It serves him right if he couldn’t get anybody at all.’

It was the dismal but triumphant voice of Lewis Crum.

III

Up in his room, Basil found a package lying on his bed. He knew its contents and for a long time he had been eagerly expecting it, but such was his depression that he opened it listlessly. It was a series of eight colour reproductions of Harrison Fisher girls ‘on glossy paper, without printing or advertising matter and suitable for framing’.

The pictures were named Dora, Marguerite, Babette, Lucille, Gretchen, Rose, Katherine, and Mina. Two of them — Marguerite and Rose — Basil looked at, slowly tore up, and dropped in the waste-basket, as one who disposes of the inferior pups from a litter. The other six he pinned at intervals around the room. Then he lay down on his bed and regarded them.

Dora, Lucille, and Katherine were blonde; Gretchen was medium; Babette and Mina were dark. After a few minutes, he found that he was looking oftenest at Dora and Babette and, to a lesser extent, at Gretchen, though the latter’s Dutch cap seemed unromantic and precluded the element of mystery. Babette, a dark little violet-eyed beauty in a tight-fitting hat, attracted him most; his eyes came to rest on her at last.

‘Babette,’ he whispered to himself — ‘beautiful Babette.’

The sound of the word, so melancholy and suggestive, like ‘Vilia’ or ‘I’m happy at Maxim’s’ on the phonograph, softened him and, turning over on his face, he sobbed into the pillow. He took hold of the bed rails over his head and, sobbing and straining, began to talk to himself brokenly — how he hated them and whom he hated — he listed a dozen — and what he would do to them when he was great and powerful. In previous moments like these he had always rewarded Fat Gaspar for his kindness, but now he

was like the rest. Basil set upon him, pummelling him unmercifully, or laughed sneeringly when he passed him blind and begging on the street.

He controlled himself as he heard Treadway come in, but did not move or speak. He listened as the other moved about the room, and after a while became conscious that there was an unusual opening of closets and bureau drawers. Basil turned over, his arm concealing his tear-stained face. Treadway had an armful of shirts in his hand.

‘What are you doing?’ Basil demanded.

His room-mate looked at him stonily. ‘I’m moving in with Wales,’ he said.

‘Oh!’

Treadway went on with his packing. He carried out a suitcase full, then another, took down some pennants and dragged his trunk into the hall. Basil watched him bundle his toilet things into a towel and take one last survey about the room’s new barrenness to see if there was anything forgotten.

‘Good-bye,’ he said to Basil, without a ripple of expression on his face.

‘Good-bye.’

Treadway went out. Basil turned over once more and choked into the pillow.

‘Oh, poor Babette!’ he cried huskily. ‘Poor little Babette! Poor little Babette!’ Babette, svelte and piquante, looked down at him coquettishly from the wall.

IV

Doctor Bacon, sensing Basil’s predicament and perhaps the extremity of his misery, arranged it that he should go into New York, after all. He went in the company of Mr Rooney, the football coach and history teacher. At twenty Mr Rooney had hesitated for some time between joining the police force and having his way paid through a small New England college; in fact he was a hard specimen and Doctor Bacon was planning to get rid of him at Christmas. Mr Rooney’s contempt for Basil was founded on the latter’s

ambiguous and unreliable conduct on the football field during the past season — he had consented to take him to New York for reasons of his own.

Basil sat meekly beside him on the train, glancing past Mr Rooney's bulky body at the Sound and the fallow fields of Westchester County. Mr Rooney finished his newspaper, folded it up and sank into a moody silence. He had eaten a large breakfast and the exigencies of time had not allowed him to work it off with exercise. He remembered that Basil was a fresh boy, and it was time he did something fresh and could be called to account. This reproachless silence annoyed him.

'Lee,' he said suddenly, with a thinly assumed air of friendly interest, 'why don't you get wise to yourself?'

'What, sir?' Basil was startled from his excited trance of this morning.

'I said why don't you get wise to yourself?' said Mr Rooney in a somewhat violent tone. 'Do you want to be the butt of the school all your time here?'

'No, I don't.' Basil was chilled. 'Couldn't all this be left behind for just one day?'

'You oughtn't to get so fresh all the time. A couple of times in history class I could just about have broken your neck.' Basil could think of no appropriate answer. 'Then out playing football,' continued Mr Rooney, '— you didn't have any nerve. You could play better than a lot of 'em when you wanted, like that day against the Pomfret seconds, but you lost your nerve.'

'I shouldn't have tried for the second team,' said Basil. 'I was too light. I should have stayed on the third.'

'You were yellow, that was all the trouble. You ought to get wise to yourself. In class, you're always thinking of something else. If you don't study, you'll never get to college.'

'I'm the youngest boy in the fifth form,' Basil said rashly.

'You think you're pretty bright, don't you?' He eyed Basil ferociously. Then something seemed to occur to him that changed his attitude and they rode for a while in silence. When the train began to run through the thickly

clustered communities near New York, he spoke again in a milder voice and with an air of having considered the matter for a long time:

‘Lee, I’m going to trust you.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You go and get some lunch and then go on to your show. I’ve got some business of my own I got to attend to, and when I’ve finished I’ll try to get to the show. If I can’t, I’ll anyhow meet you outside.’ Basil’s heart leaped up.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I don’t want you to open your mouth about this at school — I mean, about me doing some business of my own.’

‘No, sir.’

‘We’ll see if you can keep your mouth shut for once,’ he said, making it fun. Then he added, on a note of moral sternness, ‘And no drinks, you understand that?’

‘Oh, no, sir!’ The idea shocked Basil. He had never tasted a drink, nor even contemplated the possibility, save the intangible and nonalcoholic champagne of his café dreams.

On the advice of Mr Rooney he went for luncheon to the Manhattan Hotel, near the station, where he ordered a club sandwich, French fried potatoes, and a chocolate parfait. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the nonchalant, debonair, blasé New Yorkers at neighbouring tables, investing them with a romance by which these possible fellow citizens of his from the Middle West lost nothing. School had fallen from him like a burden; it was no more than an unheeded clamour, faint and far away. He even delayed opening the letter from the morning’s mail which he found in his pocket, because it was addressed to him at school.

He wanted another chocolate parfait, but being reluctant to bother the busy waiter any more, he opened the letter and spread it before him instead. It was from his mother:

Dear Basil:

This is written in great haste, as I didn't want to frighten you by telegraphing. Grandfather is going abroad to take the waters and he wants you and me to come too. The idea is that you'll go to school at Grenoble or Montreux for the rest of the year and learn the language and we'll be close by. That is, if you want to. I know how you like St Regis and playing football and baseball, and of course there would be none of that; but on the other hand, it would be a nice change, even if it postponed your entering Yale by an extra year. So, as usual, I want you to do just as you like. We will be leaving home almost as soon as you get this and will come to the Waldorf in New York, where you can come in and see us for a few days, even if you decide to stay. Think it over, dear.

With love to my dearest boy,

Mother.

Basil got up from his chair with a dim idea of walking over to the Waldorf and having himself locked up safely until his mother came. Then, impelled to some gesture, he raised his voice and in one of his first basso notes called booming and without reticence for the waiter. No more St Regis! No more St Regis! He was almost strangling with happiness.

'Oh, gosh!' he cried to himself. 'Oh, golly! Oh, gosh! Oh, gosh!' No more Doctor Bacon and Mr Rooney and Brick Wales and Fat Gaspar. No more Bugs Brown and on bounds and being called Bossy. He need no longer hate them, for they were impotent shadows in the stationary world that he was sliding away from, sliding past, waving his hand. 'Good-bye!' he pitied them. 'Good-bye!'

It required the din of Forty-second Street to sober his maudlin joy. With his hand on his purse to guard against the omnipresent pickpocket, he moved cautiously towards Broadway. What a day! He would tell Mr Rooney — Why, he needn't ever go back! Or perhaps it would be better to go back and let them know what he was going to do, while they went on and on in the dismal, dreary round of school.

He found the theatre and entered the lobby with its powdery feminine atmosphere of a matinée. As he took out his ticket, his gaze was caught and held by a sculptured profile a few feet away. It was that of a well-built blond

young man of about twenty with a strong chin and direct grey eyes. Basil's brain spun wildly for a moment and then came to rest upon a name — more than a name — upon a legend, a sign in the sky. What a day! He had never seen the young man before, but from a thousand pictures he knew beyond the possibility of a doubt that it was Ted Fay, the Yale football captain, who had almost single-handedly beaten Harvard and Princeton last fall. Basil felt a sort of exquisite pain. The profile turned away; the crowd revolved; the hero disappeared. But Basil would know all through the next hours that Ted Fay was here too.

In the rustling, whispering, sweet-smelling darkness of the theatre he read the programme. It was the show of all shows that he wanted to see, and until the curtain actually rose the programme itself had a curious sacredness — a prototype of the thing itself. But when the curtain rose it became waste paper to be dropped carelessly to the floor.

Act 1. The Village Green of a Small Town near New York

It was too bright and blinding to comprehend all at once, and it went so fast that from the very first Basil felt he had missed things; he would make his mother take him again when she came — next week — tomorrow.

An hour passed. It was very sad at this point — a sort of gay sadness, but sad. The girl — the man. What kept them apart even now? Oh, those tragic errors, and misconceptions. So sad. Couldn't they look into each other's eyes and see?

In a blaze of light and sound, of resolution, anticipation and imminent trouble, the act was over.

He went out. He looked for Ted Fay and thought he saw him leaning rather moodily on the plush wall at the rear of the theatre, but he could not be sure. He bought cigarettes and lit one, but fancying at the first puff he heard a blare of music he rushed back inside.

Act 2. The Foyer of the Hotel Astor

Yes, she was, indeed, like a song — a Beautiful Rose of the Night. The waltz buoyed her up, brought her with it to a point of aching beauty and then let

her slide back to life across its last bars as a leaf slants to earth across the air. The high life of New York! Who could blame her if she was carried away by the glitter of it all, vanishing into the bright morning of the amber window borders or into distant and entrancing music as the door opened and closed that led to the ballroom? The toast of the shining town.

Half an hour passed. Her true love brought her roses like herself and she threw them scornfully at his feet. She laughed and turned to the other, and danced — danced madly, wildly. Wait! That delicate treble among the thin horns, the low curving note from the great strings. There it was again, poignant and aching, sweeping like a great gust of emotion across the stage, catching her again like a leaf helpless in the wind:

‘Rose — Rose — Rose of the night

When the spring moon is bright you’ll be fair — ’

A few minutes later, feeling oddly shaken and exalted, Basil drifted outside with the crowd. The first thing upon which his eyes fell was the almost forgotten and now curiously metamorphosed spectre of Mr Rooney.

Mr Rooney had, in fact, gone a little to pieces. He was, to begin with, wearing a different and much smaller hat than when he left Basil at noon. Secondly, his face had lost its somewhat gross aspect and turned a pure and even delicate white, and he was wearing his necktie and even portions of his shirt on the outside of his unaccountably wringing-wet overcoat. How, in the short space of four hours, Mr Rooney had got himself in such shape is explicable only by the pressure of confinement in a boys’ school upon a fiery outdoor spirit. Mr Rooney was born to toil under the clear light of heaven and, perhaps half-consciously, he was headed towards his inevitable destiny.

‘Lee,’ he said dimly, ‘you ought to get wise to y’self. I’m going to put you wise y’self.’

To avoid the ominous possibility of being put wise to himself in the lobby, Basil uneasily changed the subject.

‘Aren’t you coming to the show?’ he asked, flattering Mr Rooney by implying that he was in any condition to come to the show. ‘It’s a wonderful show.’

Mr Rooney took off his hat, displaying wringing-wet matted hair. A picture of reality momentarily struggled for development in the back of his brain.

‘We got to get back to school,’ he said in a sombre and unconvinced voice.

‘But there’s another act,’ protested Basil in horror. ‘I’ve got to stay for the last act.’

Swaying, Mr Rooney looked at Basil dimly realizing that he had put himself in the hollow of this boy’s hand.

‘All righ’,’ he admitted. ‘I’m going to get somethin’ to eat. I’ll wait for you next door.’

He turned abruptly, reeled a dozen steps, and curved dizzily into a bar adjoining the theatre. Considerably shaken, Basil went back inside.

Act 3. The Roof Garden of Mr Van Astor’s House.

Night

Half an hour passed. Everything was going to be all right, after all. The comedian was at his best now, with the glad appropriateness of laughter after tears, and there was a promise of felicity in the bright tropical sky. One lovely plaintive duet, and then abruptly the long moment of incomparable beauty was over.

Basil went into the lobby and stood in thought while the crowd passed out. His mother’s letter and the show had cleared his mind of bitterness and vindictiveness — he was his old self and he wanted to do the right thing. He wondered if it was the right thing to get Mr Rooney back to school. He walked towards the saloon, slowed up as he came to it and, gingerly opening the swinging door, took a quick peer inside. He saw only that Mr Rooney was not one of those drinking at the bar. He walked down the street a little way, came back and tried again. It was as if he thought the doors were teeth to bite him, for he had the old-fashioned Middle-Western boy’s horror of the saloon. The third time he was successful. Mr Rooney was sound asleep at a table in the back of the room.

Outside again Basil walked up and down, considering. He would give Mr Rooney half an hour. If, at the end of that time, he had not come out, he would go back to school. After all, Mr Rooney had laid for him ever since football season — Basil was simply washing his hands of the whole affair, as in a day or so he would wash his hands of school.

He had made several turns up and down, when glancing up an alley that ran beside the theatre his eye was caught by the sign, Stage Entrance. He could watch the actors come forth.

He waited. Women streamed by him, but those were the days before Glorification and he took these drab people for wardrobe women or something. Then suddenly a girl came out and with her a man, and Basil turned and ran a few steps up the street as if afraid they would recognize him — and ran back, breathing as if with a heart attack — for the girl, a radiant little beauty of nineteen, was Her and the young man by her side was Ted Fay.

Arm in arm, they walked past him, and irresistibly Basil followed. As they walked, she leaned towards Ted Fay in a way that gave them a fascinating air of intimacy. They crossed Broadway and turned into the Knickerbocker Hotel, and twenty feet behind them Basil followed, in time to see them go into a long room set for afternoon tea. They sat at a table for two, spoke vaguely to a waiter, and then, alone at last, bent eagerly towards each other. Basil saw that Ted Fay was holding her gloved hand.

The tea room was separated only by a hedge of potted firs from the main corridor. Basil went along this to a lounge which was almost up against their table and sat down.

Her voice was low and faltering, less certain than it had been in the play, and very sad: 'Of course I do, Ted.' For a long time, as their conversation continued, she repeated, 'Of course I do,' or 'But I do, Ted.' Ted Fay's remarks were too low for Basil to hear.

' — says next month, and he won't be put off any more . . . I do in a way, Ted. It's hard to explain, but he's done everything for mother and me . . . There's no use kidding myself. It was a foolproof part and any girl he gave it

to was made right then and there . . . He's been awfully thoughtful. He's done everything for me.'

Basil's ears were sharpened by the intensity of his emotion; now he could hear Ted Fay's voice too:

'And you say you love me.'

'But don't you see I promised to marry him more than a year ago.'

'Tell him the truth — that you love me. Ask him to let you off.'

'This isn't musical comedy, Ted.'

'That was a mean one,' he said bitterly.

'I'm sorry, dear, Ted darling, but you're driving me crazy going on this way. You're making it so hard for me.'

'I'm going to leave New Haven, anyhow.'

'No, you're not. You're going to stay and play baseball this spring. Why, you're an ideal to all those boys! Why, if you —'

He laughed shortly. 'You're a fine one to talk about ideals.'

'Why not? I'm living up to my responsibility to Beltzman; you've got to make up your mind just like I have — that we can't have each other.'

'Jerry! Think what you're doing! All my life, whenever I hear that waltz —'

Basil got to his feet and hurried down the corridor, through the lobby and out of the hotel. He was in a state of wild emotional confusion. He did not understand all he had heard, but from his clandestine glimpse into the privacy of these two, with all the world that his short experience could conceive of at their feet, he had gathered that life for everybody was a struggle, sometimes magnificent from a distance, but always difficult and surprisingly simple and a little sad.

They would go on. Ted Fay would go back to Yale, put her picture in his bureau drawer and knock out home runs with the bases full this spring — at

8.30 the curtain would go up and She would miss something warm and young out of her life, something she had had this afternoon.

It was dark outside and Broadway was a blazing forest fire as Basil walked slowly along towards the point of brightest light. He looked up at the great intersecting planes of radiance with a vague sense of approval and possession. He would see it a lot now, lay his restless heart upon this greater restlessness of a nation — he would come whenever he could get off from school.

But that was all changed — he was going to Europe. Suddenly Basil realized that he wasn't going to Europe. He could not forgo the moulding of his own destiny just to alleviate a few months of pain. The conquest of the successive worlds of school, college and New York — why, that was his true dream that he had carried from boyhood into adolescence, and because of the jeers of a few boys he had been about to abandon it and run ignominiously up a back alley! He shivered violently, like a dog coming out of the water, and simultaneously he was reminded of Mr Rooney.

A few minutes later he walked into the bar, past the quizzical eyes of the bartender and up to the table where Mr Rooney still sat asleep. Basil shook him gently, then firmly. Mr Rooney stirred and perceived Basil.

'G'wise to yourself,' he muttered drowsily. 'G'wise to yourself an' let me alone.'

'I am wise to myself,' said Basil. 'Honest, I am wise to myself, Mr Rooney. You got to come with me into the washroom and get cleaned up, and then you can sleep on the train again, Mr Rooney. Come on, Mr Rooney, please —'

V

It was a long hard time. Basil got on bounds again in December and wasn't free again until March. An indulgent mother had given him no habits of work and this was almost beyond the power of anything but life itself to remedy, but he made numberless new starts and failed and tried again.

He made friends with a new boy named Maplewood after Christmas, but they had a silly quarrel; and through the winter term, when a boys' school is shut in with itself and only partly assuaged from its natural savagery by indoor sports, Basil was snubbed and slighted a good deal for his real and imaginary sins, and he was much alone. But on the other hand, there was Ted Fay, and Rose of the Night on the phonograph — 'All my life whenever I hear that waltz' — and the remembered lights of New York, and the thought of what he was going to do in football next autumn and the glamorous image of Yale and the hope of spring in the air.

Fat Gaspar and a few others were nice to him now. Once when he and Fat walked home together by accident from down-town they had a long talk about actresses — a talk that Basil was wise enough not to presume upon afterwards. The smaller boys suddenly decided that they approved of him, and a master who had hitherto disliked him put his hand on his shoulder walking to a class one day. They would all forget eventually — maybe during the summer. There would be new fresh boys in September; he would have a clean start next year.

One afternoon in February, playing basketball, a great thing happened. He and Brick Wales were at forward on the second team and in the fury of the scrimmage the gymnasium echoed with sharp slapping contacts and shrill cries.

'Here yar!'

'Bill! Bill!'

Basil had dribbled the ball down the court and Brick Wales, free, was crying for it.

'Here yar! Lee! Hey! Lee-y!'

Lee-y!

Basil flushed and made a poor pass. He had been called by a nickname. It was a poor makeshift, but it was something more than the stark bareness of his surname or a term of derision. Brick Wales went on playing, unconscious that he had done anything in particular or that he had contributed to the

events by which another boy was saved from the army of the bitter, the selfish, the neurasthenic and the unhappy. It isn't given to us to know those rare moments when people are wide open and the lightest touch can wither or heal. A moment too late and we can never reach them any more in this world. They will not be cured by our most efficacious drugs or slain with our sharpest swords.

Lee-y! it could scarcely be pronounced. But Basil took it to bed with him that night, and thinking of it, holding it to him happily to the last, fell easily to sleep.

HE THINKS HE'S WONDERFUL

I

The Saturday Evening Post (29 September, 1928)

After the college-board examinations in June, Basil Duke Lee and five other boys from St. Regis School boarded the train for the West. Two got out at Pittsburgh, one slanted south toward St. Louis and two stayed in Chicago; from then on Basil was alone. It was the first time in his life that he had ever felt the need of tranquillity, but now he took long breaths of it; for, though things had gone better toward the end, he had had an unhappy year at school.

He wore one of those extremely flat derbies in vogue during the twelfth year of the century, and a blue business suit became a little too short for his constantly lengthening body. Within he was by turns a disembodied spirit, almost unconscious of his person and moving in a mist of impressions and emotions, and a fiercely competitive individual trying desperately to control the rush of events that were the steps in his own evolution from child to man. He believed that everything was a matter of effort — the current principle of American education — and his fantastic ambition was continually leading him to expect too much. He wanted to be a great athlete, popular, brilliant and always happy. During this year at school, where he had been punished for his “freshness,” for fifteen years of thorough spoiling at home, he had grown uselessly introspective, and this interfered with that observation of others which is the beginning of wisdom. It was apparent that before he obtained much success in dealing with the world he would know that he'd been in a fight.

He spent the afternoon in Chicago, walking the streets and avoiding members of the underworld. He bought a detective story called “In the Dead of the Night,” and at five o'clock recovered his suitcase from the station check room and boarded the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul.

Immediately he encountered a contemporary, also bound home from school.

Margaret Torrence was fourteen; a serious girl, considered beautiful by a sort of tradition, for she had been beautiful as a little girl. A year and a half before, after a breathless struggle, Basil had succeeded in kissing her on the forehead. They met now with extraordinary joy; for a moment each of them to the other represented home, the blue skies of the past, the summer afternoons ahead.

He sat with Margaret and her mother in the dining car that night. Margaret saw that he was no longer the ultraconfident boy of a year before; his brightness was subdued, and the air of consideration in his face — a mark of his recent discovery that others had wills as strong as his, and more power — appeared to Margaret as a charming sadness. The spell of peace after a struggle was still upon him. Margaret had always liked him — she was of the grave, conscientious type who sometimes loved him and whose love he could never return — and now she could scarcely wait to tell people how attractive he had grown.

After dinner they went back to the observation car and sat on the deserted rear platform while the train pulled them visibly westward between the dark wide farms. They talked of people they knew, of where they had gone for Easter vacation, of the plays they had seen in New York.

“Basil, we’re going to get an automobile,” she said, “and I’m going to learn to drive.”

“That’s fine.” He wondered if his grandfather would let him drive the electric sometimes this summer.

The light from inside the car fell on her young face, and he spoke impetuously, borne on by the rush of happiness that he was going home: “You know something? You know you’re the prettiest girl in the city?”

At the moment when the remark blurred with the thrilling night in Margaret’s heart, Mrs. Torrence appeared to fetch her to bed.

Basil sat alone on the platform for a while, scarcely realizing that she was gone, at peace with himself for another hour and content that everything should remain patternless and shapeless until tomorrow.

II

Fifteen is of all ages the most difficult to locate — to put one's fingers on and say, "That's the way I was." The melancholy Jacques does not select it for mention, and all one can know is that somewhere between thirteen, boyhood's majority, and seventeen, when one is a sort of counterfeit young man, there is a time when youth fluctuates hourly between one world and another — pushed ceaselessly forward into unprecedented experiences and vainly trying to struggle back to the days when nothing had to be paid for. Fortunately none of our contemporaries remember much more than we do of how we behaved in those days; nevertheless the curtain is about to be drawn aside for an inspection of Basil's madness that summer.

To begin with, Margaret Torrence, in one of those moods of idealism which overcome the most matter-of-fact girls, gave it as her rapt opinion that Basil was wonderful. Having practised believing things all year at school, and having nothing much to believe at that moment, her friends accepted the fact. Basil suddenly became a legend. There were outbreaks of giggling when girls encountered him on the street, but he suspected nothing at all.

One night, when he had been home a week, he and Riply Buckner went on to an after-dinner gathering on Imogene Bissel's veranda. As they came up the walk Margaret and two other girls suddenly clung together, whispered convulsively and pursued one another around the yard, uttering strange cries — an inexplicable business that ended only when Gladys Van Schellinger, tenderly and impressively accompanied by her mother's maid, arrived in a limousine.

All of them were a little strange to one another. Those who had been East at school felt a certain superiority, which, however, was more than counterbalanced by the fact that romantic pairings and quarrels and

jealousies and adventures, of which they were lamentably ignorant, had gone on while they had been away.

After the ice cream at nine they sat together on the warm stone steps in a quiet confusion that was halfway between childish teasing and adolescent coquetry. Last year the boys would have ridden their bicycles around the yard; now they had all begun to wait for something to happen.

They knew it was going to happen, the plainest girls, the shyest boys; they had begun to associate with others the romantic world of summer night that pressed deeply and sweetly on their senses. Their voices drifted in a sort of broken harmony in to Mrs. Bissel, who sat reading beside an open window.

“No, look out. You’ll break it. Bay-zil!”

“Rip-lee!”

“Sure I did!”

Laughter.

“ — on Moonlight Bay

We could hear their voices call — ”

“Did you see — ”

“Connie, don’t — don’t! You tickle. Look out!”

Laughter.

“Going to the lake tomorrow?”

“Going Friday.”

“Elwood’s home.”

“Is Elwood home?”

“ — you have broken my heart — ”

“Look out now!”

“Look out!”

Basil sat beside Riply on the balustrade, listening to Joe Gorman singing. It was one of the griefs of his life that he could not sing “so people could stand it,” and he conceived a sudden admiration for Joe Gorman, reading into his personality the thrilling clearness of those sounds that moved so confidently through the dark air.

They evoked for Basil a more dazzling night than this, and other more remote and enchanted girls. He was sorry when the voice died away, and there was a rearranging of seats and a businesslike quiet — the ancient game of Truth had begun.

“What’s your favorite color, Bill?”

“Green,” supplies a friend.

“Sh-h-h! Let him alone.”

Bill says, “Blue.”

“What’s your favorite girl’s name?”

“Mary,” says Bill.

“Mary Haupt! Bill’s got a crush on Mary Haupt!”

She was a cross-eyed girl, a familiar personification of repulsiveness.

“Who would you rather kiss than anybody?”

Across the pause a snicker stabbed the darkness.

“My mother.”

“No, but what girl?”

“Nobody.”

“That’s not fair. Forfeit! Come on, Margaret.”

“Tell the truth, Margaret.”

She told the truth and a moment later Basil looked down in surprise from his perch; he had just learned that he was her favorite boy.

“Oh, yes-s!” he exclaimed sceptically. “Oh, yes-s! How about Hubert Blair?”

He renewed a casual struggle with Riply Buckner and presently they both fell off the balustrade. The game became an inquisition into Gladys Van Schellinger’s carefully chaperoned heart.

“What’s your favorite sport?”

“Croquet.”

The admission was greeted by a mild titter.

“Favorite boy.”

“Thurston Kohler.”

A murmur of disappointment.

“Who’s he?”

“A boy in the East.”

This was manifestly an evasion.

“Who’s your favorite boy here?”

Gladys hesitated. “Basil,” she said at length.

The faces turned up to the balustrade this time were less teasing, less jocular. Basil depreciated the matter with “Oh, yes-s! Sure! Oh, yes-s!” But he had a pleasant feeling of recognition, a familiar delight.

Imogene Bissel, a dark little beauty and the most popular girl in their crowd, took Gladys’ place. The interlocutors were tired of gastronomic preferences — the first question went straight to the point.

“Imogene, have you ever kissed a boy?”

“No.” A cry of wild unbelief. “I have not!” she declared indignantly.

“Well, have you ever been kissed?”

Pink but tranquil, she nodded, adding, "I couldn't help it."

"Who by?"

"I won't tell."

"Oh-h-h! How about Hubert Blair?"

"What's your favorite book, Imogene?"

"Beverly of Graustark."

"Favorite girl?"

"Passion Johnson."

"Who's she?"

"Oh, just a girl at school."

Mrs. Bissel had fortunately left the window.

"Who's your favorite boy?"

Imogene answered steadily, "Basil Lee."

This time an impressed silence fell. Basil was not surprised — we are never surprised at our own popularity — but he knew that these were not those ineffable girls, made up out of books and faces momentarily encountered, whose voices he had heard for a moment in Joe Gorman's song. And when, presently, the first telephone rang inside, calling a daughter home, and the girls, chattering like birds, piled all together into Gladys Van Schellinger's limousine, he lingered back in the shadow so as not to seem to be showing off. Then, perhaps because he nourished a vague idea that if he got to know Joe Gorman very well he would get to sing like him, he approached him and asked him to go to Lambert's for a soda.

Joe Gorman was a tall boy with white eyebrows and a stolid face who had only recently become one of their "crowd." He did not like Basil, who, he considered, had been "stuck up" with him last year, but he was acquisitive of useful knowledge and he was momentarily overwhelmed by Basil's success with girls.

It was cheerful in Lambert's, with great moths batting against the screen door and languid couples in white dresses and light suits spread about the little tables. Over their sodas, Joe proposed that Basil come home with him to spend the night; Basil's permission was obtained over the telephone.

Passing from the gleaming store into the darkness, Basil was submerged in an unreality in which he seemed to see himself from the outside, and the pleasant events of the evening began to take on fresh importance.

Disarmed by Joe's hospitality, he began to discuss the matter.

"That was a funny thing that happened tonight," he said, with a disparaging little laugh.

"What was?"

"Why, all those girls saying I was their favorite boy." The remark jarred on Joe. "It's a funny thing," went on Basil. "I was sort of unpopular at school for a while, because I was fresh, I guess. But the thing must be that some boys are popular with boys and some are popular with girls."

He had put himself in Joe's hands, but he was unconscious of it; even Joe was only aware of a certain desire to change the subject.

"When I get my car," suggested Joe, up in his room, "we could take Imogene and Margaret and go for rides."

"All right."

"You could have Imogene and I'd take Margaret, or anybody I wanted. Of course I know they don't like me as well as they do you."

"Sure they do. It's just because you haven't been in our crowd very long yet."

Joe was sensitive on that point and the remark did not please him. But Basil continued: "You ought to be more polite to the older people if you want to be popular. You didn't say how do you do to Mrs. Bissel tonight."

"I'm hungry," said Joe quickly. "Let's go down to the pantry and get something to eat."

Clad only in their pajamas, they went downstairs. Principally to dissuade Basil from pursuing the subject, Joe began to sing in a low voice:

“Oh, you beautiful doll,

You great — big — ”

But the evening, coming after the month of enforced humility at school, had been too much for Basil. He got a little awful. In the kitchen, under the impression that his advice had been asked, he broke out again:

“For instance, you oughtn’t to wear those white ties. Nobody does that that goes East to school.” Joe, a little red, turned around from the ice box and Basil felt a slight misgiving. But he pursued with: “For instance, you ought to get your family to send you East to school. It’d be a great thing for you. Especially if you want to go East to college, you ought to first go East to school. They take it out of you.”

Feeling that he had nothing special to be taken out of him, Joe found the implication distasteful. Nor did Basil appear to him at that moment to have been perfected by the process.

“Do you want cold chicken or cold ham?” They drew up chairs to the kitchen table. “Have some milk?”

“Thanks.”

Intoxicated by the three full meals he had had since supper, Basil warmed to his subject. He built up Joe’s life for him little by little, transformed him radiantly from what was little more than a Midwestern bumpkin to an Easterner bursting with *savoir-faire* and irresistible to girls. Going into the pantry to put away the milk, Joe paused by the open window for a breath of quiet air; Basil followed. “The thing is if a boy doesn’t get it taken out of him at school, he gets it taken out of him at college,” he was saying.

Moved by some desperate instinct, Joe opened the door and stepped out onto the back porch. Basil followed. The house abutted on the edge of the bluff occupied by the residential section, and the two boys stood silent for a moment, gazing at the scattered lights of the lower city. Before the mystery

of the unknown human life coursing through the streets below, Basil felt the purport of his words grow thin and pale.

He wondered suddenly what he had said and why it had seemed important to him, and when Joe began to sing again softly, the quiet mood of the early evening, the side of him that was best, wisest and most enduring, stole over him once more. The flattery, the vanity, the fatuousness of the last hour moved off, and when he spoke it was almost in a whisper:

“Let’s walk around the block.”

The sidewalk was warm to their bare feet. It was only midnight, but the square was deserted save for their whitish figures, inconspicuous against the starry darkness. They snorted with glee at their daring. Once a shadow, with loud human shoes, crossed the street far ahead, but the sound served only to increase their own unsubstantiality. Slipping quickly through the clearings made by gas lamps among the trees, they rounded the block, hurrying when they neared the Gorman house as though they had been really lost in a midsummer night’s dream.

Up in Joe’s room, they lay awake in the darkness.

“I talked too much,” Basil thought. “I probably sounded pretty bossy and maybe I made him sort of mad. But probably when we walked around the block he forgot everything I said.”

Alas, Joe had forgotten nothing — except the advice by which Basil had intended him to profit.

“I never saw anybody as stuck up,” he said to himself wrathfully. “He thinks he’s wonderful. He thinks he’s so darn popular with girls.”

III

An element of vast importance had made its appearance with the summer; suddenly the great thing in Basil’s crowd was to own an automobile. Fun no longer seemed available save at great distances, at suburban lakes or remote country clubs. Walking downtown ceased to be a legitimate

pastime. On the contrary, a single block from one youth's house to another's must be navigated in a car. Dependent groups formed around owners and they began to wield what was, to Basil at least, a disconcerting power.

On the morning of a dance at the lake he called up Riply Buckner.

"Hey, Rip, how you going out to Connie's tonight?"

"With Elwood Leaming."

"Has he got a lot of room?"

Riply seemed somewhat embarrassed. "Why, I don't think he has. You see, he's taking Margaret Torrence and I'm taking Imogene Bissel."

"Oh!"

Basil frowned. He should have arranged all this a week ago. After a moment he called up Joe Gorman.

"Going to the Davies' tonight, Joe?"

"Why, yes."

"Have you got room in your car — I mean, could I go with you?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so."

There was a perceptible lack of warmth in his voice.

"Sure you got plenty of room?"

"Sure. We'll call for you quarter to eight."

Basil began preparations at five. For the second time in his life he shaved, completing the operation by cutting a short straight line under his nose. It bled profusely, but on the advice of Hilda, the maid, he finally stanching the flow with little pieces of toilet paper. Quite a number of pieces were necessary; so, in order to facilitate breathing, he trimmed it down with a scissors, and with this somewhat awkward mustache of paper and gore clinging to his upper lip, wandered impatiently around the house.

At six he began working on it again, soaking off the tissue paper and dabbing at the persistently freshening crimson line. It dried at length, but when he rashly hailed his mother it opened once more and the tissue paper was called back into play.

At quarter to eight, dressed in blue coat and white flannels, he drew one last bar of powder across the blemish, dusted it carefully with his handkerchief and hurried out to Joe Gorman's car. Joe was driving in person, and in front with him were Lewis Crum and Hubert Blair. Basil got in the big rear seat alone and they drove without stopping out of the city onto the Black Bear Road, keeping their backs to him and talking in low voices together. He thought at first that they were going to pick up other boys; now he was shocked, and for a moment he considered getting out of the car, but this would imply that he was hurt. His spirit, and with it his face, hardened a little and he sat without speaking or being spoken to for the rest of the ride.

After half an hour the Davies' house, a huge rambling bungalow occupying a small peninsula in the lake, floated into sight. Lanterns outlined its shape and wavered in gleaming lines on the gold-and-rose colored water, and as they came near, the low notes of bass horns and drums were blown toward them from the lawn.

Inside Basil looked about for Imogene. There was a crowd around her seeking dances, but she saw Basil; his heart bounded at her quick intimate smile.

"You can have the fourth, Basil, and the eleventh and the second extra. . . . How did you hurt your lip?"

"Cut it shaving," he said hurriedly. "How about supper?"

"Well, I have to have supper with Riply because he brought me."

"No, you don't," Basil assured her.

"Yes, she does," insisted Riply, standing close at hand. "Why don't you get your own girl for supper?"

— but Basil had no girl, though he was as yet unaware of the fact.

After the fourth dance, Basil led Imogene down to the end of the pier, where they found seats in a motorboat.

“Now what?” she said.

He did not know. If he had really cared for her he would have known. When her hand rested on his knee for a moment he did not notice it. Instead, he talked. He told her how he had pitched on the second baseball team at school and had once beaten the first in a five-inning game. He told her that the thing was that some boys were popular with boys and some boys were popular with girls — he, for instance, was popular with girls. In short, he unloaded himself.

At length, feeling that he had perhaps dwelt disproportionately on himself, he told her suddenly that she was his favorite girl.

Imogene sat there, sighing a little in the moonlight. In another boat, lost in the darkness beyond the pier, sat a party of four. Joe Gorman was singing:

“My little love —

— in honey man,

He sure has won my — ”

“I thought you might want to know,” said Basil to Imogene. “I thought maybe you thought I liked somebody else. The truth game didn’t get around to me the other night.”

“What?” asked Imogene vaguely. She had forgotten the other night, all nights except this, and she was thinking of the magic in Joe Gorman’s voice. She had the next dance with him; he was going to teach her the words of a new song. Basil was sort of peculiar, telling her all this stuff. He was good-looking and attractive and all that, but — she wanted the dance to be over. She wasn’t having any fun.

The music began inside — “Everybody’s Doing It,” played with many little nervous jerks on the violins.

“Oh, listen!” she cried, sitting up and snapping her fingers. “Do you know how to rag?”

“Listen, Imogene” — He half realized that something had slipped away — “let’s sit out this dance — you can tell Joe you forgot.”

She rose quickly. “Oh, no, I can’t!”

Unwillingly Basil followed her inside. It had not gone well — he had talked too much again. He waited moodily for the eleventh dance so that he could behave differently. He believed now that he was in love with Imogene. His self-deception created a tightness in his throat, a counterfeit of longing and desire.

Before the eleventh dance he was aware that some party was being organized from which he was purposely excluded. There were whisperings and arguings among some of the boys, and unnatural silences when he came near. He heard Joe Gorman say to Riply Buckner, “We’ll just be gone three days. If Gladys can’t go, why don’t you ask Connie? The chaperons’ll — ” he changed his sentence as he saw Basil — “and we’ll all go to Smith’s for ice-cream soda.”

Later, Basil took Riply Buckner aside but failed to elicit any information: Riply had not forgotten Basil’s attempt to rob him of Imogene tonight.

“It wasn’t about anything,” he insisted. “We’re going to Smith’s, honest. . . . How’d you cut your lip?”

“Cut it shaving.”

When his dance with Imogene came she was even vaguer than before, exchanging mysterious communications with various girls as they moved around the room, locked in the convulsive grip of the Grizzly Bear. He led her out to the boat again, but it was occupied, and they walked up and down the pier while he tried to talk to her and she hummed:

“My little lov-in honey man — ”

“Imogene, listen. What I wanted to ask you when we were on the boat before was about the night we played Truth. Did you really mean what you said?”

“Oh, what do you want to talk about that silly game for?”

It had reached her ears, not once but several times, that Basil thought he was wonderful — news that was flying about with as much volatility as the rumor of his graces two weeks before. Imogene liked to agree with everyone — and she had agreed with several impassioned boys that Basil was terrible. And it was difficult not to dislike him for her own disloyalty.

But Basil thought that only ill luck ended the intermission before he could accomplish his purpose; though what he had wanted he had not known.

Finally, during the intermission, Margaret Torrence, whom he had neglected, told him the truth.

“Are you going on the touring party up to the St. Croix River?” she asked. She knew he was not.

“What party?”

“Joe Gorman got it up. I’m going with Elwood Leaming.”

“No, I’m not going,” he said gruffly. “I couldn’t go.”

“Oh!”

“I don’t like Joe Gorman.”

“I guess he doesn’t like you much either.”

“Why? What did he say?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“But what? Tell me what he said.”

After a minute she told him, as if reluctantly: “Well, he and Hubert Blair said you thought — you thought you were wonderful.” Her heart misgave her.

But she remembered he had asked her for only one dance. “Joe said you told him that all the girls thought you were wonderful.”

“I never said anything like that,” said Basil indignantly, “never!”

He understood — Joe Gorman had done it all, taken advantage of Basil’s talking too much — an affliction which his real friends had always allowed

for — in order to ruin him. The world was suddenly compact of villainy. He decided to go home.

In the coat room he was accosted by Bill Kampf: “Hello, Basil, how did you hurt your lip?”

“Cut it shaving.”

“Say, are you going to this party they’re getting up next week?”

“No.”

“Well, look, I’ve got a cousin from Chicago coming to stay with us and mother said I could have a boy out for the week-end. Her name is Minnie Bibble.”

“Minnie Bibble?” repeated Basil, vaguely revolted.

“I thought maybe you were going to that party, too, but Riply Buckner said to ask you and I thought — ”

“I’ve got to stay home,” said Basil quickly.

“Oh, come on, Basil,” he pursued. “It’s only for two days, and she’s a nice girl. You’d like her.”

“I don’t know,” Basil considered. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Bill. I’ve got to get the street car home. I’ll come out for the week-end if you’ll take me over to Wildwood now in your car.”

“Sure I will.”

Basil walked out on the veranda and approached Connie Davies.

“Good-by,” he said. Try as he might, his voice was stiff and proud. “I had an awfully good time.”

“I’m sorry you’re leaving so early, Basil.” But she said to herself: “He’s too stuck up to have a good time. He thinks he’s wonderful.”

From the veranda he could hear Imogene’s laughter down at the end of the pier. Silently he went down the steps and along the walk to meet Bill Kampf,

giving strollers a wide berth as though he felt the sight of him would diminish their pleasure.

It had been an awful night.

Ten minutes later Bill dropped him beside the waiting trolley. A few last picnickers sauntered aboard and the car bobbed and clanged through the night toward St. Paul.

Presently two young girls sitting opposite Basil began looking over at him and nudging each other, but he took no notice — he was thinking how sorry they would all be — Imogene and Margaret, Joe and Hubert and Riply.

“Look at him now!” they would say to themselves sorrowfully. “President of the United States at twenty-five! Oh, if we only hadn’t been so bad to him that night!”

He thought he was wonderful!

IV

Ermine Gilberte Labouisse Bibble was in exile. Her parents had brought her from New Orleans to Southampton in May, hoping that the active outdoor life proper to a girl of fifteen would take her thoughts from love. But North or South, a storm of sappling arrows flew about her. She was “engaged” before the first of June.

Let it not be gathered from the foregoing that the somewhat hard outlines of Miss Bibble at twenty had already begun to appear. She was of a radiant freshness; her head had reminded otherwise not illiterate young men of damp blue violets, pierced with blue windows that looked into a bright soul, with today’s new roses showing through.

She was in exile. She was going to Glacier National Park to forget. It was written that in passage she would come to Basil as a sort of initiation, turning his eyes out from himself and giving him a first dazzling glimpse into the world of love.

She saw him first as a quiet handsome boy with an air of consideration in his face, which was the mark of his recent re-discovery that others had wills as strong as his, and more power. It appeared to Minnie — as a few months back it had appeared to Margaret Torrence, like a charming sadness. At dinner he was polite to Mrs. Kampf in a courteous way that he had from his father, and he listened to Mr. Bibble's discussion of the word "Creole" with such evident interest and appreciation that Mr. Bibble thought, "Now here's a young boy with something to him."

After dinner, Minnie, Basil and Bill rode into Black Bear village to the movies, and the slow diffusion of Minnie's charm and personality presently became the charm and personality of the affair itself.

It was thus that all Minnie's affairs for many years had a family likeness. She looked at Basil, a childish open look; then opened her eyes wider as if she had some sort of comic misgivings, and smiled — she smiled —

For all the candor of this smile, the effect — because of the special contours of Minnie's face and independent of her mood — was sparkling invitation. Whenever it appeared Basil seemed to be suddenly inflated and borne upward, a little farther each time, only to be set down when the smile had reached a point where it must become a grin, and chose instead to melt away. It was like a drug. In a little while he wanted nothing except to watch it with a vast buoyant delight.

Then he wanted to see how close he could get to it.

There is a certain stage of an affair between young people when the presence of a third party is a stimulant. Before the second day had well begun, before Minnie and Basil had progressed beyond the point of great gross compliments about each other's surpassing beauty and charm, both of them had begun to think about the time when they could get rid of their host, Bill Kampf.

In the late afternoon, when the first cool of the evening had come down and they were fresh and thin-feeling from swimming, they sat in a cushioned swing, piled high with pillows and shaded by the thick veranda vines; Basil put his arm around her and leaned toward her cheek and Minnie managed it

that he touched her fresh lips instead. And he had always learned things quickly.

They sat there for an hour, while Bill's voice reached them, now from the pier, now from the hall above, now from the pagoda at the end of the garden, and three saddled horses chafed their bits in the stable and all around them the bees worked faithfully among the flowers. Then Minnie reached up to reality, and they allowed themselves to be found —

“Why, we were looking for you too.”

And Basil, by simply waving his arms and wishing, floated miraculously upstairs to brush his hair for dinner.

“She certainly is a wonderful girl. Oh, gosh, she certainly is a wonderful girl!”

He mustn't lose his head. At dinner and afterward he listened with unwavering deferential attention while Mr. Bibble talked of the boll weevil.

“But I'm boring you. You children want to go off by yourselves.”

“Not at all, Mr. Bibble. I was very interested — honestly.”

“Well, you all go on and amuse yourselves. I didn't realize time was getting on. Nowadays it's so seldom you meet a young man with good manners and good common sense in his head, that an old man like me is likely to go along forever.”

Bill walked down with Basil and Minnie to the end of the pier. “Hope we'll have a good sailing tomorrow. Say, I've got to drive over to the village and get somebody for my crew. Do you want to come along?”

“I reckon I'll sit here for a while and then go to bed,” said Minnie.

“All right. You want to come, Basil?”

“Why — why, sure, if you want me, Bill.”

“You'll have to sit on a sail I'm taking over to be mended.”

“I don't want to crowd you.”

“You won't crowd me. I'll go get the car.”

When he had gone they looked at each other in despair. But he did not come back for an hour — something happened about the sail or the car that took a long time. There was only the threat, making everything more poignant and breathless, that at any minute he *would* be coming.

By and by they got into the motorboat and sat close together murmuring: “This fall — ” “When you come to New Orleans — ” “When I go to Yale year after next — ” “When I come North to school — ” “When I get back from Glacier Park — ” “Kiss me once more.” . . . “You’re terrible. Do you know you’re terrible? . . . You’re absolutely terrible — ”

The water lapped against the posts; sometimes the boat bumped gently on the pier; Basil undid one rope and pushed, so that they swung off and way from the pier, and became a little island in the night . . .

. . . next morning, while he packed his bag, she opened the door of his room and stood beside him. Her face shone with excitement; her dress was starched and white.

“Basil, listen! I have to tell you: Father was talking after breakfast and he told Uncle George that he’d never met such a nice, quiet, level-headed boy as you, and Cousin Bill’s got to tutor this month, so father asked Uncle George if he thought your family would let you go to Glacier Park with us for two weeks so I’d have some company.” They took hands and danced excitedly around the room. “Don’t say anything about it, because I reckon he’ll have to write your mother and everything. Basil, isn’t it wonderful?”

So when Basil left at eleven, there was no misery in their parting. Mr. Bibble, going into the village for a paper, was going to escort Basil to his train, and till the motor-car moved away the eyes of the two young people shone and there was a secret in their waving hands.

Basil sank back in the seat, replete with happiness. He relaxed — to have made a success of the visit was so nice. He loved her — he loved even her father sitting beside him, her father who was privileged to be so close to her, to fuddle himself at that smile.

Mr. Bibble lit a cigar. “Nice weather,” he said. “Nice climate up to the end of October.”

“Wonderful,” agreed Basil. “I miss October now that I go East to school.”

“Getting ready for college?”

“Yes, sir; getting ready for Yale.” A new pleasurable thought occurred to him. He hesitated, but he knew that Mr. Bibble, who liked him, would share his joy. “I took my preliminaries this spring and I just heard from them — I passed six out of seven.”

“Good for you!”

Again Basil hesitated, then he continued: “I got A in ancient history and B in English history and English A. And I got C in algebra A and Latin A and B. I failed French A.”

“Good!” said Mr. Bibble.

“I should have passed them all,” went on Basil, “but I didn’t study hard at first. I was the youngest boy in my class and I had a sort of swelled head about it.”

It was well that Mr. Bibble should know he was taking no dullard to Glacier National Park. Mr. Bibble took a long puff of his cigar.

On second thought, Basil decided that his last remark didn’t have the right ring and he amended it a little.

“It wasn’t exactly a swelled head, but I never had to study very much, because in English I’d usually read most of the books before, and in history I’d read a lot too.” He broke off and tried again: “I mean, when you say swelled head you think of a boy just going around with his head swelled, sort of, saying, ‘Oh, look how much I know!’ Well, I wasn’t like that. I mean, I didn’t think I knew everything, but I was sort of — ”

As he searched for the elusive word, Mr. Bibble said, “H’m!” and pointed with his cigar at a spot in the lake.

“There’s a boat,” he said.

“Yes,” agreed Basil. “I don’t know much about sailing. I never cared for it. Of course I’ve been out a lot, just tending boards and all that, but most of the time you have to sit with nothing to do. I like football.”

“H’m!” said Mr. Bibble. “When I was your age I was out in the Gulf in a catboat every day.”

“I guess it’s fun if you like it,” conceded Basil.

“Happiest days of my life.”

The station was in sight. It occurred to Basil that he should make one final friendly gesture.

“Your daughter certainly is an attractive girl, Mr. Bibble,” he said. “I usually get along with girls all right, but I don’t usually like them very much. But I think your daughter is the most attractive girl I ever met.” Then, as the car stopped, a faint misgiving overtook him and he was impelled to add with a disparaging little laugh. “Good-by. I hope I didn’t talk too much.”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Bibble. “Good luck to you. Goo’-by.”

A few minutes later, when Basil’s train had pulled out, Mr. Bibble stood at the newsstand buying a paper and already drying his forehead against the hot July day.

“Yes, sir! That was a lesson not to do anything in a hurry,” he was saying to himself vehemently. “Imagine listening to that fresh kid gabbling about himself all through Glacier Park! Thank the good Lord for that little ride!”

On his arrival home, Basil literally sat down and waited. Under no pretext would he leave the house save for short trips to the drug store for refreshments, whence he returned on a full run. The sound of the telephone or the door-bell galvanized him into the rigidity of the electric chair.

That afternoon he composed a wondrous geographical poem, which he mailed to Minnie:

Of all the fair flowers of Paris,

Of all the red roses of Rome,

Of all the deep tears of Vienna

The sadness wherever you roam,

I think of that night by the lakeside,

The beam of the moon and stars,

And the smell of an aching like perfume,

The tune of the Spanish guitars.

But Monday passed and most of Tuesday and no word came. Then, late in the afternoon of the second day, as he moved vaguely from room to room looking out of different windows into a barren lifeless street, Minnie called him on the phone.

“Yes?” His heart was beating wildly.

“Basil, we’re going this afternoon.”

“Going!” he repeated blankly.

“Oh, Basil, I’m so sorry. Father changed his mind about taking anybody West with us.”

“Oh!”

“I’m so sorry, Basil.”

“I probably couldn’t have gone.”

There was a moment’s silence. Feeling her presence over the wire, he could scarcely breathe, much less speak.

“Basil, can you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“We may come back this way. Anyhow, remember we’re going to meet this winter in New York.”

“Yes,” he said, and he added suddenly: “Perhaps we won’t ever meet again.”

“Of course we will. They’re calling me, Basil. I’ve got to go. Good-by.”

He sat down beside the telephone, wild with grief. The maid found him half an hour later bowed over the kitchen table. He knew what had happened as well as if Minnie had told him. He had made the same old error, undone the behavior of three days in half an hour. It would have been no consolation if it had occurred to him that it was just as well. Somewhere on the trip he would have let go and things might have been worse — though perhaps not so sad. His only thought now was that she was gone.

He lay on his bed, baffled, mistaken, miserable but not beaten. Time after time, the same vitality that had led his spirit to a scourging made him able to shake off the blood like water not to forget, but to carry his wounds with him to new disasters and new atonements — toward his unknown destiny.

Two days later his mother told him that on condition of his keeping the batteries on charge, and washing it once a week, his grandfather had consented to let him use the electric whenever it was idle in the afternoon. Two hours later he was out in it, gliding along Crest Avenue at the maximum speed permitted by the gears and trying to lean back as if it were a Stutz Bearcat. Imogene Bissel waved at him from in front of her house and he came to an uncertain stop.

“You’ve got a car!”

“It’s grandfather’s,” he said modestly. “I thought you were up on that party at the St. Croix.”

She shook her head. “Mother wouldn’t let me go — only a few girls went. There was a big accident over in Minneapolis and mother won’t even let me ride in a car unless there’s someone over eighteen driving.”

“Listen, Imogene, do you suppose your mother meant electrics?”

“Why, I never thought — I don’t know. I could go and see.”

“Tell your mother it won’t go over twelve miles an hour,” he called after her.

A minute later she ran joyfully down the walk. “I can go, Basil,” she cried.

“Mother never heard of any wrecks in an electric. What’ll we do?”

“Anything,” he said in a reckless voice. “I didn’t mean that about this bus making only twelve miles an hour — it’ll make fifteen. Listen, let’s go down to Smith’s and have a claret lemonade.”

“Why, Basil Lee!”

OUTSIDE THE CABINET-MAKER'S

The Century Magazine (December, 1928)

The automobile stopped at the corner of Sixteenth and some dingy-looking street. The lady got out. The man and the little girl stayed in the car.

"I'm going to tell him it can't cost more than twenty dollars," said the lady.

"All right. Have you the plans?"

"Oh, yes" — she reached for her bag in the back seat — "at least I have now."

"Dites qu'il ne faut pas avoir les forts placards," said the man. "Ni le bon bois."

"All right."

"I wish you wouldn't talk French," said the little girl.

"Et il faut avoir un bon 'height.' L'un des Murphys était comme ça."

He held his hand five feet from the ground. The lady went through a door lettered "Cabinet-Maker" and disappeared up a small stairs.

The man and the little girl looked around unexpectedly. The neighborhood was red brick, vague, quiet. There were a few darkies doing something or other up the street and an occasional automobile went by. It was a fine November day.

"Listen," said the man to the little girl, "I love you."

"I love you too," said the little girl, smiling politely.

"Listen," the man continued. "Do you see that house over the way?"

The little girl looked. It was a flat in back of a shop. Curtains masked most of its interior, but there was a faint stir behind them. On one window a loose

shutter banged from back to forth every few minutes. Neither the man nor the little girl had ever seen the place before.

“There’s a Fairy Princess behind those curtains,” said the man. “You can’t see her but she’s there, kept concealed by an Ogre. Do you know what an Ogre is?”

“Yes.”

“Well, this Princess is very beautiful with long golden hair.”

They both regarded the house. Part of a yellow dress appeared momentarily in the window.

“That’s her,” the man said. “The people who live there are guarding her for the Ogre. He’s keeping the King and Queen prisoner ten thousand miles below the earth. She can’t get out until the Prince finds the three — ” He hesitated.

“And what, Daddy? The three what?”

“The three — Look! There she is again.”

“The three what?”

“The three — the three stones that will release the King and Queen.”

He yawned.

“And what then?”

“Then he can come and tap three times on each window and that will set her free.”

The lady’s head emerged from the upper story of the cabinetmaker’s.

“He’s busy,” she called down. “Gosh, what a nice day!”

“And what, Daddy?” asked the little girl. “Why does the Ogre want to keep her there?”

“Because he wasn’t invited to the christening. The Prince has already found one stone in President Coolidge’s collar-box. He’s looking for the second in

Iceland. Every time he finds a stone the room where the Princess is kept turns blue. Gosh!“

“What, Daddy?”

“Just as you turned away I could see the room turn blue. That means he’s found the second stone.”

“Gosh!” said the little girl. “Look! It turned blue again, that means he’s found the third stone.”

Aroused by the competition the man looked around cautiously and his voice grew tense.

“Do you see what I see?” he demanded. “Coming up the street — there’s the Ogre himself, disguised — you know: transformed, like *Mombiin* ‘The Land of Oz.’”

“I know.”

They both watched. The small boy, extraordinarily small and taking very long steps, went to the door of the flat and knocked; no one answered but he didn’t seem to expect it or to be greatly disappointed. He took some chalk from his pocket and began drawing pictures under the door-bell.

“He’s making magic signs,” whispered the man. “He wants to be sure that the Princess doesn’t get out this door. He must know that the Prince has set the King and Queen free and will be along for her pretty soon.”

The small boy lingered for a moment; then he went to a window and called an unintelligible word. After a while a woman threw the window open and made an answer that the crisp wind blew away.

“She says she’s got the Princess locked up,” explained the man.

“Look at the Ogre,” said the little girl. “He’s making magic signs under the window too. And on the sidewalk. Why?”

“He wants to keep her from getting out, of course. That’s why he’s dancing. That’s a charm too — it’s a magic dance.”

The Ogre went away, taking very big steps. Two men crossed the street ahead and passed out of sight.

“Who are they, Daddy?”

“They’re two of the King’s soldiers. I think the army must be gathering over on Market Street to surround the house. Do you know what ‘surround’ means?”

“Yes. Are those men soldiers too?”

“Those too. And I believe that the old one just behind is the King himself. He’s keeping bent down low like that so that the Ogre’s people won’t recognize him.”

“Who is the lady?”

“She’s a Witch, a friend of the Ogre’s.”

The shutter blew closed with a bang and then slowly opened again.

“That’s done by the good and bad fairies,” the man explained. “They’re invisible, but the bad fairies want to close the shutter so nobody can see in and the good ones want to open it.”

“The good fairies are winning now.”

“Yes.” He looked at the little girl. “You’re my good fairy.”

“Yes. Look, Daddy! What is that man?”

“He’s in the King’s army too.” The clerk of Mr. Miller, the jeweler, went by with a somewhat unmartial aspect. “Hear the whistle? That means they’re gathering. And listen — there goes the drum.”

“There’s the Queen, Daddy. Look at there. Is that the Queen?”

“No, that’s a girl called Miss Television.” He yawned. He began to think of something pleasant that had happened yesterday. He went into a trance. Then he looked at the little girl and saw that she was quite happy. She was six and lovely to look at. He kissed her.

“That man carrying the cake of ice is also one of the King’s soldiers,” he said. “He’s going to put the ice on the Ogre’s head and freeze his brains so he can’t do any more harm.”

Her eyes followed the man down street. Other men passed. A darky in a yellow darky’s overcoat drove by with a cart marked The Del Upholstery Co. The shutter banged again and then slowly opened.

“See, Daddy, the good fairies are winning again.”

The man was old enough to know that he would look back to that time — the tranquil street and the pleasant weather and the mystery playing before the child’s eyes, mystery which he had created, but whose luster and texture he could never see or touch any more himself. Again he touched his daughter’s cheek instead and in payment fitted another small boy and limping man into the story.

“Oh, I love you,” he said.

“I know, Daddy,” she answered, abstractedly. She was staring at the house. For a moment he closed his eyes and tried to see with her but he couldn’t see — those ragged blinds were drawn against him forever. There were only the occasional darkies and the small boys and the weather that reminded him of more glamorous mornings in the past.

The lady came out of the cabinet-maker’s shop.

“How did it go?” he asked.

“Good. Il dit qu’il a fait les maisons de poupée pour les Du Ponts. Il va le faire.”

“Combien?”

“Vingt-cinq. I’m sorry I was so long.”

“Look, Daddy, there go a lot more soldiers!”

They drove off. When they had gone a few miles the man turned around and said, “We saw the most remarkable thing while you were there.” He summarized the episode. “It’s too bad we couldn’t wait and see the rescue.”

“But we did,” the child cried. “They had the rescue in the next street. And there’s the Ogre’s body in that yard there. The King and Queen and Prince were killed and now the Princess is queen.”

He had liked his King and Queen and felt that they had been too summarily disposed of.

“You had to have a heroine,” he said rather impatiently.

“She’ll marry somebody and make him Prince.”

They rode on abstractedly. The lady thought about the doll’s house, for she had been poor and had never had one as a child, the man thought how he had almost a million dollars and the little girl thought about the odd doings on the dingy street that they had left behind.

THE CAPTURED SHADOW

I

Saturday Evening Post (29 December 1928)

Basil Duke Lee shut the front door behind him and turned on the dining-room light. His mother's voice drifted sleepily downstairs:

"Basil, is that you?"

"No, mother, it's a burglar."

"It seems to me twelve o'clock is pretty late for a fifteen-year-old boy."

"We went to Smith's and had a soda."

Whenever a new responsibility devolved upon Basil he was "a boy almost sixteen," but when a privilege was in question, he was "a fifteen-year-old boy."

There were footsteps above, and Mrs. Lee, in kimono, descended to the first landing.

"Did you and Riply enjoy the play?"

"Yes, very much."

"What was it about?"

"Oh, it was just about this man. Just an ordinary play."

"Didn't it have a name?"

"Are You a Mason?"

"Oh." She hesitated, covetously watching his alert and eager face, holding him there. "Aren't you coming to bed?"

"I'm going to get something to eat."

"Something more?"

For a moment he didn't answer. He stood in front of a glassed-in bookcase in the living room, examining its contents with an equally glazed eye.

"We're going to get up a play," he said suddenly. "I'm going to write it."

"Well — that'll be very nice. Please come to bed soon. You were up late last night, too, and you've got dark circles under your eyes."

From the bookcase Basil presently extracted "Van Bibber and Others," from which he read while he ate a large plate of straw softened with half a pint of cream. Back in the living room he sat for a few minutes at the piano, digesting, and meanwhile staring at the colored cover of a song from "The Midnight Sons." It showed three men in evening clothes and opera hats sauntering jovially along Broadway against the blazing background of Times Square.

Basil would have denied incredulously the suggestion that that was currently his favorite work of art. But it was.

He went upstairs. From a drawer of his desk he took out a composition book and opened it.

Basil DUKE LEE

ST. REGIS SCHOOL
EASTCHESTER, CONN.
FIFTH FORM FRENCH

and on the next page, under Irregular Verbs:

Present

je connais *nous con*

tu connais

il connait

He turned over another page.

MR. WASHINGTON SQUARE

A Musical Comedy by

Basil DUKE LEE

Music by Victor Herbert

ACT I

[*The porch of the Millionaires' Club, near New York. Opening Chorus, LEILIA and DEBUTANTES:*

We sing not soft, we sing not loud

For no one ever heard an opening chorus.

We are a very merry crowd

But no one ever heard an opening chorus.

We're just a crowd of debutantes

As merry as can be

And nothing that there is could ever bore us

We're the wittiest ones, the prettiest ones.

In all society

But no one ever heard an opening chorus.

LEILIA (*stepping forward*): Well, girls, has Mr. Washington Square been around here today?

Basil turned over a page. There was no answer to Leilia's question. Instead in capitals was a brand-new heading:

HIC! HIC! HIC!

A Hilarious Farce in One Act

by

Basil DUKE LEE

SCENE

[*A fashionable apartment near Broadway, New York City. It is almost midnight. As the curtain goes up there is a knocking at the door and a few minutes later*

it opens to admit a handsome man in a full evening dress and a companion. He has evidently been imbibing, for his words are thick, his nose is red, and he can hardly stand up. He turns up the light and comes down center.

STUYVESANT: Hic! Hic! Hic!

O'HARA (*his companion*): Begorra, you been sayin' nothing else all this evening.

Basil turned over a page and then another, reading hurriedly, but not without interest.

PROFESSOR PUMPKIN: Now, if you are an educated man, as you claim, perhaps you can tell me the Latin word for "this."

STUYVESANT: Hic! Hic! Hic!

PROFESSOR PUMPKIN: Correct. Very good indeed. I—

At this point Hic! Hic! Hic! came to an end in midsentence. On the following page, in just as determined a hand as if the last two works had not faltered by the way, was the heavily underlined beginning of another:

The Captured Shadow

A Melodramatic Farce in Three Acts

by

Basil DUKE LEE

SCENE

[All three acts take place in the library of the VAN BAKERS' house in New York. It is well furnished with a red lamp on one side and some crossed spears and helmets and so on and a divan and a general air of an oriental den.

When the curtain rises MISS SAUNDERS, LEILIA VAN BAKER and ESTELLA CARRAGE are sitting at a table. MISS SAUNDERS is an old maid about forty very kittenish. LEILIA is pretty with dark hair. ESTELLA has light hair. They are a striking combination.

“The Captured Shadow” filled the rest of the book and ran over into several loose sheets at the end. When it broke off Basil sat for a while in thought. This had been a season of “crook comedies” in New York, and the feel, the swing, the exact and vivid image of the two he had seen, were in the foreground of his mind. At the time they had been enormously suggestive, opening out into a world much larger and more brilliant than themselves that existed outside their windows and beyond their doors, and it was this suggested world rather than any conscious desire to imitate “Officer 666,” that had inspired the effort before him. Presently he printed Act II at the head of a new tablet and began to write.

An hour passed. Several times he had recourse to a collection of joke books and to an old Treasury of Wit and Humor which embalmed the faded Victorian cracks of Bishop Wilberforce and Sydney Smith. At the moment when, in his story, a door moved slowly open, he heard a heavy creak upon the stairs. He jumped to his feet, aghast and trembling, but nothing stirred; only a white moth bounced against the screen, a clock struck the half-hour far across the city, a bird whacked its wings in a tree outside.

Voyaging to the bathroom at half-past four, he saw with a shock that morning was already blue at the window. He had stayed up all night. He remembered that people who stayed up all night went crazy, and transfixed in the hall, he tried agonizingly to listen to himself, to feel whether or not he was going crazy. The things around him seemed preternaturally unreal, and rushing frantically back into his bedroom, he began tearing off his clothes, racing after the vanishing night. Undressed, he threw a final regretful glance at his pile of manuscript — he had the whole next scene in his head. As a compromise with incipient madness he got into bed and wrote for an hour more.

Late next morning he was startled awake by one of the ruthless Scandinavian sisters who, in theory, were the Lees’ servants. “Eleven o’clock!” she shouted. “Five after!”

“Let me alone,” Basil mumbled. “What do you come and wake me up for?”

“Somebody downstairs.” He opened his eyes. “You ate all the cream last night,” Hilda continued. “Your mother didn’t have any for her coffee.”

“All the cream!” he cried. “Why, I saw some more.”

“It was sour.”

“That’s terrible,” he exclaimed, sitting up. “Terrible!”

For a moment she enjoyed his dismay. Then she said, “Riply Buckner’s downstairs,” and went out, closing the door.

“Send him up!” he called after her. “Hilda, why don’t you ever listen for a minute? Did I get any mail?”

There was no answer. A moment later Riply came in.

“My gosh, are you still in bed?”

“I wrote on the play all night. I almost finished Act Two.” He pointed to his desk.

“That’s what I want to talk to you about,” said Riply. “Mother thinks we ought to get Miss Halliburton.”

“What for?”

“Just to sort of be there.”

Though Miss Halliburton was a pleasant person who combined the occupations of French teacher and bridge teacher, unofficial chaperon and children’s friend, Basil felt that her superintendence would give the project an unprofessional ring.

“She wouldn’t interfere,” went on Riply, obviously quoting his mother. “I’ll be the business manager and you’ll direct the play, just like we said, but it would be good to have her there for prompter and to keep order at rehearsals. The girls’ mothers’ll like it.”

“All right,” Basil agreed reluctantly. “Now look, let’s see who we’ll have in the cast. First, there’s the leading man — this gentleman burglar that’s called The Shadow. Only it turns out at the end that he’s really a young man about town doing it on a bet, and not really a burglar at all.”

“That’s you.”

“No, that’s you.”

“Come on! You’re the best actor,” protested Riply.

“No, I’m going to take a smaller part, so I can coach.”

“Well, haven’t I got to be business manager?”

Selecting the actresses, presumably all eager, proved to be a difficult matter. They settled finally on Imogene Bissel for leading lady; Margaret Torrence for her friend, and Connie Davies for “Miss Saunders, an old maid very kittenish.”

On Riply’s suggestion that several other girls wouldn’t be pleased at being left out, Basil introduced a maid and a cook, “who could just sort of look in from the kitchen.” He rejected firmly Riply’s further proposal that there should be two or three maids, “a sort of sewing woman,” and a trained nurse. In a house so clogged with femininity even the most umbrageous of gentleman burglars would have difficulty in moving about.

“I’ll tell you two people we won’t have,” Basil said meditatively — “that’s Joe Gorman and Hubert Blair.”

“I wouldn’t be in it if we had Hubert Blair,” asserted Riply.

“Neither would I.”

Hubert Blair’s almost miraculous successes with girls had caused Basil and Riply much jealous pain.

They began calling up the prospective cast and immediately the enterprise received its first blow. Imogene Bissel was going to Rochester, Minnesota, to have her appendix removed, and wouldn’t be back for three weeks.

They considered.

“How about Margaret Torrence?”

Basil shook his head. He had vision of Leilia Van Baker as someone rarer and more spirited than Margaret Torrence. Not that Leilia had much being, even to Basil — less than the Harrison Fisher girls pinned around his wall at

school. But she was not Margaret Torrence. She was no one you could inevitably see by calling up half an hour before on the phone.

He discarded candidate after candidate. Finally a face began to flash before his eyes, as if in another connection, but so insistently that at length he spoke the name.

“Evelyn Beebe.”

“Who?”

Though Evelyn Beebe was only sixteen, her precocious charms had elevated her to an older crowd and to Basil she seemed of the very generation of his heroine, Leilia Van Baker. It was a little like asking Sarah Bernhardt for her services, but once her name had occurred to him, other possibilities seemed pale.

At noon they rang the Beebes' door-bell, stricken by a paralysis of embarrassment when Evelyn opened the door herself and, with politeness that concealed a certain surprise, asked them in.

Suddenly, through the portière of the living room, Basil saw and recognized a young man in golf knickerbockers.

“I guess we better not come in,” he said quickly.

“We'll come some other time,” Riply added.

Together they started precipitately for the door, but she barred their way.

“Don't be silly,” she insisted. “It's just Andy Lockheart.”

Just Andy Lockheart — winner of the Western Golf Championship at eighteen, captain of his freshman baseball team, handsome, successful at everything he tried, a living symbol of the splendid, glamorous world of Yale. For a year Basil had walked like him and tried unsuccessfully to play the piano by ear as Andy Lockheart was able to do.

Through sheer ineptitude at escaping, they were edged into the room. Their plan suddenly seemed presumptuous and absurd.

Perceiving their condition Evelyn tried to soothe them with pleasant banter.

“Well it’s about time you came to see me,” she told Basil. “Here I’ve been sitting at home every night waiting for you — ever since the Davies dance. Why haven’t you been here before?”

He stared at her blankly, unable even to smile, and muttered: “Yes, you have.”

“I have though. Sit down and tell me why you’ve been neglecting me! I suppose you’ve both been rushing the beautiful Imogene Bissel.”

“Why, I understand — ” said Basil. “Why, I heard from somewhere that she’s gone up to have some kind of an appendicitis — that is — ” He ran down to a pitch of inaudibility as Andy Lockheart at the piano began playing a succession of thoughtful chords, which resolved itself into the maxixe, an eccentric stepchild of the tango. Kicking back a rug and lifting her skirts a little, Evelyn fluently tapped out a circle with her heels around the floor.

They sat inanimate as cushions on the sofa watching her. She was almost beautiful, with rather large features and bright fresh color behind which her heart seemed to be trembling a little with laughter. Her voice and her lithe body were always mimicking, ceaselessly caricaturing every sound and movement near by, until even those who disliked her admitted that “Evelyn could always make you laugh.” She finished her dance now with a false stumble and an awed expression as she clutched at the piano, and Basil and Riply chuckled. Seeing their embarrassment lighten, she came and sat down beside them, and they laughed again when she said: “Excuse my lack of self-control.”

“Do you want to be the leading lady in a play we’re going to give?” demanded Basil with sudden desperation. “We’re going to have it at the Martindale School, for the benefit of the Baby Welfare.”

“Basil, this is so sudden.”

Andy Lockheart turned around from the piano.

“What’re you going to give — a minstrel show?”

“No, it’s a crook play named The Captured Shadow. Miss Halliburton is going to coach it.” He suddenly realized the convenience of that name to shelter himself behind.

“Why don’t you give something like ‘The Private Secretary?’” interrupted Andy. “There’s a good play for you. We gave it my last year at school.”

“Oh, no, it’s all settled,” said Basil quickly. “We’re going to put on this play that I wrote.”

“You wrote it yourself?” exclaimed Evelyn.

“Yes.”

“My-y gosh!” said Andy. He began to play again.

“Look, Evelyn,” said Basil. “It’s only for three weeks, and you’d be the leading lady.”

She laughed. “Oh, no. I couldn’t. Why don’t you get Imogene?”

“She’s sick, I tell you. Listen — ”

“Or Margaret Torrence?”

“I don’t want anybody but you.”

The directness of this appeal touched her and momentarily she hesitated. But the hero of the Western Golf Championship turned around from the piano with a teasing smile and she shook her head.

“I can’t do it, Basil. I may have to go East with the family.”

Reluctantly Basil and Riply got up.

“Gosh, I wish you’d be in it, Evelyn.”

“I wish I could.”

Basil lingered, thinking fast, wanting her more than ever; indeed, without her, it scarcely seemed worth while to go on with the play. Suddenly a desperate expedient took shape on his lips:

“You certainly would be wonderful. You see, the leading man is going to be Hubert Blair.”

Breathlessly he watched her, saw her hesitate.

“Good-by,” he said.

She came with them to the door and then out on the veranda, frowning a little.

“How long did you say the rehearsals would take?” she asked thoughtfully.

II

On an August evening three days later Basil read the play to the cast on Miss Halliburton’s porch. He was nervous and at first there were interruptions of “Louder” and “Not so fast.” Just as his audience was beginning to be amused by the repartee of the two comic crooks — repartee that had seen service with Weber and Fields — he was interrupted by the late arrival of Hubert Blair.

Hubert was fifteen, a somewhat shallow boy save for two or three felicities which he possessed to an extraordinary degree. But one excellence suggests the presence of others, and young ladies never failed to respond to his most casual fancy, enduring his fickleness of heart and never convinced that his fundamental indifference might not be overcome. They were dazzled by his flashing self-confidence, by his cherubic ingenuousness, which concealed a shrewd talent for getting around people, and by his extraordinary physical grace. Long-legged, beautifully proportioned, he had that tumbler’s balance usually characteristic only of men “built near the ground.” He was in constant motion that was a delight to watch, and Evelyn Beebe was not the only older girl who had found in him a mysterious promise and watched him for a long time with something more than curiosity.

He stood in the doorway now with an expression of bogus reverence on his round pert face.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Is this the First Methodist Episcopal Church?” Everybody laughed — even Basil. “I didn’t know. I thought maybe I was in the right church, but in the wrong pew.”

They laughed again, somewhat discouraged. Basil waited until Hubert had seated himself beside Evelyn Beebe. Then he began to read once more, while the others, fascinated, watched Hubert’s efforts to balance a chair on its hind legs. This squeaky experiment continued as an undertone to the reading. Not until Basil’s desperate “Now, here’s where you come in, Hube,” did attention swing back to the play.

Basil read for more than an hour. When, at the end, he closed the composition book and looked up shyly, there was a burst of spontaneous applause. He had followed his models closely, and for all its grotesqueries, the result was actually interesting — it was a play. Afterward he lingered, talking to Miss Halliburton, and he walked home glowing with excitement and rehearsing a little by himself into the August night.

The first week of rehearsal was a matter of Basil climbing back and forth from auditorium to stage, crying, “No! Look here, Connie; you come in more like this.” Then things began to happen. Mrs. Van Schellinger came to rehearsal one day, and lingering afterward, announced that she couldn’t let Gladys be in “a play about criminals.” Her theory was that this element could be removed; for instance, the two comic crooks could be changed to “two funny farmers.”

Basil listened with horror. When she had gone he assured Miss Halliburton that he would change nothing. Luckily Gladys played the cook, an interpolated part that could be summarily struck out, but her absence was felt in another way. She was tranquil and tractable, “the most carefully brought-up girl in town,” and at her withdrawal rowdiness appeared during rehearsals. Those who had only such lines as “I’ll ask Mrs. Van Baker, sir,” in Act I and “No, ma’am,” in Act III showed a certain tendency to grow restless in between. So now it was:

“Please keep that dog quiet or else send him home!” or:

“Where’s that maid? Wake up, Margaret, for heaven’s sake!” or:

“What is there to laugh at that’s so darn funny?”

More and more the chief problem was the tactful management of Hubert Blair. Apart from his unwillingness to learn his lines, he was a satisfactory hero, but off the stage he became a nuisance. He gave an endless private performance for Evelyn Beebe, which took such forms as chasing her amorously around the hall or of flipping peanuts over his shoulder to land mysteriously on the stage. Called to order, he would mutter, “Aw, shut up yourself,” just loud enough for Basil to guess, but not to hear.

But Evelyn Beebe was all that Basil had expected. Once on the stage, she compelled a breathless attention, and Basil recognized this by adding to her part. He envied the half-sentimental fun that she and Hubert derived from their scenes together and he felt a vague, impersonal jealousy that almost every night after rehearsal they drove around together in Hubert’s car.

One afternoon when matters had progressed a fortnight, Hubert came in an hour late, loafed through the first act and then informed Miss Halliburton that he was going home.

“What for?” Basil demanded.

“I’ve got some things I got to do.”

“Are they important?”

“What business is that of yours?”

“Of course it’s my business,” said Basil heatedly, whereupon Miss Halliburton interfered.

“There’s no use of anybody getting angry. What Basil means, Hubert, is that if it’s just some small thing — why, we’re all giving up our pleasures to make this play a success.”

Hubert listened with obvious boredom.

“I’ve got to drive downtown and get father.”

He looked coolly at Basil, as if challenging him to deny the adequacy of this explanation.

“Then why did you come an hour late?” demanded Basil.

“Because I had to do something for mother.”

A group had gathered and he glanced around triumphantly. It was one of those sacred excuses, and only Basil saw that it was disingenuous.

“Oh, tripe!” he said.

“Maybe you think so — Bossy.”

Basil took a step toward him, his eyes blazing.

“What’d you say?”

“I said ‘Bossy.’ Isn’t that what they call you at school?”

It was true. It had followed him home. Even as he went white with rage a vast impotence surged over him at the realization that the past was always lurking near. The faces of school were around him, sneering and watching. Hubert laughed.

“Get out!” said Basil in a strained voice. “Go on! Get right out!”

Hubert laughed again, but as Basil took a step toward him he retreated.

“I don’t want to be in your play anyhow. I never did.”

“Then go on out of this hall.”

“Now, Basil!” Miss Halliburton hovered breathlessly beside them. Hubert laughed again and looked about for his cap.

“I wouldn’t be in your crazy old show,” he said. He turned slowly and jauntily, and sauntered out the door.

Riply Buckner read Hubert’s part that afternoon, but there was a cloud upon the rehearsal. Miss Beebe’s performance lacked its customary verve and the others clustered and whispered, falling silent when Basil came near. After the rehearsal, Miss Halliburton, Riply and Basil held a conference. Upon Basil flatly refusing to take the leading part, it was decided to enlist a certain Mayall De Bec, known slightly to Riply, who had made a name for himself in theatricals at the Central High School.

But next day a blow fell that was irreparable. Evelyn, flushed and uncomfortable, told Basil and Miss Halliburton that her family's plans had changed — they were going East next week and she couldn't be in the play after all. Basil understood. Only Hubert had held her this long.

“Good-by,” he said gloomily.

His manifest despair shamed her and she tried to justify herself.

“Really, I can't help it. Oh, Basil, I'm so sorry!”

“Couldn't you stay over a week with me after your family goes?” Miss Halliburton asked innocently.

“Not possibly. Father wants us all to go together. That's the only reason. If it wasn't for that I'd stay.”

“All right,” Basil said. “Good-by.”

“Basil, you're not mad, are you?” A gust of repentance swept over her. “I'll do anything to help. I'll come to rehearsals this week until you get someone else, and then I'll try to help her all I can. But father says we've got to go.”

In vain Riply tried to raise Basil's morale after the rehearsal that afternoon, making suggestions which he waved contemptuously away. Margaret Torrence? Connie Davies? They could hardly play the parts they had. It seemed to Basil as if the undertaking was falling to pieces before his eyes.

It was still early when he got home. He sat dispiritedly by his bedroom window, watching the little Barnfield boy playing a lonesome game by himself in the yard next door.

His mother came in at five, and immediately sensed his depression.

“Teddy Barnfield has the mumps,” she said, in an effort to distract him.

“That's why he's playing there all alone.”

“Has he?” he responded listlessly.

“It isn't at all dangerous, but it's very contagious. You had it when you were seven.”

“H’m.”

She hesitated.

“Are you worrying about your play? Has anything gone wrong?”

“No, mother. I just want to be alone.”

After a while he got up and started after a malted milk at the soda fountain around the corner. It was half in his mind to see Mr. Beebe and ask him if he couldn’t postpone his trip East. If he could only be sure that that was Evelyn’s real reason.

The sight of Evelyn’s nine-year-old brother coming along the street broke in on his thoughts.

“Hello, Ham. I hear you’re going away.”

Ham nodded.

“Going next week. To the seashore.”

Basil looked at him speculatively, as if, through his proximity to Evelyn, he held the key to the power of moving her.

“Where are you going now?” he asked.

“I’m going to play with Teddy Barnfield.”

“What!” Basil exclaimed. “Why, didn’t you know — ” He stopped. A wild, criminal idea broke over him; his mother’s words floated through his mind: “It isn’t at all dangerous, but it’s very contagious.” If little Ham Beebe got the mumps, and Evelyn *couldn’t* go away —

He came to a decision quickly and coolly.

“Teddy’s playing in his back yard,” he said. “If you want to see him without going through his house, why don’t you go down this street and turn up the alley?”

“All right. Thanks,” said Ham trustingly.

Basil stood for a minute looking after him until he turned the corner into the alley, fully aware that it was the worst thing he had ever done in his life.

III

A week later Mrs. Lee had an early supper — all Basil's favorite things: chipped beef, french-fried potatoes, sliced peaches and cream, and devil's food.

Every few minutes Basil said, "Gosh! I wonder what time it is," and went out in the hall to look at the clock. "Does that clock work right?" he demanded with sudden suspicion. It was the first time the matter had ever interested him.

"Perfectly all right. If you eat so fast you'll have indigestion and then you won't be able to act well."

"What do you think of the program?" he asked for the third time. "Riply Buckner, Jr., presents Basil Duke Lee's comedy, 'The Captured Shadow.'"

"I think it's very nice."

"He doesn't really present it."

"It sounds very well though."

"I wonder what time it is?" he inquired.

"You just said it was ten minutes after six."

"Well, I guess I better be starting."

"Eat your peaches, Basil. If you don't eat you won't be able to act."

"I don't have to act," he said patiently. "All I am is a small part, and it wouldn't matter — " It was too much trouble to explain.

"Please don't smile at me when I come on, mother," he requested. "Just act as if I was anybody else."

"Can't I even say how-do-you-do?"

“What?” Humor was lost on him. He said good-by. Trying very hard to digest not his food but his heart, which had somehow slipped down into his stomach, he started off for the Martindale School.

As its yellow windows loomed out of the night his excitement became insupportable; it bore no resemblance to the building he had been entering so casually for three weeks. His footsteps echoed symbolically and portentously in its deserted hall; upstairs there was only the janitor setting out the chairs in rows, and Basil wandered about the vacant stage until someone came in.

It was Mayall De Bec, the tall, clever, not very likeable youth they had imported from Lower Crest Avenue to be the leading man. Mayall, far from being nervous, tried to engage Basil in casual conversation. He wanted to know if Basil thought Evelyn Beebe would mind if he went to see her sometime when the show was over. Basil supposed not. Mayall said he had a friend whose father owned a brewery who owned a twelve-cylinder car.

Basil said, “Gee!”

At quarter to seven the participants arrived in groups — Riply Buckner with the six boys he had gathered to serve as ticket takers and ushers; Miss Halliburton, trying to seem very calm and reliable; Evelyn Beebe, who came in as if she were yielding herself up to something and whose glance at Basil seemed to say: “Well, it looks as if I’m really going through with it after all.”

Mayall De Bec was to make up the boys and Miss Halliburton the girls. Basil soon came to the conclusion that Miss Halliburton knew nothing about make-up, but he judged it diplomatic, in that lady’s overwrought condition, to say nothing, but to take each girl to Mayall for corrections when Miss Halliburton had done.

An exclamation from Bill Kampf, standing at a crack in the curtain, brought Basil to his side. A tall bald-headed man in spectacles had come in and was shown to a seat in the middle of the house, where he examined the program. He was the public. Behind those waiting eyes, suddenly so mysterious and incalculable, was the secret of the play’s failure or success.

He finished the program, took off his glasses and looked around. Two old ladies and two little boys came in, followed immediately by a dozen more.

“Hey, Riply,” Basil called softly. “Tell them to put the children down in front.”

Riply, struggling into his policeman’s uniform, looked up, and the long black mustache on his upper lip quivered indignantly.

“I thought of that long ago.”

The hall, filling rapidly, was now alive with the buzz of conversation. The children in front were jumping up and down in their seats, and everyone was talking and calling back and forth save the several dozen cooks and housemaids who sat in stiff and quiet pairs about the room.

Then, suddenly, everything was ready. It was incredible. “Stop! Stop!” Basil wanted to say. “It can’t be ready. There must be something — there always has been something,” but the darkened auditorium and the piano and violin from Geyer’s Orchestra playing “Meet Me in the Shadows” belied his words. Miss Saunders, Leilia Van Baker and Leilia’s friend, Estella Carrage, were already seated on the stage, and Miss Halliburton stood in the wings with the prompt book. Suddenly the music ended and the chatter in front died away.

“Oh, gosh!” Basil thought. “Oh, my gosh!”

The curtain rose. A clear voice floated up from somewhere. Could it be from that unfamiliar group on the stage?

I will, Miss Saunders. I tell you I will!

But, Miss Leilia, I don’t consider the newspapers proper for young ladies nowadays.

I don’t care. I want to read about this wonderful gentleman burglar they call The Shadow.

It was actually going on. Almost before he realized it, a ripple of laughter passed over the audience as Evelyn gave her imitation of Miss Saunders behind her back.

“Get ready, Basil,” breathed Miss Halliburton.

Basil and Bill Kampf, the crooks, each took an elbow of Victor Van Baker, the dissolute son of the house, and made ready to aid him through the front door.

It was strangely natural to be out on the stage with all those eyes looking up encouragingly. His mother’s face floated past him, other faces that he recognized and remembered.

Bill Kampf stumbled on a line and Basil picked him up quickly and went on.

MISS SAUNDERS: So you are alderman from the Sixth Ward?

RABBIT SIMMONS: Yes, ma’am.

MISS SAUNDERS (*shaking her head kittenishly*): Just what is an alderman?

CHINAMAN RUDD: An alderman is halfway between a politician and a pirate.

This was one of Basil’s lines that he was particularly proud of — but there was not a sound from the audience, not a smile. A moment later Bill Kampf absent-mindedly wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and then stared at it, startled by the red stains of make-up on it — and the audience roared. The theater was like that.

MISS SAUNDERS: Then you believe in spirits, Mr. Rudd.

CHINAMAN RUDD: Yes, ma’am, I certainly do believe in spirits. Have you got any?

The first big scene came. On the darkened stage a window rose slowly and Mayall De Bec, “in a full evening dress,” climbed over the sill. He was tiptoeing cautiously from one side of the stage to the other, when Leilia Van Baker came in. For a moment she was frightened, but he assured her that he was a friend of her brother Victor. They talked. She told him naïvely yet feelingly of her admiration for The Shadow, of whose exploits she had read. She hoped, though, that The Shadow would not come here tonight, as the family jewels were all in that safe at the right.

The stranger was hungry. He had been late for his dinner and so had not been able to get any that night. Would he have some crackers and milk? That would be fine. Scarcely had she left the room when he was on his knees by the safe, fumbling at the catch, undeterred by the unpromising word "Cake" stencilled on the safe's front. It swung open, but he heard footsteps outside and closed it just as Leilia came back with the crackers and milk.

They lingered, obviously attracted to each other. Miss Saunders came in, very kittenish, and was introduced. Again Evelyn mimicked her behind her back and the audience roared. Other members of the household appeared and were introduced to the stranger.

What's this? A banging at the door, and Mulligan, a policeman, rushes in.

We have just received word from the Central Office that the notorious Shadow has been seen climbing in the window! No one can leave this house tonight!

The curtain fell. The first rows of the audience — the younger brothers and sisters of the cast — were extravagant in their enthusiasm. The actors took a bow.

A moment later Basil found himself alone with Evelyn Beebe on the stage. A weary doll in her make-up she was leaning against a table.

"Heigh-ho, Basil," she said.

She had not quite forgiven him for holding her to her promise after her little brother's mumps had postponed their trip East, and Basil had tactfully avoided her, but now they met in the genial glow of excitement and success.

"You were wonderful," he said — "Wonderful!"

He lingered a moment. He could never please her, for she wanted someone like herself, someone who could reach her through her senses, like Hubert Blair. Her intuition told her that Basil was of a certain vague consequence; beyond that his incessant attempts to make people think and feel, bothered and wearied her. But suddenly, in the glow of the evening, they leaned

forward and kissed peacefully, and from that moment, because they had no common ground even to quarrel on, they were friends for life.

When the curtain rose upon the second act Basil slipped down a flight of stairs and up to another to the back of the hall, where he stood watching in the darkness. He laughed silently when the audience laughed, enjoying it as if it were a play he had never seen before.

There was a second and a third act scene that were very similar. In each of them The Shadow, alone on the stage, was interrupted by Miss Saunders. Mayall De Bec, having had but ten days of rehearsal, was inclined to confuse the two, but Basil was totally unprepared for what happened. Upon Connie's entrance Mayall spoke his third-act line and involuntarily Connie answered in kind.

Others coming on the stage were swept up in the nervousness and confusion, and suddenly they were playing the third act in the middle of the second. It happened so quickly that for a moment Basil had only a vague sense that something was wrong. Then he dashed down one stairs and up another and into the wings, crying:

“Let down the curtain! Let down the curtain!”

The boys who stood there aghast sprang to the rope. In a minute Basil, breathless, was facing the audience.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “there's been changes in the cast and what just happened was a mistake. If you'll excuse us we'd like to do that scene over.”

He stepped back in the wings to a flutter of laughter and applause.

“All right, Mayall!” he called excitedly. “On the stage alone. Your line is: ‘I just want to see that the jewels are all right,’ and Connie's is: ‘Go ahead, don't mind me.’ All right! Curtain up!”

In a moment things righted themselves. Someone brought water for Miss Halliburton, who was in a state of collapse, and as the act ended they all took a curtain call once more. Twenty minutes later it was over. The hero clasped Leilia Van Baker to his breast, confessing that he was The Shadow,

“and a captured Shadow at that”; the curtain went up and down, up and down; Miss Halliburton was dragged unwillingly on the stage and the ushers came up the aisles laden with flowers. Then everything became informal and the actors mingled happily with the audience, laughing and important, congratulated from all sides. An old man whom Basil didn’t know came up to him and shook his hand, saying, “You’re a young man that’s going to be heard from some day,” and a reporter from the paper asked him if he was really only fifteen. It might all have been very bad and demoralizing for Basil, but it was already behind him. Even as the crowd melted away and the last few people spoke to him and went out, he felt a great vacancy come into his heart. It was over, it was done and gone — all that work, and interest and absorption. It was a hollowness like fear.

“Good night, Miss Halliburton. Good night, Evelyn.”

“Good night, Basil. Congratulations, Basil. Good night.”

“Where’s my coat? Good night, Basil.”

“Leave your costumes on the stage, please. They’ve got to go back tomorrow.”

He was almost the last to leave, mounting to the stage for a moment and looking around the deserted hall. His mother was waiting and they strolled home together through the first cool night of the year.

“Well, I thought it went very well indeed. Were you satisfied?” He didn’t answer for a moment. “Weren’t you satisfied with the way it went?”

“Yes.” He turned his head away.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” and then, “Nobody really cares, do they?”

“About what?”

“About anything.”

“Everybody cares about different things. I care about you, for instance.”

Instinctively he ducked away from a hand extended caressingly toward him:

“Oh, don’t. I don’t mean like that.”

“You’re just overwrought, dear.”

“I am not overwrought. I just feel sort of sad.”

“You shouldn’t feel sad. Why, people told me after the play — ”

“Oh, that’s all over. Don’t talk about that — don’t ever talk to me about that any more.”

“Then what are you sad about?”

“Oh, about a little boy.”

“What little boy?”

“Oh, little Ham — you wouldn’t understand.”

“When we get home I want you to take a real hot bath and quiet your nerves.”

“All right.”

But when he got home he fell immediately into deep sleep on the sofa. She hesitated. Then covering him with a blanket and a comforter, she pushed a pillow under his protesting head and went upstairs.

She knelt for a long time beside her bed.

“God, help him! help him,” she prayed, “because he needs help that I can’t give him any more.”

THE PERFECT LIFE

I

The Saturday Evening Post (5 January, 1929)

When he came into the dining room, a little tired, but with his clothes hanging cool and free on him after his shower, the whole school stood up and clapped and cheered until he slunk down into his seat. From one end of the table to the other, people leaned forward and smiled at him.

“Nice work, Lee. Not your fault we didn’t win.”

Basil knew that he had been good. Up to the last whistle he could feel his expended energy miraculously replacing itself after each surpassing effort. But he couldn’t realize his success all at once, and only little episodes lingered with him, such as when that shaggy Exeter tackle stood up big in the line and said, “Let’s get that quarter! He’s yellow.” Basil shouted back, “Yellow your gra’mother!” and the linesman grinned good-naturedly, knowing it wasn’t true. During that gorgeous hour bodies had no weight or force; Basil lay under piles of them, tossed himself in front of them without feeling the impact, impatient only to be on his feet dominating those two green acres once more. At the end of the first half he got loose for sixty yards and a touchdown, but the whistle had blown and it was not allowed. That was the high point of the game for St. Regis. Outweighed ten pounds to the man, they wilted down suddenly in the fourth quarter and Exeter put over two touchdowns, glad to win over a school whose membership was only one hundred and thirty-five.

When lunch was over and the school was trooping out of the dining hall, the Exeter coach came over to Basil and said:

“Lee, that was about the best game I’ve ever seen played by a prep-school back, and I’ve seen a lot of them.”

Doctor Bacon beckoned to him. He was standing with two old St. Regis boys, up from Princeton for the day.

“It was a very exciting game, Basil. We are all very proud of the team and — ah — especially of you.” And, as if this praise had been an indiscretion, he hastened to add: “And of all the others.”

He presented him to the two alumni. One of them, John Granby, Basil knew by reputation. He was said to be a “big man” at Princeton — serious, upright, handsome, with a kindly smile and large, earnest blue eyes. He had graduated from St. Regis before Basil entered.

“That was pretty work, Lee!” Basil made the proper deprecatory noises. “I wonder if you’ve got a moment this afternoon when we could have a little talk.”

“Why, yes, sir.” Basil was flattered. “Any time you say.”

“Suppose we take a walk about three o’clock. My train goes at five.”

“I’d like to very much.”

He walked on air to his room in the Sixth Form House. One short year ago he had been perhaps the most unpopular boy at St. Regis — “Bossy” Lee. Only occasionally did people forget and call him “Bossy” now, and then they corrected themselves immediately.

A youngster leaned out of the window of Mitchell House as he passed and cried, “Good work!” The negro gardener, trimming a hedge, chuckled and called, “You almost beatum by y’ own self.” Mr. Hicks the housemaster cried, “They ought to have given you that touchdown! That was a crime!” as Basil passed his door. It was a frosty gold October day, tinged with the blue smoke of Indian summer, weather that set him dreaming of future splendors, triumphant descents upon cities, romantic contacts with mysterious and scarcely mortal girls. In his room he floated off into an ambulatory dream in which he walked up and down repeating to himself tag ends of phrases: “by a prep-school back, and I’ve seen a lot of them.” . . . “Yellow your gra’mother!” . . . “You get off side again and I’ll kick your fat bottom for you!”

Suddenly he rolled on his bed with laughter. The threatened one had actually apologized between quarters — it was Pork Corrigan who only last year had chased him up two flights of stairs.

At three he met John Granby and they set off along the Grunwald Pike, following a long, low red wall that on fair mornings always suggested to Basil an adventurous quest like in “The Broad Highway.” John Granby talked awhile about Princeton, but when he realized that Yale was an abstract ideal deep in Basil’s heart, he gave up. After a moment a far-away expression, a smile that seemed a reflection of another and brighter world, spread over his handsome face.

“Lee, I love St. Regis School,” he said suddenly. “I spent the happiest years of my life here. I owe it a debt I can never repay.” Basil didn’t answer and Granby turned to him suddenly. “I wonder if you realize what you could do here.”

“What? Me?”

“I wonder if you know the effect on the whole school of that wonderful game you played this morning.”

“It wasn’t so good.”

“It’s like you to say that,” declared Granby emphatically, “but it isn’t the truth. However, I didn’t come out here to sing your praises. Only I wonder if you realize your power for good. I mean your power of influencing all these boys to lead clean, upright, decent lives.”

“I never thought about that,” said Basil, somewhat startled; “I never thought about — ”

Granby slapped him smartly on the shoulder.

“Since this morning a responsibility has come to you that you can’t dodge. From this morning every boy in this school who goes around smoking cigarettes behind the gym and reeking with nicotine is a little bit your responsibility; every bit of cursing and swearing, or of learning to take the property of others by stealing milk and food supplies out of the pantry at night is a little bit your responsibility.”

He broke off. Basil looked straight ahead, frowning.

“Gee!” he said.

“I mean it,” continued Granby, his eyes shining. “You have the sort of opportunity very few boys have. I’m going to tell you a little story. Up at Princeton I knew two boys who were wrecking their lives with drink. I could have said, ‘It’s not my affair,’ and let them go to pieces their own way, but when I looked deep into my own heart I found I couldn’t. So I went to them frankly and put it up to them fairly and squarely, and those two boys haven’t — at least one of them hasn’t — touched a single drop of liquor from that day to this.”

“But I don’t think anybody in school drinks,” objected Basil. “At least there was a fellow named Bates that got fired last year — ”

“It doesn’t matter,” John Granby interrupted. “Smoking leads to drinking and drinking leads to — other things.”

For an hour Granby talked and Basil listened; the red wall beside the road and the apple-heavy branches overhead seemed to become less vivid minute by minute as his thoughts turned inward. He was deeply affected by what he considered the fine unselfishness of this man who took the burdens of others upon his shoulders. Granby missed his train, but he said that didn’t matter if he had succeeded in planting a sense of responsibility in Basil’s mind.

Basil returned to his room awed, sobered and convinced. Up to this time he had always considered himself rather bad; in fact, the last hero character with which he had been able to identify himself was Hairbreadth Harry in the comic supplement, when he was ten. Though he often brooded, his brooding was dark and nameless and never concerned with moral questions. The real restraining influence on him was fear — the fear of being disqualified from achievement and power.

But this meeting with John Granby had come at a significant moment. After this morning’s triumph, life at school scarcely seemed to hold anything more — and here was something new. To be perfect, wonderful inside and out — as Granby had put it, to try to lead the perfect life. Granby had outlined the

perfect life to him, not without a certain stress upon its material rewards such as honor and influence at college, and Basil's imagination was already far in the future. When he was tapped last man for Skull and Bones at Yale and shook his head with a sad sweet smile, somewhat like John Granby's, pointing to another man who wanted it more, a burst of sobbing would break from the assembled crowd. Then, out into the world, where, at the age of twenty-five, he would face the nation from the inaugural platform on the Capitol steps, and all around him his people would lift up their faces in admiration and love. . . .

As he thought he absent-mindedly consumed half a dozen soda crackers and a bottle of milk, left from a pantry raid the night before. Vaguely he realized that this was one of the things he was giving up, but he was very hungry. However, he reverently broke off the train of his reflections until he was through.

Outside his window the autumn dusk was split with shafts of lights from passing cars. In these cars were great football players and lovely débutantes, mysterious adventuresses and international spies — rich, gay, glamorous people moving toward brilliant encounters in New York, at fashionable dances and secret cafés, or on roof gardens under the autumn moon. He sighed; perhaps he could blend in these more romantic things later. To be of great wit and conversational powers, and simultaneously strong and serious and silent. To be generous and open and self-sacrificing, yet to be somewhat mysterious and sensitive and even a little bitter with melancholy. To be both light and dark. To harmonize this, to melt all this down into a single man — ah, there was something to be done. The very thought of such perfection crystallized his vitality into an ecstasy of ambition. For a moment longer his soul followed the speeding lights toward the metropolis; then resolutely he arose, put out his cigarette on the window sill, and turning on his reading lamp, began to note down a set of requirements for the perfect life.

One month later George Dorsey, engaged in the painful duty of leading his mother around the school grounds, reached the comparative seclusion of the tennis courts and suggested eagerly that she rest herself upon a bench.

Hitherto his conversation had confined itself to a few hoarse advices, such as "That's the gym," . . . "That's Cuckoo Conklin that teaches French. Everybody hates him." . . . "Please don't call me 'Brother' in front of boys." Now his face took on the preoccupied expression peculiar to adolescents in the presence of their parents. He relaxed. He waited to be asked things.

"Now, about Thanksgiving, George. Who is this boy you're bringing home?"

"His name is Basil Lee."

"Tell me something about him."

"There isn't anything to tell. He's just a boy in the Sixth Form, about sixteen."

"Is he a nice boy?"

"Yes. He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. I asked him a long time ago."

A certain reticence in her son's voice interested Mrs. Dorsey.

"Do you mean you're sorry you asked him? Don't you like him any more?"

"Sure I like him."

"Because there's no use bringing anyone you don't like. You could just explain that your mother has made other plans."

"But I like him," George insisted, and then he added hesitantly: "It's just some funny way he's got to be lately."

"How?"

"Oh, just sort of queer."

"But how, George? I don't want you to bring anyone into the house that's queer."

“He isn’t exactly queer. He just gets people aside and talks to them. Then he sort of smiles at them.”

Mrs. Dorsey was mystified. “Smiles at them?”

“Yeah. He gets them off in a corner somewheres and talks to them as long as they can stand it, and then he smiles” — his own lips twisted into a peculiar grimace — “like that.”

“What does he talk about?”

“Oh, about swearing and smoking and writing home and a lot of stuff like that. Nobody pays any attention except one boy he’s got doing the same thing. He got stuck up or something because he was so good at football.”

“Well, if you don’t want him, don’t let’s have him.”

“Oh, no,” George cried in alarm. “I’ve got to have him. I asked him.”

Naturally, Basil was unaware of this conversation when, one morning, a week later, the Dorseys’ chauffeur relieved them of their bags in the Grand Central station. There was a slate-pink light over the city and people in the streets carried with them little balloons of frosted breath. About them the buildings broke up through many planes toward heaven, at their base the wintry color of an old man’s smile, on through diagonals of diluted gold, edged with purple where the cornices floated past the stationary sky.

In a long, low, English town car — the first of the kind that Basil had ever seen — sat a girl of about his own age. As they came up she received her brother’s kiss perfunctorily, nodded stiffly to Basil and murmured, “how-d’y’-do” without smiling. She said nothing further but seemed absorbed in meditations of her own. At first, perhaps because of her extreme reserve, Basil received no especial impression of her, but before they reached the Dorseys’ house he began to realize that she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen in his life.

It was a puzzling face. Her long eyelashes lay softly against her pale cheeks, almost touching them, as if to conceal the infinite boredom in her eyes, but when she smiled, her expression was illumined by a fiery and lovely friendliness, as if she were saying, “Go on; I’m listening. I’m fascinated. I’ve

been waiting — oh, ages — for just this moment with you.” Then she remembered that she was shy or bored; the smile vanished, the gray eyes half closed again. Almost before it had begun, the moment was over, leaving a haunting and unsatisfied curiosity behind.

The Dorseys’ house was on Fifty-third Street. Basil was astonished first at the narrowness of its white stone front and then at the full use to which the space was put inside. The formal chambers ran the width of the house, artificial sunlight bloomed in the dining-room windows, a small elevator navigated the five stories in deferential silence. For Basil there was a new world in its compact luxury. It was thrilling and romantic that a foothold on this island was more precious than the whole rambling sweep of the James J. Hill house at home. In his excitement the feel of school dropped momentarily away from him. He was possessed by the same longing for a new experience, that his previous glimpses of New York had aroused. In the hard bright glitter of Fifth Avenue, in this lovely girl with no words to waste beyond a mechanical “How-d’y’-do,” in the perfectly organized house, he recognized nothing, and he knew that to recognize nothing in his surroundings was usually a guaranty of adventure.

But his mood of the last month was not to be thrown off so lightly. There was now an ideal that came first. A day mustn’t pass when he wasn’t, as John Granby put it, “straight with himself” — and that meant to help others. He could get in a good deal of work on George Dorsey in these five days; other opportunities might turn up, besides. Meanwhile, with the consciousness of making the best of both worlds, he unpacked his grip and got ready for luncheon.

He sat beside Mrs. Dorsey, who found him somewhat precipitately friendly in a Midwestern way, but polite, apparently not unbalanced. He told her he was going to be a minister and immediately he didn’t believe it himself; but he saw that it interested Mrs. Dorsey and let it stand.

The afternoon was already planned; they were going dancing — for those were the great days: Maurice was tangoing in “Over the River,” the Castles were doing a swift stiff-legged walk in the third act of “The Sunshine Girl” — a walk that gave the modern dance a social position and brought the nice

girl into the café, thus beginning a profound revolution in American life. The great rich empire was feeling its oats and was out for some not too plebeian, yet not too artistic, fun.

By three o'clock seven young people were assembled, and they started in a limousine for Emil's. There were two stylish, anæmic girls of sixteen — one bore an impressive financial name — and two freshmen from Harvard who exchanged private jokes and were attentive only to Jobena Dorsey. Basil expected that presently everyone would begin asking each other such familiar questions as "Where do you go to school?" and "Oh, do you know So-and-So?" and the party would become more free and easy, but nothing of the sort happened. The atmosphere was impersonal; he doubted if the other four guests knew his name. "In fact," he thought, "it's just as if everyone's waiting for some one else to make a fool of himself." Here again was something new and unrecognizable; he guessed that it was a typical part of New York.

They reached Emil's. Only in certain Paris restaurants where the Argentines step untiringly through their native coils does anything survive of the dance craze as it existed just before the war. At that time it was not an accompaniment to drinking or love-making or hailing in the dawn — it was an end in itself. Sedentary stockbrokers, grandmothers of sixty, Confederate veterans, venerable statesmen and scientists, sufferers from locomotor ataxia, wanted not only to dance but to dance beautifully. Fantastic ambitions bloomed in hitherto sober breasts, violent exhibitionism cropped out in families modest for generations. Nonentities with long legs became famous overnight, and there were rendezvous where they could renew the dance, if they wished, next morning. Because of a neat glide or an awkward stumble careers were determined and engagements were made or broken, while the tall Englishman and the girl in the Dutch cap called the tune.

As they went into the cabaret sudden anxiety attacked Basil — modern dancing was one of the things upon which John Granby had been most severe.

He approached George Dorsey in the coat room.

“There’s an extra man, so do you suppose I’d be all right if I only danced when there’s a waltz? I’m no good at anything else.”

“Sure. It’s all right with me.” He looked curiously at Basil. “Gosh, have you sworn off everything?”

“No, not everything,” answered Basil uncomfortably.

The floor was already crowded. All ages and several classes of society shuffled around tensely to the nervous, disturbing beats of “Too Much Mustard.” Automatically the other three couples were up and away, leaving Basil at the table. He watched, trying to pretend to himself that he disapproved of it all but was too polite to show it. However, with so much to see, it was difficult to preserve that attitude, and he was gazing with fascination at Jobena’s active feet when a good-looking young man of about nineteen sat down beside him at the table.

“Excuse me,” he said with exaggerated deference. “This Miss Jobena Dorsey’s table?”

“Yes, it is.”

“I’m expected. Name’s De Vinci. Don’t ask me if I’m any relation to the painter.”

“My name’s Lee.”

“All right, Lee. What’ll you have? What are you having?” The waiter arrived with a tray, and De Vinci looked at its contents with disgust. “Tea — all tea. . . . Waiter, bring me a double Bronx. . . . How about you, Lee? Another double Bronx?”

“Oh, no, thanks,” said Basil quickly.

“One then, waiter.”

De Vinci sighed; he had the unmistakable lush look of a man who has been drinking hard for several days.

“Nice dog under that table over there. They oughtn’t to let people smoke if they’re going to bring dogs in here.”

“Why?”

“Hurts their eyes.”

Confusedly Basil deliberated this piece of logic.

“But don’t talk to me about dogs,” said De Vinci with a profound sigh; “I’m trying to keep from thinking of dogs.”

Basil obligingly changed the subject for him by asking him if he was in college.

“Two weeks.” For emphasis De Vinci held up two fingers. “I passed quickly through Yale. First man fired out of ‘15 Sheff.”

“That’s too bad,” said Basil earnestly. He took a deep breath and his lips twisted up in a kindly smile. “Your parents must have felt pretty badly about that.”

De Vinci stared at him as if over a pair of spectacles, but before he could answer, the dance ended and the others came back to the table.

“Hello there, Skiddy.”

“Well, well, Skiddy!”

They all knew him. One of the freshmen yielded him a place next to Jobena and they began to talk together in lowered voices.

“Skiddy De Vinci,” George whispered to Basil. “He and Jobena were engaged last summer, but I think she’s through.” He shook his head. “They used to go off in his mother’s electric up at Bar Harbor; it was disgusting.”

Basil glowed suddenly with excitement as if he had been snapped on like an electric torch. He looked at Jobena — her face, infinitely reserved, lightened momentarily, but this time her smile had gone sad; there was the deep friendliness but not the delight. He wondered if Skiddy De Vinci cared about her being through with him. Perhaps, if he reformed and stopped drinking and went back to Yale, she would change her mind.

The music began again. Basil stared uncomfortably into his cup of tea.

“This is a tango,” said George. “You can dance the tango, can’t you? It’s all right; it’s Spanish.”

Basil considered.

“Sure you can,” insisted George. “It’s Spanish, I tell you. There’s nothing to stop your dancing if it’s Spanish, is there?”

One of the freshmen looked at them curiously. Basil leaned over the table and asked Jobena to dance.

She made a last low-voiced remark to De Vinci before she rose; then, to atone for the slight rudeness, she smiled up at Basil. He was light-headed as they moved out on the floor.

Abruptly she made an outrageous remark and Basil started and nearly stumbled, doubtful that he had heard aright.

“I’ll bet you’ve kissed about a thousand girls in your time,” she said, “with that mouth.”

“What!”

“Not so?”

“Oh, no,” declared Basil. “Really, I— ”

Her lids and lashes had drooped again indifferently; she was singing the band’s tune:

“Tango makes you warm inside;

You bend and sway and glide;

There’s nothing far and wide — ”

What was the implication — that kissing people was all right; was even admirable? He remembered what John Granby had said: “Every time you kiss a nice girl you may have started her on the road to the devil.”

He thought of his own past — an afternoon on the Kampf’s porch with Minnie Bibble, a ride home from Black Bear Lake with Imogene Bissel in the back seat of the car, a miscellany of encounters running back to games of

post office and to childish kisses that were consummated upon an unwilling nose or ear.

That was over; he was never going to kiss another girl until he found the one who would become his wife. It worried him that this girl whom he found lovely should take the matter so lightly. The strange thrill he had felt when George spoke of her “behaving disgustingly” with Skiddy De Vinci in his electric, was transformed into indignation — steadily rising indignation. It was criminal — a girl not yet seventeen.

Suddenly it occurred to him that this was perhaps his responsibility, his opportunity. If he could implant in her mind the futility of it all, the misery she was laying up for herself, his visit to New York would not have been in vain. He could go back to school happy, knowing he had brought to one girl the sort of peace she had never known before.

In fact, the more he thought of Jobena and Skiddy De Vinci in the electric, the madder it made him.

At five they left Emil’s to go to Castle House. There was a thin rain falling and the streets were gleaming. In the excitement of going out into the twilight Jobena slipped her arm quickly through Basil’s.

“There’s too many for the car. Let’s take the hansom.”

She gave the address to a septuagenarian in faded bottle green, and the slanting doors closed upon them, shutting them back away from the rain.

“I’m tired of them,” she whispered. “Such empty faces, except Skiddy’s, and in another hour he won’t be able to even talk straight. He’s beginning to get maudlin about his dog Eggshell that died last month, and that’s always a sign. Do you ever feel the fascination of somebody that’s doomed; who just goes on and on in the way he was born to go, never complaining, never hoping; just sort or resigned to it all?”

His fresh heart cried out against this.

“Nobody has to go to pieces,” he assured her. “They can just turn over a new leaf.”

“Not Skiddy.”

“Anybody,” he insisted. “You just make up your mind and resolve to live a better life, and you’d be surprised how easy it is and how much happier you are.”

She didn’t seem to hear him.

“Isn’t it nice, rolling along in this hansom with the damp blowing in, and you and I back here” — she turned to him and smiled — “together.”

“Yes,” said Basil abstractedly. “The thing is that everybody should try to make their life perfect. They can’t start young enough; in fact, they ought to start about eleven or twelve in order to make their life absolutely perfect.”

“That’s true,” she said. “In a way Skiddy’s life is perfect. He never worries, never regrets. You could put him back at the time of the — oh, the eighteenth century, or whenever it was they had the bucks and beaux — and he’d fit right in.”

“I didn’t mean that,” said Basil in alarm. “That isn’t at all what I mean by the perfect life.”

“You mean something more masterful,” she supplied. “I thought so, when I saw that chin of yours. I’ll bet you just take everything you want.”

Again she looked at him, swayed close to him.

“You don’t understand — ” he began.

She put her hand on his arm. “Wait a minute; we’re almost there. Let’s not go in yet. It’s so nice with all the lights going on and it’ll be so hot and crowded in there. Tell him to drive out a few blocks more. I noticed you only danced a few times; I like that. I hate men that pop up at the first sound of music as if their life depended on it. Is it true you’re only sixteen?”

“Yes.”

“You seem older. There’s so much in your face.”

“You don’t understand — ” Basil began again desperately.

She spoke through the trap to the cabby:

“Go up Broadway till we tell you to stop.” Sitting back in the cab, she repeated dreamily, “The perfect life. I’d like my life to be perfect. I’d like to suffer, if I could find something worth suffering for, and I’d like to never do anything low or small or mean, but just have big sins.”

“Oh, no!” said Basil, aghast. “That’s no way to feel; that’s morbid. Why, look, you oughtn’t to talk like that — a girl sixteen years old. You ought to — to talk things over with yourself — you ought to think more of the after life.” He stopped, half expecting to be interrupted, but Jobena was silent.

“Why, up to a month ago I used to smoke as many as twelve or fifteen cigarettes a day, unless I was training for football. I used to curse and swear and only write home once in a while, so they had to telegraph sometimes to see if I was sick. I had no sense of responsibility. I never thought I could lead a perfect life until I tried.”

He paused, overcome by his emotion.

“Didn’t you?” said Jobena, in a small voice.

“Never. I was just like everybody else, only worse. I used to kiss girls and never think anything about it.”

“What — what changed you?”

“A man I met.” Suddenly he turned to her and, with an effort, caused to spread over his face a caricature of John Granby’s sad sweet smile. “Jobena, you — you have the makings of a fine girl in you. It grieved me a lot this afternoon to see you smoking nicotine and dancing modern suggestive dances that are simply savagery. And the way you talk about kissing. What if you meet some man that has kept himself pure and never gone around kissing anybody except his family, and you have to tell him that you went around behaving disgustingly?”

She leaned back suddenly and spoke crisply through the panel.

“You can go back now — the address we gave you.”

“You ought to cut it out.” Again Basil smiled at her, straining and struggling to lift her up out of herself to a higher plane. “Promise me you’ll try. It isn’t so hard. And then some day when some upright and straightforward man comes along and says, ‘Will you marry me?’ you’ll be able to say you never danced suggestive modern dances, except the Spanish tango and the Boston, and you never kissed anybody — that is, since you were sixteen, and maybe you wouldn’t have to say that you ever kissed anybody at all.”

“That wouldn’t be the truth,” she said in an odd voice. “Shouldn’t I tell him the truth?”

“You could tell him you didn’t know any better.”

“Oh.”

To Basil’s regret the cab drew up at Castle House. Jobena hurried in, and to make up for her absence, devoted herself exclusively to Skiddy and the Harvard freshmen for the remainder of the afternoon. But doubtless she was thinking hard — as he had done a month before. With a little more time he could have clinched his argument by showing the influence that one leading a perfect life could exert on others. He must find an opportunity tomorrow.

But next day he scarcely saw her. She was out for luncheon and she did not appear at her rendezvous with Basil and George after the matinée; they waited in vain in the Biltmore grill for an hour. There was company at dinner and Basil began to feel a certain annoyance when she disappeared immediately afterwards. Was it possible that his seriousness had frightened her? In that case it was all the more necessary to see her, reassure her, bind her with the invisible cords of high purpose to himself. Perhaps — perhaps she was the ideal girl that he would some day marry. At the gorgeous idea his whole being was flooded with ecstasy. He planned out the years of waiting, each one helping the other to lead the perfect life, neither of them ever kissing anybody else — he would insist on that, absolutely insist on it; she must promise not even to see Skiddy De Vinci — and then marriage and a life of service, perfection, fame and love.

The two boys went to the theatre again that night. When they came home a little after eleven, George went upstairs to say good night to his mother, leaving Basil to make reconnaissance in the ice box. The intervening pantry was dark and as he fumbled unfamiliarly for the light he was startled by hearing a voice in the kitchen pronounce his name:

“ — Mr. Basil Duke Lee.”

“Seemed all right to me.” Basil recognized the drawling tone of Skiddy De Vinci. “Just a kid.”

“On the contrary, he’s a nasty little prig,” said Jobena decisively. “He gave me the old-fashioned moral lecture about nicotine and modern dancing and kissing, and about that upright, straightforward man that was going to come along some day — you know that upright straightforward man they’re always talking about. I suppose he meant himself, because he told me he led a perfect life. Oh, it was all so oily and horrible, it made me positively sick. Skiddy. For the first time in my life I was tempted to take a cocktail.”

“Oh, he’s just a kid,” said Skiddy moderately. “It’s a phase. He’ll get over it.”

Basil listened in horror; his face burning, his mouth ajar. He wanted above all things to get away, but his dismay rooted him to the floor.

“What I think of righteous men couldn’t be put on paper,” said Jobena after a moment. “I suppose I’m just naturally bad, Skiddy; at least, all my contacts with upright young men have affected me like this.”

“Then how about it, Jobena?”

There was a long silence.

“This has done something to me,” she said finally. “Yesterday I thought I was through with you, Skiddy, but ever since this happened I’ve had a vision of a thousand Mr. Basil Duke Lees, all grown up and asking me to share their perfect lives. I refuse to — definitely. If you like, I’ll marry you in Greenwich tomorrow.”

At one Basil's light was still burning. Walking up and down his room, he made out case after case for himself, with Jobena in the role of villainess, but each case was wrecked upon the rock of his bitter humiliation. "A nasty little prig" — the words, uttered with conviction and scorn, had driven the high principles of John Granby from his head. He was a slave to his own admirations, and in the past twenty-four hours Jobena's personality had become the strongest force in his life; deep in his heart he believed that what she had said was true.

He woke up on Thanksgiving morning with dark circles rimming his eyes. His bag, packed for immediate departure, brought back the debacle of the night before, and as he lay staring at the ceiling, relaxed by sleep, giant tears welled up into his eyes. An older man might have taken refuge behind the virtue of his intentions, but Basil knew no such refuge. For sixteen years he had gone his own way without direction, due to his natural combativeness and to the fact that no older man save John Granby had yet captured his imagination. Now John Granby had vanished in the night, and it seemed the natural thing to Basil that he should struggle back to rehabilitation unguided and alone.

One thing he knew — Jobena must not marry Skiddy De Vinci. That was a responsibility she could not foist upon him. If necessary, he would go to her father and tell what he knew.

Emerging from his room half an hour later, he met her in the hall. She was dressed in a smart blue street suit with a hobble skirt and a ruff of linen at her throat. Her eyes opened a little and she wished him a polite good morning.

"I've got to talk to you," he said quickly.

"I'm terribly sorry." To his intense discomfort she flashed her smile at him, just as if nothing had happened. "I've only a minute now."

"It's something very important. I know you don't like me — "

"What nonsense!" She laughed cheerfully. "Of course I like you. How did you get such a silly idea in your head?"

Before he could answer, she waved her hand hastily and ran down the stairs.

George had gone to town and Basil spent the morning walking through large deliberate snowflakes in Central Park rehearsing what he should say to Mr. Dorsey.

“It’s nothing to me, but I cannot see your only daughter throw away her life on a dissipated man. If I had a daughter of my own who was about to throw away her life, I would want somebody to tell me, and so I have come to tell you. Of course, after this I cannot stay in your house, and so I bid you good-bye.”

At quarter after twelve, waiting anxiously in the drawing-room, he heard Mr. Dorsey come in. He rushed downstairs, but Mr. Dorsey had already entered the lift and closed the door. Turning about, Basil raced against the machine to the third story and caught him in the hall.

“In regard to your daughter,” he began excitedly — “in regard to your daughter — ”

“Well,” said Mr. Dorsey, “is something the matter with Jobena?”

“I want to talk to you about her.”

Mr. Dorsey laughed. “Are you going to ask her hand in marriage?”

“Oh, no.”

“Well, suppose we have a talk after dinner when we’re full of turkey and stuffing, and feeling happy.”

He clapped his hand on Basil’s shoulder and went on into his room.

It was a large family dinner party, and under cover of the conversation Basil kept an attentive eye on Jobena, trying to determine her desperate intention from her clothes and the expression of her face. She was adept at concealing her real emotions, as he had discovered this morning, but once or twice he saw her eyes wander to her watch and a look of abstraction come into them.

There was coffee afterward in the library, and, it seemed to Basil, interminable chatter. When Jobena arose suddenly and left the room, he moved just as quickly to Mr. Dorsey's side.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?"

"Why — " Basil hesitated.

"Now is the time to ask me — when I'm well fed and happy."

"Why — " Again Basil stopped.

"Don't be shy. It's something about my Jobena."

But a peculiar thing had happened to Basil. In sudden detachment he saw himself from the outside — saw himself sneaking to Mr. Dorsey, in a house in which he was a guest, to inform against a girl.

"Why — " he repeated blankly.

"The question is: Can you support her?" said Mr. Dorsey jovially. "And the second is: Can you control her?"

"I forgot what it was I wanted to say," Basil blurted out.

He hurried from the library, his brain in a turmoil. Dashing upstairs, he knocked at the door of Jobena's room. There was no answer and he opened the door and glanced inside. The room was empty, but a half-packed suitcase lay on the bed.

"Jobena," he called anxiously. There was no answer. A maid passing along the hall told him Miss Jobena was having a marcel wave in her mother's room.

He hurried downstairs and into his hat and coat, racking his brains for the address where they had dropped Skiddy De Vinci the other afternoon. Sure that he would recognize the building, he drove down Lexington Avenue in a taxi, tried three doors, and trembled with excitement as he found the name "Leonard Edward Davies De Vinci" on a card beside a bell. When he rang, a latch clicked on an inner door.

He had no plan. Failing argument, he had a vague melodramatic idea of knocking him down, tying him up and letting him lie there until it blew over. In view of the fact that Skiddy outweighed him by forty pounds, this was a large order.

Skiddy was packing — the overcoat he tossed hastily over his suitcase did not serve to hide this fact from Basil. There was an open bottle of whisky on his littered dresser, and beside it a half-full glass.

Concealing his surprise, he invited Basil to sit down.

“I had to come and see you” — Basil tried to make his voice calm — “about Jobena.”

“Jobena?” Skiddy frowned. “What about her? Did she send you here?”

“Oh, no.” Basil swallowed hard, stalling for time. “I thought — maybe you could advise me — you see, I don’t think she likes me, and I don’t know why.”

Skiddy’s face relaxed. “That’s nonsense. Of course she likes you. Have a drink?”

“No. At least not now.”

Skiddy finished his glass. After a slight hesitation he removed his overcoat from the suitcase.

“Excuse me if I go on packing, will you? I’m going out of town.”

“Certainly.”

“Better have a drink.”

“No, I’m on the water wagon — just now.”

“When you get worrying about nothing, the thing to do is to have a drink.”

The phone rang and he answered it, squeezing the receiver close to his ear:

“Yes. . . . I can’t talk now. . . . Yes. . . . At half-past five then. It’s now about four. . . . I’ll explain why when I see you. . . . Good-by.” He hung up. “My

office,” he said with affected nonchalance . . . “Won’t you have a little drink?”

“No, thanks.”

“Never worry. Enjoy yourself.”

“It’s hard to be visiting in a house and know somebody doesn’t like you.”

“But she does like you. Told me so herself the other day.”

While Skiddy packed they discussed the question. He was a little hazy and extremely nervous, and a single question asked in the proper serious tone would send him rambling along indefinitely. As yet Basil had evolved no plan save to stay with Skiddy and wait for the best opportunity of coming into the open.

But staying with Skiddy was going to be difficult; he was becoming worried at Basil’s tenacity. Finally he closed his suitcase with one of those definite snaps, took down a large drink quickly and said:

“Well, guess I ought to get started.”

They went out together and Skiddy hailed a taxi.

“Which way are you going?” Basil asked.

“Uptown — I mean downtown.”

“I’ll ride with you,” volunteered Basil. “We might — we might have a drink in the — Biltmore.”

Skiddy hesitated. “I’ll drop you there,” he said.

When they reached the Biltmore, Basil made no move to get out.

“You’re coming in with me, aren’t you?” he asked in a surprised voice.

Frowning, Skiddy looked at his watch. “I haven’t got much time.”

Basil’s face fell; he sat back in the car.

“Well, there’s no use my going in alone, because I look sort of young and they wouldn’t give me anything unless I was with an older man.”

The appeal succeeded. Skiddy got out, saying, “I’ll have to hurry,” and they went into the bar.

“What’ll it be?”

“Something strong,” Basil said, lighting his first cigarette in a month.

“Two stingers,” ordered Skiddy.

“Let’s have something really strong.”

“Two double stingers then.”

Out of the corner of his eye Basil looked at the clock. It was twenty after five. Waiting until Skiddy was in the act of taking down his drink he signalled to the waiter to repeat the order.

“Oh, no!” cried Skiddy.

“You’ll have to have one on me.”

“You haven’t touched yours.”

Basil sipped his drink, hating it. He saw that with the new alcohol Skiddy had relaxed a little.

“Got to be going,” he said automatically. “Important engagement.”

Basil had an inspiration.

“I’m thinking of buying a dog,” he announced.

“Don’t talk about dogs,” said Skiddy mournfully. “I had an awful experience about a dog. I’ve just got over it.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I don’t even like to talk about it; it was awful.”

“I think a dog is the best friend a man has,” Basil said.

“Do you?” Skiddy slapped the table emphatically with his open hand. “So do I, Lee. So do I.”

“Nobody ever loves him like a dog,” went on Basil, staring off sentimentally into the distance.

The second round of double stingers arrived.

“Let me tell you about my dog that I lost,” said Skiddy. He looked at his watch. “I’m late, but a minute won’t make any difference, if you like dogs.”

“I like them better than anything in the world.” Basil raised his first glass, still half full. “Here’s to man’s best friend — a dog.”

They drank. There were tears in Skiddy’s eyes.

“Let me tell you. I raised this dog Eggshell from a pup. He was a beauty — an Airedale, sired by McTavish VI.”

“I bet he was a beauty.”

“He was! Let me tell you — ”

As Skiddy warmed to his subject, Basil pushed his new drink toward Skiddy, whose hand presently closed upon the stem. Catching the bartender’s attention, he ordered two more. The clock stood at five minutes of six.

Skiddy rambled on. Ever afterward the sight of a dog story in a magazine caused Basil an attack of acute nausea. At half-past six Skiddy rose uncertainly.

“I’ve gotta go. Got important date. Be mad.”

“All right. We’ll stop by the bar and have one more.”

The bartender knew Skiddy and they talked for a few minutes, for time seemed of no account now. Skiddy had a drink with his old friend to wish him luck on a very important occasion. Then he had another.

At a quarter before eight o’clock Basil piloted Leonard Edward Davies De Vinci from the hotel bar, leaving his suitcase in care of the bartender.

“Important engagement,” Skiddy mumbled as they hailed a taxi.

“Very important,” Basil agreed. “I’m going to see that you get there.”

When the car rolled up, Skiddy tumbled in and Basil gave the address to the driver.

“Good-by and thanks!” Skiddy called fervently. “Ought to go in, maybe, and drink once more to best friend man ever had.”

“Oh, no,” said Basil, “it’s too important.”

“You’re right. It’s too important.”

The car rolled off and Basil followed it with his eye as it turned the corner. Skiddy was going out on Long Island to visit Eggshell’s grave.

IV

Basil had never had a drink before and, now with his jubilant relief, the three cocktails that he had been forced to down mounted swiftly to his head. On his way to the Dorseys’ house he threw back his head and roared with laughter. The self-respect he had lost last night rushed back to him; he felt himself tingling with the confidence of power.

As the maid opened the door for him he was aware subconsciously that there was someone in the lower hall. He waited till the maid disappeared; then stepping to the door of the coat room, he pulled it open. Beside her suitcase stood Jobena, wearing a look of mingled impatience and fright. Was he deceived by his ebullience or, when she saw him, did her face lighten with relief?

“Hello.” She took off her coat and hung it up as if that was her purpose there, and came out under the lights. Her face, pale and lovely, composed itself, as if she had sat down and folded her hands.

“George was looking for you,” she said indifferently.

“Was he? I’ve been with a friend.”

With an expression of surprise she sniffed the faint aroma of cocktails.

“But my friend went to visit his dog’s tomb, so I came home.”

She stiffened suddenly. “You’ve been with Skiddy?”

“He was telling me about his dog,” said Basil gravely. “A man’s best friend is his dog after all.”

She sat down and stared at him, wide-eyed.

“Has Skiddy passed out?”

“He went to see a dog.”

“Oh, the fool!” she cried.

“Were you expecting him? Is it possible that that’s your suitcase?”

“It’s none of your business.”

Basil took it out of the closet and deposited it in the elevator.

“You won’t need it tonight,” he said.

Her eyes shone with big despairing tears.

“You oughtn’t to drink,” she said brokenly. “Can’t you see what it’s made of him?”

“A man’s best friend is a stinger.”

“You’re just sixteen. I suppose all that you told me the other afternoon was a joke — I mean, about the perfect life.”

“All a joke,” he agreed.

“I thought you meant it. Doesn’t anybody ever mean anything?”

“I like you better than any girl I ever knew,” Basil said quietly. “I mean that.”

“I liked you, too, until you said that about my kissing people.”

He went and stood over her and took her hand.

“Let’s take the bag upstairs before the maid comes in.”

They stepped into the dark elevator and closed the door.

“There’s a light switch somewhere,” she said.

Still holding her hand, he drew her close and tightened his arm around her in the darkness. “Just for this once we don’t need the light.”

Going back on the train, George Dorsey came to a sudden resolution. His mouth tightened.

“I don’t want to say anything, Basil — ” He hesitated. “But look — Did you have something to drink Thanksgiving Day?”

Basil frowned and nodded.

“Sometimes I’ve got to,” he said soberly. “I don’t know what it is. All my family died of liquor.”

“Gee!” exclaimed George.

“But I’m through. I promised Jobena I wouldn’t touch anything more till I’m twenty-one. She feels that if I go on with this constant dissipation it’ll ruin my life.”

George was silent for a moment.

“What were you and she talking about those last few days? Gosh, I thought you were supposed to be visiting me.”

“It’s — it’s sort of sacred,” Basil said placidly. . . . “Look here; if we don’t have anything fit to eat for dinner, let’s get Sam to leave the pantry window unlocked tonight.”

FORGING AHEAD

Saturday Evening Post (March 30, 1929)

Basil Duke Lee and Riply Buckner, Jr., sat on the Lees' front steps in the regretful gold of a late summer afternoon. Inside the house the telephone sang out with mysterious promise.

"I thought you were going home," Basil said.

"I thought you were."

"I am."

"So am I."

"Well, why don't you go, then?"

"Why don't you, then?"

"I am."

They laughed, ending with yawning gurgles that were not laughed out but sucked in. As the telephone rang again, Basil got to his feet.

"I've got to study trig before dinner."

"Are you honestly going to Yale this fall?" demanded Riply skeptically.

"Yes."

"Everybody says you're foolish to go at sixteen."

"I'll be seventeen in September. So long. I'll call you up tonight."

Basil heard his mother at the upstairs telephone and he was immediately aware of distress in her voice.

"Yes. . . . Isn't that awful, Everett! . . . Yes. . . . Oh-h my!" After a minute he gathered that it was only the usual worry about business and went on into the kitchen for refreshments. Returning, he met his mother hurrying

downstairs. She was blinking rapidly and her hat was on backward — characteristic testimony to her excitement.

“I’ve got to go over to your grandfather’s.”

“What’s the matter, mother?”

“Uncle Everett thinks we’ve lost a lot of money.”

“How much?” he asked, startled.

“Twenty-two thousand dollars apiece. But we’re not sure.”

She went out.

“Twenty-two thousand dollars!” he repeated in an awed whisper.

His ideas of money were vague and somewhat debonair, but he had noticed that at family dinners the immemorial discussion as to whether the Third Street block would be sold to the railroads had given place to anxious talk of Western Public Utilities. At half-past six his mother telephoned for him to have his dinner, and with growing uneasiness he sat alone at the table, undistracted by The Mississippi Bubble, open beside his plate. She came in at seven, distraught and miserable, and dropping down at the table, gave him his first exact information about finance — she and her father and her brother Everett had lost something more than eighty thousand dollars. She was in a panic and she looked wildly around the dining room as if money were slipping away even here, and she wanted to retrench at once.

“I’ve got to stop selling securities or we won’t have anything,” she declared.

“This leaves us only three thousand a year — do you realize that, Basil? I don’t see how I can possibly afford to send you to Yale.”

His heart tumbled into his stomach; the future, always glowing like a comfortable beacon ahead of him, flared up in glory and went out. His mother shivered, and then emphatically shook her head.

“You’ll just have to make up your mind to go to the state university.”

“Gosh!” Basil said.

Sorry for his shocked, rigid face, she yet spoke somewhat sharply, as people will with a bitter refusal to convey.

“I feel terribly about it — your father wanted you to go to Yale. But everyone says that, with clothes and railroad fare, I can count on it costing two thousand a year. Your grandfather helped me to send you to St. Regis School, but he always thought you ought to finish at the state university.”

After she went distractedly upstairs with a cup of tea, Basil sat thinking in the dark parlor. For the present the loss meant only one thing to him — he wasn't going to Yale after all. The sentence itself, divorced from its meaning, overwhelmed him, so many times had he announced casually, “I'm going to Yale,” but gradually he realized how many friendly and familiar dreams had been swept away. Yale was the faraway East, that he had loved with a vast nostalgia since he had first read books about great cities. Beyond the dreary railroad stations of Chicago and the night fires of Pittsburgh, back in the old states, something went on that made his heart beat fast with excitement. He was attuned to the vast, breathless bustle of New York, to the metropolitan days and nights that were tense as singing wires. Nothing needed to be imagined there, for it was all the very stuff of romance — life was as vivid and satisfactory as in books and dreams.

But first, as a sort of gateway to that deeper, richer life, there was Yale. The name evoked the memory of a heroic team backed up against its own impassable goal in the crisp November twilight, and later, of half a dozen immaculate noblemen with opera hats and canes standing at the Manhattan Hotel bar. And tangled up with its triumphs and rewards, its struggles and glories, the vision of the inevitable, incomparable girl.

Well, then, why not work his way through Yale? In a moment the idea had become a reality. He began walking rapidly up and down the room, declaring half aloud, “Of course, that's the thing to do.” Rushing upstairs, he knocked at his mother's door and announced in the inspired voice of a prophet: “Mother, I know what I'm going to do! I'm going to work my way through Yale.”

He sat down on her bed and she considered uncertainly. The men in her family had not been resourceful for several generations, and the idea startled her.

“It doesn’t seem to me you’re a boy who likes to work,” she said. “Besides, boys who work their way through college have scholarships and prizes, and you’ve never been much of a student.”

He was annoyed. He was ready for Yale a year ahead of his age and her reproach seemed unfair.

“What would you work at?” she said.

“Take care of furnaces,” said Basil promptly. “And shovel snow off sidewalks. I think they mostly do that — and tutor people. You could let me have as much money as it would take to go to the state university?”

“We’ll have to think it over.”

“Well, don’t you worry about anything,” he said emphatically, “because my earning my way through Yale will really make up for the money you’ve lost, almost.”

“Why don’t you start by finding something to do this summer?”

“I’ll get a job tomorrow. Maybe I can pile up enough so you won’t have to help me. Good night, Mother.”

Up in his room he paused only to thunder grimly to the mirror that he was going to work his way through Yale, and going to his bookcase, took down half a dozen dusty volumes of Horatio Alger, unopened for years. Then, much as a postwar young man might consult the George Washington Condensed Business Course, he sat at his desk and slowly began to turn the pages of *Bound to Rise*.

Two days later, after being insulted by the doorkeepers, office boys and telephone girls of the Press, the Evening News, the Socialist Gazette and a green scandal sheet called the Courier, and assured that no one wanted a reporter practically seventeen, after enduring every ignominy prepared for a young man in a free country trying to work his way through Yale, Basil Duke

Lee, too “stuck-up” to apply to the parents of his friends, got a position with the railroad, through Eddie Parmelee, who lived across the way.

At 6.30 the following morning, carrying his lunch, and a new suit of overalls that had cost four dollars, he strode self-consciously into the Great Northern car shops. It was like entering a new school, except that no one showed any interest in him or asked him if he was going out for the team. He punched a time clock, which affected him strangely, and without even an admonition from the foreman to “go in and win,” was put to carrying boards for the top of a car.

Twelve o'clock arrived; nothing had happened. The sun was blazing hot and his hands and back were sore, but no real events had ruffled the dull surface of the morning. The president's little daughter had not come by, dragged by a runaway horse; not even a superintendent had walked through the yard and singled him out with an approving eye. Undismayed, he toiled on — you couldn't expect much the first morning.

He and Eddie Parmelee ate their lunches together. For several years Eddie had worked here in vacations; he was sending himself to the state university this fall. He shook his head doubtfully over the idea of Basil's earning his way through Yale.

“Here's what you ought to do,” he said: “You borrow two thousand dollars from your mother and buy twenty shares in Ware Plow and Tractor. Then go to a bank and borrow two thousand more with those shares for collateral, and with that two thousand buy twenty more shares. Then you sit on your back for a year, and after that you won't have to think about earning your way through Yale.”

“I don't think mother would give me two thousand dollars.”

“Well, anyhow, that's what I'd do.”

If the morning had been uneventful, the afternoon was distinguished by an incident of some unpleasantness. Basil had risen a little, having been requested to mount to the top of a freight car and help nail the boards he had carried in the morning. He found that nailing nails into a board was more highly technical than nailing tacks into a wall, but he considered that

he was progressing satisfactorily when an angry voice hailed him from below:

“Hey, you! Get up!”

He looked down. A foreman stood there, unpleasantly red in the face.

“Yes, you in the new suit. Get up!”

Basil looked about to see if someone was lying down, but the two sullen hunyaks seemed to be hard at work and it grew on him that he was indeed being addressed.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” he said.

“Get up on your knees or get out! What the h — do you think this is?”

He had been sitting down as he nailed, and apparently the foreman thought that he was loafing. After another look at the foreman, he suppressed the explanation that he felt steadier sitting down and decided to just let it go. There were probably no railroad shops at Yale; yet, he remembered with a pang the ominous name, New York, New Haven and Hartford.

The third morning, just as he had become aware that his overalls were not where he had hung them in the shop, it was announced that all men of less than six months' service were to be laid off. Basil received four dollars and lost his overalls. Learning that nails are driven from a kneeling position had cost him only carfare.

In a large old-fashioned house in the old section of the city lived Basil's great-uncle, Benjamin Reilly, and there Basil presented himself that evening. It was a last resort — Benjamin Reilly and Basil's grandfather were brothers and they had not spoken for twenty years.

He was received in the living room by the small, dumpy old man whose inscrutable face was hidden behind a white poodle beard. Behind him stood a woman of forty, his wife of six months, and her daughter, a girl of fifteen. Basil's branch of the family had not been invited to the wedding, and he had never seen these two additions before.

“I thought I’d come down and see you, Uncle Ben,” he said with some embarrassment.

There was a certain amount of silence.

“Your mother well?” asked the old man.

“Oh, yes, thank you.”

Mr. Reilly waited. Mrs. Reilly spoke to her daughter, who threw a curious glance at Basil and reluctantly left the room. Her mother made the old man sit down.

Out of sheer embarrassment Basil came to the point. He wanted a summer job in the Reilly Wholesale Drug Company.

His uncle fidgeted for a minute and then replied that there were no positions open.

“Oh.”

“It might be different if you wanted a permanent place, but you say you want to go to Yale.” He said this with some irony of his own, and glanced at his wife.

“Why, yes,” said Basil. “That’s really why I want the job.”

“Your mother can’t afford to send you, eh?” The note of pleasure in his voice was unmistakable. “Spent all her money?”

“Oh, no,” answered Basil quickly. “She’s going to help me.”

To his surprise, aid came from an unpromising quarter. Mrs. Reilly suddenly bent and whispered in her husband’s ear, whereupon the old man nodded and said aloud:

“I’ll think about it, Basil. You go in there.”

And his wife repeated: “We’ll think about it. You go in the library with Rhoda while Mr. Reilly looks up and sees.”

The door of the library closed behind him and he was alone with Rhoda, a square-chinned, decided girl with fleshy white arms and a white dress that

reminded Basil domestically of the lacy pants that blew among the laundry in the yard. Puzzled by his uncle's change of front, he eyed her abstractedly for a moment.

"I guess you're my cousin," said Rhoda, closing her book, which he saw was *The Little Colonel, Maid of Honor*.

"Yes," he admitted.

"I heard about you from somebody." The implication was that her information was not flattering.

"From who?"

"A girl named Elaine Washmer."

"Elaine Washmer!" His tone dismissed the name scornfully. "That girl!"

"She's my best friend." He made no reply. "She said you thought you were wonderful."

Young people do not perceive at once that the giver of wounds is the enemy and the quoted tattle merely the arrow. His heart smoldered with wrath at Elaine Washmer.

"I don't know many kids here," said the girl, in a less aggressive key. "We've only been here six months. I never saw such a stuck-up bunch."

"Oh, I don't think so," he protested. "Where did you live before?"

"Sioux City. All the kids have much more fun in Sioux City."

Mrs. Reilly opened the door and called Basil back into the living room. The old man was again on his feet.

"Come down tomorrow morning and I'll find you something," he said.

"And why don't you have dinner with us tomorrow night?" added Mrs. Reilly, with a cordiality wherein an adult might have detected disingenuous purpose.

"Why, thank you very much."

His heart, buoyant with gratitude, had scarcely carried him out the door before Mrs. Reilly laughed shortly and called in her daughter.

“Now we’ll see if you don’t get around a little more,” she announced.

“When was it you said they had those dances?”

“Thursdays at the College Club and Saturdays at the Lake Club,” said Rhoda promptly.

“Well, if this young man wants to hold the position your father has given him, you’ll go to them all the rest of the summer.”

Arbitrary groups formed by the hazards of money or geography may be sufficiently quarrelsome and dull, but for sheer unpleasantness the condition of young people who have been thrust together by a common unpopularity can be compared only with that of prisoners herded in a cell. In Basil’s eyes the guests at the little dinner the following night were a collection of cripples. Lewis and Hector Crum, dullard cousins who were tolerable only to each other; Sidney Rosen, rich but awful; ugly Mary Haupt, Elaine Washmer, and Betty Geer, who reminded Basil of a cruel parody they had once sung to the tune of Jungle Town:

Down below the hill

There lives a pill

That makes me ill,

And her name is Betty Geer.

We had better stop right here. . . .

She’s so fat,

She looks just like a cat,

And she’s the queen of pills.

Moreover, they resented Basil, who was presumed to be “stuck-up,” and walking home afterward, he felt dreary and vaguely exploited. Of course, he was grateful to Mrs. Reilly for her kindness, yet he couldn’t help wondering if a cleverer boy couldn’t have got out of taking Rhoda to the Lake Club next

Saturday night. The proposal had caught him unaware; but when he was similarly trapped the following week, and the week after that, he began to realize the situation. It was a part of his job, and he accepted it grimly, unable, nevertheless, to understand how such a bad dancer and so unsociable a person should want to go where she was obviously a burden. "Why doesn't she just sit at home and read a book," he thought disgustedly, "or go away somewhere — or sew?"

It was one Saturday afternoon while he watched a tennis tournament and felt the unwelcome duty of the evening creep up on him, that he found himself suddenly fascinated by a girl's face a few yards away. His heart leaped into his throat and the blood in his pulse beat with excitement; and then, when the crowd rose to go, he saw to his astonishment that he had been staring at a child ten years old. He looked away, oddly disappointed; after a moment he looked back again. The lovely, self-conscious face suggested a train of thought and sensation that he could not identify. As he passed on, forgoing a vague intention of discovering the child's identity, there was beauty suddenly all around him in the afternoon; he could hear its unmistakable whisper, its never-inadequate, never-failing promise of happiness. "Tomorrow — one day soon now — this fall — maybe tonight." Irresistibly compelled to express himself, he sat down and tried to write to a girl in New York. His words were stilted and the girl seemed cold and far away. The real image on his mind, the force that had propelled him into this state of yearning, was the face of the little girl seen that afternoon.

When he arrived with Rhoda Sinclair at the Lake Club that night, he immediately cast a quick look around to see what boys were present who were indebted to Rhoda or else within his own sphere of influence. This was just before cutting-in arrived, and ordinarily he was able to dispose of half a dozen dances in advance, but tonight an older crowd was in evidence and the situation was unpromising. However, as Rhoda emerged from the dressing room he saw Bill Kampf and thankfully bore down upon him.

"Hello, old boy," he said, exuding personal good will. "How about dancing once with Rhoda tonight?"

“Can’t,” Bill answered briskly. “We’ve got people visiting us. Didn’t you know?”

“Well, why couldn’t we swap a dance anyhow?”

Bill looked at him in surprise.

“I thought you knew,” he exclaimed. “Erminie’s here. She’s been talking about you all afternoon.”

“Erminie Bible!”

“Yes. And her father and mother and her kid sister. Got here this morning.”

Now, indeed, the emotion of two hours before bubbled up in Basil’s blood, but this time he knew why. It was the little sister of Erminie Gilbert Labouisse Bible whose strangely familiar face had so attracted him. As his mind swung sharply back to a long afternoon on the Kampfs’ veranda at the lake, ages ago, a year ago, a real voice rang in his ear, “Basil!” and a sparkling little beauty of fifteen came up to him with a fine burst of hurry, taking his hand as though she was stepping into the circle of his arm.

“Basil, I’m so glad!” Her voice was husky with pleasure, though she was at the age when pleasure usually hides behind grins and mumbles. It was Basil who was awkward and embarrassed, despite the intention of his heart. He was a little relieved when Bill Kampf, more conscious of his lovely cousin than he had been a year ago, led her out on the floor.

“Who was that?” Rhoda demanded, as he returned in a daze. “I never saw her around.”

“Just a girl.” He scarcely knew what he was saying.

“Well, I know that. What’s her name?”

“Minnie Bible, from New Orleans.”

“She certainly looks conceited. I never saw anybody so affected in my life.”

“Hush!” Basil protested involuntarily. “Let’s dance.”

It was a long hour before Basil was relieved by Hector Crum, and then several dances passed before he could get possession of Minnie, who was now the center of a moving whirl. But she made it up to him by pressing his hand and drawing him out to a veranda which overhung the dark lake.

“It’s about time,” she whispered. With a sort of instinct she found the darkest corner. “I might have known you’d have another crush.”

“I haven’t,” he insisted in horror. “That’s a sort of a cousin of mine.”

“I always knew you were fickle. But I didn’t think you’d forget me so soon.”

She had wriggled up until she was touching him. Her eyes, floating into his, said, What does it matter? We’re alone.

In a curious panic he jumped to his feet. He couldn’t possibly kiss her like this — right at once. It was all so different and older than a year ago. He was too excited to do more than walk up and down and say, “Gosh, I certainly am glad to see you,” supplementing this unoriginal statement with an artificial laugh.

Already mature in poise, she tried to soothe him: “Basil, come and sit down!”

“I’ll be all right,” he gasped, as if he had just fainted. “I’m a little fussed, that’s all.”

Again he contributed what, even to his pounding ears, sounded like a silly laugh.

“I’ll be here three weeks. Won’t it be fun?” And she added, with warm emphasis: “Do you remember on Bill’s veranda that afternoon?”

All he could find to answer was: “I work now in the afternoon.”

“You can come out in the evenings, Basil. It’s only half an hour in a car.”

“I haven’t got a car.”

“I mean you can get your family’s car.”

“It’s an electric.”

She waited patiently. He was still romantic to her — handsome, incalculable, a little sad.

“I saw your sister,” he blurted out. Beginning with that, he might bridge this perverse and intolerable reverence she inspired. “She certainly looks like you.”

“Does she?”

“It was wonderful,” he said. “Wonderful! Let me tell you — ”

“Yes, do.” She folded her hands expectantly in her lap.

“Well, this afternoon — ”

The music had stopped and started several times. Now, in an intermission, there was the sound of determined footsteps on the veranda, and Basil looked up to find Rhoda and Hector Crum.

“I got to go home, Basil,” squeaked Hector in his changing voice. “Here’s Rhoda.”

Take Rhoda out to the dock and push her in the lake. But only Basil’s mind said this; his body stood up politely.

“I didn’t know where you were, Basil,” said Rhoda in an aggrieved tone.

“Why didn’t you come back?”

“I was just coming.” His voice trembled a little as he turned to Minnie. “Shall I find your partner for you?”

“Oh, don’t bother,” said Minnie. She was not angry, but she was somewhat astonished. She could not be expected to guess that the young man walking away from her so submissively was at the moment employed in working his way through Yale.

From the first, Basil’s grandfather, who had once been a regent at the state university, wanted him to give up the idea of Yale, and now his mother, picturing him hungry and ragged in a garret, adjoined her persuasions. The sum on which he could count from her was far below the necessary minimum, and although he stubbornly refused to consider defeat, he

consented, “just in case anything happened,” to register at the university for the coming year.

In the administration building he ran into Eddie Parmelee, who introduced his companion, a small, enthusiastic Japanese.

“Well, well,” said Eddie. “So you’ve given up Yale!”

“I given up Yale,” put in Mr. Utsonomia, surprisingly. “Oh, yes, long time I given up Yale.” He broke into enthusiastic laughter. “Oh, sure. Oh, yes.”

“Mr. Utsonomia’s a Japanese,” explained Eddie, winking. “He’s a sub-freshman too.”

“Yes, I given up Harvard, Princeton too,” continued Mr. Utsonomia. “They give me choice back in my country. I choose here.”

“You did?” said Basil, almost indignantly.

“Sure, more strong here. More peasants come, with strength and odor of ground.”

Basil stared at him. “You like that?” he asked incredulously.

Utsonomia nodded. “Here I get to know real American peoples. Girls too. Yale got only boys.”

“But they haven’t got college spirit here,” explained Basil patiently.

Utsonomia looked blankly at Eddie.

“Rah-rah!” elucidated Eddie, waving his arms. “Rah-rah-rah! You know.”

“Besides, the girls here — ” began Basil, and stopped.

“You know girls here?” grinned Utsonomia.

“No, I don’t know them,” said Basil firmly. “But I know they’re not like the girls that you’d meet down at the Yale proms. I don’t think they even have proms here. I don’t mean the girls aren’t all right, but they’re just not like the ones at Yale. They’re just coeds.”

“I hear you got a crush on Rhoda Sinclair,” said Eddie.

“Yes, I have!” said Basil ironically.

“They used to invite me to dinner sometimes last spring, but since you take her around to all the club dances — ”

“Good-bye,” said Basil hastily. He exchanged a jerky bow for Mr. Utsonomia’s more formal dip, and departed.

From the moment of Minnie’s arrival the question of Rhoda had begun to assume enormous proportions. At first he had been merely indifferent to her person and a little ashamed of her lacy, oddly reminiscent clothes, but now, as he saw how relentlessly his services were commandeered, he began to hate her. When she complained of a headache, his imagination would eagerly convert it into a long, lingering illness from which she would recover only after college opened in the fall. But the eight dollars a week which he received from his great-uncle would pay his fare to New Haven, and he knew that if he failed to hold this position his mother would refuse to let him go.

Not suspecting the truth, Minnie Bibble found the fact that he only danced with her once or twice at each hop, and was then strangely moody and silent, somehow intriguing. Temporarily, at least, she was fascinated by his indifference, and even a little unhappy. But her precociously emotional temperament would not long stand neglect, and it was agony for Basil to watch several rivals beginning to emerge. There were moments when it seemed too big a price to pay even for Yale.

All his hopes centered upon one event. That was a farewell party in her honor for which the Kampfs had engaged the College Club and to which Rhoda was not invited. Given the mood and the moment, he might speed her departure knowing that he had stamped himself indelibly on her heart.

Three days before the party he came home from work at six to find the Kampfs’ car before his door and Minnie sitting alone on the front porch.

“Basil, I had to see you,” she said. “You’ve been so funny and distant to me.”

Intoxicated by her presence on his familiar porch, he found no words to answer.

“I’m meeting the family in town for dinner and I’ve got an hour. Can’t we go somewhere? I’ve been frightened to death your mother would come home and think it was fresh for me to call on you.” She spoke in a whisper, though there was no one close enough to hear. “I wish we didn’t have the old chauffeur. He listens.”

“Listens to what?” Basil asked, with a flash of jealousy.

“He just listens.”

“I’ll tell you,” he proposed: “We’ll have him drop us by grampa’s house and I’ll borrow the electric.”

The hot wind blew the brown curls around her forehead as they glided along Crest Avenue.

That he contributed the car made him feel more triumphantly astride the moment. There was a place he had saved for such a time as this — a little pigtail of a road left from the excavations of Prospect Park, where Crest Avenue ran obliviously above them and the late sun glinted on the Mississippi flats a mile away.

The end of summer was in the afternoon; it had turned a corner, and what was left must be used while there was yet time.

Suddenly she was whispering in his arms, “You’re first, Basil — nobody but you.”

“You just admitted you were a flirt.”

“I know, but that was years ago. I used to like to be called fast when I was thirteen or fourteen, because I didn’t care what people said; but about a year ago I began to see there was something better in life — honestly, Basil — and I’ve tried to act properly. But I’m afraid I’ll never be an angel.”

The river flowed in a thin scarlet gleam between the public baths and the massed tracks upon the other side. Booming, whistling, faraway railroad sounds reached them from down there; the voices of children playing tennis in Prospect Park sailed frailly overhead.

“I really haven’t got such a line as everybody thinks, Basil, for I mean a lot of what I say way down deep, and nobody believes me. You know how much alike we are, and in a boy it doesn’t matter, but a girl has to control her feelings, and that’s hard for me, because I’m emotional.”

“Haven’t you kissed anybody since you’ve been in St. Paul?”

“No.”

He saw she was lying, but it was a brave lie. They talked from their hearts — with the half truths and evasions peculiar to that organ, which has never been famed as an instrument of precision. They pieced together all the shreds of romance they knew and made garments for each other no less warm than their childish passion, no less wonderful than their sense of wonder.

He held her away suddenly, looked at her, made a strained sound of delight. There it was, in her face touched by sun — that promise — in the curve of her mouth, the tilted shadow of her nose on her cheek, the point of dull fire in her eyes — the promise that she could lead him into a world in which he would always be happy.

“Say I love you,” he whispered.

“I’m in love with you.”

“Oh, no; that’s not the same.”

She hesitated. “I’ve never said the other to anybody.”

“Please say it.”

She blushed the color of the sunset.

“At my party,” she whispered. “It’d be easier at night.”

When she dropped him in front of his house she spoke from the window of the car:

“This is my excuse for coming to see you. My uncle couldn’t get the club Thursday, so we’re having the party at the regular dance Saturday night.”

Basil walked thoughtfully into the house; Rhoda Sinclair was also giving a dinner at the College Club dance Saturday night.

It was put up to him frankly. Mrs. Reilly listened to his tentative excuses in silence and then said:

“Rhoda invited you first for Saturday night, and she already has one girl too many. Of course, if you choose to simply turn your back on your engagement and go to another party, I don’t know how Rhoda will feel, but I know how I should feel.”

And the next day his great-uncle, passing through the stock room, stopped and said: “What’s all this trouble about parties?”

Basil started to explain, but Mr. Reilly cut him short. “I don’t see the use of hurting a young girl’s feelings. You better think it over.”

Basil had thought it over; on Saturday afternoon he was still expected at both dinners and he had hit upon no solution at all.

Yale was only a month away now, but in four days Erminie Bibble would be gone, uncommitted, unsecured, grievously offended, lost forever. Not yet delivered from adolescence, Basil’s moments of foresight alternated with those when the future was measured by a day. The glory that was Yale faded beside the promise of that incomparable hour.

On the other side loomed up the gaunt specter of the university, with phantoms flitting in and out its portals that presently disclosed themselves as peasants and girls. At five o’clock, in a burst of contempt for his weakness, he went to the phone and left word with a maid at the Kampfs’ house that he was sick and couldn’t come tonight. Nor would he sit with the dull left-overs of his generation — too sick for one party, he was too sick for the other. The Reillys could have no complaint as to that.

Rhoda answered the phone and Basil tried to reduce his voice to a weak murmur:

“Rhoda, I’ve been taken sick. I’m in bed now,” he murmured feebly, and then added: “The phone’s right next to the bed, you see; so I thought I’d call you up myself.”

“You mean to say you can’t come?” Dismay and anger were in her voice.

“I’m sick in bed,” he repeated doggedly. “I’ve got chills and a pain and a cold.”

“Well, can’t you come anyhow?” she asked, with what to the invalid seemed a remarkable lack of consideration. “You’ve just got to. Otherwise there’ll be two extra girls.”

“I’ll send someone to take my place,” he said desperately. His glance, roving wildly out the window, fell on a house over the way. “I’ll send Eddie Parmelee.”

Rhoda considered. Then she asked with quick suspicion: “You’re not going to that other party?”

“Oh, no; I told them I was sick too.”

Again Rhoda considered. Eddie Parmelee was mad at her.

“I’ll fix it up,” Basil promised. “I know he’ll come. He hasn’t got anything to do tonight.”

A few minutes later he dashed across the street. Eddie himself, tying a bow on his collar, came to the door. With certain reservations, Basil hastily outlined the situation. Would Eddie go in his place?

“Can’t do it, old boy, even if I wanted to. Got a date with my real girl tonight.”

“Eddie, I’d make it worth your while,” he said recklessly. “I’d pay you for your time — say, five dollars.”

Eddie considered, there was hesitation in his eyes, but he shook his head.

“It isn’t worth it, Basil. You ought to see what I’m going out with tonight.”

“You could see her afterward. They only want you — I mean me — because they’ve got more girls than men for dinner — and listen, Eddie, I’ll make it ten dollars.”

Eddie clapped him on the shoulder.

“All right, old boy, I’ll do it for an old friend. Where’s the pay?”

More than a week’s salary melted into Eddie’s palm, but another sort of emptiness accompanied Basil back across the street — the emptiness of the coming night. In an hour or so the Kampfs’ limousine would draw up at the College Club and — time and time again his imagination halted miserably before that single picture, unable to endure any more.

In despair he wandered about the dark house. His mother had let the maid go out and was at his grandfather’s for dinner, and momentarily Basil considered finding some rake like Elwood Leaming and going down to Carling’s Restaurant to drink whiskey, wines and beer. Perhaps on her way back to the lake after the dance, Minnie, passing by, would see his face among the wildest of the revelers and understand.

“I’m going to Maxim’s,” he hummed to himself desperately; then he added impatiently: “Oh, to heck with Maxim’s!”

He sat in the parlor and watched a pale moon come up over the Lindsays’ fence at McKubben Street. Some young people came by, heading for the trolley that went to Como Park. He pitied their horrible dreariness — they were not going to dance with Minnie at the College Club tonight.

Eight-thirty — she was there now. Nine — they were dancing between courses to “Peg of My Heart” or doing the Castle Walk that Andy Lockheart brought home from Yale.

At ten o’clock he heard his mother come in, and almost immediately the phone rang. For a moment he listened without interest to her voice; then abruptly he sat up in his chair.

“Why, yes; how do you do, Mrs. Reilly. . . . Oh, I see. . . . Oh. . . . Are you sure it isn’t Basil you want to speak to? . . . Well, frankly, Mrs. Reilly, I don’t see that it’s my affair.”

Basil got up and took a step toward the door; his mother’s voice was growing thin and annoyed: “I wasn’t here at the time and I don’t know who he promised to send.”

Eddie Parmelee hadn’t gone after all — well, that was the end.

“ . . . Of course not. It must be a mistake. I don't think Basil would possibly do that; I don't think he even knows any Japanese.”

Basil's brain reeled. For a moment he was about to dash across the street after Eddie Parmelee. Then he heard a definitely angry note come into his mother's voice:

“Very well, Mrs. Reilly. I'll tell my son. But his going to Yale is scarcely a matter I care to discuss with you. In any case, he no longer needs anyone's assistance.”

He had lost his position and his mother was trying to put a proud face on it. But her voice continued, soaring a little:

“Uncle Ben might be interested to know that this afternoon we sold the Third Street block to the Union Depot Company for four hundred thousand dollars.”

Mr. Utsonomia was enjoying himself. In the whole six months in America he had never felt so caught up in its inner life before. At first it had been a little hard to make plain to the lady just whose place it was he was taking, but Eddie Parmelee had assured him that such substitutions were an American custom, and he was spending the evening collecting as much data upon American customs as possible.

He did not dance, so he sat with the elderly lady until both the ladies went home, early and apparently a little agitated, shortly after dinner. But Mr. Utsonomia stayed on. He watched and he wandered. He was not lonesome; he had grown accustomed to being alone.

About eleven he sat on the veranda pretending to be blowing the smoke of a cigarette — which he hated — out over the city, but really listening to a conversation which was taking place just behind. It had been going on for half an hour, and it puzzled him, for apparently it was a proposal, and it was not refused. Yet, if his eyes did not deceive him, the contracting parties were of an age that Americans did not associate with such serious affairs. Another thing puzzled him even more: obviously, if one substituted for an absent guest, the absent guest should not be among those present, and he was almost sure that the young man who had just engaged himself for

marriage was Mr. Basil Lee. It would be bad manners to intrude now, but he would urbanely ask him about a solution of this puzzle when the state university opened in the fall.

BASIL AND CLEOPATRA

I

Saturday Evening Post (27 April 1929)

Wherever she was, became a beautiful and enchanted place to Basil, but he did not think of it that way. He thought the fascination was inherent in the locality, and long afterward a commonplace street or the mere name of a city would exude a peculiar glow, a sustained sound, that struck his soul alert with delight. In her presence he was too absorbed to notice his surroundings; so that her absence never made them empty, but, rather, sent him seeking for her through haunted rooms and gardens that he had never really seen before.

This time, as usual, he saw only the expression of her face, the mouth that gave an attractive interpretation of any emotion she felt or pretended to feel — oh, invaluable mouth — and the rest of her, new as a peach and old as sixteen. He was almost unconscious that they stood in a railroad station and entirely unconscious that she had just glanced over his shoulder and fallen in love with another young man. Turning to walk with the rest to the car, she was already acting for the stranger; no less so because her voice was pitched for Basil and she clung to him, squeezing his arm.

Had Basil noticed this other young man that the train discharged he would merely have been sorry for him — as he had been sorry for the wretched people in the villages along the railroad and for his fellow travelers — they were not entering Yale in a fortnight nor were they about to spend three days in the same town with Miss Erminie Gilberte Labouisse Bibble. There was something dense, hopeless and a little contemptible about them all.

Basil had come to visit here because Erminie Bibble was visiting here.

On the sad eve of her departure from his native Western city a month before, she had said, with all the promise one could ask in her urgent voice:

“If you know a boy in Mobile, why don’t you make him invite you down when I’ll be there?”

He had followed this suggestion. And now with the soft, unfamiliar Southern city actually flowing around him, his excitement led him to believe that Fat Gaspar’s car floated off immediately they entered it. A voice from the curb came as a surprise:

“Hi, Bessie Belle. Hi, William. How you all?”

The newcomer was tall and lean and a year or so older than Basil. He wore a white linen suit and a panama hat, under which burned fierce, undefeated Southern eyes.

“Why, Littleboy Le Moyne!” exclaimed Miss Cheever. “When did you get home?”

“Jus’ now, Bessie Belle. Saw you lookin’ so fine and pretty, had to come and see closer.”

He was introduced to Minnie and Basil.

“Drop you somewhere, Littleboy?” asked Fat — on his native heath, William.

“Why — ” Le Moyne hesitated. “You’re very kind, but the man ought to be here with the car.”

“Jump in.”

Le Moyne swung his bag on top of Basil’s and with courteous formality got in the back seat beside them. Basil caught Minnie’s eye and she smiled quickly back, as if to say, “This is too bad, but it’ll soon be over.”

“Do you happen to come from New Orleans, Miss Bibble?” asked Le Moyne.

“Sure do.”

“‘Cause I just came from there and they told me one of their mos’ celebrated heartbreakers was visiting up here, and meanwhile her suitors were shooting themselves all over the city. That’s the truth. I used to help pick ’em up myself sometimes when they got littering the streets.”

“This must be Mobile Bay on the left,” Basil thought; “Down Mobile,” and the Dixie moonlight and darky stevedores singing. The houses on either side of the street were gently faded behind proud, protecting vines; there had been crinolines on these balconies, and guitars by night in these broken gardens.

It was so warm; the voices were so sure they had time to say everything — even Minnie’s voice, answering the banter of the youth with the odd nickname, seemed slower and lazier — he had scarcely ever thought of her as a Southern girl before. They stopped at a large gate where flickers of a yellow house showed through luscious trees. Le Moyne got out.

“I certainly hope you both enjoy your visit here. If you’ll permit me I’ll call around and see if there’s anything I can do to add to your pleasure.” He swooped his panama. “I bid you good day.”

As they started off, Bessie Belle turned around and smiled at Minnie.

“Didn’t I tell you?” she demanded.

“I guessed it in the station, before he came up to the car,” said Minnie. “Something told me that was him.”

“Did you think he was good-looking?”

“He was divine,” Minnie said.

“Of course he’s always gone with an older crowd.”

To Basil, this prolonged discussion seemed a little out of place. After all, the young man was simply a local Southerner who lived here; add to that, that he went with an older crowd, and it seemed that his existence was being unnecessarily insisted upon.

But now Minnie turned to him, said, “Basil,” wriggled invitingly and folded her hands in a humble, expectant way that invariably caused disturbances in his heart.

“I loved your letters,” she said.

“You might have answered them.”

“I haven’t had a minute, Basil. I visited in Chicago and then in Nashville. I haven’t even been home.” She lowered her voice. “Father and mother are getting a divorce, Basil. Isn’t that awful?”

He was startled; then, after a moment, he adjusted the idea to her and she became doubly poignant; because of its romantic connection with her, the thought of divorce would never shock him again.

“That’s why I didn’t write. But I’ve thought of you so much. You’re the best friend I have, Basil. You always understand.”

This was decidedly not the note upon which they had parted in St. Paul. A dreadful rumor that he hadn’t intended to mention rose to his lips.

“Who is this fellow Bailey you met at Lake Forest?” he inquired lightly.

“Buzz Bailey!” Her big eyes opened in surprise. “He’s very attractive and a divine dancer, but we’re just friends.” She frowned. “I bet Connie Davies has been telling tales in St. Paul. Honestly, I’m so sick of girls that, just out of jealousy or nothing better to do, sit around and criticize you if you have a good time.”

He was convinced now that something had occurred in Lake Forest, but he concealed the momentary pang from Minnie.

“Anyhow, you’re a fine one to talk.” She smiled suddenly. “I guess everybody knows how fickle you are, Mr. Basil Duke Lee.”

Generally such an implication is considered flattering, but the lightness, almost the indifference, with which she spoke increased his alarm — and then suddenly the bomb exploded.

“You needn’t worry about Buzz Bailey. At present I’m absolutely heart-whole and fancy free.”

Before he could even comprehend the enormity of what she had said, they stopped at Bessie Belle Cheever’s door and the two girls ran up the steps, calling back, “We’ll see you this afternoon.”

Mechanically Basil climbed into the front seat beside his host.

“Going out for freshman football, Basil?” William asked.

“What? Oh, sure. If I can get off my two conditions.” There was no if in his heart; it was the greatest ambition of his life.

“You’ll probably make the freshman team easy. That fellow Littleboy Le Moyne you just met is going to Princeton this fall. He played end at V. M. I.”

“Where’d he get that crazy name?”

“Why, his family always called him that and everybody picked it up.” After a moment he added, “He asked them to the country-club dance with him tonight.”

“When did he?” Basil demanded in surprise.

“Right then. That’s what they were talking about. I meant to ask them and I was just leading up to it gradually, but he stepped in before I could get a chance.” He sighed, blaming himself. “Well, anyhow, we’ll see them there.”

“Sure; it doesn’t matter,” said Basil. But was it Fat’s mistake? Couldn’t Minnie have said right out: “But Basil came all this way to see me and I ought to go with him on his first night here.”

What had happened? One month ago, in the dim, thunderous Union Station at St. Paul, they had gone behind a baggage truck and he had kissed her, and her eyes had said: “Again.” Up to the very end, when she disappeared in a swirl of vapor at the car window, she had been his — those weren’t things you thought; they were things you knew. He was bewildered. It wasn’t like Minnie, who, for all her glittering popularity, was invariably kind. He tried to think of something in his letters that might have offended her, and searched himself for new shortcomings. Perhaps she didn’t like him the way he was in the morning. The joyous mood in which he had arrived was vanishing into air.

She was her familiar self when they played tennis that afternoon; she admired his strokes and once, when they were close at the net, she suddenly patted his hand. But later, as they drank lemonade on the Cheevers’ wide, shady porch, he couldn’t seem to be alone with her even for a minute. Was it by accident that, coming back from the courts, she had sat

in front with Fat? Last summer she had made opportunities to be alone with him — made them out of nothing. It was in a state that seemed to border on some terrible realization that he dressed for the country-club dance.

The club lay in a little valley, almost roofed over by willows, and down through their black silhouettes, in irregular blobs and patches, dripped the light of a huge harvest moon. As they parked the car, Basil's tune of tunes, Chinatown, drifted from the windows and dissolved into its notes which thronged like elves through the glade. His heart quickened, suffocating him; the throbbing tropical darkness held a promise of such romance as he had dreamed of; but faced with it, he felt himself too small and impotent to seize the felicity he desired. When he danced with Minnie he was ashamed of inflicting his merely mortal presence on her in this fairyland whose unfamiliar figures reached towering proportions of magnificence and beauty. To make him king here, she would have to reach forth and draw him close to her with soft words; but she only said, "Isn't it wonderful, Basil? Did you ever have a better time?"

Talking for a moment with Le Moyne in the stag line, Basil was hesitantly jealous and oddly shy. He resented the tall form that stooped down so fiercely over Minnie as they danced, but he found it impossible to dislike him or not to be amused by the line of sober-faced banter he kept up with passing girls. He and William Gasper were the youngest boys here, as Bessie Belle and Minnie were the youngest girls, and for the first time in his life he wanted passionately to be older, less impressionable, less impressed. Quivering at every scent, sight or tune, he wanted to be blasé and calm. Wretchedly he felt the whole world of beauty pour down upon him like moonlight, pressing on him, making his breath now sighing, now short, as he wallowed helplessly in a superabundance of youth for which a hundred adults present would have given years of life.

Next day, meeting her in a world that had shrunk back to reality, things were more natural, but something was gone and he could not bring himself to be amusing and gay. It would be like being brave after the battle. He should have been all that the night before. They went downtown in an unpaired foursome and called at a photographer's for some pictures of Minnie. Basil liked one proof that no one else liked — somehow, it reminded him of her as

she had been in St. Paul — so he ordered two — one for her to keep and one to send after him to Yale. All afternoon she was distracted and vaguely singing, but back at the Cheevers' she sprang up the steps at the sound of the phone inside. Ten minutes later she appeared, sulky and lowering, and Basil heard a quick exchange between the two girls:

“He can't get out of it.”

“ — a pity.”

“ — back Friday.”

It could only be Le Moyne who had gone away, and to Minnie it mattered. Presently, unable to endure her disappointment, he got up wretchedly and suggested to William that they go home. To his surprise, Minnie's hand on his arm arrested him.

“Don't go, Basil. It doesn't seem as if I've seen you a minute since you've been here.”

He laughed unhappily.

“As if it mattered to you.”

“Basil, don't be silly.” She bit her lip as if she were hurt. “Let's go out to the swing.”

He was suddenly radiant with hope and happiness. Her tender smile, which seemed to come from the heart of freshness, soothed him and he drank down her lies in grateful gulps like cool water. The last sunshine touched her cheeks with the unearthly radiance he had seen there before, as she told him how she hadn't wanted to accept Le Moyne's invitation, and how surprised and hurt she had been when he hadn't come near her last night.

“Then do one thing, Minnie,” he pleaded: “Won't you let me kiss you just once?”

“But not here,” she exclaimed, “you silly!”

“Let's go in the summerhouse, for just a minute.”

“Basil, I can’t. Bessie Belle and William are on the porch. Maybe some other time.”

He looked at her distraught, unable to believe or disbelieve in her, and she changed the subject quickly:

“I’m going to Miss Beecher’s school, Basil. It’s only a few hours from New Haven. You can come up and see me this fall. The only thing is, they say you have to sit in glass parlors. Isn’t that terrible?”

“Awful,” he agreed fervently.

William and Bessie Belle had left the veranda and were out in front, talking to some people in a car.

“Minnie, come into the summerhouse now — for just a minute. They’re so far away.”

Her face set unwillingly.

“I can’t, Basil. Don’t you see I can’t?”

“Why not? I’ve got to leave tomorrow.”

“Oh, no.”

“I have to. I only have four days to get ready for my exams. Minnie — ”

He took her hand. It rested calmly enough in his, but when he tried to pull her to her feet she plucked it sharply away. The swing moved with the little struggle and Basil put out his foot and made it stop. It was terrible to swing when one was at a disadvantage.

She laid the recovered hand on his knee.

“I’ve stopped kissing people, Basil. Really. I’m too old; I’ll be seventeen next May.”

“I’ll bet you kissed Le Moyne,” he said bitterly.

“Well, you’re pretty fresh — ”

Basil got out of the swing.

“I think I’ll go.”

Looking up, she judged him dispassionately, as she never had before — his sturdy graceful figure; the high, warm color through his tanned skin; his black, shining hair that she had once thought so romantic. She felt, too — as even those who disliked him felt — that there was something else in his face — a mark, a hint of destiny, a persistence that was more than will, that was rather a necessity of pressing its own pattern on the world, of having its way. That he would most probably succeed at Yale, that it would be nice to go there this year as his girl, meant nothing to her. She had never needed to be calculating. Hesitating, she alternately drew him toward her in her mind and let him go. There were so many men and they wanted her so much. If Le Moyne had been here at hand she wouldn’t have hesitated, for nothing must interfere with the mysterious opening glory of that affair; but he was gone for three days and she couldn’t decide quite yet to let Basil go.

“Stay over till Wednesday and I’ll — I’ll do what you want,” she said.

“But I can’t. I’ve got these exams to study for. I ought to have left this afternoon.”

“Study on the train.”

She wriggled, dropped her hands in her lap and smiled at him. Taking her hand suddenly, he pulled her to her feet and toward the summerhouse and the cool darkness behind its vines.

II

The following Friday Basil arrived in New Haven and set about crowding five days’ work into two. He had done no studying on the train; instead he sat in a trance and concentrated upon Minnie, wondering what was happening now that Le Moyne was there. She had kept her promise to him, but only literally — kissed him once in the playhouse, once, grudgingly, the second evening; but the day of his departure there had been a telegram from Le Moyne, and in front of Bessie Belle she had not even dared to kiss him good-

by. As a sort of amend she had given him permission to call on the first day permitted by Miss Beecher's school.

The opening of college found him rooming with Brick Wales and George Dorsey in a suite of two bedrooms and a study in Wright Hall. Until the result of his trigonometry examination was published he was ineligible to play football, but watching the freshmen practice on Yale field, he saw that the quarterback position lay between Cullum, last year's Andover captain, and a man named Danziger from a New Bedford high school. There was a rumor that Cullum would be moved to halfback. The other quarterbacks did not appear formidable and Basil felt a great impatience to be out there with a team in his hands to move over the springy turf. He was sure he could at least get in some of the games.

Behind everything, as a light showing through, was the image of Minnie; he would see her in a week, three days, tomorrow. On the eve of the occasion he ran into Fat Gaspar, who was in Sheff, in the oval by Haughton Hall. In the first busy weeks they had scarcely met; now they walked along for a little way together.

"We all came North together," Fat said. "You ought to have been along. We had some excitement. Minnie got in a jam with Littleboy Le Moyne."

Basil's blood ran cold.

"It was funny afterward, but she was pretty scared for a while," continued Fat. "She had a compartment with Bessie Belle, but she and Littleboy wanted to be alone; so in the afternoon Bessie Belle came and played cards in ours. Well, after about two hours Bessie Belle and I went back, and there were Minnie and Littleboy standing in the vestibule arguing with the conductor; Minnie white as a sheet. Seems they locked the door and pulled down the blinds, and I guess there was a little petting going on. When he came along after the tickets and knocked on the door, they thought it was us kidding them, and wouldn't let him in at first, and when they did, he was pretty upset. He asked Littleboy if that was his compartment, and whether he and Minnie were married that they locked the door, and Littleboy lost his temper trying to explain that there was nothing wrong. He said the conductor had insulted Minnie and he wanted him to fight. But that

conductor could have made trouble, and believe me, I had an awful time smoothing it all over.”

With every detail imagined, with every refinement of jealousy beating in his mind, including even envy for their community of misfortune as they stood together in the vestibule, Basil went up to Miss Beecher’s next day. Radiant and glowing, more mysteriously desirable than ever, wearing her very sins like stars, she came down to him in her plain white uniform dress, and his heart turned over at the kindness of her eyes.

“You were wonderful to come up, Basil. I’m so excited having a beau so soon. Everybody’s jealous of me.”

The glass doors hinged like French windows, shutting them in on all sides. It was hot. Down through three more compartments he could see another couple — a girl and her brother, Minnie said — and from time to time they moved and gestured soundlessly, as unreal in these tiny human conservatories as the vase of paper flowers on the table. Basil walked up and down nervously.

“Minnie, I want to be a great man some day and I want to do everything for you. I understand you’re tired of me now. I don’t know how it happened, but somebody else came along — it doesn’t matter. There isn’t any hurry. But I just want you to — oh, remember me in some different way — try to think of me as you used to, not as if I was just another one you threw over. Maybe you’d better not see me for a while — I mean at the dance this fall. Wait till I’ve accomplished some big scene or deed, you know, and I can show it to you and say I did that all for you.”

It was very futile and young and sad. Once, carried away by the tragedy of it all, he was on the verge of tears, but he controlled himself to that extent. There was sweat on his forehead. He sat across the room from her, and Minnie sat on the couch, looking at the floor, and said several times: “Can’t we be friends, Basil? I always think of you as one of my best friends.”

Toward the end she rose patiently.

“Don’t you want to see the chapel?”

They walked upstairs and he glanced dismally into a small dark space, with her living, sweet-smelling presence half a yard from his shoulder. He was almost glad when the funereal business was over and he walked out of the school into the fresh autumn air.

Back in New Haven he found two pieces of mail on his desk. One was a notice from the registrar telling him that he had failed his trigonometry examination and would be ineligible for football. The second was a photograph of Minnie — the picture that he had liked and ordered two of in Mobile. At first the inscription puzzled him: “L. L. from E. G. L. B. Trains are bad for the heart.” Then suddenly he realized what had happened, and threw himself on his bed, shaken with wild laughter.

III

Three weeks later, having requested and passed a special examination in trigonometry, Basil began to look around him gloomily to see if there was anything left in life. Not since his miserable first year at school had he passed through such a period of misery; only now did he begin for the first time to be aware of Yale. The quality of romantic speculation reawoke, and, listlessly at first, then with growing determination, he set about merging himself into this spirit which had fed his dreams so long.

“I want to be chairman of the News or the Record,” thought his old self one October morning, “and I want to get my letter in football, and I want to be in Skull and Bones.”

Whenever the vision of Minnie and Le Moyne on the train occurred to him, he repeated this phrase like an incantation. Already he thought with shame of having stayed over in Mobile, and there began to be long strings of hours when he scarcely brooded about her at all.

He had missed half of the freshman football season, and it was with scant hope that he joined the squad on Yale field. Dressed in his black and white St. Regis jersey, amid the motley of forty schools, he looked enviously at the proud two dozen in Yale blue. At the end of four days he was reconciling

himself to obscurity for the rest of the season when the voice of Carson, assistant coach, singled him suddenly out of a crowd of scrub backs.

“Who was throwing those passes just now?”

“I was, sir.”

“I haven’t seen you before, have I?”

“I just got eligible.”

“Know the signals?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you take this team down the field — ends, Krutch and Bispam; tackles — ”

A moment later he heard his own voice snapping out on the crisp air:

“Thirty-two, sixty-five, sixty-seven, twenty-two — ”

There was a ripple of laughter.

“Wait a minute! Where’d you learn to call signals like that?” said Carson.

“Why, we had a Harvard coach, sir.”

“Well, just drop the Haughton emphasis. You’ll get everybody too excited.”

After a few minutes they were called in and told to put on headgears.

“Where’s Waite?” Carson asked. “Test, eh? Well, you then — what’s your name? — in the black and white sweater?”

“Lee.”

“You call signals. And let’s see you get some life into this outfit. Some of you guards and tackles are big enough for the varsity. Keep them on their toes, you — what’s your name?”

“Lee.”

They lined up with possession of the ball on the freshmen's twenty-yard line. They were allowed unlimited downs, but when, after a dozen plays, they were in approximately that same place, the ball was given to the first team.

"That's that!" thought Basil. "That finishes me."

But an hour later, as they got out of the bus, Carson spoke to him:

"Did you weigh this afternoon?"

"Yes. Hundred and fifty-eight."

"Let me give you a tip — you're still playing prep-school football. You're still satisfied with stopping them. The idea here is that if you lay them down hard enough you wear them out. Can you kick?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's too bad you didn't get out sooner."

A week later his name was read out as one of those to go to Andover. Two quarterbacks ranked ahead of him, Danziger and a little hard rubber ball of a man, named Appleton, and Basil watched the game from the sidelines, but when, the following Tuesday, Danziger splintered his arm in practice, Basil was ordered to report to training table.

On the eve of the game with the Princeton freshmen, the egress of the student body to Princeton for the Varsity encounter left the campus almost deserted. Deep autumn had set in, with a crackling wind from the west, and walking back to his room after final skull practice, Basil felt the old lust for glory sweep over him. Le Moyne was playing end on the Princeton freshman and it was probable that Minnie would be in the stands, but now, as he ran along the springy grass in front of Osborne, swaying to elude imaginary tacklers, the fact seemed of less importance than the game. Like most Americans, he was seldom able really to grasp the moment, to say: "This, for me, is the great equation by which everything else will be measured; this is the golden time," but for once the present was sufficient. He was going to spend two hours in a country where life ran at the pace he demanded of it.

The day was fair and cool; an unimpassioned crowd, mostly townsmen, was scattered through the stands. The Princeton freshmen looked sturdy and solid in their diagonal stripes, and Basil picked out Le Moyne, noting coldly that he was exceptionally fast, and bigger than he had seemed in his clothes. On an impulse Basil turned and searched for Minnie in the crowd, but he could not find her. A minute later the whistle blew; sitting at the coach's side, he concentrated all his faculties on the play.

The first half was played between the thirty-yard lines. The main principles of Yale's offense seemed to Basil too simple; less effective than the fragments of the Haughton system he had learned at school, while the Princeton tactics, still evolved in Sam White's long shadow, were built around a punter and the hope of a break. When the break came, it was Yale's. At the start of the second half Princeton fumbled and Appleton sent over a drop kick from the thirty-yard line.

It was his last act of the day. He was hurt on the next kick-off and, to a burst of freshmen cheering, assisted from the game.

With his heart in a riot, Basil sprinted out on the field. He felt an overpowering strangeness, and it was someone else in his skin who called the first signals and sent an unsuccessful play through the line. As he forced his eyes to take in the field slowly, they met Le Moyne's, and Le Moyne grinned at him. Basil called for a short pass over the line, throwing it himself for a gain of seven yards. He sent Cullum off tackle for three more and a first down. At the forty, with more latitude, his mind began to function smoothly and surely. His short passes worried the Princeton fullback, and, in consequence, the running gains through the line were averaging four yards instead of two.

At the Princeton forty he dropped back to kick formation and tried Le Moyne's end, but Le Moyne went under the interfering halfback and caught Basil by a foot. Savagely Basil tugged himself free, but too late — the halfback bowled him over. Again Le Moyne's face grinned at him, and Basil hated it. He called the same end and, with Cullum carrying the ball, they rolled over Le Moyne six yards, to Princeton's thirty-two. He was slowing down, was he? Then run him ragged! System counseled a pass, but he heard

himself calling the end again. He ran parallel to the line, saw his interference melt away and Le Moyne, his jaw set, coming for him. Instead of cutting in, Basil turned full about and tried to reverse his field. When he was trapped he had lost fifteen yards.

A few minutes later the ball changed hands and he ran back to the safety position thinking: "They'd yank me if they had anybody to put in my place."

The Princeton team suddenly woke up. A long pass gained thirty yards. A fast new back dazzled his way through the line for another first down. Yale was on the defensive, but even before they had realized the fact, the disaster had happened. Basil was drawn on an apparently developed play; too late he saw the ball shoot out of scrimmage to a loose end; saw, as he was neatly blocked, that the Princeton substitutes were jumping around wildly, waving their blankets. They had scored.

He got up with his heart black, but his brain cool. Blunders could be atoned for — if they only wouldn't take him out. The whistle blew for the quarter, and squatting on the turf with the exhausted team, he made himself believe that he hadn't lost their confidence, kept his face intent and rigid, refusing no man's eye. He had made his errors for today.

On the kick-off he ran the ball back to the thirty-five, and a steady rolling progress began. The short passes, a weak spot inside tackle, Le Moyne's end. Le Moyne was tired now. His face was drawn and dogged as he smashed blindly into the interference; the ball carrier eluded him — Basil or another.

Thirty more to go — twenty — over Le Moyne again. Disentangling himself from the pile, Basil met the Southerner's weary glance and insulted him in a crisp voice:

"You've quit, Littleboy. They better take you out."

He started the next play at him and, as Le Moyne charged in furiously, tossed a pass over his head for the score. Yale 10, Princeton 7. Up and down the field again, with Basil fresher every minute and another score in sight, and suddenly the game was over.

Trudging off the field, Basil's eye ranged over the stands, but he could not see her.

"I wonder if she knows I was pretty bad," he thought, and then bitterly: "If I don't, he'll tell her."

He could hear him telling her in that soft Southern voice — the voice that had wooed her so persuasively that afternoon on the train. As he emerged from the dressing room an hour later he ran into Le Moyne coming out of the visitors' quarters next door. He looked at Basil with an expression at once uncertain and angry.

"Hello, Lee." After a momentary hesitation he added: "Good work."

"Hello, Le Moyne," said Basil, clipping his words.

Le Moyne turned away, turned back again.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Do you want to carry this any further?"

Basil didn't answer. The bruised face and the bandaged hand assuaged his hatred a little, but he couldn't bring himself to speak. The game was over, and now Le Moyne would meet Minnie somewhere, make the defeat negligible in the victory of the night.

"If it's about Minnie, you're wasting your time being sore," Le Moyne exploded suddenly. "I asked her to the game, but she didn't come."

"Didn't she?" Basil was startled.

"That was it, eh? I wasn't sure. I thought you were just trying to get my goat in there." His eyes narrowed. "The young lady kicked me about a month ago."

"Kicked you?"

"Threw me over. Got a little weary of me. She runs through things quickly."

Basil perceived that his face was miserable.

"Who is it now?" he asked in more civil tone.

“It seems to be a classmate of yours named Jubal — and a mighty sad bird, if you ask me. She met him in New York the day before her school opened, and I hear it’s pretty heavy. She’ll be at the Lawn Club Dance tonight.”

IV

Basil had dinner at the Taft with Jobena Dorsey and her brother George. The Varsity had won at Princeton and the college was jubilant and enthusiastic; as they came in, a table of freshmen by the door gave Basil a hand.

“You’re getting very important,” Jobena said.

A year ago Basil had thought for a few weeks that he was in love with Jobena; when they next met he knew immediately that he was not.

“And why was that?” he asked her now, as they danced. “Why did it all go so quick?”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Because I let it go.”

“You let it go?” he repeated. “I like that!”

“I decided you were too young.”

“Didn’t I have anything to do with it?”

She shook her head.

“That’s what Bernard Shaw says,” Basil admitted thoughtfully. “But I thought it was just about older people. So you go after the men.”

“Well, I should say not!” Her body stiffened indignantly in his arms. “The men are usually there, and the girl blinks at them or something. It’s just instinct.”

“Can’t a man make a girl fall for him?”

“Some men can — the ones who really don’t care.”

He pondered this awful fact for a moment and stowed it away for future examination. On the way to the Lawn Club he brought forth more questions.

If a girl who had been “crazy about a boy” became suddenly infatuated with another, what ought the first boy to do?

“Let her go,” said Jobena.

“Supposing he wasn’t willing to do that. What ought he to do?”

“There isn’t anything to do.”

“Well, what’s the best thing?”

Laughing, Jobena laid her head on his shoulder.

“Poor Basil,” she said, “I’ll be Laura Jean Libbey and you tell me the whole story.”

He summarized the affair. “You see,” he concluded, “if she was just anybody I could get over it, no matter how much I loved her. But she isn’t — she’s the most popular, most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. I mean she’s like Messalina and Cleopatra and Salome and all that.”

“Louder,” requested George from the front seat.

“She’s sort of an immortal woman,” continued Basil in a lower voice. “You know, like Madame du Barry and all that sort of thing. She’s not just — ”

“Not just like me.”

“No. That is, you’re sort of like her — all the girls I’ve cared about are sort of the same. Oh, Jobena, you know what I mean.”

As the lights of the New Haven Lawn Club loomed up she became obligingly serious:

“There’s nothing to do. I can see that. She’s more sophisticated than you. She staged the whole thing from the beginning, even when you thought it was you. I don’t know why she got tired, but evidently she is, and she

couldn't create it again, even if she wanted to, and you couldn't because you're — ”

“Go on. What?”

“You're too much in love. All that's left for you to do is to show her you don't care. Any girl hates to lose an old beau; so she may even smile at you — but don't go back. It's all over.”

In the dressing room Basil stood thoughtfully brushing his hair. It was all over. Jobena's words had taken away his last faint hope, and after the strain of the afternoon the realization brought tears to his eyes. Hurriedly filling the bowl, he washed his face. Someone came in and slapped him on the back.

“You played a nice game, Lee.”

“Thanks, but I was rotten.”

“You were great. That last quarter — ”

He went into the dance. Immediately he saw her, and in the same breath he was dizzy and confused with excitement. A little dribble of stags pursued her wherever she went, and she looked up at each one of them with the bright-eyed, passionate smile he knew so well. Presently he located her escort and indignantly discovered it was a flip, blatant boy from Hill School he had already noticed and set down as impossible. What quality lurked behind those watery eyes that drew her? How could that raw temperament appreciate that she was one of the immortal sirens of the world?

Having examined Mr. Jubal desperately and in vain for the answers to these questions, he cut in and danced all of twenty feet with her, smiling with cynical melancholy when she said:

“I'm so proud to know you, Basil. Everybody says you were wonderful this afternoon.”

But the phrase was precious to him and he stood against the wall repeating it over to himself, separating it into its component parts and trying to suck out any lurking meaning. If enough people praised him it might influence

her. "I'm proud to know you, Basil. Everybody says you were wonderful this afternoon."

There was a commotion near the door and someone said, "By golly, they got in after all!"

"Who?" another asked.

"Some Princeton freshmen. Their football season's over and three or four of them broke training at the Hofbrau."

And now suddenly the curious specter of a young man burst out of the commotion, as a back breaks through a line, and neatly straight-arming a member of the dance committee, rushed unsteadily onto the floor. He wore no collar with his dinner coat, his shirt front had long expelled its studs, his hair and eyes were wild. For a moment he glanced around as if blinded by the lights; then his glance fell on Minnie Bibble and an unmistakable love light came into his face. Even before he reached her he began to call her name aloud in a strained, poignant Southern voice.

Basil sprang forward, but others were before him, and Littleboy Le Moyne, fighting hard, disappeared into the coatroom in a flurry of legs and arms, many of which were not his own. Standing in the doorway. Basil found his disgust tempered with a monstrous sympathy; for Le Moyne, each time his head emerged from under the faucet, spoke desperately of his rejected love.

But when Basil danced with Minnie again, he found her frightened and angry; so much so that she seemed to appeal to Basil for support, made him sit down.

"Wasn't he a fool?" she cried feelingly. "That sort of thing gives a girl a terrible reputation. They ought to have put him in jail."

"He didn't know what he was doing. He played a hard game and he's all in, that's all."

But her eyes filled with tears.

“Oh, Basil,” she pleaded, “am I just perfectly terrible? I never want to be mean to anybody; things just happen.”

He wanted to put his arm around her and tell her she was the most romantic person in the world, but he saw in her eyes that she scarcely perceived him; he was a lay figure — she might have been talking to another girl. He remembered what Jobena had said — there was nothing left except to escape with his pride.

“You’ve got more sense.” Her soft voice flowed around him like an enchanted river. “You know that when two people aren’t — aren’t crazy about each other any more, the thing is to be sensible.”

“Of course,” he said, and forced himself to add lightly: “When a thing’s over, it’s over.”

“Oh, Basil, you’re so satisfactory. You always understand.” And now suddenly, for the first time in months, she was actually thinking of him. He would be an invaluable person in any girl’s life, she thought, if that brain of his, which was so annoying sometimes, was really used “to sort of understand.”

He was watching Jobena dance, and Minnie followed his eyes.

“You brought a girl, didn’t you? She’s awfully pretty.”

“Not as pretty as you.”

“Basil.”

Resolutely he refused to look at her, guessing that she had wriggled slightly and folded her hands in her lap. And as he held on to himself an extraordinary thing happened — the world around, outside of her, brightened a little. Presently more freshmen would approach him to congratulate him on the game, and he would like it — the words and the tribute in their eyes. There was a good chance he would start against Harvard next week.

“Basil!”

His heart made a dizzy tour of his chest. Around the corner of his eyes he felt her eyes waiting. Was she really sorry? Should he seize the opportunity to turn to her and say: "Minnie, tell this crazy nut to go jump in the river, and come back to me." He wavered, but a thought that had helped him this afternoon returned: He had made all his mistakes for this time. Deep inside of him the plea expired slowly.

Jubal the impossible came up with an air of possession, and Basil's heart went bobbing off around the ballroom in a pink silk dress. Lost again in a fog of indecision, he walked out on the veranda. There was a flurry of premature snow in the air and the stars looked cold. Staring up at them he saw that they were his stars as always — symbols of ambition, struggle and glory. The wind blew through them, trumpeting that high white note for which he always listened, and the thin-blown clouds, stripped for battle, passed in review. The scene was of an unparalleled brightness and magnificence, and only the practiced eye of the commander saw that one star was no longer there.

THE LAST OF THE BELLES

I

Saturday Evening Post (2 March 1929)

After Atlanta's elaborate and theatrical rendition of Southern charm, we all underestimated Tarleton. It was a little hotter than anywhere we'd been — a dozen rookies collapsed the first day in that Georgia sun — and when you saw herds of cows drifting through the business streets, hi-yaed by colored drovers, a trance stole down over you out of the hot light; you wanted to move a hand or foot to be sure you were alive.

So I stayed out at camp and let Lieutenant Warren tell me about the girls. This was fifteen years ago, and I've forgotten how I felt, except that the days went along, one after another, better than they do now, and I was empty-hearted, because up North she whose legend I had loved for three years was getting married. I saw the clippings and newspaper photographs. It was "a romantic wartime wedding," all very rich and sad. I felt vividly the dark radiance of the sky under which it took place, and as a young snob, was more envious than sorry.

A day came when I went into Tarleton for a haircut and ran into a nice fellow named Bill Knowles, who was in my time at Harvard. He'd been in the National Guard division that preceded us in camp; at the last moment he had transferred to aviation and been left behind.

"I'm glad I met you, Andy," he said with undue seriousness. "I'll hand you on all my information before I start for Texas. You see, there're really only three girls here — "

I was interested; there was something mystical about there being three girls.

" — and here's one of them now."

We were in front of a drug store and he marched me in and introduced me to a lady I promptly detested.

“The other two are Ailie Calhoun and Sally Carrol Happer.”

I guessed from the way he pronounced her name, that he was interested in Ailie Calhoun. It was on his mind what she would be doing while he was gone; he wanted her to have a quiet, uninteresting time.

At my age I don't even hesitate to confess that entirely unchivalrous images of Ailie Calhoun — that lovely name — rushed into my mind. At twenty-three there is no such thing as a preëmpted beauty; though, had Bill asked me, I would doubtless have sworn in all sincerity to care for her like a sister. He didn't; he was just fretting out loud at having to go. Three days later he telephoned me that he was leaving next morning and he'd take me to her house that night.

We met at the hotel and walked uptown through the flowery, hot twilight. The four white pillars of the Calhoun house faced the street, and behind them the veranda was dark as a cave with hanging, weaving, climbing vines.

When we came up the walk a girl in a white dress tumbled out of the front door, crying, “I'm so sorry I'm late!” and seeing us, added: “Why, I thought I heard you come ten minutes — ”

She broke off as a chair creaked and another man, an aviator from Camp Harry Lee, emerged from the obscurity of the veranda.

“Why, Canby!” she cried. “How are you?”

He and Bill Knowles waited with the tenseness of open litigants.

“Canby, I want to whisper to you, honey,” she said, after just a second.

“You'll excuse us, Bill.”

They went aside. Presently Lieutenant Canby, immensely displeased, said in a grim voice, “Then we'll make it Thursday, but that means sure.” Scarcely nodding to us, he went down the walk, the spurs with which he presumably urged on his aeroplane gleaming in the lamplight.

“Come in — I don't just know your name — ”

There she was — the Southern type in all its purity. I would have recognized Ailie Calhoun if I'd never heard Ruth Draper or read Marse Chan. She had the adroitness sugar-coated with sweet, voluble simplicity, the suggested background of devoted fathers, brothers and admirers stretching back into the South's heroic age, the unfailing coolness acquired in the endless struggle with the heat. There were notes in her voice that order slaves around, that withered up Yankee captains, and then soft, wheedling notes that mingled in unfamiliar loveliness with the night.

I could scarcely see her in the darkness, but when I rose to go — it was plain that I was not to linger — she stood in the orange light from the doorway. She was small and very blond; there was too much fever-colored rouge on her face, accentuated by a nose dabbed clownish white, but she shone through that like a star.

“After Bill goes I'll be sitting here all alone night after night. Maybe you'll take me to the country-club dances.” The pathetic prophecy brought a laugh from Bill. “Wait a minute,” Ailie murmured. “Your guns are all crooked.”

She straightened my collar pin, looking up at me for a second with something more than curiosity. It was a seeking look, as if she asked, “Could it be you?” Like Lieutenant Canby, I marched off unwillingly into the suddenly insufficient night.

Two weeks later I sat with her on the same veranda, or rather she half lay in my arms and yet scarcely touched me — how she managed that I don't remember. I was trying unsuccessfully to kiss her, and had been trying for the best part of an hour. We had a sort of joke about my not being sincere. My theory was that if she'd let me kiss her I'd fall in love with her. Her argument was that I was obviously insincere.

In a lull between two of these struggles she told me about her brother who had died in his senior year at Yale. She showed me his picture — it was a handsome, earnest face with a Leyendecker forelock — and told me that when she met someone who measured up to him she'd marry. I found this family idealism discouraging; even my brash confidence couldn't compete with the dead.

The evening and other evenings passed like that, and ended with my going back to camp with the remembered smell of magnolia flowers and a mood of vague dissatisfaction. I never kissed her. We went to the vaudeville and to the country club on Saturday nights, where she seldom took ten consecutive steps with one man, and she took me to barbecues and rowdy watermelon parties, and never thought it was worth while to change what I felt for her into love. I see now that it wouldn't have been hard, but she was a wise nineteen and she must have seen that we were emotionally incompatible. So I became her confidant instead.

We talked about Bill Knowles. She was considering Bill; for, though she wouldn't admit it, a winter at school in New York and a prom at Yale had turned her eyes North. She said she didn't think she'd marry a Southern man. And by degrees I saw that she was consciously and voluntarily different from these other girls who sang nigger songs and shot craps in the country-club bar. That's why Bill and I and others were drawn to her. We recognized her.

June and July, while the rumors reached us faintly, ineffectually, of battle and terror overseas, Ailie's eyes roved here and there about the country-club floor, seeking for something among the tall young officers. She attached several, choosing them with unfailing perspicacity — save in the case of Lieutenant Canby, whom she claimed to despise, but, nevertheless, gave dates to “because he was so sincere” — and we apportioned her evenings among us all summer.

One day she broke all her dates — Bill Knowles had leave and was coming. We talked of the event with scientific impersonality — would he move her to a decision? Lieutenant Canby, on the contrary, wasn't impersonal at all; made a nuisance of himself. He told her that if she married Knowles he was going to climb up six thousand feet in his aeroplane, shut off the motor and let go. He frightened her — I had to yield him my last date before Bill came.

On Saturday night she and Bill Knowles came to the country club. They were very handsome together and once more I felt envious and sad. As they danced out on the floor the three-piece orchestra was playing *After You've Gone*, in a poignant incomplete way that I can hear yet, as if each bar were

trickling off a precious minute of that time. I knew then that I had grown to love Tarleton, and I glanced about half in panic to see if some face wouldn't come in for me out of that warm, singing, outer darkness that yielded up couple after couple in organdie and olive drab. It was a time of youth and war, and there was never so much love around.

When I danced with Ailie she suddenly suggested that we go outside to a car. She wanted to know why didn't people cut in on her tonight? Did they think she was already married?

"Are you going to be?"

"I don't know, Andy. Sometimes, when he treats me as if I were sacred, it thrills me." Her voice was hushed and far away. "And then — "

She laughed. Her body, so frail and tender, was touching mine, her face was turned up to me, and there, suddenly, with Bill Knowles ten yards off, I could have kissed her at last. Our lips just touched experimentally; then an aviation officer turned a corner of the veranda near us, peered into our darkness and hesitated.

"Ailie."

"Yes."

"You heard about this afternoon?"

"What?" She leaned forward, tenseness already in her voice.

"Horace Canby crashed. He was instantly killed."

She got up slowly and stepped out of the car.

"You mean he was killed?" she said.

"Yes. They don't know what the trouble was. His motor — "

"Oh-h-h!" Her rasping whisper came through the hands suddenly covering her face. We watched her helplessly as she put her head on the side of the car, gagging dry tears. After a minute I went for Bill, who was standing in the stag line, searching anxiously about for her, and told him she wanted to go home.

I sat on the steps outside. I had disliked Canby, but his terrible, pointless death was more real to me than the day's toll of thousands in France. In a few minutes Ailie and Bill came out. Ailie was whimpering a little, but when she saw me her eyes flexed and she came over swiftly.

"Andy" — she spoke in a quick, low voice — "of course you must never tell anybody what I told you about Canby yesterday. What he said, I mean."

"Of course not."

She looked at me a second longer as if to be quite sure. Finally she was sure. Then she sighed in such a quaint little way that I could hardly believe my ears, and her brow went up in what can only be described as mock despair.

"An-dy!"

I looked uncomfortably at the ground, aware that she was calling my attention to her involuntarily disastrous effect on men. "Good night, Andy!" called Bill as they got into a taxi.

"Good night," I said, and almost added: "You poor fool."

II

Of course I should have made one of those fine moral decisions that people make in books, and despised her. On the contrary, I don't doubt that she could still have had me by raising her hand.

A few days later she made it all right by saying wistfully, "I know you think it was terrible of me to think of myself at a time like that, but it was such a shocking coincidence."

At twenty-three I was entirely unconvinced about anything, except that some people were strong and attractive and could do what they wanted, and others were caught and disgraced. I hoped I was of the former. I was sure Ailie was.

I had to revise other ideas about her. In the course of a long discussion with some girl about kissing — in those days people still talked about kissing

more than they kissed — I mentioned the fact that Ailie had only kissed two or three men, and only when she thought she was in love. To my considerable disconcertion the girl figuratively just lay on the floor and howled.

“But it’s true,” I assured her, suddenly knowing it wasn’t. “She told me herself.”

“Ailie Calhoun! Oh, my heavens! Why, last year at the Tech spring house party — ”

This was in September. We were going over-seas any week now, and to bring us up to full strength a last batch of officers from the fourth training camp arrived. The fourth camp wasn’t like the first three — the candidates were from the ranks; even from the drafted divisions. They had queer names without vowels in them, and save for a few young militiamen, you couldn’t take it for granted that they came out of any background at all. The addition to our company was Lieutenant Earl Schoen from New Bedford, Massachusetts; as fine a physical specimen as I have ever seen. He was six-foot-three, with black hair, high color and glossy dark-brown eyes. He wasn’t very smart and he was definitely illiterate, yet he was a good officer, high-tempered and commanding, and with that becoming touch of vanity that sits well on the military. I had an idea that New Bedford was a country town, and set down his bumptious qualities to that.

We were doubled up in living quarters and he came into my hut. Inside of a week there was a cabinet photograph of some Tarleton girl nailed brutally to the shack wall.

“She’s no jane or anything like that. She’s a society girl; goes with all the best people here.”

The following Sunday afternoon I met the lady at a semiprivate swimming pool in the country. When Ailie and I arrived, there was Schoen’s muscular body rippling out of a bathing suit at the far end of the pool.

“Hey, lieutenant!”

When I waved back at him he grinned and winked, jerking his head toward the girl at his side. Then, digging her in the ribs, he jerked his head at me. It was a form of introduction.

“Who’s that with Kitty Preston?” Ailie asked, and when I told her she said he looked like a street-car conductor, and pretended to look for her transfer.

A moment later he crawled powerfully and gracefully down the pool and pulled himself up at our side. I introduced him to Ailie.

“How do you like my girl, lieutenant?” he demanded. “I told you she was all right, didn’t I?” He jerked his head toward Ailie; this time to indicate that his girl and Ailie moved in the same circles. “How about us all having dinner together down at the hotel some night?”

I left them in a moment, amused as I saw Ailie visibly making up her mind that here, anyhow, was not the ideal. But Lieutenant Earl Schoen was not to be dismissed so lightly. He ran his eyes cheerfully and inoffensively over her cute, slight figure, and decided that she would do even better than the other. Then minutes later I saw them in the water together, Ailie swimming away with a grim little stroke she had, and Schoen wallowing riotously around her and ahead of her, sometimes pausing and staring at her, fascinated, as a boy might look at a nautical doll.

While the afternoon passed he remained at her side. Finally Ailie came over to me and whispered, with a laugh: “He’s following me around. He thinks I haven’t paid my carfare.”

She turned quickly. Miss Kitty Preston, her face curiously flustered, stood facing us.

“Ailie Calhoun, I didn’t think it of you to go out and delib’ately try to take a man away from another girl.” — An expression of distress at the impending scene flitted over Ailie’s face. — “I thought you considered yourself above anything like that.”

Miss Preston’s voice was low, but it held that tensivity that can be felt farther than it can be heard, and I saw Ailie’s clear lovely eyes glance about in panic. Luckily, Earl himself was ambling cheerfully and innocently toward us.

“If you care for him you certainly oughtn’t to belittle yourself in front of him,” said Ailie in a flash, her head high.

It was her acquaintance with the traditional way of behaving against Kitty Preston’s naïve and fierce possessiveness, or if you prefer it, Ailie’s “breeding” against the other’s “commonness.” She turned away.

“Wait a minute, kid!” cried Earl Schoen. “How about your address? Maybe I’d like to give you a ring on the phone.”

She looked at him in a way that should have indicated to Kitty her entire lack of interest.

“I’m very busy at the Red Cross this month,” she said, her voice as cool as her slicked-back blond hair. “Good-by.”

On the way home she laughed. Her air of having been unwittingly involved in a contemptible business vanished.

“She’ll never hold that young man,” she said. “He wants somebody new.”

“Apparently he wants Ailie Calhoun.”

The idea amused her.

“He could give me his ticket punch to wear, like a fraternity pin. What fun! If mother ever saw anybody like that come in the house, she’d just lie down and die.”

And to give Ailie credit, it was fully a fortnight before he did come in her house, although he rushed her until she pretended to be annoyed at the next country-club dance.

“He’s the biggest tough, Andy,” she whispered to me. “But he’s so sincere.”

She used the word “tough” without the conviction it would have carried had he been a Southern boy. She only knew it with her mind; her ear couldn’t distinguish between one Yankee voice and another. And somehow Mrs. Calhoun didn’t expire at his appearance on the threshold. The supposedly ineradicable prejudices of Ailie’s parents were a convenient phenomenon that disappeared at her wish. It was her friends who were

astonished. Ailie, always a little above Tarleton, whose beaux had been very carefully the “nicest” men of the camp — Ailie and Lieutenant Schoen! I grew tired of assuring people that she was merely distracting herself — and indeed every week or so there was someone new — an ensign from Pensacola, an old friend from New Orleans — but always, in between times, there was Earl Schoen.

Orders arrived for an advance party of officers and sergeants to proceed to the port of embarkation and take ship to France. My name was on the list. I had been on the range for a week and when I got back to camp, Earl Schoen buttonholed me immediately.

“We’re giving a little farewell party in the mess. Just you and I and Captain Craker and three girls.”

Earl and I were to call for the girls. We picked up Sally Carrol Happer and Nancy Lamar, and went on to Ailie’s house; to be met at the door by the butler with the announcement that she wasn’t home.

“Isn’t home?” Earl repeated blankly. “Where is she?”

“Didn’t leave no information about that; just said she wasn’t home.”

“But this is a darn funny thing!” he exclaimed. He walked around the familiar dusky veranda while the butler waited at the door. Something occurred to him. “Say,” he informed me — “say, I think she’s sore.”

I waited. He said sternly to the butler, “You tell her I’ve got to speak to her a minute.”

“How’m I goin’ tell her that when she ain’t home?”

Again Earl walked musingly around the porch. Then he nodded several times and said:

“She’s sore at something that happened downtown.”

In a few words he sketched out the matter to me.

“Look here; you wait in the car,” I said. “Maybe I can fix this.” And when he reluctantly retreated: “Oliver, you tell Miss Ailie I want to see her alone.”

After some argument he bore this message and in a moment returned with a reply:

“Miss Ailie say she don’t want to see that other gentleman about nothing never. She say come in if you like.”

She was in the library. I had expected to see a picture of cool, outraged dignity, but her face was distraught, tumultuous, despairing. Her eyes were red-rimmed, as though she had been crying slowly and painfully, for hours.

“Oh, hello, Andy,” she said brokenly. “I haven’t seen you for so long. Has he gone?”

“Now, Ailie — ”

“Now, Ailie!” she cried. “Now, Ailie! He spoke to me, you see. He lifted his hat. He stood there ten feet from me with that horrible — that horrible woman — holding her arm and talking to her, and then when he saw me he raised his hat. Andy, I didn’t know what to do. I had to go in the drug store and ask for a glass of water, and I was so afraid he’d follow in after me that I asked Mr. Rich to let me go out the back way. I never want to see him or hear of him again.”

I talked. I said what one says in such cases. I said it for half an hour. I could not move her. Several times she answered by murmuring something about his not being “sincere,” and for the fourth time I wondered what the word meant to her. Certainly not constancy; it was, I half suspected, some special way she wanted to be regarded.

I got up to go. And then, unbelievably, the automobile horn sounded three times impatiently outside. It was stupefying. It said as plainly as if Earl were in the room, “All right; go to the devil then! I’m not going to wait here all night.”

Ailie looked at me aghast. And suddenly a peculiar look came into her face, spread, flickered, broke into a teary, hysterical smile.

“Isn’t he awful?” she cried in helpless despair. “Isn’t he terrible?”

“Hurry up,” I said quickly. “Get your cape. This is our last night.”

And I can still feel that last night vividly, the candlelight that flickered over the rough boards of the mess shack, over the frayed paper decorations left from the supply company's party, the sad mandolin down a company street that kept picking My Indiana Home out of the universal nostalgia of the departing summer. The three girls lost in this mysterious men's city felt something, too — a bewitched impermanence as though they were on a magic carpet that had lighted on the Southern countryside, and any moment the wind would lift it and waft it away. We toasted ourselves and the South. Then we left our napkins and empty glasses and a little of the past on the table, and hand in hand went out into the moonlight itself. Taps had been played; there was no sound but the far-away whinny of a horse, and a loud persistent snore at which we laughed, and the leathery snap of a sentry coming to port over by the guardhouse. Craker was on duty; we others got into a waiting car, motored into Tarleton and left Craker's girl.

Then Ailie and Earl, Sally and I, two and two in the wide back seat, each couple turned from the other, absorbed and whispering, drove away into the wide, flat darkness.

We drove through pine woods heavy with lichen and Spanish moss, and between the fallow cotton fields along a road white as the rim of the world. We parked under the broken shadow of a mill where there was the sound of running water and restive squawky birds and over everything a brightness that tried to filter in anywhere — into the lost nigger cabins, the automobile, the fastnesses of the heart. The South sang to us — I wonder if they remember. I remember — the cool pale faces, the somnolent amorous eyes and the voices:

“Are you comfortable?”

“Yes; are you?”

“Are you sure you are?”

“Yes.”

Suddenly we knew it was late and there was nothing more. We turned home.

Our detachment started for Camp Mills next day, but I didn't go to France after all. We passed a cold month on Long Island, marched aboard a transport with steel helmets slung at our sides and then marched off again. There wasn't any more war. I had missed the war. When I came back to Tarleton I tried to get out of the Army, but I had a regular commission and it took most of the winter. But Earl Schoen was one of the first to be demobilized. He wanted to find a good job "while the picking was good." Ailie was noncommittal, but there was an understanding between them that he'd be back.

By January the camps, which for two years had dominated the little city, were already fading. There was only the persistent incinerator smell to remind one of all that activity and bustle. What life remained centered bitterly about divisional headquarters building, with the disgruntled regular officers who had also missed the war.

And now the young men of Tarleton began drifting back from the ends of the earth — some with Canadian uniforms, some with crutches or empty sleeves. A returned battalion of the National Guard paraded through the streets with open ranks for their dead, and then stepped down out of romance forever and sold you things over the counters of local stores. Only a few uniforms mingled with the dinner coats at the country-club dance.

Just before Christmas, Bill Knowles arrived unexpectedly one day and left the next — either he gave Ailie an ultimatum or she had made up her mind at last. I saw her sometimes when she wasn't busy with returned heroes from Savannah and Augusta, but I felt like an outmoded survival — and I was. She was waiting for Earl Schoen with such a vast uncertainty that she didn't like to talk about it. Three days before I got my final discharge he came.

I first happened upon them walking down Market Street together, and I don't think I've ever been so sorry for a couple in my life; though I suppose the same situation was repeating itself in every city where there had been camps. Exteriorly Earl had about everything wrong with him that could be imagined. His hat was green, with a radical feather; his suit was slashed and braided in a grotesque fashion that national advertising and the movies have

put an end to. Evidently he had been to his old barber, for his hair bloused neatly on his pink, shaved neck. It wasn't as though he had been shiny and poor, but the background of mill-town dance halls and outing clubs flamed out at you — or rather flamed out at Ailie. For she had never quite imagined the reality; in these clothes even the natural grace of that magnificent body had departed. At first he boasted of his fine job; it would get them along all right until he could “see some easy money.” But from the moment he came back into her world on its own terms he must have known it was hopeless. I don't know what Ailie said or how much her grief weighed against her stupefaction. She acted quickly — three days after his arrival, Earl and I went North together on the train.

“Well, that's the end of that,” he said moodily. “She's a wonderful girl, but too much of a highbrow for me. I guess she's got to marry some rich guy that'll give her a great social position. I can't see that stuck-up sort of thing.” And then, later: “She said to come back and see her in a year, but I'll never go back. This aristocrat stuff is all right if you got the money for it, but — ”

“But it wasn't real,” he meant to finish. The provincial society in which he had moved with so much satisfaction for six months already appeared to him as affected, “dudish” and artificial.

“Say, did you see what I saw getting on the train?” he asked me after a while. “Two wonderful janes, all alone. What do you say we mosey into the next car and ask them to lunch? I'll take the one in blue.” Halfway down the car he turned around suddenly. “Say, Andy,” he demanded, frowning; “one thing — how do you suppose she knew I used to command a street car? I never told her that.”

“Search me.”

III

This narrative arrives now at one of the big gaps that stared me in the face when I began. For six years, while I finished at Harvard Law and built commercial aeroplanes and backed a pavement block that went gritty under trucks, Ailie Calhoun was scarcely more than a name on a Christmas card;

something that blew a little in my mind on warm nights when I remembered the magnolia flowers. Occasionally an acquaintance of Army days would ask me, "What became of that blond girl who was so popular?" but I didn't know. I ran into Nancy Lamar at the Montmartre in New York one evening and learned that Ailie had become engaged to a man in Cincinnati, had gone North to visit his family and then broken it off. She was lovely as ever and there was always a heavy beau or two. But neither Bill Knowles nor Earl Schoen had ever come back.

And somewhere about that time I heard that Bill Knowles had married a girl he met on a boat. There you are — not much of a patch to mend six years with.

Oddly enough, a girl seen at twilight in a small Indiana station started me thinking about going South. The girl, in stiff pink organdie, threw her arms about a man who got off our train and hurried him to a waiting car, and I felt a sort of pang. It seemed to me that she was bearing him off into the lost midsummer world of my early twenties, where time had stood still and charming girls, dimly seen like the past itself, still loitered along the dusky streets. I suppose that poetry is a Northern man's dream of the South. But it was months later that I sent off a wire to Ailie, and immediately followed it to Tarleton.

It was July. The Jefferson Hotel seemed strangely shabby and stuffy — a boosters' club burst into intermittent song in the dining room that my memory had long dedicated to officers and girls. I recognized the taxi driver who took me up to Ailie's house, but his "Sure, I do, lieutenant," was unconvincing. I was only one of twenty thousand.

It was a curious three days. I suppose some of Ailie's first young lustre must have gone the way of such mortal shining, but I can't bear witness to it. She was still so physically appealing that you wanted to touch the personality that trembled on her lips. No — the change was more profound than that.

At once I saw she had a different line. The modulations of pride, the vocal hints that she knew the secrets of a brighter, finer ante-bellum day, were gone from her voice; there was no time for them now as it rambled on in the half-laughing, half-desperate banter of the newer South. And everything

was swept into this banter in order to make it go on and leave no time for thinking — the present, the future, herself, me. We went to a rowdy party at the house of some young married people, and she was the nervous, glowing center of it. After all, she wasn't eighteen, and she was as attractive in her rôle of reckless clown as she had ever been in her life.

"Have you heard anything from Earl Schoen?" I asked her the second night, on our way to the country-club dance.

"No." She was serious for a moment. "I often think of him. He was the — " She hesitated.

"Go on."

"I was going to say the man I loved most, but that wouldn't be true. I never exactly loved him, or I'd have married him any old how, wouldn't I?" She looked at me questioningly. "At least I wouldn't have treated him like that."

"It was impossible."

"Of course," she agreed uncertainly. Her mood changed; she became flippant: "How the Yankees did deceive us poor little Southern girls. Ah, me!"

When we reached the country club she melted like a chameleon into the — to me — unfamiliar crowd. There was a new generation upon the floor, with less dignity than the ones I had known, but none of them were more a part of its lazy, feverish essence than Ailie. Possibly she had perceived that in her initial longing to escape from Tarleton's provincialism she had been walking alone, following a generation which was doomed to have no successors. Just where she lost the battle, waged behind the white pillars of her veranda, I don't know. But she had guessed wrong, missed out somewhere. Her wild animation, which even now called enough men around her to rival the entourage of the youngest and freshest, was an admission of defeat.

I left her house, as I had so often left it that vanished June, in a mood of vague dissatisfaction. It was hours later, tossing about my bed in the hotel, that I realized what was the matter, what had always been the matter — I was deeply and incurably in love with her. In spite of every incompatibility,

she was still, she would always be to me, the most attractive girl I had ever known. I told her so next afternoon. It was one of those hot days I knew so well, and Ailie sat beside me on a couch in the darkened library.

“Oh, no, I couldn’t marry you,” she said, almost frightened; “I don’t love you that way at all. . . . I never did. And you don’t love me. I didn’t mean to tell you now, but next month I’m going to marry another man. We’re not even announcing it, because I’ve done that twice before.” Suddenly it occurred to her that I might be hurt: “Andy, you just had a silly idea, didn’t you? You know I couldn’t ever marry a Northern man.”

“Who is he?” I demanded.

“A man from Savannah.”

“Are you in love with him?”

“Of course I am.” We both smiled. “Of course I am! What are you trying to make me say?”

There were no doubts, as there had been with other men. She couldn’t afford to let herself have doubts. I knew this because she had long ago stopped making any pretensions with me. This very naturalness, I realized, was because she didn’t consider me as a suitor. Beneath her mask of an instinctive thoroughbred she had always been on to herself, and she couldn’t believe that anyone not taken in to the point of uncritical worship could really love her. That was what she called being “sincere”; she felt most security with men like Canby and Earl Schoen, who were incapable of passing judgments on the ostensibly aristocratic heart.

“All right,” I said, as if she had asked my permission to marry. “Now, would you do something for me?”

“Anything.”

“Ride out to camp.”

“But there’s nothing left there, honey.”

“I don’t care.”

We walked downtown. The taxi driver in front of the hotel repeated her objection: “Nothing there now, cap.”

“Never mind. Go there anyhow.”

Twenty minutes later he stopped on a wide unfamiliar plain powdered with new cotton fields and marked with isolated clumps of pine.

“Like to drive over yonder where you see the smoke?” asked the driver. “That’s the new state prison.”

“No. Just drive along this road. I want to find where I used to live.”

An old race course, inconspicuous in the camp’s day of glory, had reared its dilapidated grandstand in the desolation. I tried in vain to orient myself.

“Go along this road past that clump of trees, and then turn right — no, turn left.”

He obeyed, with professional disgust.

“You won’t find a single thing, darling,” said Ailie. “The contractors took it all down.”

We rode slowly along the margin of the fields. It might have been here —

“All right. I want to get out,” I said suddenly.

I left Ailie sitting in the car, looking very beautiful with the warm breeze stirring her long, curly bob.

It might have been here. That would make the company streets down there and the mess shack, where we dined that night, just over the way.

The taxi driver regarded me indulgently while I stumbled here and there in the knee-deep underbrush, looking for my youth in a clapboard or a strip of roofing or a rusty tomato can. I tried to sight on a vaguely familiar clump of trees, but it was growing darker now and I couldn’t be quite sure they were the right trees.

“They’re going to fix up the old race course,” Ailie called from the car.

“Tarleton’s getting quite doggy in its old age.”

No. Upon consideration they didn't look like the right trees. All I could be sure of was this place that had once been so full of life and effort was gone, as if it had never existed, and that in another month Ailie would be gone, and the South would be empty for me forever.

THE ROUGH CROSSING

I

The Saturday Evening Post (8 June 1929)

Once on the long, covered piers, you have come into a ghostly country that is no longer Here and not yet There. Especially at night. There is a hazy yellow vault full of shouting, echoing voices. There is the rumble of trucks and the clump of trunks, the strident chatter of a crane and the first salt smell of the sea. You hurry through, even though there's time. The past, the continent, is behind you; the future is that glowing mouth in the side of the ship; this dim turbulent alley is too confusedly the present.

Up the gangplank, and the vision of the world adjusts itself, narrows. One is a citizen of a commonwealth smaller than Andorra. One is no longer so sure of anything. Curiously unmoved the men at the purser's desk, cell-like the cabin, disdainful the eyes of voyagers and their friends, solemn the officer who stands on the deserted promenade deck thinking something of his own as he stares at the crowd below. A last odd idea that one didn't really have to come, then the loud, mournful whistles, and the thing — certainly not the boat, but rather a human idea, a frame of mind — pushes forth into the big dark night.

Adrian Smith, one of the celebrities on board — not a very great celebrity, but important enough to be bathed in flashlight by a photographer who had been given his name, but wasn't sure what his subject 'did' — Adrian Smith and his blonde wife, Eva, went up to the promenade deck, passed the melancholy ship's officer, and, finding a quiet aerie, put their elbows on the rail.

'We're going!' he cried presently, and they both laughed in ecstasy. 'We've escaped. They can't get us now.'

'Who?'

He waved his hand vaguely at the civic tiara.

‘All those people out there. They’ll come with their posses and their warrants and list of crimes we’ve committed, and ring the bell at our door on Park Avenue and ask for the Adrian Smiths, but what ho! the Adrian Smiths and their children and nurse are off for France.’

‘You make me think we really have committed crimes.’

‘They can’t have you,’ he said frowning. ‘That’s one thing they’re after me about — they know I haven’t got any right to a person like you, and they’re furious. That’s one reason I’m glad to get away.’

‘Darling,’ said Eva.

She was twenty-six — five years younger than he. She was something precious to everyone who knew her.

‘I like this boat better than the *Majestic* or the *Aquitania*,’ she remarked, unfaithful to the ships that had served their honeymoon.

‘It’s much smaller.’

‘But it’s very slick and it has all those little shops along the corridors. And I think the staterooms are bigger.’

‘The people are very formal — did you notice? — as if they thought everyone else was a card sharp. And in about four days half of them will be calling the other half by their first names.’

Four of the people came by now — a quartet of young girls abreast, making a circuit of the deck. Their eight eyes swept momentarily towards Adrian and Eva, and then swept automatically back, save for one pair which lingered for an instant with a little start. They belonged to one of the girls in the middle, who was, indeed, the only passenger of the four. She was not more than eighteen — a dark little beauty with the fine crystal gloss over her that, in brunettes, takes the place of a blonde’s bright glow.

‘Now, who’s that?’ wondered Adrian. ‘I’ve seen her before.’

‘She’s pretty,’ said Eva.

‘Yes.’ He kept wondering, and Eva deferred momentarily to his distraction; then, smiling up at him, she drew him back into their privacy.

‘Tell me more,’ she said.

‘About what?’

‘About us — what a good time we’ll have, and how we’ll be much better and happier, and very close always.’

‘How could we be any closer?’ His arm pulled her to him.

‘But I mean never even quarrel any more about silly things. You know, I made up my mind when you gave me my birthday present last week’ — her fingers caressed the fine seed pearls at her throat — ‘that I’d try never to say a mean thing to you again.’

‘You never have, my precious.’

Yet even as he strained her against his side she knew that the moment of utter isolation had passed almost before it had begun. His antennae were already out, feeling over this new world.

‘Most of the people look rather awful,’ he said — ‘little and swarthy and ugly. Americans didn’t use to look like that.’

‘They look dreary,’ she agreed. ‘Let’s not get to know anybody, but just stay together.’

A gong was beating now, and stewards were shouting down the decks, ‘Visitors ashore, please!’ and voices rose to a strident chorus. For a while the gangplanks were thronged; then they were empty, and the jostling crowd behind the barrier waved and called unintelligible things, and kept up a grin of good will. As the stevedores began to work at the ropes a flat-faced, somewhat befuddled young man arrived in a great hurry and was assisted up the gangplank by a porter and a taxi driver. The ship having swallowed him as impassively as though he were a missionary for Beirut, a low, portentous vibration began. The pier with its faces commenced to slide by, and for a moment the boat was just a piece accidentally split off from it; then the faces became remote, voiceless, and the pier was one among many

yellow blurs along the water front. Now the harbour flowed swiftly toward the sea.

On a northern parallel of latitude a hurricane was forming and moving south by southeast preceded by a strong west wind. On its course it was destined to swamp the *Peter I. Eudin* of Amsterdam, with a crew of sixty-six, to break a boom on the largest boat in the world, and to bring grief and want to the wives of several hundred seamen. This liner, leaving New York Sunday evening, would enter the zone of the storm Tuesday, and of the hurricane late Wednesday night.

II

Tuesday afternoon Adrian and Eva paid their first visit to the smoking-room. This was not in accord with their intentions — they had ‘never wanted to see a cocktail again’ after leaving America — but they had forgotten the staccato loneliness of ships, and all activity centred about the bar. So they went in for just a minute.

It was full. There were those who had been there since luncheon, and those who would be there until dinner, not to mention a faithful few who had been there since nine this morning. It was a prosperous assembly, taking its recreation at bridge, solitaire, detective stories, alcohol, argument and love. Up to this point you could have matched it in the club or casino life of any country, but over it all played a repressed nervous energy, a barely disguised impatience that extended to old and young alike. The cruise had begun, and they had enjoyed the beginning, but the show was not varied enough to last six days, and already they wanted it to be over.

At a table near them Adrian saw the pretty girl who had stared at him on the deck the first night. Again he was fascinated by her loveliness; there was no mist upon the brilliant gloss that gleamed through the smoky confusion of the room. He and Eva had decided from the passenger list that she was probably ‘Miss Elizabeth D’Amido and maid’, and he had heard her called Betsy as he walked past a deck-tennis game. Among the young people with her was the flat-nosed youth who had been ‘poured on board’, the night of

their departure; yesterday he had walked the deck morosely, but he was apparently reviving. Miss D'Amido whispered something to him, and he looked over at the Smiths with curious eyes. Adrian was new enough at being a celebrity to turn self-consciously away.

'There's a little roll. Do you feel it?' Eva demanded.

'Perhaps we'd better split a pint of champagne.'

While he gave the order a short colloquy was taking place at the other table; presently a young man rose and came over to them.

'Isn't this Mr Adrian Smith?'

'Yes.'

'We wondered if we couldn't put you down for the deck-tennis tournament. We're going to have a deck-tennis tournament.'

'Why — ' Adrian hesitated.

'My name's Stacomb,' burst out the young man. 'We all know your — your plays or whatever it is, and all that — and we wondered if you wouldn't like to come over to our table.'

Somewhat overwhelmed, Adrian laughed: Mr Stacomb, glib, soft, slouching, waited; evidently under the impression that he had delivered himself of a graceful compliment.

Adrian, understanding that, too, replied: 'Thanks, but perhaps you'd better come over here.'

'We've got a bigger table.'

'But we're older and more — more settled.'

The young man laughed kindly, as if to say, 'That's all right.'

'Put me down,' said Adrian. 'How much do I owe you?'

'One buck. Call me Stac.'

'Why?' asked Adrian, startled.

‘It’s shorter.’

When he had gone they smiled broadly.

‘Heavens,’ Eva gasped, ‘I believe they are coming over.’

They were. With a great draining of glasses, calling of waiters, shuffling of chairs, three boys and two girls moved to the Smiths’ table. If there was any diffidence, it was confined to the hosts; for the new additions gathered around them eagerly, eyeing Adrian with respect — too much respect — as if to say: ‘This was probably a mistake and won’t be amusing, but maybe we’ll get something out of it to help us in our after life, like at school.’

In a moment Miss D’Amido changed seats with one of the men and placed her radiant self at Adrian’s side, looking at him with manifest admiration.

‘I fell in love with you the minute I saw you,’ she said audibly and without self-consciousness; ‘so I’ll take all the blame for butting in. I’ve seen your play four times.’

Adrian called a waiter to take their orders.

‘You see,’ continued Miss D’Amido, ‘we’re going into a storm, and you might be prostrated the rest of the trip, so I couldn’t take any chances.’

He saw that there was no undertone or innuendo in what she said, nor the need of any. The words themselves were enough, and the deference with which she neglected the young men and bent her politeness on him was somehow very touching. A little glow went over him; he was having rather more than a pleasant time.

Eva was less entertained; but the flat-nosed young man, whose name was Butterworth, knew people that she did, and that seemed to make the affair less careless and casual. She did not like meeting new people unless they had ‘something to contribute’, and she was often bored by the great streams of them, of all types and conditions and classes, that passed through Adrian’s life. She herself ‘had everything’ — which is to say that she was well endowed with talents and with charm — and the mere novelty of people did not seem a sufficient reason for eternally offering everything up to them.

Half an hour later when she rose to go and see the children, she was content that the episode was over. It was colder on deck, with a damp that was almost rain, and there was a perceptible motion. Opening the door of her state-room she was surprised to find the cabin steward sitting languidly on her bed, his head slumped upon the upright pillow. He looked at her listlessly as she came in, but made no move to get up.

‘When you’ve finished your nap you can fetch me a new pillow-case,’ she said briskly.

Still the man didn’t move. She perceived then that his face was green.

‘You can’t be seasick in here,’ she announced firmly. ‘You go and lie down in your own quarters.’

‘It’s me side,’ he said faintly. He tried to rise, gave out a little rasping sound of pain and sank back again. Eva rang for the stewardess.

A steady pitch, toss, roll had begun in earnest and she felt no sympathy for the steward, but only wanted to get him out as quick as possible. It was outrageous for a member of the crew to be seasick. When the stewardess came in Eva tried to explain this, but now her own head was whirring, and throwing herself on the bed, she covered her eyes.

‘It’s his fault,’ she groaned when the man was assisted from the room. ‘I was all right and it made me sick to look at him. I wish he’d die.’

In a few minutes Adrian came in.

‘Oh, but I’m sick!’ she cried.

‘Why, you poor baby.’ He leaned over and took her in his arms. ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I was all right upstairs, but there was a steward — Oh, I’m too sick to talk.’

‘You’d better have dinner in bed.’

‘Dinner! Oh, my heavens!’

He waited solicitously, but she wanted to hear his voice, to have it drown out the complaining sound of the beams.

‘Where’ve you been?’

‘Helping to sign up people for the tournament.’

‘Will they have it if it’s like this? Because if they do I’ll just lose for you.’

He didn’t answer; opening her eyes, she saw that he was frowning.

‘I didn’t know you were going in the doubles,’ he said.

‘Why, that’s the only fun.’

‘I told the D’Amido girl I’d play with her.’

‘Oh.’

‘I didn’t think. You know I’d much rather play with you.’

‘Why didn’t you, then?’ she asked coolly.

‘It never occurred to me.’

She remembered that on their honeymoon they had been in the finals and won a prize. Years passed. But Adrian never frowned in this regretful way unless he felt a little guilty. He stumbled about, getting his dinner clothes out of the trunk, and she shut her eyes.

When a particular violent lurch startled her awake again he was dressed and tying his tie. He looked healthy and fresh, and his eyes were bright.

‘Well, how about it?’ he inquired. ‘Can you make it, or no?’

‘No.’

‘Can I do anything for you before I go?’

‘Where are you going?’

‘Meeting those kids in the bar. Can I do anything for you?’

‘No.’

‘Darling, I hate to leave you like this.’

‘Don’t be silly. I just want to sleep.’

That solicitous frown — when she knew he was crazy to be out and away from the close cabin. She was glad when the door closed. The thing to do was to sleep, sleep.

Up — down — sideways. Hey there, not so far! Pull her round the corner there! Now roll her, right — left — Crea-eak! Wrench! Swoop!

Some hours later Eva was dimly conscious of Adrian bending over her. She wanted him to put his arms around her and draw her up out of this dizzy lethargy, but by the time she was fully awake the cabin was empty. He had looked in and gone. When she awoke next the cabin was dark and he was in bed.

The morning was fresh and cool, and the sea was just enough calmer to make Eva think she could get up. They breakfasted in the cabin and with Adrian's help she accomplished an unsatisfactory makeshift toilet and they went up on the boat deck. The tennis tournament had already begun and was furnishing action for a dozen amateur movie cameras, but the majority of passengers were represented by lifeless bundles in deck chairs beside untasted trays.

Adrian and Miss D'Amido played their first match. She was deft and graceful; blatantly well. There was even more warmth behind her ivory skin than there had been the day before. The strolling first officer stopped and talked to her; half a dozen men whom she couldn't have known three days ago called her Betsy. She was already the pretty girl of the voyage, the cynosure of starved ship's eyes.

But after a while Eva preferred to watch the gulls in the wireless masts and the slow slide of the roll-top sky. Most of the passengers looked silly with their movie cameras that they had all rushed to get and now didn't know what to use for, but the sailors painting the lifeboat stanchions were quiet and beaten and sympathetic, and probably wished, as she did, that the voyage was over.

Butterworth sat down on the deck beside her chair.

'They're operating on one of the stewards this morning. Must be terrible in this sea.'

‘Operating? What for?’ she asked listlessly.

‘Appendicitis. They have to operate now because we’re going into worse weather. That’s why they’re having the ship’s party tonight.’

‘Oh, the poor man!’ she cried, realizing it must be her steward.

Adrian was showing off now by being very courteous and thoughtful in the game.

‘Sorry. Did you hurt yourself? . . . No, it was my fault . . . You better put on your coat right away, pardner, or you’ll catch cold.’

The match was over and they had won. Flushed and hearty, he came up to Eva’s chair.

‘How do you feel?’

‘Terrible.’

‘Winners are buying a drink in the bar,’ he said apologetically.

‘I’m coming, too,’ Eva said, but an immediate dizziness made her sink back in her chair.

‘You’d better stay here. I’ll send you up something.’

She felt that his public manner had hardened towards her slightly.

‘You’ll come back?’

‘Oh, right away.’

She was alone on the boat deck, save for a solitary ship’s officer who slanted obliquely as he paced the bridge. When the cocktail arrived she forced herself to drink it, and felt better. Trying to distract her mind with pleasant things, she reached back to the sanguine talks that she and Adrian had had before sailing: There was the little villa in Brittany, the children learning French — that was all she could think of now — the little villa in Brittany, the children learning French — so she repeated the words over and over to herself until they became as meaningless as the wide white sky. The why of their being here had suddenly eluded her; she felt unmotivated, accidental,

and she wanted Adrian to come back quick, all responsive and tender, to reassure her. It was in the hope that there was some secret of graceful living, some real compensation for the lost, careless confidence of twenty-one, that they were going to spend a year in France.

The day passed darkly, with fewer people around and a wet sky falling. Suddenly it was five o'clock, and they were all in the bar again, and Mr Butterworth was telling her about his past. She took a good deal of champagne, but she was seasick dimly through it, as if the illness was her soul trying to struggle up through some thickening incrustation of abnormal life.

'You're my idea of a Greek goddess, physically,' Butterworth was saying.

It was pleasant to be Mr Butterworth's idea of a Greek goddess physically, but where was Adrian? He and Miss D'Amido had gone out on a forward deck to feel the spray. Eva heard herself promising to get out her colours and paint the Eiffel Tower on Butterworth's shirt front for the party tonight.

When Adrian and Betsy D'Amido, soaked with spray, opened the door with difficulty against the driving wind and came into the now-covered security of the promenade deck, they stopped and turned toward each other.

'Well?' she said. But he only stood with his back to the rail, looking at her, afraid to speak. She was silent, too, because she wanted him to be first; so for a moment nothing happened. Then she made a step towards him, and he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

'You're just sorry for me, that's all.' She began to cry a little. 'You're just being kind.'

'I feel terribly about it.' His voice was taut and trembling.

'Then kiss me.'

The deck was empty. He bent over her swiftly.

'No, really kiss me.'

He could not remember when anything had felt so young and fresh as her lips. The rain lay, like tears shed for him, upon the softly shining porcelain cheeks. She was all new and immaculate, and her eyes were wild.

‘I love you,’ she whispered. ‘I can’t help loving you, can I? When I first saw you — oh, not on the boat, but over a year ago — Grace Heally took me to a rehearsal and suddenly you jumped up in the second row and began telling them what to do. I wrote you a letter and tore it up.’

‘We’ve got to go.’

She was weeping as they walked along the deck. Once more, imprudently, she held up her face to him at the door of her cabin. His blood was beating through him in wild tumult as he walked on to the bar.

He was thankful that Eva scarcely seemed to notice him or to know that he had been gone. After a moment he pretended an interest in what she was doing.

‘What’s that?’

‘She’s painting the Eiffel Tower on my shirt front for tonight,’ explained Butterworth.

‘There,’ Eva laid away her brush and wiped her hands.

‘How’s that?’

‘A *chef-d’oeuvre*.’

Her eyes swept around the watching group, lingered casually upon Adrian.

‘You’re wet. Go and change.’

‘You come too.’

‘I want another champagne cocktail.’

‘You’ve had enough. It’s time to dress for the party.’

Unwilling she closed her paints and preceded him.

‘Stacomb’s got a table for nine,’ he remarked as they walked along the corridor.

‘The younger set,’ she said with unnecessary bitterness. ‘Oh, the younger set. And you just having the time of your life — with a child.’

They had a long discussion in the cabin, unpleasant on her part and evasive on his, which ended when the ship gave a sudden gigantic heave, and Eva, the edge worn off her champagne, felt ill again. There was nothing to do but to have a cocktail in the cabin, and after that they decided to go to the party — she believed him now, or she didn’t care.

Adrian was ready first — he never wore fancy dress.

‘I’ll go on up. Don’t be long.’

‘Wait for me, please; it’s rocking so.’

He sat down on a bed, concealing his impatience.

‘You don’t mind waiting, do you? I don’t want to parade up there all alone.’

She was taking a tuck in an oriental costume rented from the barber.

‘Ships make people feel crazy,’ she said. ‘I think they’re awful.’

‘Yes,’ he muttered absently.

‘When it gets very bad I pretend I’m in the top of a tree, rocking to and fro. But finally I get pretending everything, and finally I have to pretend I’m sane when I know I’m not.’

‘If you get thinking that way you will go crazy.’

‘Look, Adrian.’ She held up the string of pearls before clasping them on.

‘Aren’t they lovely?’

In Adrian’s impatience she seemed to move around the cabin like a figure in a slow-motion picture. After a moment he demanded:

‘Are you going to be long? It’s stifling in here.’

‘You go on!’ she fired up.

‘I don’t want — ’

‘Go on, please! You just make me nervous trying to hurry me.’

With a show of reluctance he left her. After a moment’s hesitation he went down a flight to a deck below and knocked at a door.

‘Betsy.’

‘Just a minute.’

She came out in the corridor attired in a red pea-jacket and trousers borrowed from the elevator boy.

‘Do elevator boys have fleas?’ she demanded. ‘I’ve got everything in the world on under this as a precaution.’

‘I had to see you,’ he said quickly.

‘Careful,’ she whispered. ‘Mrs Worden, who’s supposed to be chaperoning me, is across the way. She’s sick.’

‘I’m sick for you.’

They kissed suddenly, clung close together in the narrow corridor, swaying to and fro with the motion of the ship.

‘Don’t go away,’ she murmured.

‘I’ve got to. I’ve — ’

Her youth seemed to flow into him, bearing him up into a delicate romantic ecstasy that transcended passion. He couldn’t relinquish it; he had discovered something that he had thought was lost with his own youth forever. As he walked along the passage he knew that he had stopped thinking, no longer dared to think.

He met Eva going into the bar.

‘Where’ve you been?’ she asked with a strained smile.

‘To see about the table.’

She was lovely; her cool distinction conquered the trite costume and filled him with a resurgence of approval and pride. They sat down at a table.

The gale was rising hour by hour and the mere traversing of a passage had become a rough matter. In every stateroom trunks were lashed to the washstands, and the *Vestris* disaster was being reviewed in detail by nervous ladies, tossing, ill and wretched, upon their beds. In the smoking-room a stout gentleman had been hurled backward and suffered a badly cut head; and now the lighter chairs and tables were stacked and roped against the wall.

The crowd who had donned fancy dress and were dining together had swollen to about sixteen. The only remaining qualification for membership was the ability to reach the smoking-room. They ranged from a Groton-Harvard lawyer to an ungrammatical broker they had nicknamed Gyp the Blood, but distinctions had disappeared; for the moment they were samurai, chosen from several hundred for their triumphant resistance to the storm.

The gala dinner, overhung sardonically with lanterns and streamers, was interrupted by great communal slides across the room, precipitate retirements and spilled wine, while the ship roared and complained that under the panoply of a palace it was a ship after all. Upstairs afterward a dozen couples tried to dance, shuffling and galloping here and there in a crazy fandango, thrust around fantastically by a will alien to their own. In view of the condition of tortured hundreds below, there grew to be something indecent about it like a revel in a house of mourning, and presently there was an egress of the ever-dwindling survivors towards the bar.

As the evening passed, Eva's feeling of unreality increased. Adrian had disappeared — presumably with Miss D'Amido — and her mind, distorted by illness and champagne, began to enlarge upon the fact; annoyance changed slowly to dark and brooding anger, grief to desperation. She had never tried to bind Adrian, never needed to — for they were serious people, with all sorts of mutual interests, and satisfied with each other — but this was a breach of the contract, this was cruel. How could he think that she didn't know?

It seemed several hours later that he leaned over her chair in the bar where she was giving some woman an impassioned lecture upon babies, and said:

‘Eva, we’d better turn in.’

Her lip curled. ‘So that you can leave me there and then come back to your eighteen-year — ’

‘Be quiet.’

‘I won’t come to bed.’

‘Very well. Good night.’

More time passed and the people at the table changed. The stewards wanted to close up the room, and thinking of Adrian — her Adrian — off somewhere saying tender things to someone fresh and lovely, Eva began to cry.

‘But he’s gone to bed,’ her last attendants assured her. ‘We saw him go.’

She shook her head. She knew better. Adrian was lost. The long seven-year dream was broken. Probably she was punished for something she had done; as this thought occurred to her the shrieking timbers overhead began to mutter that she had guessed at last. This was for the selfishness to her mother, who hadn’t wanted her to marry Adrian; for all the sins and omissions of her life. She stood up, saying she must go out and get some air.

The deck was dark and drenched with wind and rain. The ship pounded through valleys, fleeing from black mountains of water that roared towards it. Looking out at the night, Eva saw that there was no chance for them unless she could make atonement, propitiate the storm. It was Adrian’s love that was demanded of her. Deliberately she unclasped her pearl necklace, lifted it to her lips — for she knew that with it went the freshest, fairest part of her life — and flung it out into the gale.

III

When Adrian awoke it was lunchtime, but he knew that some heavier sound than the bugle had called him up from his deep sleep. Then he realized that the trunk had broken loose from its lashings and was being thrown back and forth between a wardrobe and Eva's bed. With an exclamation he jumped up, but she was unharmed — still in costume and stretched out in deep sleep. When the steward had helped him secure the trunk, Eva opened a single eye.

'How are you?' he demanded, sitting on the side of her bed.

She closed the eye, opened it again.

'We're in a hurricane now,' he told her. 'The steward says it's the worst he's seen in twenty years.'

'My head,' she muttered. 'Hold my head.'

'How?'

'In front. My eyes are going out. I think I'm dying.'

'Nonsense. Do you want the doctor?'

She gave a funny little gasp that frightened him; he rang and sent the steward for the doctor.

The young doctor was pale and tired. There was a stubble of beard upon his face. He bowed curtly as he came in and, turning to Adrian, said with scant ceremony:

'What's the matter?'

'My wife doesn't feel well.'

'Well, what is it you want — a bromide?'

A little annoyed by his shortness, Adrian said: 'You'd better examine her and see what she needs.'

'She needs a bromide,' said the doctor. 'I've given orders that she is not to have any more to drink on this ship.'

'Why not?' demanded Adrian in astonishment.

‘Don’t you know what happened last night?’

‘Why, no, I was asleep.’

‘Mrs Smith wandered around the boat for an hour, not knowing what she was doing. A sailor was sent to follow her, and then the medical stewardess tried to get her to bed, and your wife insulted her.’

‘Oh, my heavens!’ cried Eva faintly.

‘The nurse and I had both been up all night with Steward Carton, who died this morning.’ He picked up his case. ‘I’ll send down a bromide for Mrs Smith. Good-bye.’

For a few minutes there was silence in the cabin. Then Adrian put his arm around her quickly.

‘Never mind,’ he said. ‘We’ll straighten it out.’

‘I remember now.’ Her voice was an awed whisper. ‘My pearls. I threw them overboard.’

‘Threw them overboard!’

‘Then I began looking for you.’

‘But I was here in bed.’

‘I didn’t believe it; I thought you were with that girl.’

‘She collapsed during dinner. I was taking a nap down here.’

Frowning, he rang the bell and asked the steward for luncheon and a bottle of beer.

‘Sorry, but we can’t serve any beer to your cabin, sir.’

When he went out Adrian exploded: ‘This is an outrage. You were simply crazy from that storm and they can’t be so high-handed. I’ll see the captain.’

‘Isn’t that awful?’ Eva murmured. ‘The poor man died.’

She turned over and began to sob into her pillow. There was a knock at the door.

‘Can I come in?’

The assiduous Mr Butterworth, surprisingly healthy and immaculate, came into the crazily tipping cabin.

‘Well, how’s the mystic?’ he demanded of Eva. ‘Do you remember praying to the elements in the bar last night?’

‘I don’t want to remember anything about last night.’

They told him about the stewardess, and with the telling the situation lightened; they all laughed together.

‘I’m going to get you some beer to have with your luncheon,’ Butterworth said. ‘You ought to get up on deck.’

‘Don’t go,’ Eva said. ‘You look so cheerful and nice.’

‘Just for ten minutes.’

When he had gone, Adrian rang for two baths.

‘The thing is to put on our best clothes and walk proudly three times around the deck,’ he said.

‘Yes.’ After a moment she added abstractedly: ‘I like that young man. He was awfully nice to me last night when you’d disappeared.’

The bath steward appeared with the information that bathing was too dangerous today. They were in the midst of the wildest hurricane on the North Atlantic in ten years; there were two broken arms this morning from attempts to take baths. An elderly lady had been thrown down a staircase and was not expected to live. Furthermore, they had received the SOS signal from several boats this morning.

‘Will we go to help them?’

‘They’re all behind us, sir, so we have to leave them to the *Mauretania*. If we tried to turn in this sea the portholes would be smashed.’

This array of calamities minimized their own troubles. Having eaten a sort of luncheon and drunk the beer provided by Butterworth, they dressed and went on deck.

Despite the fact that it was only possible to progress step by step, holding on to rope or rail, more people were abroad than on the day before. Fear had driven them from their cabins, where the trunks bumped and the waves pounded the portholes, and they awaited momentarily the call to the boats. Indeed, as Adrian and Eva stood on the transverse deck above the second class, there was a bugle call, followed by a gathering of stewards and stewardesses on the deck below. But the boat was sound: it had outlasted one of its cargo — Steward James Carton was being buried at sea.

It was very British and sad. There were the rows of stiff, disciplined men and women standing in the driving rain, and there was a shape covered by the flag of the Empire that lived by the sea. The chief purser read the service, a hymn was sung, the body slid off into the hurricane. With Eva's burst of wild weeping for this humble end, some last string snapped within her. Now she really didn't care. She responded eagerly when Butterworth suggested that he get some champagne to their cabin. Her mood worried Adrian; she wasn't used to so much drinking and he wondered what he ought to do. At his suggestion that they sleep instead, she merely laughed, and the bromide the doctor had sent stood untouched on the washstand. Pretending to listen to the insipidities of several Mr Stacombs, he watched her; to his surprise and discomfort she seemed on intimate and even sentimental terms with Butterworth and he wondered if this was a form of revenge for his attention to Betsy D'Amido.

The cabin was full of smoke, the voices went on incessantly, the suspension of activity, the waiting for the storm's end, was getting on his nerves. They had been at sea only four days; it was like a year.

The two Mr Stacombs left finally, but Butterworth remained. Eva was urging him to go for another bottle of champagne.

'We've had enough,' objected Adrian. 'We ought to go to bed.'

'I won't go to bed!' she burst out. 'You must be crazy! You play around all you want, and then, when I find somebody I— I like, you want to put me to bed.'

'You're hysterical.'

'On the contrary, I've never been so sane.'

'I think you'd better leave us, Butterworth,' Adrian said. 'Eva doesn't know what she's saying.'

'He won't go, I won't let him go.' She clasped Butterworth's hand passionately. 'He's the only person that's been half decent to me.'

'You'd better go, Butterworth,' repeated Adrian.

The young man looked at him uncertainly.

'It seems to me you're being unjust to your wife,' he ventured.

'My wife isn't herself.'

'That's no reason for bullying her.'

Adrian lost his temper. 'You get out of here!' he cried.

The two men looked at each other for a moment in silence. Then Butterworth turned to Eva, said, 'I'll be back later,' and left the cabin.

'Eva, you've got to pull yourself together,' said Adrian when the door closed.

She didn't answer, looked at him from sullen, half-closed eyes.

'I'll order dinner here for us both and then we'll try to get some sleep.'

'I want to go up and send a wireless.'

'Who to?'

'Some Paris lawyer. I want a divorce.'

In spite of his annoyance, he laughed. 'Don't be silly.'

'Then I want to see the children.'

‘Well, go and see them. I’ll order dinner.’

He waited for her in the cabin twenty minutes. Then impatiently he opened the door across the corridor; the nurse told him that Mrs Smith had not been there.

With a sudden prescience of disaster he ran upstairs, glanced in the bar, the salons, even knocked at Butterworth’s door. Then a quick round of the decks, feeling his way through the black spray and rain. A sailor stopped him at a network of ropes.

‘Orders are no one goes by, sir. A wave has gone over the wireless room.’

‘Have you seen a lady?’

‘There was a young lady here — ’ He stopped and glanced around. ‘Hello, she’s gone.’

‘She went up the stairs!’ Adrian said anxiously. ‘Up to the wireless room!’

The sailor ran up to the boat deck; stumbling and slipping, Adrian followed. As he cleared the protected sides of the companionway, a tremendous body struck the boat a staggering blow and, as she keeled over to an angle of forty-five degrees, he was thrown in a helpless roll down the drenched deck, to bring up dizzy and bruised against a stanchion.

‘Eva!’ he called. His voice was soundless in the black storm. Against the faint light of the wireless-room window he saw the sailor making his way forward.

‘Eva!’

The wind blew him like a sail up against a lifeboat. Then there was another shuddering crash, and high over his head, over the very boat, he saw a gigantic, glittering white wave, and in the split second that it balanced there he became conscious of Eva, standing beside a ventilator twenty feet away. Pushing out from the stanchion, he lunged desperately toward her, just as the wave broke with a smashing roar. For a moment the rushing water was five feet deep, sweeping with enormous force towards the side, and then a human body was washed against him, and frantically he clutched it and was

swept with it back towards the rail. He felt his body bump against it, but desperately he held on to his burden; then, as the ship rocked slowly back, the two of them, still joined by his fierce grip, were rolled out exhausted on the wet planks. For a moment he knew no more.

IV

Two days later, as the boat train moved tranquilly south toward Paris, Adrian tried to persuade his children to look out the window at the Norman countryside.

‘It’s beautiful,’ he assured them. ‘All the little farms like toys. Why, in heaven’s name, won’t you look?’

‘I like the boat better,’ said Estelle.

Her parents exchanged an infanticidal glance.

‘The boat is still rocking for me,’ Eva said with a shiver. ‘Is it for you?’

‘No. Somehow, it all seems a long way off. Even the passengers looked unfamiliar going through the customs.’

‘Most of them hadn’t appeared above ground before.’

He hesitated. ‘By the way, I cashed Butterworth’s cheque for him.’

‘You’re a fool. You’ll never see the money again.’

‘He must have needed it pretty badly or he would not have come to me.’

A pale and wan girl, passing along the corridor, recognized them and put her head through the doorway.

‘How do you feel?’

‘Awful.’

‘Me, too,’ agreed Miss D’Amido. ‘I’m vainly hoping my fiancé will recognize me at the Gare du Nord. Do you know two waves went over the wireless room?’

‘So we heard,’ Adrian answered dryly.

She passed gracefully along the corridor and out of their life.

‘The real truth is that none of it happened,’ said Adrian after a moment. ‘It was a nightmare — an incredibly awful nightmare.’

‘Then, where are my pearls?’

‘Darling, there are better pearls in Paris. I’ll take the responsibility for those pearls. My real belief is that you saved the boat.’

‘Adrian, let’s never get to know anyone else, but just stay together always — just we two.’

He tucked her arm under his and they sat close. ‘Who do you suppose those Adrian Smiths on the boat were?’ he demanded. ‘It certainly wasn’t me.’

‘Nor me.’

‘It was two other people,’ he said, nodding to himself. ‘There are so many Smiths in this world.’

MAJESTY

I

Saturday Evening Post (13 July 1929)

The extraordinary thing is not that people in a lifetime turn out worse or better than we had prophesied; particularly in America that is to be expected. The extraordinary thing is how people keep their levels, fulfill their promises, seem actually buoyed up by an inevitable destiny.

One of my conceits is that no one has ever disappointed me since I turned eighteen and could tell a real quality from a gift for sleight of hand, and even many of the merely showy people in my past seem to go on being blatantly and successfully showy to the end.

Emily Castleton was born in Harrisburg in a medium-sized house, moved to New York at sixteen to a big house, went to the Briarly School, moved to an enormous house, moved to a mansion at Tuxedo Park, moved abroad, where she did various fashionable things and was in all the papers. Back in her debutante year one of those French artists who are so dogmatic about American beauties, included her with eleven other public and semipublic celebrities as one of America's perfect types. At the time numerous men agreed with him.

She was just faintly tall, with fine, rather large features, eyes with such an expanse of blue in them that you were really aware of it whenever you looked at her, and a good deal of thick blond hair — arresting and bright. Her mother and father did not know very much about the new world they had commandeered so Emily had to learn everything for herself, and she became involved in various situations and some of the first bloom wore off. However, there was bloom to spare. There were engagements and semi-engagements, short passionate attractions, and then a big affair at twenty-two that embittered her and sent her wandering the continents looking for happiness. She became “artistic” as most wealthy unmarried girls do at that age, because artistic people seem to have some secret, some inner refuge,

some escape. But most of her friends were married now, and her life was a great disappointment to her father; so, at twenty-four, with marriage in her head if not in her heart, Emily came home.

This was a low point in her career and Emily was aware of it. She had not done well. She was one of the most popular, most beautiful girls of her generation with charm, money and a sort of fame, but her generation was moving into new fields. At the first note of condescension from a former schoolmate, now a young “matron,” she went to Newport and was won by William Brevoort Blair. Immediately she was again the incomparable Emily Castleton. The ghost of the French artist walked once more in the newspapers; the most-talked-of leisure-class event of October was her wedding day.

Splendor to mark society nuptials. . . . Harold Castleton sets out a series of five-thousand-dollar pavilions arranged like the interconnecting tents of a circus, in which the reception, the wedding supper and the ball will be held. . . . Nearly a thousand guests, many of them leaders in business, will mingle with those who dominate the social world. . . . The wedding gifts are estimated to be worth a quarter of a million dollars. . . .

An hour before the ceremony, which was to be solemnized at St. Bartholomew’s, Emily sat before a dressing-table and gazed at her face in the glass. She was a little tired of her face at that moment and the depressing thought suddenly assailed her that it would require more and more looking after in the next fifty years.

“I ought to be happy,” she said aloud, “but every thought that comes into my head is sad.”

Her cousin, Olive Mercy, sitting on the side of the bed, nodded. “All brides are sad.”

“It’s such a waste,” Emily said.

Olive frowned impatiently.

“Waste of what? Women are incomplete unless they’re married and have children.”

For a moment Emily didn't answer. Then she said slowly, "Yes, but whose children?"

For the first time in her life, Olive, who worshipped Emily, almost hated her. Not a girl in the wedding party but would have been glad of Brevoort Blair — Olive among the others.

"You're lucky," she said. "You're so lucky you don't even know it. You ought to be paddled for talking like that."

"I shall learn to love him," announced Emily facetiously. "Love will come with marriage. Now, isn't that a hell of a prospect?"

"Why so deliberately unromantic?"

"On the contrary, I'm the most romantic person I've ever met in my life. Do you know what I think when he puts his arms around me? I think that if I look up I'll see Garland Kane's eyes."

"But why, then — "

"Getting into his plane the other day I could only remember Captain Marchbanks and the little two-seater we flew over the Channel in, just breaking our hearts for each other and never saying a word about it because of his wife. I don't regret those men; I just regret the part of me that went into caring. There's only the sweepings to hand to Brevoort in a pink wastebasket. There should have been something more; I thought even when I was most carried away that I was saving something for the one. But apparently I wasn't." She broke off and then added: "And yet I wonder."

The situation was no less provoking to Olive for being comprehensible, and save for her position as a poor relation, she would have spoken her mind. Emily was well spoiled — eight years of men had assured her they were not good enough for her and she had accepted the fact as probably true.

"You're nervous." Olive tried to keep the annoyance out of her voice. "Why not lie down for an hour?"

"Yes," answered Emily absently.

Olive went out and downstairs. In the lower hall she ran into Brevoort Blair, attired in a nuptial cutaway even to the white carnation, and in a state of considerable agitation.

“Oh, excuse me,” he blurted out. “I wanted to see Emily. It’s about the rings — which ring, you know. I’ve got four rings and she never decided and I can’t just hold them out in the church and have her take her pick.”

“I happen to know she wants the plain platinum band. If you want to see her anyhow — ”

“Oh, thanks very much. I don’t want to disturb her.”

They were standing close together, and even at this moment when he was gone, definitely preëmpted, Olive couldn’t help thinking how alike she and Brevoort were. Hair, coloring, features — they might have been brother and sister — and they shared the same shy serious temperaments, the same simple straightforwardness. All this flashed through her mind in an instant, with the added thought that the blond, tempestuous Emily, with her vitality and amplitude of scale, was, after all, better for him in every way; and then, beyond this, a perfect wave of tenderness, of pure physical pity and yearning swept over her and it seemed that she must step forward only half a foot to find his arms wide to receive her.

She stepped backward instead, relinquishing him as though she still touched him with the tip of her fingers and then drew the tips away. Perhaps some vibration of her emotion fought its way into his consciousness, for he said suddenly:

“We’re going to be good friends, aren’t we? Please don’t think I’m taking Emily away. I know I can’t own her — nobody could — and I don’t want to.”

Silently, as he talked, she said good-by to him, the only man she had ever wanted in her life.

She loved the absorbed hesitancy with which he found his coat and hat and felt hopefully for the knob on the wrong side of the door.

When he had gone she went into the drawing-room, gorgeous and portentous; with its painted bacchanals and massive chandeliers and the

eighteenth-century portraits that might have been Emily's ancestors, but weren't, and by that very fact belonged the more to her. There she rested, as always, in Emily's shadow.

Through the door that led out to the small, priceless patch of grass on Sixtieth Street now inclosed by the pavilions, came her uncle, Mr. Harold Castleton. He had been sampling his own champagne.

"Olive so sweet and fair." He cried emotionally, "Olive, baby, she's done it. She was all right inside, like I knew all the time. The good ones come through, don't they — the real thoroughbreds? I began to think that the Lord and me, between us, had given her too much, that she'd never be satisfied, but now she's come down to earth just like a" — he searched unsuccessfully for a metaphor — "like a thoroughbred, and she'll find it not such a bad place after all." He came closer. "You've been crying, little Olive."

"Not much."

"It doesn't matter," he said magnanimously. "If I wasn't so happy I'd cry too."

Later, as she embarked with two other bridesmaids for the church, the solemn throbbing of a big wedding seemed to begin with the vibration of the car. At the door the organ took it up, and later it would palpitate in the cellos and base viols of the dance, to fade off finally with the sound of the car that bore bride and groom away.

The crowd was thick around the church, and ten feet out of it the air was heavy with perfume and faint clean humanity and the fabric smell of new clean clothes. Beyond the massed hats in the van of the church the two families sat in front rows on either side. The Blairs — they were assured a family resemblance by their expression of faint condescension, shared by their in-laws as well as by true Blairs — were represented by the Gardiner Blairs, senior and junior; Lady Mary Bowes Howard, née Blair; Mrs. Potter Blair; Mrs. Princess Potowki Parr Blair, née Inchbit; Miss Gloria Blair, Master Gardiner Blair III, and the kindred branches, rich and poor, of Smythe, Bickle, Diffendorfer and Hamn. Across the aisle the Castletons made a less impressive showing — Mr. Harold Castleton, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore

Castleton and children, Harold Castleton Junior, and, from Harrisburg, Mr. Carl Mercy, and two little old aunts named O'Keefe hidden off in a corner. Somewhat to their surprise the two aunts had been bundled off in a limousine and dressed from head to foot by a fashionable couturière that morning.

In the vestry, where the bridesmaids fluttered about like birds in their big floppy hats, there was a last lip rouging and adjustment of pins before Emily should arrive. They represented several stages of Emily's life — a schoolmate at Briarly, a last unmarried friend of débutante year, a travelling companion of Europe, and the girl she had visited in Newport when she met Brevoort Blair.

"They've got Wakeman," this last one said, standing by the door listening to the music. "He played for my sister, but I shall never have Wakeman."

"Why not?"

"Why, he's playing the same thing over and over — 'At Dawning.' He's played it half a dozen times."

At this moment another door opened and the solicitous head of a young man appeared around it. "Almost ready?" he demanded of the nearest bridesmaid. "Brevoort's having a quiet little fit. He just stands there wilting collar after collar — "

"Be calm," answered the young lady. "The bride is always a few minutes late."

"A few minutes!" protested the best man. "I don't call it a few minutes. They're beginning to rustle and wriggle like a circus crowd out there, and the organist has been playing the same tune for half an hour. I'm going to get him to fill in with a little jazz."

"What time is it?" Olive demanded.

"Quarter of five — ten minutes of five."

"Maybe there's been a traffic tie-up." Olive paused as Mr. Harold Castleton, followed by an anxious curate, shouldered his way in, demanding a phone.

And now there began a curious dribbling back from the front of the church, one by one, then two by two, until the vestry was crowded with relatives and confusion.

“What’s happened?”

“What on earth’s the matter?”

A chauffeur came in and reported excitedly. Harold Castleton swore and, his face blazing, fought his way roughly toward the door. There was an attempt to clear the vestry, and then, as if to balance the dribbling, a ripple of conversation commenced at the rear of the church and began to drift up toward the altar, growing louder and faster and more excited, mounting always, bringing people to their feet, rising to a sort of subdued roar. The announcement from the altar that the marriage had been postponed was scarcely heard, for by that time everyone knew that they were participating in a front-page scandal, that Brevoort Blair had been left waiting at the altar and Emily Castleton had run away.

II

There were a dozen reporters outside the Castleton house on Sixtieth Street when Olive arrived, but in her absorption she failed even to hear their questions; she wanted desperately to go and comfort a certain man whom she must not approach, and as a sort of substitute she sought her Uncle Harold. She entered through the interconnecting five-thousand-dollar pavilions, where caterers and servants still stood about in a respectful funereal half-light, waiting for something to happen, amid trays of caviar and turkey’s breast and pyramided wedding cake. Upstairs, Olive found her uncle sitting on a stool before Emily’s dressing-table. The articles of make-up spread before him, the repertoire of feminine preparation in evidence about, made his singularly inappropriate presence a symbol of the mad catastrophe.

“Oh, it’s you.” His voice was listless; he had aged in two hours. Olive put her arm about his bowed shoulder.

“I’m so terribly sorry, Uncle Harold.”

Suddenly a stream of profanity broke from him, died away, and a single large tear welled slowly from one eye.

“I want to get my massage man,” he said. “Tell McGregor to get him.” He drew a long broken sigh, like a child’s breath after crying, and Olive saw that his sleeves were covered with a dust of powder from the dressing-table, as if he had been leaning forward on it, weeping, in the reaction from his proud champagne.

“There was a telegram,” he muttered.

“It’s somewhere.”

And he added slowly,

“From now on you’re my daughter.”

“Oh, no, you mustn’t say that!”

Unrolling the telegram, she read:

I can’t make the grade I would feel like a fool either way but this will be over sooner so damn sorry for you

EMILY

When Olive had summoned the masseur and posted a servant outside her uncle’s door, she went to the library, where a confused secretary was trying to say nothing over an inquisitive and persistent telephone.

“I’m so upset, Miss Mercy,” he cried in a despairing treble. “I do declare I’m so upset I have a frightful headache. I’ve thought for half an hour I heard dance music from down below.”

Then it occurred to Olive that she, too, was becoming hysterical; in the breaks of the street traffic a melody was drifting up, distinct and clear:

“ — *Is she fair*

Is she sweet

I don't care — cause

I can't compete —

Who's the — ”

She ran quickly downstairs and through the drawing-room, the tune growing louder in her ears. At the entrance of the first pavilion she stopped in stupefaction.

To the music of a small but undoubtedly professional orchestra a dozen young couples were moving about the canvas floor. At the bar in the corner stood additional young men, and half a dozen of the caterer's assistants were busily shaking cocktails and opening champagne.

“Harold!” she called imperatively to one of the dancers. “Harold!”

A tall young man of eighteen handed his partner to another and came toward her.

“Hello, Olive. How did father take it?”

“Harold, what in the name of — ”

“Emily's crazy,” he said consolingly. “I always told you Emily was crazy. Crazy as a loon. Always was.”

“What's the idea of this?”

“This?” He looked around innocently. “Oh, these are just some fellows that came down from Cambridge with me.”

“But — *dancing!*”

“Well, nobody's dead, are they? I thought we might as well use up some of this — ”

“Tell them to go home,” said Olive.

“Why? What on earth's the harm? These fellows came all the way down from Cambridge — ”

“It simply isn't dignified.”

“But they don’t care, Olive. One fellow’s sister did the same thing — only she did it the day after instead of the day before. Lots of people do it nowadays.”

“Send the music home, Harold,” said Olive firmly, “or I’ll go to your father.”

Obviously he felt that no family could be disgraced by an episode on such a magnificent scale, but he reluctantly yielded. The abysmally depressed butler saw to the removal of the champagne, and the young people, somewhat insulted, moved nonchalantly out into the more tolerant night. Alone with the shadow — Emily’s shadow — that hung over the house, Olive sat down in the drawing-room to think. Simultaneously the butler appeared in the doorway.

“It’s Mr. Blair, Miss Olive.”

She jumped tensely to her feet.

“Who does he want to see?”

“He didn’t say. He just walked in.”

“Tell him I’m in here.”

He entered with an air of abstraction rather than depression, nodded to Olive and sat down on a piano stool. She wanted to say, “Come here. Lay your head here, poor man. Never mind.” But she wanted to cry, too, and so she said nothing.

“In three hours,” he remarked quietly, “we’ll be able to get the morning papers. There’s a shop on Fifty-ninth Street.”

“That’s foolish — ” she began.

“I am not a superficial man” — he interrupted her — “nevertheless, my chief feeling now is for the morning papers. Later there will be a politely silent gauntlet of relatives, friends and business acquaintances. About the actual affair I surprise myself by not caring at all.”

“I shouldn’t care about any of it.”

“I’m rather grateful that she did it in time.”

“Why don’t you go away?” Olive leaned forward earnestly. “Go to Europe until it all blows over.”

“Blows over.” He laughed. “Things like this don’t ever blow over. A little snicker is going to follow me around the rest of my life.” He groaned. “Uncle Hamilton started right for Park Row to make the rounds of the newspaper offices. He’s a Virginian and he was unwise enough to use the old-fashioned word ‘horsewhip’ to one editor. I can hardly wait to see *that* paper.” He broke off. “How is Mr. Castleton?”

“He’ll appreciate your coming to inquire.”

“I didn’t come about that.” He hesitated. “I came to ask you a question. I want to know if you’ll marry me in Greenwich tomorrow morning.”

For a minute Olive fell precipitately through space; she made a strange little sound; her mouth dropped ajar.

“I know you like me,” he went on quickly. “In fact, I once imagined you loved me a little bit, if you’ll excuse the presumption. Anyhow, you’re very like a girl that once did love me, so maybe you would — ” His face was pink with embarrassment, but he struggled grimly on; “anyhow, I like you enormously and whatever feeling I may have had for Emily has, I might say, flown.”

The clangor and alarm inside her was so loud that it seemed he must hear it.

“The favor you’ll be doing me will be very great,” he continued. “My heavens, I know it sounds a little crazy, but what could be crazier than the whole afternoon? You see, if you married me the papers would carry quite a different story; they’d think that Emily went off to get out of our way, and the joke would be on her after all.”

Tears of indignation came to Olive’s eyes.

“I suppose I ought to allow for your wounded egotism, but do you realize you’re making me an insulting proposition?”

His face fell.

“I’m sorry,” he said after a moment. “I guess I was an awful fool even to think of it, but a man hates to lose the whole dignity of his life for a girl’s whim. I see it would be impossible. I’m sorry.”

He got up and picked up his cane.

Now he was moving toward the door, and Olive’s heart came into her throat and a great, irresistible wave of self-preservation swept over her — swept over all her scruples and her pride. His steps sounded in the hall.

“Brevoort!” she called. She jumped to her feet and ran to the door. He turned. “Brevoort, what was the name of that paper — the one your uncle went to?”

“Why?”

“Because it’s not too late for them to change their story if I telephone now! I’ll say we were married tonight!”

III

There is a society in Paris which is merely a heterogeneous prolongation of American society. People moving in are connected by a hundred threads to the motherland, and their entertainments, eccentricities and ups and downs are an open book to friends and relatives at Southampton, Lake Forest or Back Bay. So during her previous European sojourn Emily’s whereabouts, as she followed the shifting Continental seasons, were publicly advertised; but from the day, one month after the unsolemnized wedding, when she sailed from New York, she dropped completely from sight. There was an occasional letter for her father, an occasional rumor that she was in Cairo, Constantinople or the less frequented Riviera — that was all.

Once, after a year, Mr. Castleton saw her in Paris, but, as he told Olive, the meeting only served to make him uncomfortable.

“There was something about her,” he said vaguely, “as if — well, as if she had a lot of things in the back of her mind I couldn’t reach. She was nice enough, but it was all automatic and formal. — She asked about you.”

Despite her solid background of a three-month-old baby and a beautiful apartment on Park Avenue, Olive felt her heart falter uncertainly.

“What did she say?”

“She was delighted about you and Brevoort.” And he added to himself, with a disappointment he could not conceal: “Even though you picked up the best match in New York when she threw it away.” . . .

. . . It was more than a year after this that his secretary’s voice on the telephone asked Olive if Mr. Castleton could see them that night. They found the old man walking his library in a state of agitation.

“Well, it’s come,” he declared vehemently. “People won’t stand still; nobody stands still. You go up or down in this world. Emily chose to go down. She seems to be somewhere near the bottom. Did you ever hear of a man described to me as a” — he referred to a letter in his hand — “dissipated ne’er-do-well named Petrocobesco? He calls himself Prince Gabriel Petrocobesco, apparently from — from nowhere. This letter is from Hallam, my European man, and it incloses a clipping from the *Paris Matin*. It seems that this gentleman was invited by the police to leave Paris, and among the small entourage who left with him was an American girl, Miss Castleton, ‘rumored to be the daughter of a millionaire.’ The party was escorted to the station by gendarmes.” He handed clipping and letter to Brevoort Blair with trembling fingers. “What do you make of it? Emily come to that!”

“It’s not so good,” said Brevoort, frowning.

“It’s the end. I thought her drafts were big recently, but I never suspected that she was supporting — ”

“It may be a mistake,” Olive suggested. “Perhaps it’s another Miss Castleton.”

“It’s Emily all right. Hallam looked up the matter. It’s Emily, who was afraid ever to dive into the nice clean stream of life and ends up now by swimming around in the sewers.”

Shocked, Olive had a sudden sharp taste of fate in its ultimate diversity. She with a mansion building in Westbury Hills, and Emily was mixed up with a deported adventurer in disgraceful scandal.

“I’ve got no right to ask you this,” continued Mr. Castleton. “Certainly no right to ask Brevoort anything in connection with Emily. But I’m seventy-two and Fraser says if I put off the cure another fortnight he won’t be responsible, and then Emily will be alone for good. I want you to set your trip abroad forward by two months and go over and bring her back.”

“But do you think we’d have the necessary influence?” Brevoort asked. “I’ve no reason for thinking that she’d listen to me.”

“There’s no one else. If you can’t go I’ll have to.”

“Oh, no,” said Brevoort quickly. “We’ll do what we can, won’t we, Olive?”

“Of course.”

“Bring her back — it doesn’t matter how — but bring her back. Go before a court if necessary and swear she’s crazy.”

“Very well. We’ll do what we can.”

Just ten days after this interview the Brevoort Blairs called on Mr. Castleton’s agent in Paris to glean what details were available. They were plentiful but unsatisfactory. Hallam had seen Petrocobesco in various restaurants — a fat little fellow with an attractive leer and a quenchless thirst. He was of some obscure nationality and had been moved around Europe for several years, living heaven knew how — probably on Americans, though Hallam understood that of late even the most outlying circles of international society were closed to him. About Emily, Hallam knew very little. They had been reported last week in Berlin and yesterday in Budapest. It was probably that such an undesirable as Petrocobesco was required to register with the police everywhere, and this was the line he recommended the Blairs to follow.

Forty-eight hours later, accompanied by the American vice consul, they called upon the prefect of police in Budapest. The officer talked in rapid

Hungarian to the vice consul, who presently announced the gist of his remarks — the Blairs were too late.

“Where have they gone?”

“He doesn’t know. He received orders to move them on and they left last night.”

Suddenly the prefect wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it, with a terse remark, to the vice consul.

“He says try there.”

Brevoort looked at the paper.

“Sturmdorp — where’s that?”

Another rapid conversation in Hungarian.

“Five hours from here on a local train that leaves Tuesdays and Fridays. This is Saturday.”

“We’ll get a car at the hotel,” said Brevoort.

They set out after dinner. It was a rough journey through the night across the still Hungarian plain. Olive awoke once from a worried doze to find Brevoort and the chauffeur changing a tire; then again as they stopped at a muddy little river, beyond which glowed the scattered lights of a town. Two soldiers in an unfamiliar uniform glanced into the car; they crossed a bridge and followed a narrow, warped main street to Sturmdorp’s single inn; the roosters were already crowing as they tumbled down on the mean beds.

Olive awoke with a sudden sure feeling that they had caught up with Emily; and with it came that old sense of helplessness in the face of Emily’s moods; for a moment the long past and Emily dominant in it, swept back over her, and it seemed almost a presumption to be here. But Brevoort’s singleness of purpose reassured her and confidence had returned when they went downstairs, to find a landlord who spoke fluent American, acquired in Chicago before the war.

“You are not in Hungary now,” he explained. “You have crossed the border into Czjeck-Hansa. But it is only a little country with two towns, this one and the capital. We don’t ask the visa from Americans.”

“That’s probably why they came here,” Olive thought.

“Perhaps you could give us some information about strangers?” asked Brevoort. “We’re looking for an American lady — ” He described Emily, without mentioning her probable companion; as he proceeded a curious change came over the innkeeper’s face.

“Let me see your passports,” he said; then: “And why you want to see her?”

“This lady is her cousin.”

The innkeeper hesitated momentarily.

“I think perhaps I be able to find her for you,” he said.

He called the porter; there were rapid instructions in an unintelligible patois. Then:

“Follow this boy — he take you there.”

They were conducted through filthy streets to a tumble-down house on the edge of town. A man with a hunting rifle, lounging outside, straightened up and spoke sharply to the porter, but after an exchange of phrases they passed, mounted the stairs and knocked at a door. When it opened a head peered around the corner; the porter spoke again and they went in.

They were in a large dirty room which might have belonged to a poor boarding house in any quarter of the Western world — faded walls, split upholstery, a shapeless bed and an air, despite its bareness, of being overcrowded by the ghostly furniture, indicated by dust rings and worn spots, of the last decade. In the middle of the room stood a small stout man with hammock eyes and a peering nose over a sweet, spoiled little mouth, who stared intently at them as they opened the door, and then with a single disgusted “Chut!” turned impatiently away. There were several other people in the room, but Brevoort and Olive saw only Emily, who reclined in a chaise longue with half-closed eyes.

At the sight of them the eyes opened in mild astonishment; she made a move as though to jump up, but instead held out her hand, smiled and spoke their names in a clear polite voice, less as a greeting than as a sort of explanation to the others of their presence here. At their names a grudging amenity replaced the sullenness on the little man's face.

The girls kissed.

"Tutu!" said Emily, as if calling him to attention — "Prince Petrocobesco, let me present my cousin Mrs. Blair, and Mr. Blair."

"*Plaisir*," said Petrocobesco. He and Emily exchanged a quick glance, whereupon he said, "Won't you sit down?" and immediately seated himself in the only available chair, as if they were playing *Going to Jerusalem*.

"*Plaisir*," he repeated. Olive sat down on the foot of Emily's chaise longue and Brevoort took a stool from against the wall, meanwhile noting the other occupants of the room. There was a very fierce young man in a cape who stood, with arms folded and teeth gleaming, by the door, and two ragged, bearded men, one holding a revolver, the other with his head sunk dejectedly on his chest, who sat side by side in the corner.

"You come here long?" the prince asked.

"Just arrived this morning."

For a moment Olive could not resist comparing the two, the tall fair-featured American and the unprepossessing South European, scarcely a likely candidate for Ellis Island. Then she looked at Emily — the same thick bright hair with sunshine in it, the eyes with the hint of vivid seas. Her face was faintly drawn, there were slight new lines around her mouth, but she was the Emily of old — dominant, shining, large of scale. It seemed shameful for all that beauty and personality to have arrived in a cheap boarding house at the world's end.

The man in the cape answered a knock at the door and handed a note to Petrocobesco, who read it, cried "*Chut!*" and passed it to Emily.

“You see, there are no carriages,” he said tragically in French. “The carriages were destroyed — all except one, which is in a museum. Anyhow, I prefer a horse.”

“No,” said Emily.

“Yes, yes, yes!” he cried. “Whose business is it how I go?”

“Don’t let’s have a scene, Tutu.”

“Scene!” He fumed. “Scene!”

Emily turned to Olive: “You came by automobile?”

“Yes.”

“A big de luxe car? With a back that opens?”

“Yes.”

“There,” said Emily to the prince. “We can have the arms painted on the side of that.”

“Hold on,” said Brevoort. “This car belongs to a hotel in Budapest.”

Apparently Emily didn’t hear.

“Janierka could do it,” she continued thoughtfully.

At this point there was another interruption. The dejected man in the corner suddenly sprang to his feet and made as though to run to the door, whereupon the other man raised his revolver and brought the butt down on his head. The man faltered and would have collapsed had not his assailant hauled him back to the chair, where he sat comatose, a slow stream of blood trickling over his forehead.

“Dirty townsman! Filthy, dirty spy!” shouted Petrocobesco between clenched teeth.

“Now that’s just the kind of remark you’re not to make!” said Emily sharply.

“Then why we don’t hear?” he cried. “Are we going to sit here in this pigsty forever?”

Disregarding him, Emily turned to Olive and began to question her conventionally about New York. Was prohibition any more successful? What were the new plays? Olive tried to answer and simultaneously to catch Brevoort's eye. The sooner their purpose was broached, the sooner they could get Emily away.

"Can we see you alone, Emily?" demanded Brevoort abruptly.

"Why, for the moment we haven't got another room."

Petrocobesco had engaged the man with the cape in agitated conversation, and taking advantage of this, Brevoort spoke hurriedly to Emily in a lowered voice:

"Emily, your father's getting old; he needs you at home. He wants you to give up this crazy life and come back to America. He sent us because he couldn't come himself and no one else knew you well enough — "

She laughed. "You mean, knew the enormities I was capable of."

"No," put in Olive quickly. "Cared for you as we do. I can't tell you how awful it is to see you wandering over the face of the earth."

"But we're not wandering now," explained Emily. "This is Tutu's native country."

"Where's your pride, Emily?" said Olive impatiently. "Do you know that affair in Paris was in the papers? What do you suppose people think back home?"

"That affair in Paris was an outrage." Emily's blue eyes flashed around her. "Someone will pay for that affair in Paris."

"It'll be the same everywhere. Just sinking lower and lower, dragged in the mire, and one day deserted — "

"Stop, please!" Emily's voice was cold as ice. "I don't think you quite understand — "

Emily broke off as Petrocobesco came back, threw himself into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

“I can’t stand it,” he whispered. “Would you mind taking my pulse? I think it’s bad. Have you got the thermometer in your purse?”

She held his wrist in silence for a moment.

“It’s all right, Tutu.” Her voice was soft now, almost crooning. “Sit up. Be a man.”

“All right.”

He crossed his legs as if nothing had happened and turned abruptly to Brevoort:

“How are financial conditions in New York?” he demanded.

But Brevoort was in no humor to prolong the absurd scene. The memory of a certain terrible hour three years before swept over him. He was no man to be made a fool of twice, and his jaw set as he rose to his feet.

“Emily, get your things together,” he said tersely. “We’re going home.”

Emily did not move; an expression of astonishment, melting to amusement, spread over her face. Olive put her arm around her shoulder.

“Come, dear. Let’s get out of this nightmare.” Then:

“We’re waiting,” Brevoort said.

Petrocobesco spoke suddenly to the man in the cape, who approached and seized Brevoort’s arm. Brevoort shook him off angrily, whereupon the man stepped back, his hand searching his belt.

“No!” cried Emily imperatively.

Once again there was an interruption. The door opened without a knock and two stout men in frock coats and silk hats rushed in and up to Petrocobesco. They grinned and patted him on the back chattering in a strange language, and presently he grinned and patted them on the back and they kissed all around; then, turning to Emily, Petrocobesco spoke to her in French.

“It’s all right,” he said excitedly. “They did not even argue the matter. I am to have the title of king.”

With a long sigh Emily sank back in her chair and her lips parted in a relaxed, tranquil smile.

“Very well, Tutu. We’ll get married.”

“Oh, heavens, how happy!” He clasped his hands and gazed up ecstatically at the faded ceiling. “How extremely happy!” He fell on his knees beside her and kissed her inside arm.

“What’s all this about kings?” Brevoort demanded. “Is this — is he a king?”

“He’s a king. Aren’t you, Tutu?” Emily’s hand gently stroked his oiled hair and Olive saw that her eyes were unusually bright.

“I am your husband,” cried Tutu weepily. “The most happy man alive.”

“His uncle was Prince of Czjeck-Hansa before the war,” explained Emily, her voice singing her content. “Since then there’s been a republic, but the peasant party wanted a change and Tutu was next in line. Only I wouldn’t marry him unless he insisted on being king instead of prince.”

Brevoort passed his hand over his wet forehead.

“Do you mean that this is actually a fact?”

Emily nodded. “The assembly voted it this morning. And if you’ll lend us this de luxe limousine of yours we’ll make our official entrance into the capital this afternoon.”

IV

Over two years later Mr. and Mrs. Brevoort Blair and their two children stood upon a balcony of the Carlton Hotel in London, a situation recommended by the management for watching royal processions pass. This one began with a fanfare of trumpets down by the Strand, and presently a scarlet line of horse guards came into sight.

“But, mummy,” the little boy demanded, “is Aunt Emily Queen of England?”

“No, dear; she’s queen of a little tiny country, but when she visits here she rides in the queen’s carriage.”

“Oh.”

“Thanks to the magnesium deposits,” said Brevoort dryly.

“Was she a princess before she got to be queen?” the little girl asked.

“No, dear; she was an American girl and then she got to be a queen.”

“Why?”

“Because nothing else was good enough for her,” said her father. “Just think, one time she could have married me. Which would you rather do, baby — marry me or be a queen?”

The little girl hesitated.

“Marry you,” she said politely, but without conviction.

“That’ll do, Brevoort,” said her mother. “Here they come.”

“I see them!” the little boy cried.

The cavalcade swept down the crowded street. There were more horse guards, a company of dragoons, outriders, then Olive found herself holding her breath and squeezing the balcony rail as, between a double line of beefeaters, a pair of great gilt-and-crimson coaches rolled past. In the first were the royal sovereigns, their uniforms gleaming with ribbons, crosses and stars, and in the second their two royal consorts, one old, the other young. There was about the scene the glamour shed always by the old empire of half the world, by her ships and ceremonies, her pomps and symbols; and the crowd felt it, and a slow murmur rolled along before the carriage, rising to a strong steady cheer. The two ladies bowed to left and right, and though few knew who the second queen was, she was cheered too. In a moment the gorgeous panoply had rolled below the balcony and on out of sight.

When Olive turned away from the window there were tears in her eyes.

“I wonder if she likes it, Brevoort. I wonder if she’s really happy with that terrible little man.”

“Well, she got what she wanted, didn’t she? And that’s something.”

Olive drew a long breath.

“Oh, she’s so wonderful,” she cried — “so wonderful! She could always move me like that, even when I was angriest at her.”

“It’s all so silly,” Brevoort said.

“I suppose so,” answered Olive’s lips. But her heart, winged with helpless adoration, was following her cousin through the palace gates half a mile away.

AT YOUR AGE

I

Saturday Evening Post (17 August 1929)

Tom Squires came into the drug store to buy a toothbrush, a can of talcum, a gargle, Castile soap, Epsom salts and a box of cigars. Having lived alone for many years, he was methodical, and while waiting to be served he held the list in his hand. It was Christmas week and Minneapolis was under two feet of exhilarating, constantly refreshed snow; with his cane Tom knocked two clean crusts of it from his overshoes. Then, looking up, he saw the blonde girl.

She was a rare blonde, even in that Promised Land of Scandinavians, where pretty blondes are not rare. There was warm color in her cheeks, lips and pink little hands that folded powders into papers; her hair, in long braids twisted about her head, was shining and alive. She seemed to Tom suddenly the cleanest person he knew of, and he caught his breath as he stepped forward and looked into her gray eyes.

“A can of talcum.”

“What kind?”

“Any kind. . . . That’s fine.”

She looked back at him apparently without self-consciousness, and, as the list melted away, his heart raced with it wildly.

“I am not old,” he wanted to say. “At fifty I’m younger than most men of forty. Don’t I interest you at all?”

But she only said “What kind of gargle?”

And he answered, “What can you recommend? . . . That’s fine.”

Almost painfully he took his eyes from her, went out and got into his coupé.

“If that young idiot only knew what an old imbecile like me could do for her,” he thought humorously — “what worlds I could open out to her!”

As he drove away into the winter twilight he followed this train of thought to a totally unprecedented conclusion. Perhaps the time of day was the responsible stimulant, for the shop windows glowing into the cold, the tinkling bells of a delivery sleigh, the white gloss left by shovels on the sidewalks, the enormous distance of the stars, brought back the feel of other nights thirty years ago. For an instant the girls he had known then slipped like phantoms out of their dull matronly selves of today and fluttered past him with frosty, seductive laughter, until a pleasant shiver crawled up his spine.

“Youth! Youth! Youth!” he apostrophized with conscious lack of originality, and, as a somewhat ruthless and domineering man of no morals whatsoever, he considered going back to the drug store to seek the blonde girl’s address. It was not his sort of thing, so the half-formed intention passed; the idea remained.

“Youth, by heaven — youth!” he repeated under his breath. “I want it near me, all around me, just once more before I’m too old to care.”

He was tall, lean and handsome, with the ruddy, bronzed face of a sportsman and a just faintly graying mustache. Once he had been among the city’s best beaus, organizer of cotillions and charity balls, popular with men and women, and with several generations of them. After the war he had suddenly felt poor, gone into business, and in ten years accumulated nearly a million dollars. Tom Squires was not introspective, but he perceived now that the wheel of his life had revolved again, bringing up forgotten, yet familiar, dreams and yearnings. Entering his house, he turned suddenly to a pile of disregarded invitations to see whether or not he had been bidden to a dance tonight.

Throughout his dinner, which he ate alone at the Downtown Club, his eyes were half closed and on his face was a faint smile. He was practicing so that he would be able to laugh at himself painlessly, if necessary.

“I don’t even know what they talk about,” he admitted. “They pet — prominent broker goes to petting party with débutante. What is a petting party? Do they serve refreshments? Will I have to learn to play a saxophone?”

These matters, lately as remote as China in a news reel, came alive to him. They were serious questions. At ten o’clock he walked up the steps of the College Club to a private dance with the same sense of entering a new world as when he had gone into a training camp back in ‘17. He spoke to a hostess of his generation and to her daughter, overwhelmingly of another, and sat down in a corner to acclimate himself.

He was not alone long. A silly young man named Leland Jaques, who lived across the street from Tom, remarked him kindly and came over to brighten his life. He was such an exceedingly fatuous young man that, for a moment, Tom was annoyed, but he perceived craftily that he might be of service.

“Hello, Mr. Squires. How are you, sir?”

“Fine, thanks, Leland. Quite a dance.”

As one man of the world with another, Mr. Jaques sat, or lay, down on the couch and lit — or so it seemed to Tom — three or four cigarettes at once.

“You should of been here last night, Mr. Squires. Oh, boy, that was a party and a half! The Caulkins. Hap-past five!”

“Who’s that girl who changes partners every minute?” Tom asked. . . . “No, the one in white passing the door.”

“That’s Annie Lorry.”

“Arthur Lorry’s daughter?”

“Yes.”

“She seems popular.”

“About the most popular girl in town — anyway, at a dance.”

“Not popular except at dances?”

“Oh, sure, but she hangs around with Randy Cambell all the time.”

“What Cambell?”

“D. B.”

There were new names in town in the last decade.

“It’s a boy-and-girl affair.” Pleased with this phrase, Jaques tried to repeat it: “One of those boy-and-girls affair — boys-and-girl affairs — ” He gave it up and lit several more cigarettes, crushing out the first series on Tom’s lap.

“Does she drink?”

“Not especially. At least I never saw her passed out. . . . That’s Randy Cambell just cut in on her now.”

They were a nice couple. Her beauty sparkled bright against his strong, tall form, and they floated hoveringly, delicately, like two people in a nice, amusing dream. They came near and Tom admired the faint dust of powder over her freshness, the guarded sweetness of her smile, the fragility of her body calculated by Nature to a millimeter to suggest a bud, yet guarantee a flower. Her innocent, passionate eyes were brown, perhaps; but almost violet in the silver light.

“Is she out this year?”

“Who?”

“Miss Lorry.”

“Yes.”

Although the girl’s loveliness interested Tom, he was unable to picture himself as one of the attentive, grateful queue that pursued her around the room. Better meet her when the holidays were over and most of these young men were back in college “where they belonged.” Tom Squires was old enough to wait.

He waited a fortnight while the city sank into the endless northern midwinter, where gray skies were friendlier than metallic blue skies, and dusk, whose lights were a reassuring glimpse into the continuity of human

cheer, was warmer than the afternoons of bloodless sunshine. The coat of snow lost its press and became soiled and shabby, and ruts froze in the street; some of the big houses on Crest Avenue began to close as their occupants went South. In those cold days Tom asked Annie and her parents to go as his guests to the last Bachelors' Ball.

The Lorrays were an old family in Minneapolis, grown a little harassed and poor since the war. Mrs. Lorry, a contemporary of Tom's, was not surprised that he should send mother and daughter orchids and dine them luxuriously in his apartment on fresh caviar, quail and champagne. Annie saw him only dimly — he lacked vividness, as the old do for the young — but she perceived his interest in her and performed for him the traditional ritual of young beauty — smiles, polite, wide-eyed attention, a profile held obligingly in this light or in that. At the ball he danced with her twice, and, though she was teased about it, she was flattered that such a man of the world — he had become that instead of a mere old man — had singled her out. She accepted his invitation to the symphony the following week, with the idea that it would be uncouth to refuse.

There were several "nice invitations" like that. Sitting beside him, she dozed in the warm shadow of Brahms and thought of Randy Cambell and other romantic nebulosities who might appear tomorrow. Feeling casually mellow one afternoon, she deliberately provoked Tom to kiss her on the way home, but she wanted to laugh when he took her hands and told her fervently he was falling in love.

"But how could you?" she protested. "Really, you musn't say such crazy things. I won't go out with you any more, and then you'll be sorry."

A few days later her mother spoke to her as Tom waited outside in his car:

"Who's that, Annie?"

"Mr. Squires."

"Shut the door a minute. You're seeing him quite a bit."

"Why not?"

"Well, dear, he's fifty years old."

“But, mother, there’s hardly anybody else in town.”

“But you musn’t get any silly ideas about him.”

“Don’t worry. Actually, he bores me to extinction most of the time.” She came to a sudden decision: “I’m not going to see him any more. I just couldn’t get out of going with him this afternoon.”

And that night, as she stood by her door in the circle of Randy Cambell’s arm, Tom and his single kiss had no existence for her.

“Oh, I do love you so,” Randy whispered. “Kiss me once more.”

Their cool cheeks and warm lips met in the crisp darkness, and, watching the icy moon over his shoulder, Annie knew that she was his surely and, pulling his face down, kissed him again, trembling with emotion.

“When’ll you marry me then?” he whispered.

“When can you — we afford it?”

“Couldn’t you announce our engagement? If you knew the misery of having you out with somebody else and then making love to you.”

“Oh, Randy, you ask so much.”

“It’s so awful to say good night. Can’t I come in for a minute?”

“Yes.”

Sitting close together in a trance before the flickering, lessening fire, they were oblivious that their common fate was being coolly weighed by a man of fifty who lay in a hot bath some blocks away.

II

Tom Squires had guessed from Annie’s extremely kind and detached manner of the afternoon that he had failed to interest her. He had promised himself that in such an eventuality he would drop the matter, but now he found himself in no such humor. He did not want to marry her; he simply wanted to see her and be with her a little; and up to the moment of her

sweetly casual, half passionate, yet wholly unemotional kiss, giving her up would have been easy, for he was past the romantic age; but since that kiss the thought of her made his heart move up a few inches in his chest and beat there steady and fast.

“But this is the time to get out,” he said to himself. “My age; no possible right to force myself into her life.”

He rubbed himself dry, brushed his hair before the mirror, and, as he laid down the comb, said decisively: “That is that.” And after reading for an hour he turned out the lamp with a snap and repeated aloud: “That is that.”

In other words, that was not that at all, and the click of material things did not finish off Annie Lorry as a business decision might be settled by the tap of a pencil on the table.

“I’m going to carry this matter a little further,” he said to himself about half-past four; on that acknowledgment he turned over and found sleep.

In the morning she had receded somewhat, but by four o’clock in the afternoon she was all around him — the phone was for calling her, a woman’s footfalls passing his office were her footfalls, the snow outside the window was blowing, perhaps, against her rosy face.

“There is always the little plan I thought of last night,” he said to himself. “In ten years I’ll be sixty, and then no youth, no beauty for me ever any more.”

In a sort of panic he took a sheet of note paper and composed a carefully phrased letter to Annie’s mother, asking permission to pay court to her daughter. He took it himself into the hall, but before the letter slide he tore it up and dropped the pieces in a cuspidor.

“I couldn’t do such an underhand trick,” he told himself, “at my age.” But this self-congratulation was premature, for he rewrote the letter and mailed it before he left his office that night.

Next day the reply he had counted on arrived — he could have guessed its very words in advance. It was a curt and indignant refusal.

It ended:

I think it best that you and my daughter meet no more.

Very Sincerely Yours,

MABEL TOLLMAN LORRY.

“And now,” Tom thought coolly, “we’ll see what the girl says to that.” He wrote a note to Annie. Her mother’s letter had surprised him, it said, but perhaps it was best that they should meet no more, in view of her mother’s attitude.

By return post came Annie’s defiant answer to her mother’s fiat: “This isn’t the Dark Ages. I’ll see you whenever I like.” She named a rendezvous for the following afternoon. Her mother’s short-sightedness brought about what he had failed to achieve directly; for where Annie had been on the point of dropping him, she was now determined to do nothing of the sort. And the secrecy engendered by disapproval at home simply contributed the missing excitement. As February hardened into deep, solemn, interminable winter, she met him frequently and on a new basis. Sometimes they drove over to St. Paul to see a picture or to have dinner; sometimes they parked far out on a boulevard in his coupé, while the bitter sleet glazed the windshield to opacity and furred his lamps with ermine. Often he brought along something special to drink — enough to make her gay, but, carefully, never more; for mingled with his other emotions about her was something paternally concerned.

Laying his cards on the table, he told her that it was her mother who had unwittingly pushed her toward him, but Annie only laughed at his duplicity.

She was having a better time with him than with anyone else she had ever known. In place of the selfish exigency of a younger man, he showed her a never-failing consideration. What if his eyes were tired, his cheeks a little leathery and veined, if his will was masculine and strong. Moreover, his experience was a window looking out upon a wider, richer world; and with Randy Cambell next day she would feel less taken care of, less valued, less rare.

It was Tom now who was vaguely discontented. He had what he wanted — her youth at his side — and he felt that anything further would be a mistake.

His liberty was precious to him and he could offer her only a dozen years before he would be old, but she had become something precious to him and he perceived that drifting wasn't fair. Then one day late in February the matter was decided out of hand.

They had ridden home from St. Paul and dropped into the College Club for tea, breaking together through the drifts that masked the walk and rimmed the door. It was a revolving door; a young man came around in it, and stepping into his space, they smelt onions and whisky. The door revolved again after them, and he was back within, facing them. It was Randy Cambell; his face was flushed, his eyes dull and hard.

"Hello, beautiful," he said, approaching Annie.

"Don't come so close," she protested lightly. "You smell of onions."

"You're particular all of a sudden."

"Always. I'm always particular." Annie made a slight movement back toward Tom.

"Not always," said Randy unpleasantly. Then, with increased emphasis and a fractional glance at Tom: "Not always." With his remark he seemed to join the hostile world outside. "And I'll just give you a tip," he continued: "Your mother's inside."

The jealous ill-temper of another generation reached Tom only faintly, like the protest of a child, but at this impertinent warning he bristled with annoyance.

"Come on, Annie," he said brusquely. "We'll go in."

With her glance uneasily averted from Randy, Annie followed Tom into the big room.

It was sparsely populated; three middle-aged women sat near the fire. Momentarily Annie drew back, then she walked toward them.

"Hello, mother . . . Mrs. Trumble . . . Aunt Caroline."

The two latter responded; Mrs. Trumble even nodded faintly at Tom. But Annie's mother got to her feet without a word, her eyes frozen, her mouth drawn. For a moment she stood staring at her daughter; then she turned abruptly and left the room.

Tom and Annie found a table across the room.

"Wasn't she terrible?" said Annie, breathing aloud. He didn't answer.

"For three days she hasn't spoken to me." Suddenly she broke out: "Oh, people can be so small! I was going to sing the leading part in the Junior League show, and yesterday Cousin Mary Betts, the president, came to me and said I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because a representative Junior League girl mustn't defy her mother. As if I were a naughty child!"

Tom stared on at a row of cups on the mantelpiece — two or three of them bore his name. "Perhaps she was right," he said suddenly. "When I begin to do harm to you it's time to stop."

"What do you mean?"

At her shocked voice his heart poured a warm liquid forth into his body, but he answered quietly: "You remember I told you I was going South? Well, I'm going tomorrow."

There was an argument, but he had made up his mind. At the station next evening she wept and clung to him.

"Thank you for the happiest month I've had in years," he said.

"But you'll come back, Tom."

"I'll be two months in Mexico; then I'm going East for a few weeks."

He tried to sound fortunate, but the frozen city he was leaving seemed to be in blossom. Her frozen breath was a flower on the air, and his heart sank as he realized that some young man was waiting outside to take her home in a car hung with blooms.

“Good-by, Annie. Good-by, sweet!”

Two days later he spent the morning in Houston with Hal Meigs, a classmate at Yale.

“You’re in luck for such an old fella,” said Meigs at luncheon, “because I’m going to introduce you to the cutest little traveling companion you ever saw, who’s going all the way to Mexico City.”

The lady in question was frankly pleased to learn at the station that she was not returning alone. She and Tom dined together on the train and later played rummy for an hour; but when, at ten o’clock, standing in the door of the stateroom, she turned back to him suddenly with a certain look, frank and unmistakable, and stood there holding that look for a long moment, Tom Squires was suddenly in the grip of an emotion that was not the one in question. He wanted desperately to see Annie, call her for a second on the phone, and then fall asleep, knowing she was young and pure as a star, and safe in bed.

“Good night,” he said, trying to keep any repulsion out of his voice.

“Oh! Good night.”

Arriving in El Paso next day, he drove over the border to Juarez. It was bright and hot, and after leaving his bags at the station he went into a bar for an iced drink; as he sipped it a girl’s voice addressed him thickly from the table behind:

“You’n American?”

He had noticed her slumped forward on her elbows as he came in; now, turning, he faced a young girl of about seventeen, obviously drunk, yet with gentility in her unsteady, sprawling voice. The American bartender leaned confidentially forward.

“I don’t know what to do about her,” he said. “She come in about three o’clock with two young fellows — one of them her sweetie. They had a fight and the men went off, and this one’s been here ever since.”

A spasm of distaste passed over Tom — the rules of his generation were outraged and defied. That an American girl should be drunk and deserted in a tough foreign town — that such things happened, might happen to Annie. He looked at his watch, hesitated.

“Has she got a bill?” he asked.

“She owes for five gins. But suppose her boy friends come back?”

“Tell them she’s at the Roosevelt Hotel in El Paso.”

Approaching, he put his hand on her shoulder. She looked up.

“You look like Santa Claus,” she said vaguely. “You couldn’t possibly be Santa Claus, could you?”

“I’m going to take you to El Paso.”

“Well,” she considered, “you look perfectly safe to me.”

She was so young — a drenched little rose. He could have wept for her wretched unconsciousness of the old facts, the old penalties of life. Jousting at nothing in an empty tilt yard with a shaking spear. The taxi moved too slowly through the suddenly poisonous night.

Having explained things to a reluctant night clerk, he went out and found a telegraph office.

“Have given up Mexican trip,” he wired. “Leaving here tonight. Please meet train in the St. Paul station at three o’clock and ride with me to Minneapolis, as I can’t spare you for another minute. All my love.”

He could at least keep an eye on her, advise her, see what she did with her life. That silly mother of hers!

On the train, as the baked tropical lands and green fields fell away and the North swept near again with patches of snow, then fields of it, fierce winds in the vestibule and bleak, hibernating farms, he paced the corridors with intolerable restlessness. When they drew into the St. Paul station he swung himself off like a young man and searched the platform eagerly, but his eyes failed to find her. He had counted on those few minutes between the cities;

they had become a symbol of her fidelity to their friendship, and as the train started again he searched it desperately from smoker to observation car. But he could not find her, and now he knew that he was mad for her; at the thought that she had taken his advice and plunged into affairs with other men, he grew weak with fear.

Drawing into Minneapolis, his hands fumbled so that he must call the porter to fasten his baggage. Then there was an interminable wait in the corridor while the baggage was taken off and he was pressed up against a girl in a squirrel-trimmed coat.

“Tom!”

“Well, I’ll be — ”

Her arms went up around his neck. “But, Tom,” she cried, “I’ve been right here in this car since St. Paul!”

His cane fell in the corridor, he drew her very tenderly close and their lips met like starved hearts.

III

The new intimacy of their definite engagement brought Tom a feeling of young happiness. He awoke on winter mornings with the sense of undeserved joy hovering in the room; meeting young men, he found himself matching the vigor of his mind and body against theirs. Suddenly his life had a purpose and a background; he felt rounded and complete. On gray March afternoons when she wandered familiarly in his apartment the warm sureties of his youth flooded back — ecstasy and poignancy, the mortal and the eternal posed in their immemorially tragic juxtaposition and, a little astounded, he found himself relishing the very terminology of young romance. But he was more thoughtful than a younger lover; and to Annie he seemed to “know everything,” to stand holding open the gates for her passage into the truly golden world.

“We’ll go to Europe first,” he said.

“Oh, we’ll go there a lot, won’t we? Let’s spend our winters in Italy and the spring in Paris.”

“But, little Annie, there’s business.”

“Well, we’ll stay away as much as we can anyhow. I hate Minneapolis.”

“Oh, no.” He was a little shocked. “Minneapolis is all right.”

“When you’re here it’s all right.”

Mrs. Lorry yielded at length to the inevitable. With ill grace she acknowledged the engagement, asking only that the marriage should not take place until fall.

“Such a long time,” Annie sighed.

“After all, I’m your mother. It’s so little to ask.”

It was a long winter, even in a land of long winters. March was full of billowy drifts, and when it seemed at last as though the cold must be defeated, there was a series of blizzards, desperate as last stands. The people waited; their first energy to resist was spent, and man, like weather, simply hung on. There was less to do now and the general restlessness was expressed by surliness in daily contacts. Then, early in April, with a long sigh the ice cracked, the snow ran into the ground and the green, eager spring broke up through.

One day, riding along a slushy road in a fresh, damp breeze with a little starved, smothered grass in it, Annie began to cry. Sometimes she cried for nothing, but this time Tom suddenly stopped the car and put his arm around her.

“Why do you cry like that? Are you unhappy?”

“Oh, no, no!” she protested.

“But you cried yesterday the same way. And you wouldn’t tell me why. You must always tell me.”

“Nothing, except the spring. It smells so good, and it always has so many sad thoughts and memories in it.”

“It’s our spring, my sweetheart,” he said. “Annie, don’t let’s wait. Let’s be married in June.”

“I promised mother, but if you like we can announce our engagement in June.”

The spring came fast now. The sidewalks were damp, then dry, and the children roller-skated on them and boys played baseball in the soft, vacant lots. Tom got up elaborate picnics of Annie’s contemporaries and encouraged her to play golf and tennis with them. Abruptly, with a final, triumphant lurch of Nature, it was full summer.

On a lovely May evening Tom came up the Lorrays’ walk and sat down beside Annie’s mother on the porch.

“It’s so pleasant,” he said, “I thought Annie and I would walk instead of driving this evening. I want to show her the funny old house I was born in.”

“On Chambers Street, wasn’t it? Annie’ll be home in a few minutes. She went riding with some young people after dinner.”

“Yes, on Chambers Street.”

He looked at his watch presently, hoping Annie would come while it was still light enough to see. Quarter of nine. He frowned. She had kept him waiting the night before, kept him waiting an hour yesterday afternoon.

“If I was twenty-one,” he said to himself, “I’d make scenes and we’d both be miserable.”

He and Mrs. Lorry talked; the warmth of the night precipitated the vague evening lassitude of the fifties and softened them both, and for the first time since his attentions to Annie began, there was no unfriendliness between them. By and by long silences fell, broken only by the scratch of a match or the creak of her swinging settee. When Mr. Lorry came home Tom threw away his second cigar in surprise and looked at his watch; it was after ten.

“Annie’s late,” Mrs. Lorry said.

“I hope there’s nothing wrong,” said Tom anxiously. “Who is she with?”

“There were four when they started out. Randy Cambell and another couple — I didn’t notice who. They were only going for a soda.”

“I hope there hasn’t been any trouble. Perhaps — Do you think I ought to go and see?”

“Ten isn’t late nowadays. You’ll find — ” Remembering that Tom Squires was marrying Annie, not adopting her, she kept herself from adding: “You’ll get used to it.”

Her husband excused himself and went up to bed, and the conversation became more forced and desultory. When the church clock over the way struck eleven they both broke off and listened to the beats. Twenty minutes later just as Tom impatiently crushed out his last cigar, an automobile drifted down the street and came to rest in front of the door.

For a minute no one moved on the porch or in the auto. Then Annie, with a hat in her hand, got out and came quickly up the walk. Defying the tranquil night, the car snorted away.

“Oh, hello!” she cried. “I’m so sorry! What time is it? Am I terribly late?”

Tom didn’t answer. The street lamp threw wine color upon her face and expressed with a shadow the heightened flush of her cheek. Her dress was crushed, her hair was in brief, expressive disarray. But it was the strange little break in her voice that made him afraid to speak, made him turn his eyes aside.

“What happened?” Mrs. Lorry asked casually.

“Oh, a blow-out and something wrong with the engine — and we lost our way. Is it terribly late?”

And then, as she stood before them, her hat still in her hand, her breast rising and falling a little, her eyes wide and bright, Tom realized with a shock that he and her mother were people of the same age looking at a person of another. Try as he might, he could not separate himself from Mrs. Lorry. When she excused herself he suppressed a frantic tendency to say, “But why should you go now? After sitting here all evening?”

They were alone. Annie came up to him and pressed his hand. He had never been so conscious of her beauty; her damp hands were touched with dew.

“You were out with young Cambell,” he said.

“Yes. Oh, don’t be mad. I feel — I feel so upset tonight.”

“Upset?”

She sat down, whimpering a little.

“I couldn’t help it. Please don’t be mad. He wanted so for me to take a ride with him and it was such a wonderful night, so I went just for an hour. And we began talking and I didn’t realize the time. I felt so sorry for him.”

“How do you think I felt?” He scorned himself, but it was said now.

“Don’t, Tom. I told you I was terribly upset. I want to go to bed.”

“I understand. Good night, Annie.”

“Oh, please don’t act that way, Tom. Can’t you understand?”

But he could, and that was just the trouble. With the courteous bow of another generation, he walked down the steps and off into the obliterating moonlight. In a moment he was just a shadow passing the street lamps and then a faint footfall up the street.

IV

All through that summer he often walked abroad in the evenings. He liked to stand for a minute in front of the house where he was born, and then in front of another house where he had been a little boy. On his customary routes there were other sharp landmarks of the 90’s, converted habitats of gayeties that no longer existed — the shell of Jansen’s Livery Stables and the old Nushka Rink, where every winter his father had curled on the well-kept ice.

“And it’s a darn pity,” he would mutter. “A darn pity.”

He had a tendency, too, to walk past the lights of a certain drug store, because it seemed to him that it had contained the seed of another and nearer branch of the past. Once he went in, and inquiring casually about the blonde clerk, found that she had married and departed several months before. He obtained her name and on an impulse sent her a wedding present “from a dumb admirer,” for he felt he owed something to her for his happiness and pain. He had lost the battle against youth and spring, and with his grief paid the penalty for age’s unforgivable sin — refusing to die. But he could not have walked down wasted into the darkness without being used up a little; what he had wanted, after all, was only to break his strong old heart. Conflict itself has a value beyond victory and defeat, and those three months — he had them forever.

THE SWIMMERS

I

Saturday Evening Post (19 October 1929)

In the Place Benoît, a suspended mass of gasoline exhaust cooked slowly by the June sun. It was a terrible thing, for, unlike pure heat, it held no promise of rural escape, but suggested only roads choked with the same foul asthma. In the offices of The Promissory Trust Company, Paris Branch, facing the square, an American man of thirty-five inhaled it, and it became the odor of the thing he must presently do. A black horror suddenly descended upon him, and he went up to the washroom, where he stood, trembling a little, just inside the door.

Through the washroom window his eyes fell upon a sign — 1000 Chemises. The shirts in question filled the shop window, piled, cravated and stuffed, or else draped with shoddy grace on the show-case floor. 1000 Chemises — Count them! To the left he read Papeterie, Pâtisserie, Solde, Réclame, and Constance Talmadge in Déjeuner de Soleil; and his eye, escaping to the right, met yet more somber announcements: Vêtements Ecclésiastiques, Déclaration de Décès, and Pompes Funèbres. Life and Death.

Henry Marston's trembling became a shaking; it would be pleasant if this were the end and nothing more need be done, he thought, and with a certain hope he sat down on a stool. But it is seldom really the end, and after a while, as he became too exhausted to care, the shaking stopped and he was better. Going downstairs, looking as alert and self-possessed as any other officer of the bank, he spoke to two clients he knew, and set his face grimly toward noon.

"Well, Henry Clay Marston!" A handsome old man shook hands with him and took the chair beside his desk.

"Henry, I want to see you in regard to what we talked about the other night. How about lunch? In that green little place with all the trees."

“Not lunch, Judge Waterbury; I’ve got an engagement.”

“I’ll talk now, then; because I’m leaving this afternoon. What do these plutocrats give you for looking important around here?”

Henry Marston knew what was coming.

“Ten thousand and certain expense money,” he answered.

“How would you like to come back to Richmond at about double that? You’ve been over here eight years and you don’t know the opportunities you’re missing. Why both my boys — ”

Henry listened appreciatively, but this morning he couldn’t concentrate on the matter. He spoke vaguely about being able to live more comfortably in Paris and restrained himself from stating his frank opinion upon existence at home.

Judge Waterbury beckoned to a tall, pale man who stood at the mail desk.

“This is Mr. Wiese,” he said. “Mr. Wiese’s from downstate; he’s a halfway partner of mine.”

“Glad to meet you, suh.” Mr. Wiese’s voice was rather too deliberately Southern. “Understand the judge is makin’ you a proposition.”

“Yes,” Henry answered briefly. He recognized and detested the type — the prosperous sweater, presumably evolved from a cross between carpetbagger and poor white. When Wiese moved away, the judge said almost apologetically:

“He’s one of the richest men in the South, Henry.” Then, after a pause: “Come home, boy.”

“I’ll think it over, judge.” For a moment the gray and ruddy head seemed so kind; then it faded back into something one-dimensional, machine-finished, blandly and bleakly un-European. Henry Marston respected that open kindness — in the bank he touched it with daily appreciation, as a curator in a museum might touch a precious object removed in time and space; but there was no help in it for him; the questions which Henry Marston’s life propounded could be answered only in France. His seven generations of

Virginia ancestors were definitely behind him every day at noon when he turned home.

Home was a fine high-ceiling apartment hewn from the palace of a Renaissance cardinal in the Rue Monsieur — the sort of thing Henry could not have afforded in America. Chouquette, with something more than the rigid traditionalism of a French bourgeois taste, had made it beautiful, and moved through gracefully with their children. She was a frail Latin blonde with fine large features and vividly sad French eyes that had first fascinated Henry in a Grenoble *pension* in 1918. The two boys took their looks from Henry, voted the handsomest man at the University of Virginia a few years before the war.

Climbing the two broad flights of stairs, Henry stood panting a moment in the outside hall. It was quiet and cool here, and yet it was vaguely like the terrible thing that was going to happen. He heard a clock inside his apartment strike one, and inserted his key in the door.

The maid who had been in Chouquette's family for thirty years stood before him, her mouth open in the utterance of a truncated sigh.

"Bonjour, Louise."

"Monsieur!" He threw his hat on a chair. "But, monsieur — but I thought monsieur said on the phone he was going to Tours for the children!"

"I changed my mind, Louise."

He had taken a step forward, his last doubt melting away at the constricted terror in the woman's face.

"Is madame home?"

Simultaneously he perceived a man's hat and stick on the hall table and for the first time in his life he heard silence — a loud, singing silence, oppressive as heavy guns or thunder. Then, as the endless moment was broken by the maid's terrified little cry, he pushed through the portières into the next room.

An hour later Doctor Derocco, *de la Faculté de Médecine*, rang the apartment bell. Chouquette Marston, her face a little drawn and rigid, answered the door. For a moment they went through French forms; then:

“My husband has been feeling unwell for some weeks,” she said concisely. “Nevertheless, he did not complain in a way to make me uneasy. He has suddenly collapsed; he cannot articulate or move his limbs. All this, I must say, might have been precipitated by a certain indiscretion of mine — in all events, there was a violent scene, a discussion, and sometimes when he is agitated, my husband cannot comprehend well in French.”

“I will see him,” said the doctor; thinking: “Some things are comprehended instantly in all languages.”

During the next four weeks several people listened to strange speeches about one thousand chemises, and heard how all the population of Paris was becoming etherized by cheap gasoline — there was a consulting psychiatrist, not inclined to believe in any underlying mental trouble; there was a nurse from the American Hospital, and there was Chouquette, frightened, defiant and, after her fashion, deeply sorry. A month later, when Henry awoke to his familiar room, lit with a dimmed lamp, he found her sitting beside his bed and reached out for her hand.

“I still love you,” he said — “that’s the odd thing.”

“Sleep, male cabbage.”

“At all costs,” he continued with a certain feeble irony, “you can count on me to adopt the Continental attitude.”

“Please! You tear at my heart.”

When he was sitting up in bed they were ostensibly close together again — closer than they had been for months.

“Now you’re going to have another holiday,” said Henry to the two boys, back from the country. “Papa has got to go to the seashore and get really well.”

“Will we swim?”

“And get drowned, my darlings?” Choupette cried. “But fancy, at your age. Not at all!”

So, at St. Jean de Luz they sat on the shore instead, and watched the English and Americans and a few hardy French pioneers of *le sport voyage* between raft and diving tower, motorboat and sand. There were passing ships, and bright islands to look at, and mountains reaching into cold zones, and red and yellow villas, called Fleur des Bois, Mon Nid, or Sans-Souci; and farther back, tired French villages of baked cement and gray stone.

Choupette sat at Henry’s side, holding a parasol to shelter her peach-bloom skin from the sun.

“Look!” she would say, at the sight of tanned American girls. “Is that lovely? Skin that will be leather at thirty — a sort of brown veil to hide all blemishes, so that everyone will look alike. And women of a hundred kilos in such bathing suits! Weren’t clothes intended to hide Nature’s mistakes?”

Henry Clay Marston was a Virginian of the kind who are prouder of being Virginians than of being Americans. That mighty word printed across a continent was less to him than the memory of his grandfather, who freed his slaves in ‘58, fought from Manassas to Appomattox, knew Huxley and Spencer as light reading, and believed in caste only when it expressed the best of race.

To Choupette all this was vague. Her more specific criticisms of his compatriots were directed against the women.

“How would you place them?” she exclaimed. “Great ladies, bourgeois, adventuresses — they are all the same. Look! Where would I be if I tried to act like your friend, Madame de Richepin? My father was a professor in a provincial university, and I have certain things I wouldn’t do because they wouldn’t please my class, my family. Madame de Richepin has other things she wouldn’t do because of her class, her family.” Suddenly she pointed to an American girl going into the water: “But that young lady may be a stenographer and yet be compelled to warp herself, dressing and acting as if she had all the money in the world.”

“Perhaps she will have, some day.”

“That’s the story they are told; it happens to one, not to the ninety-nine. That’s why all their faces over thirty are discontented and unhappy.”

Though Henry was in general agreement, he could not help being amused at Choupette’s choice of target this afternoon. The girl — she was perhaps eighteen — was obviously acting like nothing but herself — she was what his father would have called a thoroughbred. A deep, thoughtful face that was pretty only because of the irrepressible determination of the perfect features to be recognized, a face that could have done without them and not yielded up its poise and distinction.

In her grace, at once exquisite and hardy, she was that perfect type of American girl that makes one wonder if the male is not being sacrificed to it, much as, in the last century, the lower strata in England were sacrificed to produce the governing class.

The two young men, coming out of the water as she went in, had large shoulders and empty faces. She had a smile for them that was no more than they deserved — that must do until she chose one to be the father of her children and gave herself up to destiny. Until then — Henry Marston was glad about her as her arms, like flying fish, clipped the water in a crawl, as her body spread in a swan dive or doubled in a jackknife from the springboard and her head appeared from the depth, jauntily flipping the damp hair away.

The two young men passed near.

“They push water,” Choupette said, “then they go elsewhere and push other water. They pass months in France and they couldn’t tell you the name of the President. They are parasites such as Europe has not known in a hundred years.”

But Henry had stood up abruptly, and now all the people on the beach were suddenly standing up. Something had happened out there in the fifty yards between the deserted raft and the shore. The bright head showed upon the surface; it did not flip water now, but called: “*Au secours!* Help!” in a feeble and frightened voice.

“Henry!” Choupette cried. “Stop! Henry!”

The beach was almost deserted at noon, but Henry and several others were sprinting toward the sea; the two young Americans heard, turned and sprinted after them. There was a frantic little time with half a dozen bobbing heads in the water. Chouquette, still clinging to her parasol, but managing to wring her hands at the same time, ran up and down the beach crying: "Henry! Henry!"

Now there were more helping hands, and then two swelling groups around prostrate figures on the shore. The young fellow who pulled in the girl brought her around in a minute or so, but they had more trouble getting the water out of Henry, who had never learned to swim.

II

"This is the man who didn't know whether he could swim, because he'd never tried."

Henry got up from his sun chair, grinning. It was next morning, and the saved girl had just appeared on the beach with her brother. She smiled back at Henry, brightly casual, appreciative rather than grateful.

"At the very least, I owe it to you to teach you how," she said.

"I'd like it. I decided that in the water yesterday, just before I went down the tenth time."

"You can trust me. I'll never again eat chocolate ice cream before going in."

As she went on into the water, Chouquette asked: "How long do you think we'll stay here? After all, this life wearies one."

"We'll stay till I can swim. And the boys too."

"Very well. I saw a nice bathing suit in two shades of blue for fifty francs that I will buy you this afternoon."

Feeling a little paunchy and unhealthily white, Henry, holding his sons by the hand, took his body into the water. The breakers leaped at him, staggering him, while the boys yelled with ecstasy; the returning water curled

threateningly around his feet as it hurried back to sea. Farther out, he stood waist deep with other intimidated souls, watching the people dive from the raft tower, hoping the girl would come to fulfill her promise, and somewhat embarrassed when she did.

“I’ll start with your eldest. You watch and then try it by yourself.”

He floundered in the water. It went into his nose and started a raw stinging; it blinded him; it lingered afterward in his ears, rattling back and forth like pebbles for hours. The sun discovered him, too, peeling long strips of parchment from his shoulders, blistering his back so that he lay in a feverish agony for several nights. After a week he swam, painfully, pantingly, and not very far. The girl taught him a sort of crawl, for he saw that the breast stroke was an obsolete device that lingered on with the inept and the old.

Chouquette caught him regarding his tanned face in the mirror with a sort of fascination, and the youngest boy contracted some sort of mild skin infection in the sand that retired him from competition. But one day Henry battled his way desperately to the float and drew himself up on it with his last breath.

“That being settled,” he told the girl, when he could speak, “I can leave St. Jean tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry.”

“What will you do now?”

“My brother and I are going to Antibes; there’s swimming there all through October. Then Florida.”

“And swim?” he asked with some amusement.

“Why, yes. We’ll swim.”

“Why do you swim?”

“To get clean,” she answered surprisingly.

“Clean from what?”

She frowned. “I don’t know why I said that. But it feels clean in the sea.”

“Americans are too particular about that,” he commented.

“How could anyone be?”

“I mean we’ve got too fastidious even to clean up our messes.”

“I don’t know.”

“But tell me why you — ” He stopped himself in surprise. He had been about to ask her to explain a lot of other things — to say what was clean and unclean, what was worth knowing and what was only words — to open up a new gate to life. Looking for a last time into her eyes, full of cool secrets, he realized how much he was going to miss these mornings, without knowing whether it was the girl who interested him or what she represented of his ever-new, ever-changing country.

“All right,” he told Choupette that night. “We’ll leave tomorrow.”

“For Paris?”

“For America.”

“You mean I’m to go too? And the children?”

“Yes.”

“But that’s absurd,” she protested. “Last time it cost more than we spend in six months here. And then there were only three of us. Now that we’ve managed to get ahead at last — ”

“That’s just it. I’m tired of getting ahead on your skimping and saving and going without dresses. I’ve got to make more money. American men are incomplete without money.”

“You mean we’ll stay?”

“It’s very possible.”

They looked at each other, and against her will, Choupette understood. For eight years, by a process of ceaseless adaptation, he had lived her life, substituting for the moral confusion of his own country, the tradition, the wisdom, the sophistication of France. After that matter in Paris, it had

seemed the bigger part to understand and to forgive, to cling to the home as something apart from the vagaries of love. Only now, glowing with a good health that he had not experienced for years, did he discover his true reaction. It had released him. For all his sense of loss, he possessed again the masculine self he had handed over to the keeping of a wise little Provençal girl eight years ago.

She struggled on for a moment.

“You’ve got a good position and we really have plenty of money. You know we can live cheaper here.”

“The boys are growing up now, and I’m not sure I want to educate them in France.”

“But that’s all decided,” she wailed. “You admit yourself that education in America is superficial and full of silly fads. Do you want them to be like those two dummies on the beach?”

“Perhaps I was thinking more of myself, Choupette. Men just out of college who brought their letters of credit into the bank eight years ago, travel about with ten-thousand-dollar cars now. I didn’t use to care. I used to tell myself that I had a better place to escape to, just because we knew that lobster armoricaine was really lobster americaine. Perhaps I haven’t that feeling any more.”

She stiffened. “If that’s it — ”

“It’s up to you. We’ll make a new start.”

Choupette thought for a moment. “Of course my sister can take over the apartment.”

“Of course.” He waxed enthusiastic. “And there are sure to be things that’ll tickle you — we’ll have a nice car, for instance, and one of those electric ice boxes, and all sorts of funny machines to take the place of servants. It won’t be bad. You’ll learn to play golf and talk about children all day. Then there are the movies.”

Choupette groaned.

“It’s going to be pretty awful at first,” he admitted, “but there are still a few good nigger cooks, and we’ll probably have two bathrooms.”

“I am unable to use more than one at a time.”

“You’ll learn.”

A month afterward, when the beautiful white island floated toward them in the Narrows, Henry’s throat grew constricted with the rest and he wanted to cry out to Choupette and all foreigners, “Now, you see!”

III

Almost three years later, Henry Marston walked out of his office in the Calumet Tobacco Company and along the hall to Judge Waterbury’s suite. His face was older, with a suspicion of grimness, and a slight irrepressible heaviness of body was not concealed by his white linen suit.

“Busy, judge?”

“Come in, Henry.”

“I’m going to the shore tomorrow to swim off this weight. I wanted to talk to you before I go.”

“Children going too?”

“Oh, sure.”

“Choupette’ll go abroad, I suppose.”

“Not this year. I think she’s coming with me, if she doesn’t stay here in Richmond.”

The judge thought: “There isn’t a doubt but what he knows everything.” He waited.

“I wanted to tell you, judge, that I’m resigning the end of September.”

The judge’s chair creaked backward as he brought his feet to the floor.

“You’re quitting, Henry?”

“Not exactly. Walter Ross wants to come home; let me take his place in France.”

“Boy, do you know what we pay Walter Ross?”

“Seven thousand.”

“And you’re getting twenty-five.”

“You’ve probably heard I’ve made something in the market,” said Henry deprecatingly.

“I’ve heard everything between a hundred thousand and half a million.”

“Somewhere in between.”

“Then why a seven-thousand-dollar job? Is Choupette homesick?”

“No, I think Choupette likes it over here. She’s adapted herself amazingly.”

“He knows,” the judge thought. “He wants to get away.”

After Henry had gone, he looked up at the portrait of his grandfather on the wall. In those days the matter would have been simpler. Dueling pistols in the old Wharton meadow at dawn. It would be to Henry’s advantage if things were like that today.

Henry’s chauffeur dropped him in front of a Georgian house in a new suburban section. Leaving his hat in the hall, he went directly out on the side veranda.

From the swaying canvas swing Choupette looked up with a polite smile. Save for a certain alertness of feature and a certain indefinable knack of putting things on, she might have passed for an American. Southernisms overlay her French accent with a quaint charm; there were still college boys who rushed her like a *débutante* at the Christmas dances.

Henry nodded at Mr. Charles Wiese, who occupied a wicker chair, with a gin fizz at his elbow.

“I want to talk to you,” he said, sitting down.

Wiese's glance and Choupette's crossed quickly before coming to rest on him.

"You're free, Wiese," Henry said. "Why don't you and Choupette get married?"

Choupette sat up, her eyes flashing.

"Now wait." Henry turned back to Wiese. "I've been letting this thing drift for about a year now, while I got my financial affairs in shape. But this last brilliant idea of yours makes me feel a little uncomfortable, a little sordid, and I don't want to feel that way."

"Just what do you mean?" Wiese inquired.

"On my last trip to New York you had me shadowed. I presume it was with the intention of getting divorce evidence against me. It wasn't a success."

"I don't know where you got such an idea in your head, Marston; you —"

"Don't lie!"

"Suh —" Wiese began, but Henry interrupted impatiently:

"Now don't 'Suh' me, and don't try to whip yourself up into a temper. You're not talking to a scared picker full of hookworm. I don't want a scene; my emotions aren't sufficiently involved. I want to arrange a divorce."

"Why do you bring it up like this?" Choupette cried, breaking into French.

"Couldn't we talk of it alone, if you think you have so much against me?"

"Wait a minute; this might as well be settled now," Wiese said. "Choupette does want a divorce. Her life with you is unsatisfactory, and the only reason she has kept on is because she's an idealist. You don't seem to appreciate that fact, but it's true; she couldn't bring herself to break up her home."

"Very touching." Henry looked at Choupette with bitter amusement.

"But let's come down to facts. I'd like to close up this matter before I go back to France."

Again Wiese and Choupette exchanged a look.

“It ought to be simple,” Wiese said. “Choupette doesn’t want a cent of your money.”

“I know. What she wants is the children. The answer is, You can’t have the children.”

“How perfectly outrageous!” Choupette cried. “Do you imagine for a minute I’m going to give up my children?”

“What’s your idea, Marston?” demanded Wiese. “To take them back to France and make them expatriates like yourself?”

“Hardly that. They’re entered for St. Regis School and then for Yale. And I haven’t any idea of not letting them see their mother whenever she so desires — judging from the past two years, it won’t be often. But I intend to have their entire legal custody.”

“Why?” they demanded together.

“Because of the home.”

“What the devil do you mean?”

“I’d rather apprentice them to a trade than have them brought up in the sort of home yours and Choupette’s is going to be.”

There was a moment’s silence. Suddenly Choupette picked up her glass, dashed the contents at Henry and collapsed on the settee, passionately sobbing.

Henry dabbed his face with his handkerchief and stood up.

“I was afraid of that,” he said, “but I think I’ve made my position clear.”

He went up to his room and lay down on the bed. In a thousand wakeful hours during the past year he had fought over in his mind the problem of keeping his boys without taking those legal measures against Choupette that he could not bring himself to take. He knew that she wanted the children only because without them she would be suspect, *evendéclassée*, to her family in France; but with that quality of detachment peculiar to old stock, Henry recognized this as a perfectly legitimate motive. Furthermore,

no public scandal must touch the mother of his sons — it was this that had rendered his challenge so ineffectual this afternoon.

When difficulties became insurmountable, inevitable, Henry sought surcease in exercise. For three years, swimming had been a sort of refuge, and he turned to it as one man to music or another to drink. There was a point when he would resolutely stop thinking and go to the Virginia coast for a week to wash his mind in the water. Far out past the breakers he could survey the green-and-brown line of the Old Dominion with the pleasant impersonality of a porpoise. The burden of his wretched marriage fell away with the buoyant tumble of his body among the swells, and he would begin to move in a child's dream of space. Sometimes remembered playmates of his youth swam with him; sometimes, with his two sons beside him, he seemed to be setting off along the bright pathway to the moon. Americans, he liked to say, should be born with fins, and perhaps they were — perhaps money was a form of fin. In England property begot a strong place sense, but Americans, restless and with shallow roots, needed fins and wings. There was even a recurrent idea in America about an education that would leave out history and the past, that should be a sort of equipment for aerial adventure, weighed down by none of the stowaways of inheritance or tradition.

Thinking of this in the water the next afternoon brought Henry's mind to the children; he turned and at a slow trudgen started back toward shore. Out of condition, he rested, panting, at the raft, and glancing up, he saw familiar eyes. In a moment he was talking with the girl he had tried to rescue four years ago.

He was overjoyed. He had not realized how vividly he remembered her. She was a Virginian — he might have guessed it abroad — the laziness, the apparent casualness that masked an unfailing courtesy and attention; a good form devoid of forms was based on kindness and consideration. Hearing her name for the first time, he recognized it — an Eastern Shore name, "good" as his own.

Lying in the sun, they talked like old friends, not about races and manners and the things that Henry brooded over Choupette, but rather as if they

naturally agreed about those things; they talked about what they liked themselves and about what was fun. She showed him a sitting-down, standing-up dive from the high springboard, and he emulated her inexpertly — that was fun. They talked about eating soft-shelled crabs, and she told him how, because of the curious acoustics of the water, one could lie here and be diverted by conversations on the hotel porch. They tried it and heard two ladies over their tea say:

“Now, at the Lido — ”

“Now, at Asbury Park — ”

“Oh, my dear, he just scratched and scratched all night; he just scratched and scratched — ”

“My dear, at Deauville — ”

“ — scratched and scratched all night.”

After a while the sea got to be that very blue color of four o'clock, and the girl told him how, at nineteen, she had been divorced from a Spaniard who locked her in the hotel suite when he went out at night.

“It was one of those things,” she said lightly. “But speaking more cheerfully, how's your beautiful wife? And the boys — did they learn to float? Why can't you all dine with me tonight?”

“I'm afraid I won't be able to,” he said, after a moment's hesitation. He must do nothing, however trivial, to furnish Chouquette weapons, and with a feeling of disgust, it occurred to him that he was possibly being watched this afternoon. Nevertheless, he was glad of his caution when she unexpectedly arrived at the hotel for dinner that night.

After the boys had gone to bed, they faced each other over coffee on the hotel veranda.

“Will you kindly explain why I'm not entitled to a half share in my own children?” Chouquette began. “It is not like you to be vindictive, Henry.”

It was hard for Henry to explain. He told her again that she could have the children when she wanted them, but that he must exercise entire control

over them because of certain old-fashioned convictions — watching her face grow harder, minute by minute, he saw there was no use, and broke off. She made a scornful sound.

“I wanted to give you a chance to be reasonable before Charles arrives.”

Henry sat up. “Is he coming here this evening?”

“Happily. And I think perhaps your selfishness is going to have a jolt, Henry. You’re not dealing with a woman now.”

When Wiese walked out on the porch an hour later, Henry saw that his pale lips were like chalk; there was a deep flush on his forehead and hard confidence in his eyes. He was cleared for action and he wasted no time.

“We’ve got something to say to each other, suh, and since I’ve got a motorboat here, perhaps that’d be the quietest place to say it.”

Henry nodded coolly; five minutes later the three of them were headed out into Hampton Roads on the wide fairway of the moonlight. It was a tranquil evening, and half a mile from shore Wiese cut down the engine to a mild throbbing, so that they seemed to drift without will or direction through the bright water. His voice broke the stillness abruptly:

“Marston, I’m going to talk to you straight from the shoulder. I love Choupette and I’m not apologizing for it. These things have happened before in this world. I guess you understand that. The only difficulty is this matter of the custody of Choupette’s children. You seem determined to try and take them away from the mother that bore them and raised them” — Wiese’s words became more clearly articulated, as if they came from a wider mouth — “but you left one thing out of your calculations, and that’s me. Do you happen to realize that at this moment I’m one of the richest men in Virginia?”

“I’ve heard as much.”

“Well, money is power, Marston. I repeat, suh, money is power.”

“I’ve heard that too. In fact, you’re a bore, Wiese.” Even by the moon Henry could see the crimson deepen on his brow.

“You’ll hear it again, suh. Yesterday you took us by surprise and I was unprepared for your brutality to Choupette. But this morning I received a letter from Paris that puts the matter in a new light. It is a statement by a specialist in mental diseases, declaring you to be of unsound mind, and unfit to have the custody of children. The specialist is the one who attended you in your nervous breakdown four years ago.”

Henry laughed incredulously, and looked at Choupette, half expecting her to laugh, too, but she had turned her face away, breathing quickly through parted lips. Suddenly he realized that Wiese was telling the truth — that by some extraordinary bribe he had obtained such a document and fully intended to use it.

For a moment Henry reeled as if from a material blow. He listened to his own voice saying, “That’s the most ridiculous thing I ever heard,” and to Wiese’s answer: “They don’t always tell people when they have mental troubles.”

Suddenly Henry wanted to laugh, and the terrible instant when he had wondered if there could be some shred of truth in the allegation passed. He turned to Choupette, but again she avoided his eyes.

“How could you, Choupette?”

“I want my children,” she began, but Wiese broke in quickly:

“If you’d been halfway fair, Marston, we wouldn’t have resorted to this step.”

“Are you trying to pretend you arranged this scurvy trick since yesterday afternoon?”

“I believe in being prepared, but if you had been reasonable; in fact, if you will be reasonable, this opinion needn’t be used.” His voice became suddenly almost paternal, almost kind: “Be wise, Marston. On your side there’s an obstinate prejudice; on mine there are forty million dollars. Don’t fool yourself. Let me repeat, Marston, that money is power. You were abroad so long that perhaps you’re inclined to forget that fact. Money made this country, built its great and glorious cities, created its industries, covered

it with an iron network of railroads. It's money that harnesses the forces of Nature, creates the machine and makes it go when money says go, and stop when money says stop."

As though interpreting this as a command, the engine gave forth a sudden hoarse sound and came to rest.

"What is it?" demanded Chouquette.

"It's nothing." Wiese pressed the self-starter with his foot. "I repeat, Marston, that money — The battery is dry. One minute while I spin the wheel."

He spun it for the best part of fifteen minutes while the boat meandered about in a placid little circle.

"Chouquette, open that drawer behind you and see if there isn't a rocket."

A touch of panic had crept into her voice when she answered that there was no rocket. Wiese eyed the shore tentatively.

"There's no use in yelling; we must be half a mile out. We'll just have to wait here until someone comes along."

"We won't wait here," Henry remarked.

"Why not?"

"We're moving toward the bay. Can't you tell? We're moving out with the tide."

"That's impossible!" said Chouquette sharply.

"Look at those two lights on shore — one passing the other now. Do you see?"

"Do something!" she wailed, and then, in a burst of French: "*Ah, c'est épouvantable! N'est-ce pas qu'il y a quelque chose qu'on petit faire?*"

The tide was running fast now, and the boat was drifting down the Roads with it toward the sea. The vague blots of two ships passed them, but at a distance, and there was no answer to their hail. Against the western sky a

lighthouse blinked, but it was impossible to guess how near to it they would pass.

“It looks as if all our difficulties would be solved for us,” Henry said.

“What difficulties?” Choupette demanded. “Do you mean there’s nothing to be done? Can you sit there and just float away like this?”

“It may be easier on the children, after all.” He winced as Choupette began to sob bitterly, but he said nothing. A ghostly idea was taking shape in his mind.

“Look here, Marston. Can you swim?” demanded Wiese, frowning.

“Yes, but Choupette can’t.”

“I can’t either — I didn’t mean that. If you could swim in and get to a telephone, the coast-guard people would send for us.”

Henry surveyed the dark, receding shore.

“It’s too far,” he said.

“You can try!” said Choupette.

Henry shook his head.

“Too risky. Besides, there’s an outside chance that we’ll be picked up.”

The lighthouse passed them, far to the left and out of earshot. Another one, the last, loomed up half a mile away.

“We might drift to France like that man Gerbault,” Henry remarked. “But then, of course, we’d be expatriates — and Wiese wouldn’t like that, would you, Wiese?”

Wiese, fussing frantically with the engine, looked up.

“See what you can do with this,” he said.

“I don’t know anything about mechanics,” Henry answered. “Besides, this solution of our difficulties grows on me. Just suppose you were dirty dog enough to use that statement and got the children because of it — in that

case I wouldn't have much impetus to go on living. We're all failures — I as head of my household, Choupette as a wife and a mother, and you, Wiese, as a human being. It's just as well that we go out of life together."

"This is no time for a speech, Marston."

"Oh, yes, it's a fine time. How about a little more house-organ oratory about money being power?"

Choupette sat rigid in the bow; Wiese stood over the engine, biting nervously at his lips.

"We're not going to pass that lighthouse very close." An idea suddenly occurred to him. "Couldn't you swim to that, Marston?"

"Of course he could!" Choupette cried.

Henry looked at it tentatively.

"I might. But I won't."

"You've got to!"

Again he flinched at Choupette's weeping; simultaneously he saw the time had come.

"Everything depends on one small point," he said rapidly. "Wiese, have you got a fountain pen?"

"Yes. What for?"

"If you'll write and sign about two hundred words at my dictation, I'll swim to the lighthouse and get help. Otherwise, so help me God, we'll drift out to sea! And you better decide in about one minute."

"Oh, anything!" Choupette broke out frantically. "Do what he says, Charles; he means it. He always means what he says. Oh, please don't wait!"

"I'll do what you want" — Wiese's voice was shaking — "only, for God's sake, go on. What is it you want — an agreement about the children? I'll give you my personal word of honor — "

“There’s no time for humor,” said Henry savagely. “Take this piece of paper and write.”

The two pages that Wiese wrote at Henry’s dictation relinquished all lien on the children thence and forever for himself and Choupette. When they had affixed trembling signatures Wiese cried:

“Now go, for God’s sake, before it’s too late!”

“Just one thing more: The certificate from the doctor.”

“I haven’t it here.”

“You lie.”

Wiese took it from his pocket.

“Write across the bottom that you paid so much for it, and sign your name to that.”

A minute later, stripped to his underwear, and with the papers in an oiled-silk tobacco pouch suspended from his neck, Henry dived from the side of the boat and struck out toward the light.

The waters leaped up at him for an instant, but after the first shock it was all warm and friendly, and the small murmur of the waves was an encouragement. It was the longest swim he had ever tried, and he was straight from the city, but the happiness in his heart buoyed him up. Safe now, and free. Each stroke was stronger for knowing that his two sons, sleeping back in the hotel, were safe from what he dreaded. Divorced from her own country, Choupette had picked the things out of American life that pandered best to her own self-indulgence. That, backed by a court decree, she should be permitted to hand on this preposterous moral farrago to his sons was unendurable. He would have lost them forever.

Turning on his back, he saw that already the motorboat was far away, the blinding light was nearer. He was very tired. If one let go — and, in the relaxation from strain, he felt an alarming impulse to let go — one died very quickly and painlessly, and all these problems of hate and bitterness disappeared. But he felt the fate of his sons in the oiled-silk pouch about his

neck, and with a convulsive effort he turned over again and concentrated all his energies on his goal.

Twenty minutes later he stood shivering and dripping in the signal room while it was broadcast out to the coast patrol that a launch was drifting in the bay.

“There’s not much danger without a storm,” the keeper said. “By now they’ve probably struck a cross current from the river and drifted into Peyton Harbor.”

“Yes,” said Henry, who had come to this coast for three summers. “I knew that too.”

IV

In October, Henry left his sons in school and embarked on the *Majestic* for Europe. He had come home as to a generous mother and had been profusely given more than he asked — money, release from an intolerable situation, and the fresh strength to fight for his own. Watching the fading city, the fading shore, from the deck of the *Majestic*, he had a sense of overwhelming gratitude and of gladness that America was there, that under the ugly débris of industry the rich land still pushed up, incorrigibly lavish and fertile, and that in the heart of the leaderless people the old generosities and devotions fought on, breaking out sometimes in fanaticism and excess, but indomitable and undefeated. There was a lost generation in the saddle at the moment, but it seemed to him that the men coming on, the men of the war, were better; and all his old feeling that America was a bizarre accident, a sort of historical sport, had gone forever. The best of America was the best of the world.

Going down to the purser’s office, he waited until a fellow passenger was through at the window. When she turned, they both started, and he saw it was the girl.

“Oh, hello!” she cried. “I’m glad you’re going! I was just asking when the pool opened. The great thing about this ship is that you can always get a swim.”

“Why do you like to swim?” he demanded.

“You always ask me that.” She laughed.

“Perhaps you’d tell me if we had dinner together tonight.”

But when, in a moment, he left her he knew that she could never tell him — she or another. France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter — it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart.

TWO WRONGS

I

Saturday Evening Post (18 January 1930)

“Look at those shoes,” said Bill — “twenty-eight dollars.”

Mr. Brancusi looked. “Purty.”

“Made to order.”

“I knew you were a great swell. You didn’t get me up here to show me those shoes, did you?”

“I am not a great swell. Who said I was a great swell?” demanded Bill. “Just because I’ve got more education than most people in show business.”

“And then, you know, you’re a handsome young fellow,” said Brancusi dryly.

“Sure I am — compared to you anyhow. The girls think I must be an actor, till they find out. . . . Got a cigarette? What’s more, I look like a man — which is more than most of these pretty boys round Times Square do.”

“Good-looking. Gentleman. Good shoes. Shot with luck.”

“You’re wrong there,” objected Bill. “Brains. Three years — nine shows — four big hits — only one flop. Where do you see any luck in that?”

A little bored, Brancusi just gazed. What he would have seen — had he not made his eyes opaque and taken to thinking about something else — was a fresh-faced young Irishman exuding aggressiveness and self-confidence until the air of his office was thick with it. Presently, Brancusi knew, Bill would hear the sound of his own voice and be ashamed and retire into his other humor — the quietly superior, sensitive one, the patron of the arts, modelled on the intellectuals of the Theatre Guild. Bill McChesney had not quite decided between the two, such blends are seldom complete before thirty.

“Take Ames, take Hopkins, take Harris — take any of them,” Bill insisted. “What have they got on me? What’s the matter? Do you want a drink?” — seeing Brancusi’s glance wander toward the cabinet on the opposite wall.

“I never drink in the morning. I just wondered who was it keeps on knocking. You ought to make it stop it. I get a nervous fidgets, kind of half crazy, with that kind of thing.”

Bill went quickly to the door and threw it open.

“Nobody,” he said . . . “Hello! What do you want?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” a voice answered; “I’m terribly sorry. I got so excited and I didn’t realize I had this pencil in my hand.”

“What is it you want?”

“I want to see you, and the clerk said you were busy. I have a letter for you from Alan Rogers, the playwright — and I wanted to give it to you personally.”

“I’m busy,” said Bill. “See Mr. Cadorna.”

“I did, but he wasn’t very encouraging, and Mr. Rogers said — ”

Brancusi, edging over restlessly, took a quick look at her. She was very young, with beautiful red hair, and more character in her face than her chatter would indicate; it did not occur to Mr. Brancusi that this was due to her origin in Delaney, South Carolina.

“What shall I do?” she inquired, quietly laying her future in Bill’s hands. “I had a letter to Mr. Rogers, and he just gave me this one to you.”

“Well, what do you want me to do — marry you?” exploded Bill.

“I’d like to get a part in one of your plays.”

“Then sit down and wait. I’m busy. . . . Where’s Miss Cohalan?” He rang a bell, looked once more, crossly, at the girl and closed the door of his office. But during the interruption his other mood had come over him, and he resumed his conversation with Brancusi in the key of one who was hand in glove with Reinhardt for the artistic future of the theater.

By 12:30 he had forgotten everything except that he was going to be the greatest producer in the world and that he had an engagement to tell Sol Lincoln about it at lunch. Emerging from his office, he looked expectantly at Miss Cohalan.

“Mr. Lincoln won’t be able to meet you,” she said. “He jus ‘is minute called.”

“Just this minute,” repeated Bill, shocked. “All right. Just cross him off that list for Thursday night.”

Miss Cohalan drew a line on a sheet of paper before her.

“Mr. McChesney, now you haven’t forgotten me, have you?”

He turned to the red-headed girl.

“No,” he said vaguely, and then to Miss Cohalan: “That’s all right; ask him for Thursday anyhow. To hell with him.”

He did not want to lunch alone. He did not like to do anything alone now, because contacts were too much fun when one had prominence and power.

“If you would just let me talk to you two minutes — ” she began.

“Afraid I can’t now.” Suddenly he realized that she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen in his life.

He stared at her.

“Mr. Rogers told me — ”

“Come and have a spot of lunch with me,” he said, and then, with an air of great hurry, he gave Miss Cohalan some quick and contradictory instructions and held open the door.

They stood on Forty-second Street and he breathed his pre-empted air — there is only enough air there for a few people at a time. It was November and the first exhilarating rush of the season was over, but he could look east and see the electric sign of one of his plays, and west and see another. Around the corner was the one he had put on with Brancusi — the last time he would produce anything except alone.

They went to the Bedford, where there was a to-do of waiters and captains as he came in.

“This is ver tractive restaurant,” she said, impressed and on company behavior.

“This is hams’ paradise.” He nodded to several people. “Hello, Jimmy — Bill. . . . Hello there, Jack. . . . That’s Jack Dempsey. . . . I don’t eat here much. I usually eat up at the Harvard Club.”

“Oh, did you go to Harvard? I used to know — ”

“Yes.” He hesitated; there were two versions about Harvard, and he decided suddenly on the true one. “Yes, and they had me down for a hick there, but not any more. About a week ago I was out on Long Island at the Gouverneur Hights — very fashionable people — and a couple of Gold Coast boys that never knew I was alive up in Cambridge began pulling this ‘Hello, Bill, old boy’ on me.”

He hesitated and suddenly decided to leave the story there.

“What do you want — a job?” he demanded. He remembered suddenly that she had holes in her stockings. Holes in stockings always moved him, softened him.

“Yes, or else I’ve got to go home,” she said. “I want to be a dancer — you know, Russian ballet. But the lessons cost so much, so I’ve got to get a job. I thought it’d give me stage presence anyhow.”

“Hooper, eh?”

“Oh, no, serious.”

“Well, Pavlova’s a hooper, isn’t she?”

“Oh, no.” She was shocked at this profanity, but after a moment she continued: “I took with Miss Campbell — Georgia Berriman Campbell — back home — maybe you know her. She took from Ned Wayburn, and she’s really wonderful. She — ”

“Yeah?” he said abstractedly. “Well, it’s a tough business — casting agencies bursting with people that can all do anything, till I give them a try. How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“I’m twenty-six. Came here four years ago without a cent.”

“My!”

“I could quit now and be comfortable the rest of my life.”

“My!”

“Going to take a year off next year — get married. . . . Ever hear of Irene Rikker?”

“I should say! She’s about my favorite of all.”

“We’re engaged.”

“My!”

When they went out into Times Square after a while he said carelessly, “What are you doing now?”

“Why, I’m trying to get a job.”

“I mean right this minute.”

“Why, nothing.”

“Do you want to come up to my apartment on Forty-sixth Street and have some coffee?”

Their eyes met, and Emmy Pinkard made up her mind she could take care of herself.

It was a great bright studio apartment with a ten-foot divan, and after she had coffee and he a highball, his arm dropped round her shoulder.

“Why should I kiss you?” she demanded. “I hardly know you, and besides, you’re engaged to somebody else.”

“Oh, that! She doesn’t care.”

“No, really!”

“You’re a good girl.”

“Well, I’m certainly not an idiot.”

“All right, go on being a good girl.”

She stood up, but lingered a minute, very fresh and cool, and not upset at all.

“I suppose this means you won’t give me a job?” she asked pleasantly.

He was already thinking about something else — about an interview and a rehearsal — but now he looked at her again and saw that she still had holes in her stockings. He telephoned:

“Joe, this is the Fresh Boy. . . . You didn’t think I knew you called me that, did you? . . . It’s all right. . . . Say, have you got those three girls for the party scene? Well, listen; save one for a Southern kid I’m sending around today.”

He looked at her jauntily, conscious of being such a good fellow.

“Well, I don’t know how to thank you. And Mr. Rogers,” she added audaciously. “Good-by, Mr. McChesney.”

He disdained to answer.

II

During rehearsal he used to come around a great deal and stand watching with a wise expression, as if he knew everything in people’s minds; but actually he was in a haze about his own good fortune and didn’t see much and didn’t for the moment care. He spent most of his week-ends on Long Island with the fashionable people who had “taken him up.” When Brancusi referred to him as the “big social butterfly,” he would answer, “Well, what about it? Didn’t I go to Harvard? You think they found me in a Grand Street

apple cart, like you?" He was well liked among his new friends for his good looks and good nature, as well as his success.

His engagement to Irene Rikker was the most unsatisfactory thing in his life; they were tired of each other but unwilling to put an end to it. Just as, often, the two richest young people in a town are drawn together by the fact, so Bill McChesney and Irene Rikker, borne side by side on waves of triumph, could not spare each other's nice appreciation of what was due such success. Nevertheless, they indulged in fiercer and more frequent quarrels, and the end was approaching. It was embodied in one Frank Llewellen, a big, fine-looking actor playing opposite Irene. Seeing the situation at once, Bill became bitterly humorous about it; from the second week of rehearsals there was tension in the air.

Meanwhile Emmy Pinkard, with enough money for crackers and milk, and a friend who took her out to dinner, was being happy. Her friend, Easton Hughes from Delaney, was studying at Columbia to be a dentist. He sometimes brought along other lonesome young men studying to be dentists, and at the price, if it can be called that, of a few casual kisses in taxicabs, Emmy dined when hungry. One afternoon she introduced Easton to Bill McChesney at the stage door, and afterward Bill made his facetious jealousy the basis of their relationship.

"I see that dental number has been slipping it over on me again. Well, don't let him give you any laughing gas is my advice."

Though their encounters were few, they always looked at each other. When Bill looked at her he stared for an instant as if he had not seen her before, and then remembered suddenly that she was to be teased. When she looked at him she saw many things — a bright day outside, with great crowds of people hurrying through the streets; a very good new limousine that waited at the curb for two people with very good new clothes, who got in and went somewhere that was just like New York, only away, and more fun there. Many times she had wished she had kissed him, but just as many times she was glad she hadn't; since, as the weeks passed, he grew less romantic, tied up, like the rest of them, to the play's laborious evolution.

They were opening in Atlantic City. A sudden moodiness apparent to everyone, came over Bill. He was short with the director and sarcastic with the actors. This, it was rumored, was because Irene Rikker had come down with Frank Llewellen on a different train. Sitting beside the author on the night of the dress rehearsal, he was an almost sinister figure in the twilight of the auditorium; but he said nothing until the end of the second act, when, with Llewellen and Irene Rikker on the stage alone, he suddenly called:

“We’ll go over that again — and cut out the mush!”

Llewellen came down to the footlights.

“What do you mean — cut out the mush?” he inquired. “Those are the lines, aren’t they?”

“You know what I mean — stick to business.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Bill stood up. “I mean all that damn whispering.”

“There wasn’t any whispering. I simply asked — ”

“That’ll do — take it over.”

Llewellen turned away furiously and was about to proceed, when Bill added audibly: “Even a ham has got to do his stuff.”

Llewellen whipped about. “I don’t have to stand that kind of talk, Mr. McChesney.”

“Why not? You’re a ham, aren’t you? When did you get ashamed of being a ham? I’m putting on this play and I want you to stick to your stuff.” Bill got up and walked down the aisle. “And when you don’t do it, I’m going to call you just like anybody else.”

“Well, you watch out for your tone of voice — ”

“What’ll you do about it?”

Llewellen jumped down into the orchestra pit.

“I’m not taking anything from you!” he shouted.

Irene Rikker called to them from the stage, "For heaven's sake, are you two crazy?" And then Llewellen swung at him, one short, mighty blow. Bill pitched back across a row of seats, fell through one, splintering it, and lay wedged there. There was a moment's wild confusion, then people holding Llewellen, then the author, with a white face, pulling Bill up, and the stage manager crying: "Shall I kill him, chief? Shall I break his fat face?" and Llewellen panting and Irene Rikker frightened.

"Get back there!" Bill cried, holding a handkerchief to his face and teetering in the author's supporting arms. "Everybody get back! Take that scene again, and no talk! Get back, Llewellen!"

Before they realized it they were all back on the stage, Irene pulling Llewellen's arm and talking to him fast. Someone put on the auditorium lights full and then dimmed them again hurriedly. When Emmy came out presently for her scene, she saw in a quick glance that Bill was sitting with a whole mask of handkerchiefs over his bleeding face. She hated Llewellen and was afraid that presently they would break up and go back to New York. But Bill had saved the show from his own folly, since for Llewellen to take the further initiative of quitting would hurt his professional standing. The act ended and the next one began without an interval. When it was over, Bill was gone.

Next night, during the performance, he sat on a chair in the wings in view of everyone coming on or off. His face was swollen and bruised, but he neglected to seem conscious of the fact and there were no comments. Once he went around in front, and when he returned, word leaked out that two of the New York agencies were making big buys. He had a hit — they all had a hit.

At the sight of him to whom Emmy felt they all owed so much, a great wave of gratitude swept over her. She went up and thanked him.

"I'm a good picker, red-head," he agreed grimly.

"Thank you for picking me."

And suddenly Emmy was moved to a rash remark.

“You’ve hurt your face so badly!” she exclaimed. “Oh, I think it was so brave of you not to let everything go to pieces last night.”

He looked at her hard for a moment and then an ironic smile tried unsuccessfully to settle on his swollen face.

“Do you admire me, baby?”

“Yes.”

“Even when I fell in the seats, did you admire me?”

“You got control of everything so quick.”

“That’s loyalty for you. You found something to admire in that fool mess.”

And her happiness bubbled up into, “Anyhow, you behaved just wonderfully.” She looked so fresh and young that Bill, who had had a wretched day, wanted to rest his swollen cheek against her cheek.

He took both the bruise and the desire with him to New York next morning; the bruise faded, but the desire remained. And when they opened in the city, no sooner did he see other men begin to crowd around her beauty than she became this play for him, this success, the thing that he came to see when he came to the theater. After a good run it closed just as he was drinking too much and needed someone on the gray days of reaction. They were married suddenly in Connecticut, early in June.

III

Two men sat in the Savoy Grill in London, waiting for the Fourth of July. It was already late in May.

“Is he a nice guy?” asked Hubbel.

“Very nice,” answered Brancusi; “very nice, very handsome, very popular.” After a moment, he added: “I want to get him to come home.”

“That’s what I don’t get about him,” said Hubbel. “Show business over here is nothing compared to home. What does he want to stay here for?”

“He goes around with a lot of dukes and ladies.”

“Oh?”

“Last week when I met him he was with three ladies — Lady this, Lady that, Lady the other thing.”

“I thought he was married.”

“Married three years,” said Brancusi, “got a fine child, going to have another.”

He broke off as McChesney came in, his very American face staring about boldly over the collar of a box-shouldered topcoat.

“Hello, Mac; meet my friend Mr. Hubbel.”

“J’doo,” said Bill. He sat down, continuing to stare around the bar to see who was present. After a few minutes Hubbel left, and Bill asked:

“Who’s that bird?”

“He’s only been here a month. He ain’t got a title yet. You been here six months, remember.”

Bill grinned.

“You think I’m high-hat, don’t you? Well, I’m not kidding myself anyhow. I like it; it gets me. I’d like to be the Marquis of McChesney.”

“Maybe you can drink yourself into it,” suggested Brancusi.

“Shut your trap. Who said I was drinking? Is that what they say now? Look here; if you can tell me any American manager in the history of the theater who’s had the success that I’ve had in London in less than eight months, I’ll go back to America with you tomorrow. If you’ll just tell me — ”

“It was with your old shows. You had two flops in New York.”

Bill stood up, his face hardening.

“Who do you think you are?” he demanded. “Did you come over here to talk to me like that?”

“Don’t get sore now, Bill. I just want you to come back. I’d say anything for that. Put over three seasons like you had in ‘22 and ‘23, and you’re fixed for life.”

“New York makes me sick,” said Bill moodily. “One minute you’re a king; then you have two flops, they go around saying you’re on the toboggan.”

Brancusi shook his head.

“That wasn’t why they said it. It was because you had that quarrel with Aronstael, your best friend.”

“Friend hell!”

“Your best friend in business anyhow. Then — ”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” He looked at his watch. “Look here; Emmy’s feeling bad so I’m afraid I can’t have dinner with you tonight. Come around to the office before you sail.”

Five minutes later, standing by the cigar counter, Brancusi saw Bill enter the Savoy again and descend the steps that led to the tea room.

“Grown to be a great diplomat,” thought Brancusi; “he used to just say when he had a date. Going with these dukes and ladies is polishing him up even more.”

Perhaps he was a little hurt, though it was not typical of him to be hurt. At any rate he made a decision, then and there, that McChesney was on the down grade; it was quite typical of him that at that point he erased him from his mind forever.

There was no outward indication that Bill was on the down grade; a hit at the New Strand, a hit at the Prince of Wales, and the weekly grosses pouring in almost as well as they had two or three years before in New York.

Certainly a man of action was justified in changing his base. And the man who, an hour later, turned into his Hyde Park house for dinner had all the vitality of the late twenties. Emmy, very tired and clumsy, lay on a couch in the upstairs sitting room. He held her for a moment in his arms.

“Almost over now,” he said. “You’re beautiful.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“It’s true. You’re always beautiful. I don’t know why. Perhaps because you’ve got character, and that’s always in your face, even when you’re like this.”

She was pleased; she ran her hand through his hair.

“Character is the greatest thing in the world,” he declared, “and you’ve got more than anybody I know.”

“Did you see Brancusi?”

“I did, the little louse! I decided not to bring him home to dinner.”

“What was the matter?”

“Oh, just snooty — talking about my row with Aronstael, as if it was my fault.”

She hesitated, closed her mouth tight, and then said quietly, “You got into that fight with Aronstael because you were drinking.”

He rose impatiently.

“Are you going to start — ”

“No, Bill, but you’re drinking too much now. You know you are.”

Aware that she was right, he evaded the matter and they went in to dinner. On the glow of a bottle of claret he decided he would go on the wagon tomorrow till after the baby was born.

“I always stop when I want, don’t I? I always do what I say. You never saw me quit yet.”

“Never yet.”

They had coffee together, and afterward he got up.

“Come back early,” said Emmy.

“Oh, sure. . . . What’s the matter, baby?”

“I’m just crying. Don’t mind me. Oh, go on; don’t just stand there like a big idiot.”

“But I’m worried, naturally. I don’t like to see you cry.”

“Oh, I don’t know where you go in the evenings; I don’t know who you’re with. And that Lady Sybil Combrinck who kept phoning. It’s all right, I suppose, but I wake up in the night and I feel so alone, Bill. Because we’ve always been together, haven’t we, until recently?”

“But we’re together still. . . . What’s happened to you, Emmy?”

“I know — I’m just crazy. We’d never let each other down, would we? We never have — ”

“Of course not.”

“Come back early, or when you can.”

He looked in for a minute at the Prince of Wales Theatre; then he went into the hotel next door and called a number.

“I’d like to speak to her Ladyship. Mr. McChesney calling.”

It was some time before Lady Sybil answered:

“This is rather a surprise. It’s been several weeks since I’ve been lucky enough to hear from you.”

Her voice was flip as a whip and cold as automatic refrigeration, in the mode grown familiar since British ladies took to piecing themselves together out of literature. It had fascinated Bill for a while, but just for a while. He had kept his head.

“I haven’t had a minute,” he explained easily. “You’re not sore, are you?”

“I should scarcely say ‘sore.’”

“I was afraid you might be; you didn’t send me an invitation to your party tonight. My idea was that after we talked it all over we agreed — ”

“You talked a great deal,” she said; “possibly a little too much.”

Suddenly, to Bill's astonishment, she hung up.

"Going British on me," he thought. "A little skit entitled *The Daughter of a Thousand Earls*."

The snub roused him, the indifference revived his waning interest. Usually women forgave his changes of heart because of his obvious devotion to Emmy, and he was remembered by various ladies with a not unpleasant sigh. But he had detected no such sigh upon the phone.

"I'd like to clear up this mess," he thought. Had he been wearing evening clothes, he might have dropped in at the dance and talked it over with her, still he didn't want to go home. Upon consideration it seemed important that the misunderstanding should be fixed up at once, and presently he began to entertain the idea of going as he was; Americans were excused unconventionalities of dress. In any case, it was not nearly time, and, in the company of several highballs, he considered the matter for an hour.

At midnight he walked up the steps of her Mayfair house. The coat-room attendants scrutinized his tweeds disapprovingly and a footman peered in vain for his name on the list of guests. Fortunately his friend Sir Humphrey Dunn arrived at the same time and convinced the footman it must be a mistake.

Inside, Bill immediately looked about for his hostess.

She was a very tall young woman, half American and all the more intensely English. In a sense, she had discovered Bill McChesney, vouched for his savage charms; his retirement was one of her most humiliating experiences since she had begun being bad.

She stood with her husband at the head of the receiving line — Bill had never seen them together before. He decided to choose a less formal moment for presenting himself.

As the receiving went on interminably, he became increasingly uncomfortable. He saw a few people he knew, but not many, and he was conscious that his clothes were attracting a certain attention; he was aware also that Lady Sybil saw him and could have relieved his embarrassment

with a wave of her hand, but she made no sign. He was sorry he had come, but to withdraw now would be absurd, and going to a buffet table, he took a glass of champagne.

When he turned around she was alone at last, and he was about to approach her when the butler spoke to him:

“Pardon me, sir. Have you a card?”

“I’m a friend of Lady Sybil’s,” said Bill impatiently. He turned away, but the butler followed.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I’ll have to ask you to step aside with me and straighten this up.”

“There’s no need. I’m just about to speak to Lady Sybil now.”

“My orders are different, sir,” said the butler firmly.

Then, before Bill realized what was happening, his arms were pressed quietly to his sides and he was propelled into a little anteroom back of the buffet.

There he faced a man in a pince-nez in whom he recognized the Combrincks’ private secretary.

The secretary nodded to the butler, saying, “This is the man”; whereupon Bill was released.

“Mr. McChesney,” said the secretary, “you have seen fit to force your way here without a card, and His Lordship requests that you leave his house at once. Will you kindly give me the check for your coat?”

Then Bill understood, and the single word that he found applicable to Lady Sybil sprang to his lips; whereupon the secretary gave a sign to two footmen, and in a furious struggle Bill was carried through a pantry where busy bus boys stared at the scene, down a long hall, and pushed out a door into the night. The door closed; a moment later it was opened again to let his coat billow forth and his cane clatter down the steps.

As he stood there, overwhelmed, stricken aghast, a taxicab stopped beside him and the driver called:

“Feeling ill, gov’nor?”

“What?”

“I know where you can get a good pick-me-up, gov’nor. Never too late.” The door of the taxi opened on a nightmare. There was a cabaret that broke the closing hours; there was being with strangers he had picked up somewhere; then there were arguments, and trying to cash a check, and suddenly proclaiming over and over that he was William McChesney, the producer, and convincing no one of the fact, not even himself. It seemed important to see Lady Sybil right away and call her to account; but presently nothing was important at all. He was in a taxicab whose driver had just shaken him awake in front of his own home.

The telephone was ringing as he went in, but he walked stonily past the maid and only heard her voice when his foot was on the stair.

“Mr. McChesney, it’s the hospital calling again. Mrs. McChesney’s there and they’ve been phoning every hour.”

Still in a daze, he held the receiver up to his ear.

“We’re calling from the Midland Hospital, for your wife. She was delivered of a still-born child at nine this morning.”

“Wait a minute.” His voice was dry and cracking. “I don’t understand.”

After a while he understood that Emmy’s child was dead and she wanted him. His knees sagged groggily as he walked down the street, looking for a taxi.

The room was dark; Emmy looked up and saw him from a rumped bed.

“It’s you!” she cried. “I thought you were dead! Where did you go?”

He threw himself down on his knees beside the bed, but she turned away.

“Oh, you smell awful,” she said. “It makes me sick.”

But she kept her hand in his hair, and he knelt there motionless for a long time.

“I’m done with you,” she muttered, “but it was awful when I thought you were dead. Everybody’s dead. I wish I was dead.”

A curtain parted with the wind, and as he rose to arrange it, she saw him in the full morning light, pale and terrible, with rumpled clothes and bruises on his face. This time she hated him instead of those who had hurt him. She could feel him slipping out of her heart, feel the space he left, and all at once he was gone, and she could even forgive him and be sorry for him. All this in a minute.

She had fallen down at the door of the hospital, trying to get out of the taxicab alone.

IV

When Emmy was well, physically and mentally, her incessant idea was to learn to dance; the old dream inculcated by Miss Georgia Berriman Campbell of South Carolina persisted as a bright avenue leading back to first youth and days of hope in New York. To her, dancing meant that elaborate blend of tortuous attitudes and formal pirouettes that evolved out of Italy several hundred years ago and reached its apogee in Russia at the beginning of this century. She wanted to use herself on something she could believe in, and it seemed to her that the dance was woman’s interpretation of music; instead of strong fingers, one had limbs with which to render Tchaikowsky and Stravinski; and feet could be as eloquent in Chopiniana as voices in “The Ring.” At the bottom, it was something sandwiched in between the acrobats and the trained seals; at the top it was Pavlova and art.

Once they were settled in an apartment back in New York, she plunged into her work like a girl of sixteen — four hours a day at bar exercises, attitudes, *sauts*, arabesques and pirouettes. It became the realest part of her life, and her only worry was whether or not she was too old. At twenty-six she had ten years to make up, but she was a natural dancer with a fine body — and that lovely face.

Bill encouraged it; when she was ready he was going to build the first real American ballet around her. There were even times when he envied her her absorption; for affairs in his own line were more difficult since they had come home. For one thing, he had made many enemies in those early days of self-confidence; there were exaggerated stories of his drinking and of his being hard on actors and difficult to work with.

It was against him that he had always been unable to save money and must beg a backing for each play. Then, too, in a curious way, he was intelligent, as he was brave enough to prove in several uncommercial ventures, but he had no Theatre Guild behind him, and what money he lost was charged against him.

There were successes, too, but he worked harder for them, or it seemed so, for he had begun to pay a price for his irregular life. He always intended to take a rest or give up his incessant cigarettes, but there was so much competition now — new men coming up, with new reputations for infallibility — and besides, he wasn't used to regularity. He liked to do his work in those great spurts, inspired by black coffee, that seem so inevitable in show business, but which took so much out of a man after thirty. He had come to lean, in a way, on Emmy's fine health and vitality. They were always together, and if he felt a vague dissatisfaction that he had grown to need her more than she needed him, there was always the hope that things would break better for him next month, next season.

Coming home from ballet school one November evening, Emmy swung her little gray bag, pulled her hat far down over her still damp hair, and gave herself up to pleasant speculation. For a month she had been aware of people who had come to the studio especially to watch her — she was ready to dance. Once she had worked just as hard and for as long a time on something else — her relations with Bill — only to reach a climax of misery and despair, but here there was nothing to fail her except herself. Yet even now she felt a little rash in thinking: "Now it's come. I'm going to be happy."

She hurried, for something had come up today that she must talk over with Bill.

Finding him in the living room, she called him to come back while she dressed. She began to talk without looking around:

“Listen what happened!” Her voice was loud, to compete with the water running in the tub. “Paul Makova wants me to dance with him at the Metropolitan this season; only it’s not sure, so it’s a secret — even I’m not supposed to know.”

“That’s great.”

“The only thing is whether it wouldn’t be better for me to make a *début* abroad? Anyhow Donilof says I’m ready to appear. What do you think?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t sound very enthusiastic.”

“I’ve got something on my mind. I’ll tell you about it later. Go on.”

“That’s all, dear. If you still feel like going to Germany for a month, like you said, Donilof would arrange a *début* for me in Berlin, but I’d rather open here and dance with Paul Makova. Just imagine — ” She broke off, feeling suddenly through the thick skin of her elation how abstracted he was. “Tell me what you’ve got on your mind.”

“I went to Doctor Kearns this afternoon.”

“What did he say?” Her mind was still singing with her own happiness. Bill’s intermittent attacks of hypochondria had long ceased to worry her.

“I told him about that blood this morning, and he said what he said last year — it was probably a little broken vein in my throat. But since I’d been coughing and was worried, perhaps it was safer to take an X-ray and clear the matter up. Well, we cleared it up all right. My left lung is practically gone.”

“Bill!”

“Luckily there are no spots on the other.”

She waited, horribly afraid.

“It’s come at a bad time for me,” he went on steadily, “but it’s got to be faced. He thinks I ought to go to the Adirondacks or to Denver for the winter, and his idea is Denver. That way it’ll probably clear up in five or six months.”

“Of course we’ll have to — ” she stopped suddenly.

“I wouldn’t expect you to go — especially if you have this opportunity.”

“Of course I’ll go,” she said quickly. “Your health comes first. We’ve always gone everywhere together.”

“Oh, no.”

“Why, of course.” She made her voice strong and decisive. “We’ve always been together. I couldn’t stay here without you. When do you have to go?”

“As soon as possible. I went in to see Brancusi to find out if he wanted to take over the Richmond piece, but he didn’t seem enthusiastic.” His face hardened. “Of course there won’t be anything else for the present, but I’ll have enough, with what’s owing — ”

“Oh, if I was only making some money!” Emmy cried. “You work so hard, and here I’ve been spending two hundred dollars a week for just my dancing lessons alone — more than I’ll be able to earn for years.”

“Of course in six months I’ll be as well as ever — he says.”

“Sure, dearest; we’ll get you well. We’ll start as soon as we can.”

She put an arm around him and kissed his cheek.

“I’m just an old parasite,” she said. “I should have known my darling wasn’t well.”

He reached automatically for a cigarette, and then stopped.

“I forgot — I’ve got to start cutting down smoking.” He rose to the occasion suddenly: “No, baby, I’ve decided to go alone. You’d go crazy with boredom out there, and I’d just be thinking I was keeping you away from your dancing.”

“Don’t think about that. The thing is to get you well.”

They discussed the matter hour after hour for the next week, each of them saying everything except the truth — that he wanted her to go with him and that she wanted passionately to stay in New York. She talked it over guardedly with Donilof, her ballet master, and found that he thought any postponement would be a terrible mistake. Seeing other girls in the ballet school making plans for the winter, she wanted to die rather than go, and Bill saw all the involuntary indications of her misery. For a while they talked of compromising on the Adirondacks, whither she would commute by aeroplane for the week-ends, but he was running a little fever now and he was definitely ordered West.

Bill settled it all one gloomy Sunday night, with that rough, generous justice that had first made her admire him, that made him rather tragic in his adversity, as he had always been bearable in his overweening success:

“It’s just up to me, baby. I got into this mess because I didn’t have any self-control — you seem to have all of that in this family — and now it’s only me that can get me out. You’ve worked hard at your stuff for three years and you deserve your chance — and if you came out there now you’d have it on me the rest of my life.” He grinned. “And I couldn’t stand that. Besides, it wouldn’t be good for the kid.”

Eventually she gave in, ashamed of herself, miserable — and glad. For the world of her work, where she existed without Bill, was bigger to her now than the world in which they existed together. There was more room to be glad in one than to be sorry in the other.

Two days later, with his ticket bought for that afternoon at five, they passed the last hours together, talking of everything hopeful. She protested still, and sincerely; had he weakened for a moment she would have gone. But the shock had done something to him, and he showed more character under it than he had for years. Perhaps it would be good for him to work it out alone.

“In the spring!” they said.

Then in the station with little Billy, and Bill saying: "I hate these graveside partings. You leave me here. I've got to make a phone call from the train before it goes."

They had never spent more than a night apart in six years, save when Emmy was in the hospital; save for the time in England they had a good record of faithfulness and of tenderness toward each other, even though she had been alarmed and often unhappy at this insecure bravado from the first. After he went through the gate alone, Emmy was glad he had a phone call to make and tried to picture him making it.

She was a good woman; she had loved him with all her heart. When she went out into Thirty-third Street, it was just as dead as dead for a while, and the apartment he paid for would be empty of him, and she was here, about to do something that would make her happy.

She stopped after a few blocks, thinking: "Why, this is terrible — what I'm doing! I'm letting him down like the worst person I ever heard of. I'm leaving him flat and going off to dinner with Donilof and Paul Makova, whom I like for being beautiful and for having the same color eyes and hair. Bill's on the train alone."

She swung little Billy around suddenly as if to go back to the station. She could see him sitting in the train, with his face so pale and tired, and no Emmy.

"I can't let him down," she cried to herself as wave after wave of sentiment washed over her. But only sentiment — hadn't he let her down — hadn't he done what he wanted in London?

"Oh, poor Bill!"

She stood irresolute, realizing for one last honest moment how quickly she would forget this and find excuses for what she was doing. She had to think hard of London, and her conscience cleared. But with Bill all alone in the train it seemed terrible to think that way. Even now she could turn and go back to the station and tell him that she was coming, but still she waited, with life very strong in her, fighting for her. The sidewalk was narrow where she stood; presently a great wave of people, pouring out of the theater,

came flooding along it, and she and little Billy were swept along with the crowd.

In the train, Bill telephoned up to the last minute, postponed going back to his stateroom, because he knew it was almost certain that he would not find her there. After the train started he went back and, of course, there was nothing but his bags in the rack and some magazines on the seat.

He knew then that he had lost her. He saw the set-up without any illusions — this Paul Makova, and months of proximity, and loneliness — afterward nothing would ever be the same. When he had thought about it all a long time, reading *Variety* and *Zit's* in between, it began to seem, each time he came back to it, as if Emmy somehow were dead.

“She was a fine girl — one of the best. She had character.” He realized perfectly that he had brought all this on himself and that there was some law of compensation involved. He saw, too, that by going away he had again become as good as she was; it was all evened up at last.

He felt beyond everything, even beyond his grief, an almost comfortable sensation of being in the hands of something bigger than himself; and grown a little tired and unconfident — two qualities he could never for a moment tolerate — it did not seem so terrible if he were going West for a definite finish. He was sure that Emmy would come at the end, no matter what she was doing or how good an engagement she had.

FIRST BLOOD

I

Saturday Evening Post (5 April 1930)

“I remember your coming to me in despair when Josephine was about three!” cried Mrs. Bray. “George was furious because he couldn’t decide what to go to work at, so he used to spank little Josephine.”

“I remember,” said Josephine’s mother.

“And so this is Josephine.”

This was, indeed, Josephine. She looked at Mrs. Bray and smiled, and Mrs. Bray’s eyes hardened imperceptibly. Josephine kept on smiling.

“How old are you, Josephine?”

“Just sixteen.”

“Oh-h. I would have said you were older.”

At the first opportunity Josephine asked Mrs. Perry, “Can I go to the movies with Lillian this afternoon?”

“No, dear; you have to study.” She turned to Mrs. Bray as if the matter were dismissed — but: “You darn fool,” muttered Josephine audibly.

Mrs. Bray said some words quickly to cover the situation, but, of course, Mrs. Perry could not let it pass unreprieved.

“What did you call mother, Josephine?”

“I don’t see why I can’t go to the movies with Lillian.”

Her mother was content to let it go at this.

“Because you’ve got to study. You go somewhere every day, and your father wants it to stop.”

“How crazy!” said Josephine, and she added vehemently, “How utterly insane! Father’s got to be a maniac I think. Next thing he’ll start tearing his hair and think he’s Napoleon or something.”

“No,” interposed Mrs. Bray jovially as Mrs. Perry grew rosy. “Perhaps she’s right. Maybe George is crazy — I’m sure my husband’s crazy. It’s this war.”

But she was not really amused; she thought Josephine ought to be beaten with sticks.

They were talking about Anthony Harker, a contemporary of Josephine’s older sister.

“He’s divine,” Josephine interposed — not rudely, for, despite the foregoing, she was not rude; it was seldom even that she appeared to talk too much, though she lost her temper, and swore sometimes when people were unreasonable. “He’s perfectly — ”

“He’s very popular. Personally, I don’t see very much to him. He seems rather superficial.”

“Oh, no, mother,” said Josephine. “He’s far from it. Everybody says he has a great deal of personality — which is more than you can say of most of these jakes. Any girl would be glad to get their hands on him. I’d marry him in a minute.”

She had never thought of this before; in fact, the phrase had been invented to express her feeling for Travis de Coppet. When, presently, tea was served, she excused herself and went to her room.

It was a new house, but the Perrys were far from being new people. They were Chicago Society, and almost very rich, and not uncultured as things went thereabouts in 1914. But Josephine was an unconscious pioneer of the generation that was destined to “get out of hand.”

In her room she dressed herself for going to Lillian’s house, thinking meanwhile of Travis de Coppet and of riding home from the Davidsons’ dance last night. Over his tuxedo, Travis had worn a loose blue cape inherited from an old-fashioned uncle. He was tall and thin, an exquisite dancer, and his eyes had often been described by female contemporaries as

“very dark” — to an adult it appeared that he had two black eyes in the collisional sense, and that probably they were justifiably renewed every night; the area surrounding them was so purple, or brown, or crimson, that they were the first thing you noticed about his face, and, save for his white teeth, the last. Like Josephine, he was also something new. There were a lot of new things in Chicago then, but lest the interest of this narrative be divided, it should be remarked that Josephine was the newest thing of all.

Dressed, she went down the stairs and through a softly opening side door, out into the street. It was October and a harsh breeze blew her along under trees without leaves, past houses with cold corners, past caves of the wind that were the mouths of residential streets. From that time until April, Chicago is an indoor city, where entering by a door is like going into another world, for the cold of the lake is unfriendly and not like real northern cold — it serves only to accentuate the things that go on inside. There is no music outdoors, or love-making, and even in prosperous times the wealth that rolls by in limousines is less glamorous than embittering to those on the sidewalk. But in the houses there is a deep, warm quiet, or else an excited, singing noise, as if those within were inventing things like new dances. That is part of what people mean when they say they love Chicago.

Josephine was going to meet her friend Lillian Hammel, but their plan did not include attending the movies. In comparison to it, their mothers would have preferred the most objectionable, the most lurid movie. It was no less than to go for a long auto ride with Travis de Coppet and Howard Page, in the course of which they would kiss not once but a lot. The four of them had been planning this since the previous Saturday, when unkind circumstances had combined to prevent its fulfillment.

Travis and Howard were already there — not sitting down, but still in their overcoats, like symbols of action, hurrying the girls breathlessly into the future. Travis wore a fur collar on his overcoat and carried a gold-headed cane; he kissed Josephine’s hand facetiously yet seriously, and she said, “Hello, Travis!” with the warm affection of a politician greeting a prospective vote. But for a minute the two girls exchanged news aside.

“I saw him,” Lillian whispered, “just now.”

“Did you?”

Their eyes blazed and fused together.

“Isn’t he *divine*?” said Josephine.

They were referring to Mr. Anthony Harker, who was twenty-two, and unconscious of their existence, save that in the Perry house he occasionally recognized Josephine as Constance’s younger sister.

“He has the most beautiful nose,” cried Lillian, suddenly laughing. “It’s — ” She drew it on the air with her finger and they both became hilarious. But Josephine’s face composed itself as Travis’ black eyes, conspicuous as if they had been freshly made the previous night, peered in from the hall.

“Well!” he said tensely.

The four young people went out, passed through fifty bitter feet of wind and entered Page’s car. They were all very confident and knew exactly what they wanted. Both girls were expressly disobeying their parents, but they had no more sense of guilt about it than a soldier escaping from an enemy prison camp. In the back seat, Josephine and Travis looked at each other; she waited as he burned darkly.

“Look,” he said to his hand; it was trembling. “Up till five this morning. Girls from the Follies.”

“Oh, Travis!” she cried automatically, but for the first time a communication such as this failed to thrill her. She took his hand, wondering what the matter was inside herself.

It was quite dark, and he bent over her suddenly, but as suddenly she turned her face away. Annoyed, he made cynical nods with his head and lay back in the corner of the car. He became engaged in cherishing his dark secret — the secret that always made her yearn toward him. She could see it come into his eyes and fill them, down to the cheek bones and up to the brows, but she could not concentrate on him. The romantic mystery of the world had moved into another man.

Travis waited ten minutes for her capitulation; then he tried again, and with this second approach she saw him plain for the first time. It was enough. Josephine's imagination and her desires were easily exploited up to a certain point, but after that her very impulsiveness protected her. Now, suddenly, she found something real against Travis, and her voice was modulated with lowly sorrow.

"I heard what you did last night. I heard very well."

"What's the matter?"

"You told Ed Bement you were in for a big time because you were going to take me home in your car."

"Who told you that?" he demanded, guilty but belittling.

"Ed Bement did, and he told me he almost hit you in the face when you said it. He could hardly keep restraining himself."

Once more Travis retired to his corner of the seat. He accepted this as the reason for her coolness, as in a measure it was. In view of Doctor Jung's theory that innumerable male voices argue in the subconscious of a woman, and even speak through her lips, then the absent Ed Bement was probably speaking through Josephine at that moment.

"I've decided not to kiss any more boys, because I won't have anything left to give the man I really love."

"Bull!" replied Travis.

"It's true. There's been too much talk around Chicago about me. A man certainly doesn't respect a girl he can kiss whenever he wants to, and I want to be respected by the man I'm going to marry some day."

Ed Bement would have been overwhelmed had he realized the extent of his dominance over her that afternoon.

Walking from the corner, where the youths discreetly left her, to her house, Josephine felt that agreeable lightness which comes with the end of a piece of work. She would be a good girl now forever, see less of boys, as her parents wished, try to be what Miss Benbower's school denominated An

Ideal Benbower Girl. Then next year, at Breerly, she could be an Ideal Breerly Girl. But the first stars were out over Lake Shore Drive, and all about her she could feel Chicago swinging around its circle at a hundred miles an hour, and Josephine knew that she only wanted to want such wants for her soul's sake. Actually, she had no desire for achievement. Her grandfather had had that, her parents had had the consciousness of it, but Josephine accepted the proud world into which she was born. This was easy in Chicago, which, unlike New York, was a city state, where the old families formed a caste — intellect was represented by the university professors, and there were no ramifications, save that even the Perrys had to be nice to half a dozen families even richer and more important than themselves. Josephine loved to dance, but the field of feminine glory, the ballroom floor, was something you slipped away from with a man.

As Josephine came to the iron gate of her house, she saw her sister shivering on the top steps with a departing young man; then the front door closed and the man came down the walk. She knew who he was.

He was abstracted, but he recognized her for just a moment in passing.

“Oh, hello,” he said.

She turned all the way round so that he could see her face by the street lamp; she lifted her face full out of her fur collar and toward him, and then smiled.

“Hello,” she said modestly.

They passed. She drew in her head like a turtle.

“Well, now he knows what I look like, anyhow,” she told herself excitedly as she went on into the house.

II

Several days later Constance Perry spoke to her mother in a serious tone:

“Josephine is so conceited that I really think she's a little crazy.”

“She’s very conceited,” admitted Mrs. Perry. “Father and I were talking and we decided that after the first of the year she should go East to school. But you don’t say a word about it until we know more definitely.”

“Heavens, mother, it’s none too soon! She and that terrible Travis de Coppet running around with his cloak, as if they were about a thousand years old. They came into the Blackstone last week and my *spine* crawled. They looked just like two maniacs — Travis slinking along, and Josephine twisting her mouth around as if she had St. Vitus dance. *Honestly* — ”

“What did you begin to say about Anthony Harker?” interrupted Mrs. Perry.

“That she’s got a crush on him, and he’s about old enough to be her grandfather.”

“Not quite.”

“Mother, he’s twenty-two and she’s sixteen. Every time Jo and Lillian go by him, they giggle and stare — ”

“Come here, Josephine,” said Mrs. Perry.

Josephine came into the room slowly and leaned her backbone against the edge of the opened door, teetering upon it calmly.

“What, mother?”

“Dear, you don’t want to be laughed at, do you?”

Josephine turned sulkily to her sister. “Who laughs at me? You do, I guess. You’re the only one that does.”

“You’re so conceited that you don’t see it. When you and Travis de Coppet came into the Blackstone that afternoon, my *spine* crawled. Everybody at our table and most of the other tables laughed — the ones that weren’t shocked.”

“I guess they were more shocked,” guessed Josephine complacently.

“You’ll have a fine reputation by the time you come out.”

“Oh, shut your mouth!” said Josephine.

There was a moment's silence. Then Mrs. Perry whispered solemnly, "I'll have to tell your father about this as soon as he comes home."

"Go on, tell him." Suddenly Josephine began to cry. "Oh, why can't anybody ever leave me alone? I wish I was dead."

Her mother stood with her arm around her, saying, "Josephine — now, Josephine"; but Josephine went on with deep, broken sobs that seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

"Just a lot — of — of ugly and jealous girls who get mad when anybody looks at m-me, and make up all sorts of stories that are absolutely untrue, just because I can get anybody I want. I suppose that Constance is mad about it because I went in and sat for *five* minutes with Anthony Harker while he was waiting last night."

"Yes, I was terribly jealous! I sat up and cried all night about it. Especially because he comes to talk to me about Marice Whaley. Why! — you got him so crazy about you in that five minutes that he couldn't stop laughing all the way to the Warrens."

Josephine drew in her breath in one last gasp, and stopped crying. "If you want to know, I've decided to give him up."

"Ha-ha!" Constance exploded. "Listen to *that*, mother! She's going to give him up — as if he ever looked at her or knew she was *alive*! Of all the conceited — "

But Mrs. Perry could stand no more. She put her arm around Josephine and hurried her to her room down the hall.

"All your sister meant was that she didn't like to see you laughed at," she explained.

"Well, I've given him up," said Josephine gloomily.

She had given him up, renouncing a thousand kisses she had never had, a hundred long, thrilling dances in his arms, a hundred evenings not to be recaptured. She did not mention the letter she had written him last night — and had not sent, and now would never send.

“You musn’t think about such things at your age,” said Mrs. Perry. “You’re just a child.”

Josephine got up and went to the mirror.

“I promised Lillian to come over to her house. I’m late now.”

Back in her room, Mrs. Perry thought: “Two months to February.” She was a pretty woman who wanted to be loved by everyone around her; there was no power of governing in her. She tied up her mind like a neat package and put it in the post office, with Josephine inside it safely addressed to the Breerly School.

An hour later, in the tea room at the Blackstone Hotel, Anthony Harker and another young man lingered at table. Anthony was a happy fellow, lazy, rich enough, pleased with his current popularity. After a brief career in an Eastern university, he had gone to a famous college in Virginia and in its less exigent shadow completed his education; at least, he had absorbed certain courtesies and mannerisms that Chicago girls found charming.

“There’s that guy Travis de Coppet,” his companion had just remarked.

“What’s he think he is, anyhow?”

Anthony looked remotely at the young people across the room, recognizing the little Perry girl and other young females whom he seemed to have encountered frequently in the street of late. Although obviously much at home, they seemed silly and loud; presently his eyes left them and searched the room for the party he was due to join for dancing, but he was still sitting there when the room — it had a twilight quality, in spite of the lights within and the full dark outside — woke up to confident and exciting music. A thickening parade drifted past him. The men in sack suits, as though they had just come from portentous affairs, and the women in hats that seemed about to take flight, gave a special impermanence to the scene. This implication that this gathering, a little more than uncalculated, a little less than clandestine, would shortly be broken into formal series, made him anxious to seize its last minutes, and he looked more and more intently into the crowd for the face of anyone he knew.

One face emerged suddenly around a man's upper arm not five feet away, and for a moment Anthony was the object of the saddest and most tragic regard that had ever been directed upon him. It was a smile and not a smile — two big gray eyes with bright triangles of color underneath, and a mouth twisted into a universal sympathy that seemed to include both him and herself — yet withal, the expression not of a victim, but rather of the very demon of tender melancholy — and for the first time Anthony really saw Josephine.

His immediate instinct was to see with whom she was dancing. It was a young man he knew, and with this assurance he was on his feet giving a quick tug to his coat, and then out upon the floor.

“May I cut in, please?”

Josephine came close to him as they started, looked up into his eyes for an instant, and then down and away. She said nothing. Realizing that she could not possibly be more than sixteen, Anthony hoped that the party he was to join would not arrive in the middle of the dance.

When that was over, she raised eyes to him again; a sense of having been mistaken, of her being older than he had thought, possessed him. Just before he left her at her table, he was moved to say:

“Couldn't I have another later?”

“Oh, sure.”

She united her eyes with his, every glint a spike — perhaps from the railroads on which their family fortunes were founded, and upon which they depended. Anthony was disconcerted as he went back to his table.

One hour later, they left the Blackstone together in her car.

This had simply happened — Josephine's statement, at the end of their second dance, that she must leave, then her request, and his own extreme self-consciousness as he walked beside her across the empty floor. It was a favor to her sister to take her home — but he had that unmistakable feeling of expectation.

Nevertheless, once outside and shocked into reconsideration by the bitter cold, he tried again to allocate his responsibilities in the matter. This was hard going with Josephine's insistent dark and ivory youth pressed up against him. As they got in the car he tried to dominate the situation with a masculine stare, but her eyes, shining as if with fever, melted down his bogus austerity in a whittled second.

Idly he patted her hand — then suddenly he was inside the radius of her perfume and kissing her breathlessly. . . .

"So that's that," she whispered after a moment. Startled, he wondered if he had forgotten something — something he had said to her before.

"What a cruel remark," he said, "just when I was getting interested."

"I only meant that any minute with you may be the last one," she said miserably. "The family are going to send me away to school — they think I haven't found that out yet."

"Too bad."

" — and today they got together — and tried to tell me that you didn't know I was alive!"

After a long pause, Anthony contributed feebly. "I hope you didn't let them convince you."

She laughed shortly. "I just laughed and came down here."

Her hand burrowed its way into his; when he pressed it, her eyes, bright now, not dark, rose until they were as high as his, and came toward him. A minute later he thought to himself: "This is a rotten trick I'm doing."

He was sure he was doing it.

"You're so sweet," she said.

"You're a dear child."

"I hate jealousy worse than anything in the world," Josephine broke forth, "and I have to suffer from it. And my own sister worse than all the rest."

“Oh, no,” he protested.

“I couldn’t help it if I fell in love with you. I tried to help it. I used to go out of the house when I knew you were coming.”

The force of her lies came from her sincerity and from her simple and superb confidence that whomsoever she loved must love her in return. Josephine was never either ashamed or plaintive. She was in the world of being alone with a male, a world through which she had moved surely since she was eight years old. She did not plan; she merely let herself go, and the overwhelming life in her did the rest. It is only when youth is gone and experience has given us a sort of cheap courage that most of us realize how simple such things are.

“But you couldn’t be in love with me,” Anthony wanted to say, and couldn’t. He fought with a desire to kiss her again, even tenderly, and began to tell her that she was being unwise, but before he got really started at this handsome project, she was in his arms again, and whispering something that he had to accept, since it was wrapped up in a kiss. Then he was alone, driving away from her door.

What had he agreed to? All they had said rang and beat in his ear like an unexpected temperature — tomorrow at four o’clock on that corner.

“Good God!” he thought uneasily. “All that stuff about giving me up. She’s a crazy kid, she’ll get into trouble if somebody looking for trouble comes along. *Big chance of my meeting her tomorrow!*”

But neither at dinner nor the dance that he went to that night could Anthony get the episode out of his mind; he kept looking around the ballroom regretfully, as if he missed someone who should be there.

III

Two weeks later, waiting for Marice Whaley in a meager, indefinable downstairs “sitting room,” Anthony reached in his pocket for some half-forgotten mail. Three letters he replaced; the other — after a moment of listening — he opened quickly and read with his back to the door. It was the third of a

series — for one had followed each of his meetings with Josephine — and it was exactly like the others — the letter of a child. Whatever maturity of emotion could accumulate in her expression, when once she set pen to paper was snowed under by ineptitude. There was much about “your feeling for me” and “my feeling for you,” and sentences began, “Yes, I know I am sentimental,” or more gawkily, “I have always been sort of pash, and I can’t help that,” and inevitably much quoting of lines from current popular songs, as if they expressed the writer’s state of mind more fully than verbal struggles of her own.

The letter disturbed Anthony. As he reached the postscript, which coolly made a rendezvous for five o’clock this afternoon, he heard Marice coming down-stairs, and put it back in his pocket.

Marice hummed and moved about the room. Anthony smoked.

“I saw you Tuesday afternoon,” she said suddenly. “You seemed to be having a fine time.”

“Tuesday,” he repeated, as if thinking. “Oh, yeah. I ran into some kids and we went to a tea dance. It was amusing.”

“You were *almost* alone when I saw you.”

“What are you getting at?”

Marice hummed again. “Let’s go out. Let’s go to a *matinée*.”

On the way Anthony explained how he had happened to be with Connie’s little sister; the necessity of the explanation somehow angered him. When he had done, Marice said crisply:

“If you wanted to rob the cradle, why did you have to pick out that little devil? Her reputation’s so bad already that Mrs. McRae didn’t want to invite her to dancing class this year — she only did it on account of Constance.”

“Why is she so awful?” asked Anthony, disturbed.

“I’d rather not discuss it.”

His five-o'clock engagement was on his mind throughout the matinée. Though Marice's remarks served only to make him dangerously sorry for Josephine, he was nevertheless determined that this meeting should be the last. It was embarrassing to have been remarked in her company, even though he had tried honestly to avoid it. The matter could very easily develop into a rather dangerous little mess, with no benefit either to Josephine or to himself. About Marice's indignation he did not care; she had been his for the asking all autumn, but Anthony did not want to get married; did not want to get involved with anybody at all.

It was dark when he was free at 5:30, and turned his car toward the new Philanthropological Building in the maze of reconstruction in Grant Park. The bleakness of place and time depressed him, gave a further painfulness to the affair. Getting out of his car, he walked past a young man in a waiting roadster — a young man whom he seemed to recognize — and found Josephine in the half darkness of the little chamber that the storm doors formed.

With an indefinable sound of greeting, she walked determinedly into his arms, putting up her face.

"I can only stay for a sec," she protested, just as if he had begged her to come. "I'm supposed to go to a wedding with sister, but I had to see you."

When Anthony spoke, his voice froze into a white mist, obvious in the darkness. He said things he had said to her before but this time firmly and finally. It was easier, because he could scarcely see her face and because somewhere in the middle she irritated him by starting to cry.

"I knew you were supposed to be fickle," she whispered, "but I didn't expect this. Anyhow, I've got enough pride not to bother you any further." She hesitated. "But I wish we could meet just once more to try and arrive at a more different settlement."

"No."

"Some jealous girl has been talking to you about me."

“No.” Then, in despair, he struck at her heart. “I’m not fickle. I’ve never loved you and I never told you I did.”

Guessing at the forlorn expression that would come into her face, Anthony turned away and took a purposeless step; when he wheeled nervously about, the storm door had just shut — she was gone.

“Josephine!” he shouted in helpless pity, but there was no answer. He waited, heart in his boots, until presently he heard a car drive away.

At home, Josephine thanked Ed Bement, whom she had used, with a tartlet of hope, went in by a side door and up to her room. The window was open and, as she dressed hurriedly for the wedding she stood close to it so that she would catch cold and die.

Seeing her face in the bathroom mirror, she broke down and sat on the edge of the tub, making a small choking sound like a struggle with a cough, and cleaning her finger nails. Later she could cry all night in bed when every one else was asleep, but now it was still afternoon.

The two sisters and their mother stood side by side at the wedding of Mary Jackson and Jackson Dillon. It was a sad and sentimental wedding — an end to the fine, glamorous youth of a girl who was universally admired and loved. Perhaps to no onlooker there were its details symbolical of the end of a period, yet from the vantage point of a decade, certain things that happened are already powdered with yesterday’s ridiculousness, and even tinted with the lavender of the day before. The bride raised her veil, smiling that grave sweet smile that made her “adored,” but with tears pouring down her cheeks, and faced dozens of friends hands outheld as if embracing all of them for the last time. Then she turned to a husband as serious and immaculate as herself, and looked at him as if to say, “That’s done. All this that I am is yours forever and ever.”

In her pew, Constance, who had been at school with Mary Jackson, was frankly weeping, from a heart that was a ringing vault. But the face of Josephine beside her was a more intricate study; it watched intently. Once or twice, though her eyes lost none of their level straight intensity, an isolated tear escaped, and, as if startled by the feel of it, the face hardened

slightly and the mouth remained in defiant immobility, like a child well warned against making a disturbance. Only once did she move; hearing a voice behind her say: "That's the little Perry girl. Isn't she lovely looking?" she turned presently and gazed at a stained-glass window lest her unknown admirers miss the sight of the side face.

Josephine's family went on to the reception, so she dined alone — or rather with her little brother and his nurse, which was the same thing.

She felt all empty. Tonight Anthony Harker, "so deeply lovable — so sweetly lovable — so deeply, sweetly lovable" was making love to someone new, kissing her ugly, jealous face; soon he would have disappeared forever, together with all the men of his generation, into a loveless matrimony, leaving only a world of Travis de Coppets and Ed Bements — people so easy as to scarcely be worth the effort of a smile.

Up in her room, she was excited again by the sight of herself in the bathroom mirror. Oh, what if she should die in her sleep tonight?

"Oh, what a shame," she whispered.

She opened the window, and holding her only souvenir of Anthony, a big initialed linen handkerchief, crept desolately into bed. While the sheets were still cold, there was a knock at the door.

"Special-delivery letter," said the maid.

Putting on the light, Josephine opened it, turned to the signature, then back again, her breast rising and falling quickly under her nightgown.

DARLING LITTLE Josephine: It's no use, I can't help it, I can't lie about it. I'm desperately, terribly in love with you. When you went away this afternoon, it all rushed over me, and I knew I couldn't give you up. I drove home, and I couldn't eat or sit still, but only walk up and down thinking of your darling face and your darling tears, there in that vestibule. And now I sit writing this letter —

It was four pages long. Somewhere it disposed of their disparate ages as unimportant, and the last words were:

I know how miserable you must be, and I would give ten years of my life to be there to kiss your sweet lips good night.

When she had read it through, Josephine sat motionless for some minutes; grief was suddenly gone, and for a moment she was so overwhelmed that she supposed joy had come in its stead. On her face was a twinkling frown.

“Gosh!” she said to herself. She read over the letter once more.

Her first instinct was to call up Lillian, but she thought better of it. The image of the bride at the wedding popped out at her — the reproachless bride, unsullied, beloved and holy with a sweet glow. An adolescence of uprightness, a host of friends, then the appearance of the perfect lover, the Ideal. With an effort, she recalled her drifting mind to the present occasion. Certainly Mary Jackson would never have kept such a letter. Getting out of bed, Josephine tore it into little pieces and, with some difficulty, caused by an unexpected amount of smoke, burned it on a glass-topped table. No well-brought-up girl would have answered such a letter; the proper thing was to simply ignore it.

She wiped up the table top with the man’s linen handkerchief she held in her hand, threw it absently into a laundry basket and crept into bed. She suddenly was very sleepy.

IV

For what ensued, no one, not even Constance, blamed Josephine. If a man of twenty-two should so debase himself as to pay frantic court to a girl of sixteen against the wishes of her parents and herself, there was only one answer — he was a person who shouldn’t be received by decent people. When Travis de Coppet made a controversial remark on the affair at a dance, Ed Bement beat him into what was described as “a pulp,” down in the washroom, and Josephine’s reputation rose to normal and stayed there. Accounts of how Anthony had called time and time again at the house, each time denied admittance, how he had threatened Mr. Perry, how he had tried to bribe a maid to deliver letters, how he had attempted to waylay Josephine on her way back from school — these things pointed to the fact

that he was a little mad. It was Anthony Harker's own family who insisted that he should go West.

All this was a trying time for Josephine. She saw how close she had come to disaster, and by constant consideration and implicit obedience, tried to make up to her parents for the trouble she had unwittingly caused. At first she decided she didn't want to go to any Christmas dances, but she was persuaded by her mother, who hoped she would be distracted by boys and girls home from school for the holidays. Mrs. Perry was taking her East to the Breerly School early in January, and in the buying of clothes and uniforms, mother and daughter were much together, and Mrs. Perry was delighted at Josephine's new feeling of responsibility and maturity.

As a matter of fact, it was sincere, and only once did Josephine do anything that she could not have told the world. The day after New Year's she put on her new travelling suit and her new fur coat and went out by her familiar egress, the side door, and walked down the block to the waiting car of Ed Bement. Downtown she left Ed waiting at a corner and entered a drug store opposite the old Union Station on LaSalle Street. A man with an unhappy mouth and desperate, baffled eyes was waiting for her there.

"Thank you for coming," he said miserably.

She didn't answer. Her face was grave and polite.

"Here's what I want — just one thing," he said quickly: "Why did you change? What did I do that made you change so suddenly? Was it something that happened, something I did? Was it what I said in the vestibule that night?"

Still looking at him, she tried to think, but she could only think how unattractive and rather terrible she found him now, and try not to let him see it. There would have been no use saying the simple truth — that she could not help what she had done, that great beauty has a need, almost an obligation, of trying itself, that her ample cup of emotion had spilled over on its own accord, and it was an accident that it had destroyed him and not her. The eyes of pity might follow Anthony Harker in his journey West, but most

certainly the eyes of destiny followed Josephine as she crossed the street through the falling snow to Ed Bement's car.

She sat quiet for a minute as they drove away, relieved and yet full of awe. Anthony Harker was twenty-two, handsome, popular and sought after — and how he had loved her — so much that he had to go away. She was as impressed as if they had been two other people.

Taking her silence for depression, Ed Bement said:

“Well, it did one thing anyhow — it stopped that other story they had around about you.”

She turned to him quickly. “What story?”

“Oh, just some crazy story.”

“What was it?” she demanded.

“Oh, nothing much,” he said hesitantly, “but there was a story around last August that you and Travis de Coppet were married.”

“Why, how perfectly terrible!” she exclaimed. “Why, I never heard of such a lie. It — ” She stopped herself short of saying the truth — that though she and Travis had adventurously driven twenty miles to New Ulm, they had been unable to find a minister willing to marry them. It all seemed ages behind her, childish, forgotten.

“Oh, how perfectly terrible!” she repeated. “That's the kind of story that gets started by jealous girls.”

“I know,” agreed Ed. “I'd just like to hear any boy try to repeat it to me. Nobody believed it anyhow.”

It was the work of ugly and jealous girls. Ed Bement, aware of her body next to him, and of her face shining like fire through the half darkness, knew that nobody so beautiful could ever do anything really wrong.

A NICE QUIET PLACE

I

The Saturday Evening Post (31 May, 1930)

All that week she couldn't decide whether she was a lollipop or a roman candle — through her dreams, dreams that promised uninterrupted sleep through many vacation mornings, drove a series of long, incalculable murmuring in tune with the put-put-put of their cut-outs, "I love you — I love you," over and over. She wrote in the evening:

Dear Ridge: When I think of not being able to come to the freshman dance with you this June, I could lie down and die, but mother is sort of narrow-minded in some ways, and she feels that sixteen is too young to go to a prom; and Lil Hammel's mother feels the same way. When I think of you dancing around with some other girl and hear you handing her a line, like you do to everybody, I could lie down and scream. Oh, I know — because a girl here at school met you after I left Hot Springs at Easter. Anyhow, if you start rushing some other kid when you come out to Ed Bement's house party this summer, I intend to cut her throat, or my own, or something desperate. And probably no one will even be sorry I'm dead. Ha-ha —

Summer, summer, summer — bland inland sun and friendly rain. Lake Forest, with its thousand enchanted verandas, the dancing on the outdoor platform at the club, and always the boys, centaurs, in new cars. Her mother came East to meet her, and as they walked together out of the Grand Central Station, the symphony of promise became so loud that Josephine's face was puckered and distorted, as with the pressure of strong sunshine.

"We've got the best plans," her mother said.

"Oh, what? What, mother?"

"A real change. I'll tell you all about it when we get to the hotel."

There was a sudden discord; a shadow fell upon Josephine's heart.

“What do you mean? Aren’t we going to Lake Forest?”

“Some place much better” — her mother’s voice was alarmingly cheerful.
“I’m saving it till we get to the hotel.”

Before Mrs. Perry had left Chicago, she and Josephine’s father had decided, from observations of their own and some revelations on the part of their elder daughter, Constance, that Josephine knew her way around Lake Forest all too well. The place had changed in the twenty years that it had been the summer rendezvous of fashionable Chicago; less circumscribed children of new families were resoundingly in evidence and, like most parents, Mrs. Perry thought of her daughter as one easily led into mischief by others. The more impartial eyes of other members of the colony had long regarded Josephine herself as the principal agent of corruption. But, preventive or penalty, the appalling thing to Josephine was that the Perrys were going to a “nice quiet place” this summer.

“Mother, I simply can’t go to Island Farms. I simply — ”

“Father feels — ”

“Why don’t you take me to a reform school if I’m so awful? Or to state’s penitentiary? I simply can’t go to a horrible old farm with a lot of country jakes and no fun and no friends except a lot of hicks.”

“But, dear, it’s not like that at all. They just call it Island Farms. In fact, your aunt’s place isn’t a farm; it’s really a nice little resort up in Michigan where lots of people spend the summer. Tennis and swimming and — and fishing.”

“Fishing?” repeated Josephine incredulously. “Do you call *that* something to do?” She shook her head in mute incomprehension. “I’ll just be forgotten, that’s all. When it’s my year to come out nobody will know who I am. They’ll just say, ‘Who in heck is this Josephine Perry? I never saw her around here.’ ‘Oh, she’s just some hick from a horrible old farm up in Michigan. Let’s not invite her.’ Just when everybody else is having a wonderful time — ”

“Nobody’ll forget you in one summer, dear.”

“Yes, they will. Everybody’ll have new friends and know new dances, and I’ll be up there in the backwoods, full of hayseed, forgetting everything I know. If it’s so wonderful why isn’t Constance coming?”

Lying awake in their drawing-room on the Twentieth Century, Josephine brooded upon the terrible injustice of it all. She knew that her mother was going on her account, and mostly because of the gossip of a few ugly and jealous girls. These ugly and jealous girls, her relentless enemies, were not entirely creatures of Josephine’s imagination. There was something in the frank sensuousness of her beauty that plain women found absolutely intolerable; they stared at her in a frightened, guarded way.

It was only recently that gossip had begun to worry Josephine.

Her own theory was that, though at thirteen or fourteen she had been “speedy” — a convenient word that lacked the vulgar implication of “fast” — she was now trying to do her best, and a difficult enough business it was, without the past being held against her; for the only thing she cared about in the world was being in love and being with the person she currently loved.

Toward midnight her mother spoke to her softly and found that she was asleep.

Turning on the berth light, she looked for a moment at the flushed young face, smoothed now of all its disappointment by a faint, peculiar smile.

She leaned over and kissed Josephine’s brow, behind which, doubtless, were passing in review those tender and eagerly awaited orgies of which she was to be deprived this summer.

II

Into Chicago, resonant with shrill June clamor; out to Lake Forest, where her friends moved already in an aura of new boys, new tunes, parties and house parties yet to be. One concession was granted her — she was to come back from Island Farms in time for Ed Bement’s house party — which is to say, for Ridgeway Saunders’ visit, the first of September.

Then northward, leaving all gayety behind, to the nice quiet place, implicit in its very station, which breathed no atmosphere of hectic arrivals or feverish partings: there was her aunt, her fifteen-year-old cousin, Dick, with the blank resentful stare of youth in spectacles, there were the dozen or so estates with tired people asleep inside them and the drab village three miles away. It was worse, even, than Josephine had imagined; to her the vicinity was literally unpopulated, for, as a representative of her generation, she stood alone. In despair, she buried herself in ceaseless correspondence with the outer world or, as a variant, played tennis with Dick and carried on a slow indifferent quarrel at his deliberately spiteful immaturity.

“Are you going to be this way always?” she demanded, breaking down at his stupidity one day. “Can’t you do anything about it? Does it hurt?”

“What way?” Dick shambled around the tennis net in the way that so offended her.

“Oh, such a pill! You ought to be sent away to some good school.”

“I am going to be.”

“Why, at your age most of the boys in Chicago have cars of their own.”

“Too many,” he responded.

“How do you mean?” Josephine flared up.

“I heard my aunt say there was too much of that there. That’s why they made you come up here. You’re too much for that sort of thing.”

Josephine flushed. “Couldn’t you *help* being such a pill, if you honestly tried?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Dick. “I don’t even think that maybe I *am*one.”

“Oh, yes, you are. I can assure you of that.”

It occurred to her, not very hopefully, that under proper supervision something might be made of him. Perhaps she could teach him to dance or have him learn to drive his mother’s car. She went to the extent of trying to smarten him up, to make him wash his hands bidiurnally and to soak his hair

and cleave it down the middle. She suggested that he would be more beautiful without his spectacles, and he obediently bumped around without them for several afternoons. But when he developed a feverish headache one night and confessed to his mother why he had been “so utterly insane,” Josephine gave him up without a pang.

But she could have cared for almost anyone. She wanted to hear the mystical terminology of love, to feel the lift and pull inside herself that each one of a dozen affairs had given her. She had written, of course, to Ridgeway Saunders. He answered. She wrote again. He answered — but after two weeks. On the first of August, with one month gone and one to go, came a letter from Lillian Hammel, her best friend in Lake Forest.

Dearest Jo: You said to write you every single thing, and I will, but some of it will be sort of a fatal blow to you — about Ridgeway Saunders. Ed Bement visited him in Philadelphia, and he says he is so crazy about a girl there that he wants to leave Yale and get married. Her name is Evangeline Ticknor and she was fired from Foxcroft last year for smoking; quite a speed and said to be beautiful and something like you, from what I hear. Ed said that Ridgeway was so crazy about her that he wouldn't even come out here in September unless Ed invited her, too; so Ed did. Probably a lot you care! You've probably had lots of crushes up there where you are, or aren't there any attractive boys —

Josephine walked slowly up and down her room. Her parents had what they wanted now; the plot against her was complete. For the first time in her life she had been thrown over, and by the most attractive, the most desirable boy she had ever known, cut out by a girl “very much like herself.” Josephine wished passionately that she had been fired from school — then the family might have given up and let her alone.

She was not so much humiliated as full of angry despair, but for the sake of her pride, she had a letter to write immediately. Her eyes were bright with tears as she began:

Dearest Lil: I was not surprised when I heard that about R. S. I knew he was fickle and never gave him a second *thought* after school closed in June. As a matter of fact, you know how fickle I am myself, darling, and you can

imagine that I haven't had time to let it worry me. Everybody has a right to do what they want, say I. Live and let live is my motto. I wish you could have been here this summer. More *wonderful* parties —

She paused, knowing that she should invent more circumstantial evidence of gayety. Pen in air, she gazed out into the deep, still mass of northern trees. Inventing was delicate work, and having dealt always in realities, her imagination was ill-adapted to the task. Nevertheless, after several minutes a vague, synthetic figure began to take shape in her mind. She dipped the pen and wrote: "One of the darlinest — " hesitated and turned again for inspiration to the window.

Suddenly she started and bent forward, the tears drying in her eyes. Striding down the road, not fifty feet from her window, was the handsomest, the most fascinating boy she had ever seen in her life.

III

He was about nineteen and tall, with a blond viking head; the fresh color in his slender, almost gaunt cheeks was baked warm and dry by the sun. She had a glimpse of his eyes — enough to know that they were "sad" and of an extraordinary glistening blue. His model legs were in riding breeches, above which he wore a soft sweater jacket of blue chamois, and as he walked he swung a crop acrimoniously at the overhanging leaves.

For a moment the vision endured; then the path turned into a clump of trees and he was gone, save for the small crunch of his boots on the pine needles.

Josephine did not move. The dark green trees that had seemed so lacking in promise were suddenly like a magic wall that had opened and revealed a short cut to possible delight; the trees gave forth a great trembling rustle. For another instant she waited; then she threw herself at the unfinished letter:

— he usually wears the best-looking riding clothes. He has the *most* beautiful eyes. On top he usually wears a blue chamois thing that is simply *divine*.

IV

When her mother came in, half an hour later, she found Josephine getting into her best afternoon dress with an expression that was at once animated and far away.

“I thought — ” she said. “I don’t suppose you’d want to come with me and pay a few calls?”

“I’d adore to,” said Josephine unexpectedly.

Her mother hesitated. “I’m afraid it’s been a rather stupid month for you. I didn’t realize that there wouldn’t be anyone your age. But something nice has happened that I can’t tell you about yet, and perhaps I’ll soon have some news for you.”

Josephine did not appear to hear.

“Who shall we call on?” she demanded eagerly. “Let’s just call on everybody, even if it takes until ten o’clock tonight. Let’s start at the nearest house and just keep going until we’ve killed everybody off.”

“I don’t know whether we can do that.”

“Come on.” Josephine was putting on her hat. “Let’s get going, mother.”

Perhaps, Mrs. Perry thought, the summer was really making a difference in her daughter; perhaps it was developing in her a more gently social vein. At each house they visited she positively radiated animation, and displayed sincere disappointment when they found no one home. When her mother called it a day, the light in her eyes went out.

“We can try again tomorrow,” she said impatiently. “We’ll kill the rest of them off. We’ll go back to those houses where there was no one home.”

It was almost seven — a nostalgic hour, for it had been the loveliest of all at Lake Forest a year ago. Bathed and positively shining, one had intruded then for a last minute into the departing day, and, sitting alone on the veranda, turned over the romantic prospects of the night, while lighted windows

sprang out on the blurring shapes of houses, and cars flew past with people late home from tea.

But tonight the murmurous Indian twilight of the lake country had a promise of its own, and strolling out into the lane that passed the house, Josephine broke suddenly into a certain walk, rather an externalized state of mind, that had been hitherto reserved for more sophisticated localities. It implied, through a skimming lift of the feet, through an impatience of the moving hips, through an abstracted smile, lastly through a glance that fell twenty feet ahead, that this girl was about to cross some material threshold where she was eagerly awaited; that, in fact, she had already crossed it in her imagination and left her surroundings behind. It was just at that moment she heard a strong clear whistle in front of her and the sound as of a stick swishing through leaves:

“Hello,

Fris-co,

Hello!

How do you do, my dear?

I only wish that you were here.”

Her heart beat a familiar tattoo; she realized that they would pass each other just where a last rift of sunset came down through the pines.

“Hello,

Fris-co,

Hel-lo!”

There he was, a fine shape against the foreground. His gallant face, drawn in a single dashing line, his chamois vest, so blue — she was near enough that she could have touched it. Then she realized with a shock that he had passed without noticing her proximity by a single flicker of his unhappy eyes.

“The conceited pill!” she thought indignantly. “Of all the conceited — ”

She was silent during dinner; at the end she said to her aunt, with small preliminary:

“I passed the most conceited-looking young man today. I wonder who he could have been.”

“Maybe it was the nephew of old Dorrance,” offered Dick, “or the fellow staying at old Dorrance’s. Somebody said it was his nephew or some sort of relation.”

His mother said pointedly to Josephine: “We don’t see the Dorrances. Mr. Charles Dorrance considered that my husband was unjust to him about our boundary some years ago. Old Mr. Dorrance was a very stubborn man indeed.”

Josephine wondered if that was why he had failed to respond this afternoon. It was a silly reason.

But next day, at the same place, at the same hour, he literally jumped at her soft “Good evening”; he stared at her with unmistakable signs of dismay. Then his hand went up as if to remove a hat, found none, and he bowed instead and went on by.

But Josephine turned swiftly and walked at his side, smiling.

“You might be more sociable. You really shouldn’t be so exclusive, since we’re the only two people in this place. I do think it’s silly to let older people influence young people.”

He was walking so fast that she could scarcely keep up with him.

“Honestly, I’m a nice girl,” she persisted, still smiling. “Quite a few people rush me at dances and I once had a blind man in love with me.”

They were almost at her aunt’s gate, still walking furiously.

“Here’s where I live,” she said.

“Then I’ll say good-by.”

“What is the matter?” she demanded. “How can you be so rude?”

His lips formed the words, "I'm sorry."

"I suppose you've got to hurry home so you can stare at yourself at the mirror."

She knew this was untrue. He wore his good looks in almost an apologetic way. But it reached him, for he came to a precipitate halt, immediately moving off a little.

"Excuse my rudeness," he exploded. "But I'm not used to girls."

She was too winded to answer. But as her shaken composure gradually returned, she became aware of an odd weariness in his face.

"At least you might talk to me for a minute, if I don't come any nearer."

After a moment's hesitation he hoisted himself tentatively onto a fence rail.

"If you're so frightened of females, isn't it time something was done about it?" she inquired.

"It's too late."

"Never," she said positively. "Why, you're missing half of life. Don't you want to marry and have children and make some woman a fine wife — I mean, a fine husband?"

In answer he only shivered.

"I used to be terribly timid myself," she lied kindly. "But I saw that I was missing half of life."

"It isn't a question of will power. It's just that I'm a little crazy on the subject. A minute ago I had an instinct to throw a stone at you. I know it's terrible, so if you'll excuse me — "

He jumped down off the fence, but she cried quickly: "Wait! Let's talk it all over."

He lingered reluctantly.

"Why, in Chicago," she said, "any man as good-looking as you could have any girl he wanted. Everyone would simply pursue him."

The idea seemed to distress him still further; his face grew so sad that impulsively she moved nearer, but he swung one leg over the fence.

“All right. We’ll talk about something else,” she conceded. “Isn’t this the most dismal place you ever saw? I was supposed to be a speed in Lake Forest, so the family sentenced me to this, and I’ve had the most *killing* month, just sitting and twirling my thumbs. Then yesterday I looked out the window and saw you.”

“What do you mean you were a speed?” he inquired.

“Just sort of speedy — you know, sort of pash.”

He got up — this time with an air of finality.

“You really must excuse me. I know I’m an idiot on this woman question, but there’s nothing to do about it.”

“Will you meet me here tomorrow?”

“Heavens, no!”

Josephine was suddenly angry; she had humbled herself enough for one afternoon. With a cold nod, she started homeward down the lane.

“Wait!”

Now that there was thirty feet between them, his timidity had left him. She was tempted to go back, resisted the impulse with difficulty.

“I’ll be here tomorrow,” she said coolly.

Walking slowly home, she saw, by instinct rather than logic, that there was something here she failed to understand. In general, a lack of self-confidence was enough to disqualify any boy from her approval; it was the unforgivable sin, the white flag, the refusal of battle. Yet now that this young man was out of sight, she saw him as he had appeared the previous afternoon — unself-conscious, probably arrogant, utterly debonair. Again she wondered if the unpleasantness between the families could be responsible for his attitude.

In spite of their unsatisfactory conversation, she was happy. In the soft glow of the sunset it seemed certain that it would all come right tomorrow. Already the oppressive sense of being wasted had deserted her. The boy who had passed her window yesterday afternoon was capable of anything — love, drama, or even that desperate recklessness that she loved best of all.

Her mother was waiting on the veranda.

“I wanted to see you alone,” she said, “because I thought Aunt Gladys would be offended if you looked too delighted. We’re going back to Lake Forest tomorrow.”

“Mother!”

“Constance is announcing her engagement tomorrow and getting married in ten days. Malcolm Libby is in the State Department and he’s ordered abroad. Isn’t it wonderful? Your sister’s opening up the Lake Forest house today.”

“It’ll be marvellous.” After a moment Josephine repeated, with more conviction: “Perfectly marvellous.”

Lake Forest — she could feel the fast-beating excitement of it already. Yet there was something missing, as if the note of an essential trumpet had become separated from the band. For five weeks she had passionately hated Island Farms, but glancing around her in the gathering dusk, she felt rather sorry for it, a little ashamed of her desertion.

Throughout dinner the odd feeling persisted. She would be deep in exciting thoughts that began, “Won’t it be fun to — ” then the imminent brilliance would fade and there would be a stillness inside her like the stillness of these Michigan nights. That was what was lacking in Lake Forest — a stillness for things to happen in, for people to walk into.

“We’ll be terribly busy,” her mother said. “Next week there’ll be bridesmaids in the house, and parties, and the wedding itself. We should have left tonight.”

Josephine went up to her room immediately and sat looking out into the darkness. Too bad; a wasted summer after all. If yesterday had happened sooner she might have gone away with some sense of having lived after all. Too late. “But there’ll be lots of boys,” she told herself — Ridgeway Saunders.

She could hear their confident lines, and somehow they rang silly on her ears. Suddenly she realized that what she was regretting was not the lost past but the lost future, not what had not been but what would never be. She stood up, breathing quickly.

A few minutes later she left the house by a side door and crossed the lawn to the gardener’s gate. She heard Dick call after her uncertainly, but she did not answer. It was dark and cool, and the feeling that the summer was rushing away from her. As if to overtake it, she walked faster, and in ten minutes turned in at the gate of the Dorrance house, set behind the jagged silhouettes of many trees. Someone on the veranda hailed her as she came near:

“Good evening. I can’t see who it is.”

“It’s the girl who was so fresh this afternoon.”

She heard him catch his breath suddenly.

“May I sit here on the steps for a moment? See? Quite safe and far away. I came to say good-by, because we’re going home tomorrow.”

“Are you really?” She could not tell whether his tone showed concern or relief. “It’ll be very quiet.”

“I want to explain about this afternoon, because I don’t want you to think I was just being fresh. Usually I like boys with more experience, but I just thought that since we were the only ones here, we might manage to have a good time, and there weren’t any days to waste.”

“I see.” After a moment he asked, “What will you do in Lake Forest? Be a — a speed?”

“I don’t much care what I do. I’ve wasted the whole six weeks.”

She heard him laugh.

“I gather from your tone that someone is going to have to pay for it,” he said.

“I hope so,” she answered rather grimly. She felt tears rise in her eyes. Everything was wrong. Everything seemed to be fixed against her.

“Please let me come up there on the settee,” she asked suddenly.

There was a creak as it stopped swinging.

“Please don’t. I hate to ask you, but really I’ll have to go if you do. Let’s talk about — Do you like horses?”

She got up swiftly, mounted the steps and walked toward the corner where he sat.

“No,” she said, “I think that what I’d like would be to be liked by you.”

In the light of the moon just lifting over the woods his face was positively haggard. He jumped to his feet; then his hands were on her arms and he was drawing her slowly toward him.

“You simply want to be kissed,” he was saying through scarcely opened lips. “I knew it the first time I saw that mouth of yours — that perfectly selfish, self-sufficient look that — ”

Suddenly he dropped his arms and stepped away from her with a gesture of horror.

“Don’t stop!” she cried. “Do anything, tell me anything, even if it isn’t complimentary. I don’t care.”

But he had vaulted swiftly over the railing and, with his hands clasping the back of his head, was walking across the lawn. In a minute she overtook him and stood beseechingly in his path, her small bosom rising and falling.

“Why do you suppose I’m here?” he demanded suddenly. “Do you think I’m alone?”

“What — ”

“My wife is with me.”

Josephine shivered.

“Oh — oh — then why doesn’t anybody know?”

“Because my wife is — my wife is colored.”

If it had not been so dark Josephine would have seen that for an instant he was laughing silently and uncontrollably.

“Oh,” she repeated.

“I didn’t know,” he continued.

In spite of a subconscious scepticism, an uncanny feeling stole over Josephine.

“What dealings could I have with a girl like you?”

She began to weep softly.

“Oh, I’m sorry. If I could only help you.”

“You can’t help me.” He turned gruffly away.

“You want me to go.”

He nodded.

“All right. I’ll go.”

Still sobbing, she half walked, half backed away from him, intimidated now, yet still hoping he would call to her. When she saw him for the last time from the gate, he was standing where she had left him, his fine thin face clear and handsome in the suddenly streaming light of an emergent moon.

She had gone a quarter of a mile down the road when she became conscious of running footsteps behind her. Before she could do more than start and turn anxiously, a figure sprang out at her. It was her cousin, Dick.

“Oh!” she cried. “You frightened me!”

“I followed you here. You had no business going out at night like this.”

“What a sneaky thing!” she said contemptuously.

They walked along side by side.

“I heard you with that fellow. You had a crush on him, didn’t you?”

“Will you be quiet! What does a horrible little pill like you know about anything?”

“I know a lot,” said Dick glumly. “I know there’s too much of that sort of thing at Lake Forest.”

She scorned to answer; they reached her aunt’s gate in silence.

“I tell you one thing,” he said uncertainly. “I’ll bet you wouldn’t want your mother to know about this.”

“You mean you’re going to my mother?”

“Just hold your horses. I was going to say I wouldn’t say anything about it —”

“I should hope not.”

“ — on one condition.”

“Well?”

“The condition is — ” He fidgeted uncomfortably. “You told me once that a lot of girls at Lake Forest had kissed boys and never thought anything about it.”

“Yes.” Suddenly she guessed what was coming, and an astonished laugh rose to her lips.

“Well, will you, then — kiss me?”

A vision of her mother arose — of a return to Lake Forest in chains. Deciding quickly, she bent toward him. Less than a minute later she was in her room, almost hysterical with tears and laughter. That, then, was the kiss with which destiny had seen fit to crown the summer.

V

Josephine's sensational return to Lake Forest that August marked a revision of opinion about her; it can be compared to the moment when the robber bandit evolved through sheer power into the feudal seignior.

To the three months of nervous energy conserved since Easter beneath the uniform of her school were added six weeks of resentment — added, that is, as the match might be said to be added to the powder. For Josephine exploded with an audible, visible bang; for weeks thereafter pieces of her were gathered up from Lake Forest's immaculate lawns.

It began quietly; it began with the long-awaited house party, on the first evening of which she was placed next to the unfaithful Ridgeway Saunders at dinner.

"I certainly felt pretty badly when you threw me over," Josephine said indifferently — to rid him of any lingering idea that he had thrown her over. Once she had chilled him into wondering if, after all, he had come off best in the affair, she turned to the man on the other side. By the time the salad was served, Ridgeway was explaining himself to her. And his girl from the East, Miss Ticknor, was becoming increasingly aware of what an obnoxious person Josephine Perry was. She made the mistake of saying so to Ridgeway. Josephine made no such mistake; toward the end of dinner she merely asked him the innocent question as to who was his friend with the high button shoes.

By ten o'clock Josephine and Ridgeway were out in somebody's car — far out where the colony becomes a prairie. As minute by minute she grew wearier of his softness, his anguish increased. She let him kiss her, just to be sure; and it was a desperate young man who returned to his host's that night.

All next day his eyes followed her about miserably; Miss Ticknor was unexpectedly called East the following afternoon. This was pathetic, but certainly someone had to pay for Josephine's summer. That score settled, she returned her attention to her sister's wedding.

Immediately on her return she had demanded a trousseau in keeping with the splendor of a maid of honor, and under cover of the family rush had so managed to equip herself as to add a charming year to her age. Doubtless this contributed to the change of attitude toward her, for though her emotional maturity, cropping out of a schoolgirl dress, had seemed not quite proper, in more sophisticated clothes she was an incontestable little beauty; and as such she was accepted by at least the male half of the wedding party.

Constance was openly hostile. On the morning of the wedding itself, she unburdened herself to her mother.

“I do hope you’ll take her in hand after I’m gone, mother. It’s really unendurable the way she’s behaving. None of the bridesmaids have had a good time.”

“Let’s not worry,” Mrs. Perry urged. “After all, she’s had a very quiet summer.”

“I’m not worrying about *her*,” said Constance indignantly.

The wedding party were lunching at the club, and Josephine found herself next to a jovial usher who had arrived inebriated and remained in that condition ever since. However, it was early enough in the day for him to be coherent.

“The belle of Chicago, the golden girl of the golden West. Oh, why didn’t I come out here this summer?”

“I wasn’t here. I was up in a place called Island Farms.”

“Ah!” he exclaimed. “Ah-ha! That accounts for a lot of things — that accounts for the sudden pilgrimage of Sonny Dorrance.”

“Of who?”

“The famous Sonny Dorrance, the shame of Harvard, but the maiden’s prayer. Now don’t tell me you didn’t exchange a few warm glances with Sonny Dorrance.”

“But isn’t he,” she demanded faintly — “isn’t he supposed to be — married?”

He roared with laughter.

“Married — sure, married to a mulatto! You didn’t fall for *that* old line. He always pulls it when he’s reacting from some violent affair — that’s to protect himself while he recovers. You see, his whole life has been cursed by that fatal beauty.”

In a few minutes she had the story. Apart from everything else, Sonny Dorrance was fabulously rich — women had pursued him since he was fifteen — married women, *débutantes*, chorus girls. It was legendary.

There actually had been plots to entangle him into marriage, to entangle him into anything. There was the girl who tried to kill herself, there was the one who tried to kill him. Then, this spring, there was the annulled marriage business that had cost him an election to Porcellian at Harvard, and was rumored to have cost his father fifty thousand dollars.

“And now,” Josephine asked tensely, “you say he doesn’t like women?”

“Sonny? I tell you he’s the most susceptible man in America. This last thing shook him, and so he keeps off admirers by telling them anything. But by this time next month he’ll be involved again.”

As he talked, the dining room faded out like a scene in a moving picture, and Josephine was back at Island Farms, staring out the window, as a young man appeared between the pine trees.

“He was afraid of me,” she thought to herself, her heart tapping like a machine gun. “He thought I was like the others.”

Half an hour later she interrupted her mother in the midst of the wedding’s last and most violent confusion.

“Mother, I want to go back to Island Farms for the rest of the summer,” she said at once.

Mrs. Perry looked at her in a daze, and Josephine repeated her statement.

“Why, in less than a month you’ll be starting back to school.”

“I want to go anyhow.”

“I simply can’t understand you. In the first place, you haven’t been invited, and in the second place, I think a little gayety is good for you before you go back to school, and in the third place, I want you here with me.”

“Mother,” Josephine wailed, “don’t you understand? I want to go! You take me up there all summer when I don’t want to go, and just when I do want to, you make me stay in this ghastly place. Let me tell you this isn’t any place for a sixteen-year-old girl, if you knew everything.”

“What nonsense to be bothering me with just at this time!”

Josephine threw up her hands in despair; the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

“It’s ruining me here!” she cried. “Nobody thinks of anything but boys and dances from morning till night. They go out in their cars and kiss them from morning till night.”

“Well, I know my little girl doesn’t do anything like that.”

Josephine hesitated, taken a little aback.

“Well, I will,” she announced. “I’m weak. You told me I was. I always do what anybody tells me to do, and all these boys are just simply immoral, that’s all. The first thing you know I’ll be entirely ruined, and then you’ll be sorry you didn’t let me go to Island Farms. You’ll be sorry — ”

She was working herself into hysteria. Her distracted mother took her by the shoulders and forced her down into a chair.

“I’ve never heard such silly talk. If you weren’t so old I’d spank you. If you keep this up you’ll be punished.”

Suddenly dry-eyed, Josephine got up and stalked out of the room. Punished! They had been punishing her all summer, and now they refused to punish her, refused to send her away. Oh, she was tired of trying. If she could think

of something really awful to do, so that they would send her away forever —

Mr. Malcolm Libby, the prospective bridegroom, happened upon her fifteen minutes later, in an obscure corner of the garden. He was pacing restlessly about, steadying himself for the rehearsal at four o'clock and for the ceremony two hours later.

“Why, hello!” he cried. “Why, what’s the matter? You’ve been crying.”

He sat down on the bench, full of sympathy for Constance’s little sister.

“I’m not crying,” she sobbed. “I’m just angry.”

“About Constance going away? Don’t you think I’ll take good care of her?”

Leaning over, he patted her hand. If he had seen the look that flashed suddenly across her face it would have alarmed him, for it was curiously like the expression associated with a prominent character in Faust.

When she spoke, her voice was calm, almost cool, and yet tenderly sad:

“No, that wasn’t it. It was something else.”

“Tell me about it. Maybe I can help.”

“I was crying” — she hesitated delicately — “I was crying because Constance has all the luck.”

Half an hour later when, with the rehearsal twenty minutes late, the frantic bride-to-be came searching through the garden and happened upon them suddenly, Malcolm Libby’s arm was around Josephine, who seemed dissolved in uncontrollable grief, and on his face was a wildly harassed expression she had never seen there before. Constance gave a little gasping cry and sank down upon the pebbled path.

The next hour passed in an uproar. There was a doctor; there were shut doors; there was Mr. Malcolm Libby in an agonized condition, the sweat pouring off his brow, explaining to Mrs. Perry over and over that he could explain if he could only see Constance. There was Josephine, tight-lipped, in a room, being talked to coldly by various members of the family. There was

the clamor of arriving guests; then frantic last minutes' patching up of things, with Constance and Malcolm in each other's arms and Josephine, unforgiven, being bundled into her dress.

Then a solemn silence fell and, moving to music, the maid of honor, her head demurely bowed, followed her sister up the two aisles of people that crowded the drawing-room. It was a lovely, sad wedding; the two sisters, light and dark, were a lovely contrast; there was as much interest in one as in the other. Josephine had become a great beauty and the prophets were busy; she stood for the radiant future, there at her sister's side.

The crush was so great at the reception that not until it was over was Josephine missed. And long before nine o'clock, before Mrs. Perry had time to be uneasy, a note from the station had been handed in at the door:

My Dearest Mother: Ed Bement brought me here in his car, and I am catching the train to Island Farms at seven. I have wired the housekeeper to meet me, so don't worry. I feel I have behaved *terribly* and am ashamed to *face* anyone, and I am punishing myself as I deserve by going back to the *simple* life. It is, after all, better for a girl of sixteen, I feel, and when you think it over you will agree. With dearest love.

Josephine.

After all, thought Mrs. Perry, perhaps it was just as well. Her husband was really angry, and she herself was exhausted and didn't feel up to another problem at the moment. Perhaps a nice quiet place was best.

THE BRIDAL PARTY

I

Saturday Evening Post (9 August 1930)

There was the usual insincere little note saying: "I wanted you to be the first to know." It was a double shock to Michael, announcing, as it did, both the engagement and the imminent marriage; which, moreover, was to be held, not in New York, decently and far away, but here in Paris under his very nose, if that could be said to extend over the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity, Avenue George-Cinq. The date was two weeks off, early in June.

At first Michael was afraid and his stomach felt hollow. When he left the hotel that morning, the *femme de chambre*, who was in love with his fine, sharp profile and his pleasant buoyancy, scented the hard abstraction that had settled over him. He walked in a daze to his bank, he bought a detective story at Smith's on the Rue de Rivoli, he sympathetically stared for a while at a faded panorama of the battlefields in a tourist-office window and cursed a Greek tout who followed him with a half-displayed packet of innocuous post cards warranted to be very dirty indeed.

But the fear stayed with him, and after a while he recognized it as the fear that now he would never be happy. He had met Caroline Dandy when she was seventeen, possessed her young heart all through her first season in New York, and then lost her, slowly, tragically, uselessly, because he had no money and could make no money; because, with all the energy and good will in the world, he could not find himself; because, loving him still, Caroline had lost faith and begun to see him as something pathetic, futile and shabby, outside the great, shining stream of life toward which she was inevitably drawn.

Since his only support was that she loved him, he leaned weakly on that; the support broke, but still he held on to it and was carried out to sea and washed up on the French coast with its broken pieces still in his hands. He

carried them around with him in the form of photographs and packets of correspondence and a liking for a maudlin popular song called “Among My Souvenirs.” He kept clear of other girls, as if Caroline would somehow know it and reciprocate with a faithful heart. Her note informed him that he had lost her forever.

It was a fine morning. In front of the shops in the Rue de Castiglione, proprietors and patrons were on the sidewalk gazing upward, for the Graf Zeppelin, shining and glorious, symbol of escape and destruction — of escape, if necessary, through destruction — glided in the Paris sky. He heard a woman say in French that it would not her astonish if that commenced to let fall the bombs. Then he heard another voice, full of husky laughter, and the void in his stomach froze. Jerking about, he was face to face with Caroline Dandy and her fiancé.

“Why, Michael! Why, we were wondering where you were. I asked at the Guaranty Trust, and Morgan and Company, and finally sent a note to the National City — ”

Why didn’t they back away? Why didn’t they back right up, walking backward down the Rue de Castiglione, across the Rue de Rivoli, through the Tuileries Gardens, still walking backward as fast as they could till they grew vague and faded out across the river?

“This is Hamilton Rutherford, my fiancé.”

“We’ve met before.”

“At Pat’s, wasn’t it?”

“And last spring in the Ritz Bar.”

“Michael, where have you been keeping yourself?”

“Around here.” This agony. Previews of Hamilton Rutherford flashed before his eyes — a quick series of pictures, sentences. He remembered hearing that he had bought a seat in 1920 for a hundred and twenty-five thousand of borrowed money, and just before the break sold it for more than half a million. Not handsome like Michael, but vitally attractive, confident,

authoritative, just the right height over Caroline there — Michael had always been too short for Caroline when they danced.

Rutherford was saying: “No, I’d like it very much if you’d come to the bachelor dinner. I’m taking the Ritz Bar from nine o’clock on. Then right after the wedding there’ll be a reception and breakfast at the Hotel George-Cinq.”

“And, Michael, George Packman is giving a party day after tomorrow at Chez Victor, and I want you to be sure and come. And also to tea Friday at Jebby West’s; she’d want to have you if she knew where you were. What’s your hotel, so we can send you an invitation? You see, the reason we decided to have it over here is because mother has been sick in a nursing home here and the whole clan is in Paris. Then Hamilton’s mother’s being here too — ”

The entire clan; they had always hated him, except her mother; always discouraged his courtship. What a little counter he was in this game of families and money! Under his hat his brow sweated with the humiliation of the fact that for all his misery he was worth just exactly so many invitations. Frantically he began to mumble something about going away.

Then it happened — Caroline saw deep into him, and Michael knew that she saw. She saw through to his profound woundedness, and something quivered inside her, died out along the curve of her mouth and in her eyes. He had moved her. All the unforgettable impulses of first love had surged up once more; their hearts had in some way touched across two feet of Paris sunlight. She took her fiancé’s arm suddenly, as if to steady herself with the feel of it.

They parted. Michael walked quickly for a minute; then he stopped, pretending to look in a window, and saw them farther up the street, walking fast into the Place Vendôme, people with much to do.

He had things to do also — he had to get his laundry.

“Nothing will ever be the same again,” he said to himself. “She will never be happy in her marriage and I will never be happy at all any more.”

The two vivid years of his love for Caroline moved back around him like years in Einstein's physics. Intolerable memories arose — of rides in the Long Island moonlight; of a happy time at Lake Placid with her cheeks so cold there, but warm just underneath the surface; of a despairing afternoon in a little café on Forty-eighth Street in the last sad months when their marriage had come to seem impossible.

"Come in," he said aloud.

The concierge with a telegram; brusque because Mr. Curly's clothes were a little shabby. Mr. Curly gave few tips; Mr. Curly was obviously *apetit client*.

Michael read the telegram.

"An answer?" the concierge asked.

"No," said Michael, and then, on an impulse: "Look."

"Too bad — too bad," said the concierge. "Your grandfather is dead."

"Not too bad," said Michael. "It means that I come into a quarter of a million dollars."

Too late by a single month; after the first flush of the news his misery was deeper than ever. Lying awake in bed that night, he listened endlessly to the long caravan of a circus moving through the street from one Paris fair to another.

When the last van had rumbled out of hearing and the corners of the furniture were pastel blue with the dawn, he was still thinking of the look in Caroline's eyes that morning — the look that seemed to say: "Oh, why couldn't you have done something about it? Why couldn't you have been stronger, made me marry you? Don't you see how sad I am?"

Michael's fists clenched.

"Well, I won't give up till the last moment," he whispered. "I've had all the bad luck so far, and maybe it's turned at last. One takes what one can get, up to the limit of one's strength, and if I can't have her, at least she'll go into this marriage with some of me in her heart."

II

Accordingly he went to the party at Chez Victor two days later, upstairs and into the little salon off the bar where the party was to assemble for cocktails. He was early; the only other occupant was a tall lean man of fifty. They spoke.

“You waiting for George Packman’s party?”

“Yes. My name’s Michael Curly.”

“My name’s — ”

Michael failed to catch the name. They ordered a drink, and Michael supposed that the bride and groom were having a gay time.

“Too much so,” the other agreed, frowning. “I don’t see how they stand it. We all crossed on the boat together; five days of that crazy life and then two weeks of Paris. You” — he hesitated, smiling faintly — “you’ll excuse me for saying that your generation drinks too much.”

“Not Caroline.”

“No, not Caroline. She seems to take only a cocktail and a glass of champagne, and then she’s had enough, thank God. But Hamilton drinks too much and all this crowd of young people drink too much. Do you live in Paris?”

“For the moment,” said Michael.

“I don’t like Paris. My wife — that is to say, my ex-wife, Hamilton’s mother — lives in Paris.”

“You’re Hamilton Rutherford’s father?”

“I have that honor. And I’m not denying that I’m proud of what he’s done; it was just a general comment.”

“Of course.”

Michael glanced up nervously as four people came in. He felt suddenly that his dinner coat was old and shiny; he had ordered a new one that morning. The people who had come in were rich and at home in their richness with one another — a dark, lovely girl with a hysterical little laugh whom he had met before; two confident men whose jokes referred invariably to last night's scandal and tonight's potentialities, as if they had important rôles in a play that extended indefinitely into the past and the future. When Caroline arrived, Michael had scarcely a moment of her, but it was enough to note that, like all the others, she was strained and tired. She was pale beneath her rouge; there were shadows under her eyes. With a mixture of relief and wounded vanity, he found himself placed far from her and at another table; he needed a moment to adjust himself to his surroundings. This was not like the immature set in which he and Caroline had moved; the men were more than thirty and had an air of sharing the best of this world's good. Next to him was Jebby West, whom he knew; and, on the other side, a jovial man who immediately began to talk to Michael about a stunt for the bachelor dinner: They were going to hire a French girl to appear with an actual baby in her arms, crying: "Hamilton, you can't desert me now!" The idea seemed stale and unamusing to Michael, but its originator shook with anticipatory laughter.

Farther up the table there was talk of the market — another drop today, the most appreciable since the crash; people were kidding Rutherford about it: "Too bad, old man. You better not get married, after all."

Michael asked the man on his left, "Has he lost a lot?"

"Nobody knows. He's heavily involved, but he's one of the smartest young men in Wall Street. Anyhow, nobody ever tells you the truth."

It was a champagne dinner from the start, and toward the end it reached a pleasant level of conviviality, but Michael saw that all these people were too weary to be exhilarated by any ordinary stimulant; for weeks they had drunk cocktails before meals like Americans, wines and brandies like Frenchmen, beer like Germans, whisky-and-soda like the English, and as they were no longer in the twenties, this preposterous *mélange*, that was like some gigantic cocktail in a nightmare, served only to make them temporarily less

conscious of the mistakes of the night before. Which is to say that it was not really a gay party; what gayety existed was displayed in the few who drank nothing at all.

But Michael was not tired, and the champagne stimulated him and made his misery less acute. He had been away from New York for more than eight months and most of the dance music was unfamiliar to him, but at the first bars of the "Painted Doll," to which he and Caroline had moved through so much happiness and despair the previous summer, he crossed to Caroline's table and asked her to dance.

She was lovely in a dress of thin ethereal blue, and the proximity of her crackly yellow hair, of her cool and tender gray eyes, turned his body clumsy and rigid; he stumbled with their first step on the floor. For a moment it seemed that there was nothing to say; he wanted to tell her about his inheritance, but the idea seemed abrupt, unprepared for.

"Michael, it's so nice to be dancing with you again."

He smiled grimly.

"I'm so happy you came," she continued. "I was afraid maybe you'd be silly and stay away. Now we can be just good friends and natural together. Michael, I want you and Hamilton to like each other."

The engagement was making her stupid; he had never heard her make such a series of obvious remarks before.

"I could kill him without a qualm," he said pleasantly, "but he looks like a good man. He's fine. What I want to know is, what happens to people like me who aren't able to forget?"

As he said this he could not prevent his mouth from dropping suddenly, and glancing up, Caroline saw, and her heart quivered violently, as it had the other morning.

"Do you mind so much, Michael?"

"Yes."

For a second as he said this, in a voice that seemed to have come up from his shoes, they were not dancing; they were simply clinging together. Then she leaned away from him and twisted her mouth into a lovely smile.

“I didn’t know what to do at first, Michael. I told Hamilton about you — that I’d cared for you an awful lot — but it didn’t worry him, and he was right. Because I’m over you now — yes, I am. And you’ll wake up some sunny morning and be over me just like that.”

He shook his head stubbornly.

“Oh, yes. We weren’t for each other. I’m pretty flighty, and I need somebody like Hamilton to decide things. It was that more than the question of — of — ”

“Of money.” Again he was on the point of telling her what had happened, but again something told him it was not the time.

“Then how do you account for what happened when we met the other day,” he demanded helplessly — “what happened just now? When we just pour toward each other like we used to — as if we were one person, as if the same blood was flowing through both of us?”

“Oh, don’t,” she begged him. “You mustn’t talk like that; everything’s decided now. I love Hamilton with all my heart. It’s just that I remember certain things in the past and I feel sorry for you — for us — for the way we were.”

Over her shoulder, Michael saw a man come toward them to cut in. In a panic he danced her away, but inevitably the man came on.

“I’ve got to see you alone, if only for a minute,” Michael said quickly. “When can I?”

“I’ll be at Jebby West’s tea tomorrow,” she whispered as a hand fell politely upon Michael’s shoulder.

But he did not talk to her at Jebby West’s tea. Rutherford stood next to her, and each brought the other into all conversations. They left early. The next morning the wedding cards arrived in the first mail.

Then Michael, grown desperate with pacing up and down his room, determined on a bold stroke; he wrote to Hamilton Rutherford, asking him for a rendezvous the following afternoon. In a short telephone communication Rutherford agreed, but for a day later than Michael had asked. And the wedding was only six days away.

They were to meet in the bar of the Hotel Jena. Michael knew what he would say: "See here, Rutherford, do you realize the responsibility you're taking in going through with this marriage? Do you realize the harvest of trouble and regret you're sowing in persuading a girl into something contrary to the instincts of her heart?" He would explain that the barrier between Caroline and himself had been an artificial one and was now removed, and demand that the matter be put up to Caroline frankly before it was too late.

Rutherford would be angry, conceivably there would be a scene, but Michael felt that he was fighting for his life now.

He found Rutherford in conversation with an older man, whom Michael had met at several of the wedding parties.

"I saw what happened to most of my friends," Rutherford was saying, "and I decided it wasn't going to happen to me. It isn't so difficult; if you take a girl with common sense, and tell her what's what, and do your stuff damn well, and play decently square with her, it's a marriage. If you stand for any nonsense at the beginning, it's one of these arrangements — within five years the man gets out, or else the girl gobbles him up and you have the usual mess."

"Right!" agreed his companion enthusiastically. "Hamilton, boy, you're right."

Michael's blood boiled slowly.

"Doesn't it strike you," he inquired coldly, "that your attitude went out of fashion about a hundred years ago?"

“No, it didn’t,” said Rutherford pleasantly, but impatiently. “I’m as modern as anybody. I’d get married in an aeroplane next Saturday if it’d please my girl.”

“I don’t mean that way of being modern. You can’t take a sensitive woman — ”

“Sensitive? Women aren’t so darn sensitive. It’s fellows like you who are sensitive; it’s fellows like you they exploit — all your devotion and kindness and all that. They read a couple of books and see a few pictures because they haven’t got anything else to do, and then they say they’re finer in grain than you are, and to prove it they take the bit in their teeth and tear off for a fare-you-well — just about as sensitive as a fire horse.”

“Caroline happens to be sensitive,” said Michael in a clipped voice.

At this point the other man got up to go; when the dispute about the check had been settled and they were alone, Rutherford leaned back to Michael as if a question had been asked him.

“Caroline’s more than sensitive,” he said. “She’s got sense.”

His combative eyes, meeting Michael’s, flickered with a gray light. “This all sounds pretty crude to you, Mr. Curly, but it seems to me that the average man nowadays just asks to be made a monkey of by some woman who doesn’t even get any fun out of reducing him to that level. There are darn few men who possess their wives any more, but I am going to be one of them.”

To Michael it seemed time to bring the talk back to the actual situation: “Do you realize the responsibility you’re taking?”

“I certainly do,” interrupted Rutherford. “I’m not afraid of responsibility. I’ll make the decisions — fairly, I hope, but anyhow they’ll be final.”

“What if you didn’t start right?” said Michael impetuously. “What if your marriage isn’t founded on mutual love?”

“I think I see what you mean,” Rutherford said, still pleasant. “And since you’ve brought it up, let me say that if you and Caroline had married, it

wouldn't have lasted three years. Do you know what your affair was founded on? On sorrow. You got sorry for each other. Sorrow's a lot of fun for most women and for some men, but it seems to me that a marriage ought to be based on hope." He looked at his watch and stood up.

"I've got to meet Caroline. Remember, you're coming to the bachelor dinner day after tomorrow."

Michael felt the moment slipping away. "Then Caroline's personal feelings don't count with you?" he demanded fiercely.

"Caroline's tired and upset. But she has what she wants, and that's the main thing."

"Are you referring to yourself?" demanded Michael incredulously.

"Yes."

"May I ask how long she's wanted you?"

"About two years." Before Michael could answer, he was gone.

During the next two days Michael floated in an abyss of helplessness. The idea haunted him that he had left something undone that would sever this knot drawn tighter under his eyes. He phoned Caroline, but she insisted that it was physically impossible for her to see him until the day before the wedding, for which day she granted him a tentative rendezvous. Then he went to the bachelor dinner, partly in fear of an evening alone at his hotel, partly from a feeling that by his presence at that function he was somehow nearer to Caroline, keeping her in sight.

The Ritz Bar had been prepared for the occasion by French and American banners and by a great canvas covering one wall, against which the guests were invited to concentrate their proclivities in breaking glasses.

At the first cocktail, taken at the bar, there were many slight spillings from many trembling hands, but later, with the champagne, there was a rising tide of laughter and occasional bursts of song.

Michael was surprised to find what a difference his new dinner coat, his new silk hat, his new, proud linen made in his estimate of himself; he felt less

resentment toward all these people for being so rich and assured. For the first time since he had left college he felt rich and assured himself; he felt that he was part of all this, and even entered into the scheme of Johnson, the practical joker, for the appearance of the woman betrayed, now waiting tranquilly in the room across the hall.

“We don’t want to go too heavy,” Johnson said, “because I imagine Ham’s had a pretty anxious day already. Did you see Fullman Oil’s sixteen points off this morning?”

“Will that matter to him?” Michael asked, trying to keep the interest out of his voice.

“Naturally. He’s in heavily; he’s always in everything heavily. So far he’s had luck; anyhow, up to a month ago.”

The glasses were filled and emptied faster now, and men were shouting at one another across the narrow table. Against the bar a group of ushers was being photographed, and the flash light surged through the room in a stifling cloud.

“Now’s the time,” Johnson said. “You’re to stand by the door, remember, and we’re both to try and keep her from coming in — just till we get everybody’s attention.”

He went on out into the corridor, and Michael waited obediently by the door. Several minutes passed. Then Johnson reappeared with a curious expression on his face.

“There’s something funny about this.”

“Isn’t the girl there?”

“She’s there all right, but there’s another woman there, too; and it’s nobody we engaged either. She wants to see Hamilton Rutherford, and she looks as if she had something on her mind.”

They went out into the hall. Planted firmly in a chair near the door sat an American girl a little the worse for liquor, but with a determined expression on her face. She looked up at them with a jerk of her head.

“Well, j’tell him?” she demanded. “The name is Marjorie Collins, and he’ll know it. I’ve come a long way, and I want to see him now and quick, or there’s going to be more trouble than you ever saw.” She rose unsteadily to her feet.

“You go in and tell Ham,” whispered Johnson to Michael. “Maybe he’d better get out. I’ll keep her here.”

Back at the table, Michael leaned close to Rutherford’s ear and, with a certain grimness, whispered:

“A girl outside named Marjorie Collins says she wants to see you. She looks as if she wanted to make trouble.”

Hamilton Rutherford blinked and his mouth fell ajar; then slowly the lips came together in a straight line and he said in a crisp voice:

“Please keep her there. And send the head barman to me right away.”

Michael spoke to the barman, and then, without returning to the table, asked quietly for his coat and hat. Out in the hall again, he passed Johnson and the girl without speaking and went out into the Rue Cambon. Calling a cab, he gave the address of Caroline’s hotel.

His place was beside her now. Not to bring bad news, but simply to be with her when her house of cards came falling around her head.

Rutherford had implied that he was soft — well, he was hard enough not to give up the girl he loved without taking advantage of every chance within the pale of honor. Should she turn away from Rutherford, she would find him there.

She was in; she was surprised when he called, but she was still dressed and would be down immediately. Presently she appeared in a dinner gown, holding two blue telegrams in her hand. They sat down in armchairs in the deserted lobby.

“But, Michael, is the dinner over?”

“I wanted to see you, so I came away.”

“I’m glad.” Her voice was friendly, but matter-of-fact. “Because I’d just phoned your hotel that I had fittings and rehearsals all day tomorrow. Now we can have our talk after all.”

“You’re tired,” he guessed. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have come.”

“No. I was waiting up for Hamilton. Telegrams that may be important. He said he might go on somewhere, and that may mean any hour, so I’m glad I have someone to talk to.”

Michael winced at the impersonality in the last phrase.

“Don’t you care when he gets home?”

“Naturally,” she said, laughing, “but I haven’t got much say about it, have I?”

“Why not?”

“I couldn’t start by telling him what he could and couldn’t do.”

“Why not?”

“He wouldn’t stand for it.”

“He seems to want merely a housekeeper,” said Michael ironically.

“Tell me about your plans, Michael,” she asked quickly.

“My plans? I can’t see any future after the day after tomorrow. The only real plan I ever had was to love you.”

Their eyes brushed past each other’s, and the look he knew so well was staring out at him from hers. Words flowed quickly from his heart:

“Let me tell you just once more how well I’ve loved you, never wavering for a moment, never thinking of another girl. And now when I think of all the years ahead without you, without any hope, I don’t want to live, Caroline darling. I used to dream about our home, our children, about holding you in my arms and touching your face and hands and hair that used to belong to me, and now I just can’t wake up.”

Caroline was crying softly. "Poor Michael — poor Michael." Her hand reached out and her fingers brushed the lapel of his dinner coat. "I was so sorry for you the other night. You looked so thin, and as if you needed a new suit and somebody to take care of you." She sniffled and looked more closely at his coat. "Why, you've got a new suit! And a new silk hat! Why, Michael, how swell!" She laughed, suddenly cheerful through her tears. "You must have come into money, Michael; I never saw you so well turned out."

For a moment, at her reaction, he hated his new clothes.

"I have come into money," he said. "My grandfather left me about a quarter of a million dollars."

"Why, Michael," she cried, "how perfectly swell! I can't tell you how glad I am. I've always thought you were the sort of person who ought to have money."

"Yes, just too late to make a difference."

The revolving door from the street groaned around and Hamilton Rutherford came into the lobby. His face was flushed, his eyes were restless and impatient.

"Hello, darling; hello, Mr. Curly." He bent and kissed Caroline. "I broke away for a minute to find out if I had any telegrams. I see you've got them there." Taking them from her, he remarked to Curly, "That was an odd business there in the bar, wasn't it? Especially as I understand some of you had a joke fixed up in the same line." He opened one of the telegrams, closed it and turned to Caroline with the divided expression of a man carrying two things in his head at once.

"A girl I haven't seen for two years turned up," he said. "It seemed to be some clumsy form of blackmail, for I haven't and never have had any sort of obligation toward her whatever."

"What happened?"

"The head barman had a Sûreté Générale man there in ten minutes and it was settled in the hall. The French blackmail laws make ours look like a

sweet wish, and I gather they threw a scare into her that she'll remember. But it seems wiser to tell you."

"Are you implying that I mentioned the matter?" said Michael stiffly.

"No," Rutherford said slowly. "No, you were just going to be on hand. And since you're here, I'll tell you some news that will interest you even more."

He handed Michael one telegram and opened the other.

"This is in code," Michael said.

"So is this. But I've got to know all the words pretty well this last week. The two of them together mean that I'm due to start life all over."

Michael saw Caroline's face grow a shade paler, but she sat quiet as a mouse.

"It was a mistake and I stuck to it too long," continued Rutherford. "So you see I don't have all the luck, Mr. Curly. By the way, they tell me you've come into money."

"Yes," said Michael.

"There we are, then." Rutherford turned to Caroline. "You understand, darling, that I'm not joking or exaggerating. I've lost almost every cent I had and I'm starting life over."

Two pairs of eyes were regarding her — Rutherford's noncommittal and unrequiring, Michael's hungry, tragic, pleading. In a minute she had raised herself from the chair and with a little cry thrown herself into Hamilton Rutherford's arms.

"Oh, darling," she cried, "what does it matter! It's better; I like it better, honestly I do! I want to start that way; I want to! Oh, please don't worry or be sad even for a minute!"

"All right, baby," said Rutherford. His hand stroked her hair gently for a moment; then he took his arm from around her.

“I promised to join the party for an hour,” he said. “So I’ll say good night, and I want you to go to bed soon and get a good sleep. Good night, Mr. Curly. I’m sorry to have let you in for all these financial matters.”

But Michael had already picked up his hat and cane. “I’ll go along with you,” he said.

III

It was such a fine morning. Michael’s cutaway hadn’t been delivered, so he felt rather uncomfortable passing before the cameras and moving-picture machines in front of the little church on the Avenue George-Cinq.

It was such a clean, new church that it seemed unforgivable not to be dressed properly, and Michael, white and shaky after a sleepless night, decided to stand in the rear. From there he looked at the back of Hamilton Rutherford, and the lacy, filmy back of Caroline, and the fat back of George Packman, which looked unsteady, as if it wanted to lean against the bride and groom.

The ceremony went on for a long time under the gay flags and pennons overhead, under the thick beams of June sunlight slanting down through the tall windows upon the well-dressed people.

As the procession, headed by the bride and groom, started down the aisle, Michael realized with alarm he was just where everyone would dispense with their parade stiffness, become informal and speak to him.

So it turned out. Rutherford and Caroline spoke first to him; Rutherford grim with the strain of being married, and Caroline lovelier than he had ever seen her, floating all softly down through the friends and relatives of her youth, down through the past and forward to the future by the sunlit door.

Michael managed to murmur, “Beautiful, simply beautiful,” and then other people passed and spoke to him — old Mrs. Dandy, straight from her sickbed and looking remarkably well, or carrying it off like the very fine old lady she was; and Rutherford’s father and mother, ten years divorced, but walking side by side and looking made for each other and proud. Then all

Caroline's sisters and their husbands and her little nephews in Eton suits, and then a long parade, all speaking to Michael because he was still standing paralyzed just at that point where the procession broke.

He wondered what would happen now. Cards had been issued for a reception at the George-Cinq; an expensive enough place, heaven knew. Would Rutherford try to go through with that on top of those disastrous telegrams? Evidently, for the procession outside was streaming up there through the June morning, three by three and four by four. On the corner the long dresses of girls, five abreast, fluttered many-colored in the wind. Girls had become gossamer again, perambulatory flora; such lovely fluttering dresses in the bright noon wind.

Michael needed a drink; he couldn't face that reception line without a drink. Diving into a side doorway of the hotel, he asked for the bar, whither a *chasseur* led him through half a kilometer of new American-looking passages.

But — how did it happen? — the bar was full. There were ten — fifteen men and two — four girls, all from the wedding, all needing a drink. There were cocktails and champagne in the bar; Rutherford's cocktails and champagne, as it turned out, for he had engaged the whole bar and the ballroom and the two great reception rooms and all the stairways leading up and down, and windows looking out over the whole square block of Paris. By and by Michael went and joined the long, slow drift of the receiving line. Through a flowery mist of "Such a lovely wedding," "My dear, you were simply lovely," "You're a lucky man, Rutherford" he passed down the line. When Michael came to Caroline, she took a single step forward and kissed him on the lips, but he felt no contact in the kiss; it was unreal and he floated on away from it. Old Mrs. Dandy, who had always liked him, held his hand for a minute and thanked him for the flowers he had sent when he heard she was ill.

"I'm so sorry not to have written; you know, we old ladies are grateful for —" The flowers, the fact that she had not written, the wedding — Michael saw that they all had the same relative importance to her now; she had married off five other children and seen two of the marriages go to pieces,

and this scene, so poignant, so confusing to Michael, appeared to her simply a familiar charade in which she had played her part before.

A buffet luncheon with champagne was already being served at small tables and there was an orchestra playing in the empty ballroom. Michael sat down with Jebby West; he was still a little embarrassed at not wearing a morning coat, but he perceived now that he was not alone in the omission and felt better. "Wasn't Caroline divine?" Jebby West said. "So entirely self-possessed. I asked her this morning if she wasn't a little nervous at stepping off like this. And she said, 'Why should I be? I've been after him for two years, and now I'm just happy, that's all.'"

"It must be true," said Michael gloomily.

"What?"

"What you just said."

He had been stabbed, but, rather to his distress, he did not feel the wound.

He asked Jebby to dance. Out on the floor, Rutherford's father and mother were dancing together.

"It makes me a little sad, that," she said. "Those two hadn't met for years; both of them were married again and she divorced again. She went to the station to meet him when he came over for Caroline's wedding, and invited him to stay at her house in the Avenue du Bois with a whole lot of other people, perfectly proper, but he was afraid his wife would hear about it and not like it, so he went to a hotel. Don't you think that's sort of sad?"

An hour or so later Michael realized suddenly that it was afternoon. In one corner of the ballroom an arrangement of screens like a moving-picture stage had been set up and photographers were taking official pictures of the bridal party. The bridal party, still as death and pale as wax under the bright lights, appeared, to the dancers circling the modulated semidarkness of the ballroom, like those jovial or sinister groups that one comes upon in The Old Mill at an amusement park.

After the bridal party had been photographed, there was a group of the ushers; then the bridesmaids, the families, the children. Later, Caroline,

active and excited, having long since abandoned the repose implicit in her flowing dress and great bouquet, came and plucked Michael off the floor.

“Now we’ll have them take one of just old friends.” Her voice implied that this was best, most intimate of all. “Come here, Jebby, George — not you, Hamilton; this is just my friends — Sally — ”

A little after that, what remained of formality disappeared and the hours flowed easily down the profuse stream of champagne. In the modern fashion, Hamilton Rutherford sat at the table with his arm about an old girl of his and assured his guests, which included not a few bewildered but enthusiastic Europeans, that the party was not nearly at an end; it was to reassemble at Zelli’s after midnight. Michael saw Mrs. Dandy, not quite over her illness, rise to go and become caught in polite group after group, and he spoke of it to one of her daughters, who thereupon forcibly abducted her mother and called her car. Michael felt very considerate and proud of himself after having done this, and drank much more champagne.

“It’s amazing,” George Packman was telling him enthusiastically. “This show will cost Ham about five thousand dollars, and I understand they’ll be just about his last. But did he countermand a bottle of champagne or a flower? Not he! He happens to have it — that young man. Do you know that T. G. Vance offered him a salary of fifty thousand dollars a year ten minutes before the wedding this morning? In another year he’ll be back with the millionaires.”

The conversation was interrupted by a plan to carry Rutherford out on communal shoulders — a plan which six of them put into effect, and then stood in the four-o’clock sunshine waving good-by to the bride and groom. But there must have been a mistake somewhere, for five minutes later Michael saw both bride and groom descending the stairway to the reception, each with a glass of champagne held defiantly on high.

“This is our way of doing things,” he thought. “Generous and fresh and free; a sort of Virginia-plantation hospitality, but at a different pace now, nervous as a ticker tape.”

Standing unself-consciously in the middle of the room to see which was the American ambassador, he realized with a start that he hadn't really thought of Caroline for hours. He looked about him with a sort of alarm, and then he saw her across the room, very bright and young, and radiantly happy. He saw Rutherford near her, looking at her as if he could never look long enough, and as Michael watched them they seemed to recede as he had wished them to do that day in the Rue de Castiglione — recede and fade off into joys and griefs of their own, into the years that would take the toll of Rutherford's fine pride and Caroline's young, moving beauty; fade far away, so that now he could scarcely see them, as if they were shrouded in something as misty as her white, billowing dress.

Michael was cured. The ceremonial function, with its pomp and its revelry, had stood for a sort of initiation into a life where even his regret could not follow them. All the bitterness melted out of him suddenly and the world reconstituted itself out of the youth and happiness that was all around him, profligate as the spring sunshine. He was trying to remember which one of the bridesmaids he had made a date to dine with tonight as he walked forward to bid Hamilton and Caroline Rutherford good-by.

JOSEPHINE: A WOMAN WITH A PAST

I

The Saturday Evening Post (6 September 1930)

Driving slowly through New Haven, two of the young girls became alert. Josephine and Lillian darted soft frank glances into strolling groups of three or four undergraduates, into larger groups on corners, which swung about as one man to stare at their receding heads. Believing that they recognized an acquaintance in a solitary loiterer, they waved wildly, whereupon the youth's mouth fell open, and as they turned the next corner he made a dazed dilatory gesture with his hand. They laughed. 'We'll send him a post card when we get back to school tonight, to see if it really was him.'

Adele Craw, sitting on one of the little seats, kept on talking to Miss Chambers, the chaperon. Glancing sideways at her, Lillian winked at Josephine without batting an eye, but Josephine had gone into a reverie.

This was New Haven — city of her adolescent dreams, of glittering proms where she would move on air among men as intangible as the tunes they danced to. City sacred as Mecca, shining as Paris, hidden as Timbuktu. Twice a year the life-blood of Chicago, her home, flowed into it, and twice a year flowed back, bringing Christmas or bringing summer. Bingo, bingo, bingo, that's the lingo; love of mine, I pine for one of your glances; the darling boy on the left there; underneath the stars I wait.

Seeing it for the first time, she found herself surprisingly unmoved — the men they passed seemed young and rather bored with the possibilities of the day, glad of anything to stare at; seemed undynamic and purposeless against the background of bare elms, lakes of dirty snow and buildings crowded together under the February sky. A wisp of hope, a well-turned-out derby-crowned man, hurrying with stick and suitcase towards the station, caught her attention, but his reciprocal glance was too startled, too ingenuous. Josephine wondered at the extent of her own disillusionment.

She was exactly seventeen and she was blasé. Already she had been a sensation and a scandal; she had driven mature men to a state of disequilibrium; she had, it was said, killed her grandfather, but as he was over eighty at the time perhaps he just died. Here and there in the Middle West were discouraged little spots which upon inspection turned out to be the youths who had once looked full into her green and wistful eyes. But her love affair of last summer had ruined her faith in the all-sufficiency of men. She had grown bored with the waning September days — and it seemed as though it had happened once too often. Christmas with its provocative shortness, its travelling glee clubs, had brought no one new. There remained to her only a persistent, a physical hope; hope in her stomach that there was someone whom she would love more than he loved her.

They stopped at a sporting-goods store and Adele Craw, a pretty girl with clear honourable eyes and piano legs, purchased the sporting equipment which was the reason for their trip — they were the spring hockey committee for the school. Adele was in addition the president of the senior class and the school's ideal girl. She had lately seen a change for the better in Josephine Perry — rather as an honest citizen might guilelessly approve a speculator retired on his profits. On the other hand, Adele was simply incomprehensible to Josephine — admirable, without doubt, but a member of another species. Yet with the charming adaptability that she had hitherto reserved for men, Josephine was trying hard not to disillusion her, trying to be honestly interested in the small, neat, organized politics of the school.

Two men who had stood with their backs to them at another counter turned to leave the store, when they caught sight of Miss Chambers and Adele. Immediately they came forward. The one who spoke to Miss Chambers was thin and rigid of face. Josephine recognized him as Miss Brereton's nephew, a student at New Haven, who had spent several week-ends with his aunt at the school. The other man Josephine had never seen before. He was tall and broad, with blond curly hair and an open expression in which strength of purpose and a nice consideration were pleasantly mingled. It was not the sort of face that generally appealed to Josephine. The eyes were obviously without a secret, without a sidewise gambol, without a desperate flicker to show that they had a life of their own apart from the mouth's speech. The

mouth itself was large and masculine; its smile was an act of kindness and control. It was rather with curiosity as to the sort of man who would be attentive to Adele Crow that Josephine continued to look at him, for his voice that obviously couldn't lie greeted Adele as if this meeting was the pleasant surprise of his day.

In a moment Josephine and Lillian were called over and introduced.

'This is Mr Waterbury' — that was Miss Brereton's nephew — 'and Mr Dudley Knowleton.'

Glancing at Adele, Josephine saw on her face an expression of tranquil pride, even of possession. Mr Knowleton spoke politely, but it was obvious that though he looked at the younger girls he did not quite see them. But since they were friends of Adele's he made suitable remarks, eliciting the fact that they were both coming down to New Haven to their first prom the following week. Who were their hosts? Sophomores; he knew them slightly. Josephine thought that was unnecessarily superior. Why, they were the charter members of the Loving Brothers' Association — Ridgeway Saunders and George Davey — and on the glee-club trip the girls they picked out to rush in each city considered themselves a sort of élite, second only to the girls they asked to New Haven.

'And oh, I've got some bad news for you,' Knowleton said to Adele. 'You may be leading the prom. Jack Coe went to the infirmary with appendicitis, and against my better judgement I'm the provisional chairman.' He looked apologetic. 'Being one of those stone-age dancers, the two-step king, I don't see how I ever got on the committee at all.'

When the car was on its way back to Miss Brereton's school, Josephine and Lillian bombarded Adele with questions.

'He's an old friend from Cincinnati,' she explained demurely. 'He's captain of the baseball team and he was last man for Skull and Bones.'

'You're going to the prom with him?'

'Yes. You see, I've known him all my life.'

Was there a faint implication in this remark that only those who had known Adele all her life knew her at her true worth?

‘Are you engaged?’ Lillian demanded.

Adele laughed. ‘Mercy, I don’t think of such matters! It doesn’t seem to be time for that sort of thing yet, does it?’ (‘Yes,’ interpolated Josephine silently.) ‘We’re just good friends. I think there can be a perfectly healthy friendship between a man and a girl without a lot of — ’

‘Mush,’ supplied Lillian helpfully.

‘Well, yes, but I don’t like that word. I was going to say without a lot of sentimental romantic things that ought to come later.’

‘Bravo, Adele!’ said Miss Chambers somewhat perfunctorily.

But Josephine’s curiosity was unappeased.

‘Doesn’t he say he’s in love with you, and all that sort of thing?’

‘Mercy, no! Dud doesn’t believe in such stuff any more than I do. He’s got enough to do at New Haven, serving on the committees and the team.’

‘Oh!’ said Josephine.

She was oddly interested. That two people who were attracted to each other should never even say anything about it but be content to ‘not believe in such stuff’, was something new in her experience.

She had known girls who had no beaux, others who seemed to have no emotions, and still others who lied about what they thought and did; but here was a girl who spoke of the attentions of the last man tapped for Skull and Bones as if they were two of the limestone gargoyles that Miss Chambers had pointed out on the just completed Harkness Hall.

Yet Adele seemed happy — happier than Josephine, who had always believed that boys and girls were made for nothing but each other, and as soon as possible.

In the light of his popularity and achievements, Knowleton seemed more attractive. Josephine wondered if he would remember her and dance with

her at the prom, or if that depended on how well he knew her escort, Ridgeway Saunders.

She tried to remember whether she had smiled at him when he was looking at her. If she had really smiled he would remember her and dance with her. She was still trying to be sure of that over her two French irregular verbs and her ten stanzas of the Ancient Mariner that night; but she was still uncertain when she fell asleep.

II

Three gay young sophomores, the founders of the Loving Brothers' Association, took a house together for Josephine, Lillian and a girl from Farmington and their three mothers. For the girls it was a first prom, and they arrived at New Haven with all the nervousness of the condemned; but a Sheffield fraternity tea in the afternoon yielded up such a plethora of boys from home, and boys who had visited there and friends of those boys, and new boys with unknown possibilities but obvious eagerness, that they were glowing with self-confidence as they poured into the glittering crowd that thronged the armoury at ten.

It was impressive; for the first time Josephine was at a function run by men upon men's standards — an outward projection of the New Haven world from which women were excluded and which went on mysteriously behind the scenes. She perceived that their three escorts, who had once seemed the very embodiments of worldliness, were modest fry in this relentless microcosm of accomplishment and success. A man's world! Looking around her at the glee-club concert, Josephine had felt a grudging admiration for the good fellowship, the good feeling. She envied Adele Craw, barely glimpsed in the dressing-room, for the position she automatically occupied by being Dudley Knowleton's girl tonight. She envied her more stepping off under the draped bunting through a gateway of hydrangeas at the head of the grand march, very demure and faintly unpowdered in a plain white dress. She was temporarily the centre of all attention, and at the sight something that had long lain dormant in Josephine awakened — her sense of a problem, a scarcely defined possibility.

‘Josephine,’ Ridgeway Saunders began, ‘you can’t realize how happy I am now that it’s come true. I’ve looked forward to this so long, and dreamed about it — ’

She smiled up at him automatically, but her mind was elsewhere, and as the dance progressed the idea continued to obsess her. She was rushed from the beginning; to the men from the tea were added a dozen new faces, a dozen confident or timid voices, until, like all the more popular girls, she had her own queue trailing her about the room. Yet all this had happened to her before, and there was something missing. One might have ten men to Adele’s two, but Josephine was abruptly aware that here a girl took on the importance of the man who had brought her.

She was discomfited by the unfairness of it. A girl earned her popularity by being beautiful and charming. The more beautiful and charming she was, the more she could afford to disregard public opinion. It seemed absurd that simply because Adele had managed to attach a baseball captain, who mightn’t know anything about girls at all, or be able to judge their attractions, she should be thus elevated in spite of her thick ankles, her rather too pinkish face.

Josephine was dancing with Ed Bement from Chicago. He was her earliest beau, a flame of pigtail days in dancing school when one wore white cotton stockings, lace drawers with a waist attached and ruffled dresses with the inevitable sash.

‘What’s the matter with me?’ she asked Ed, thinking aloud. ‘For months I’ve felt as if I were a hundred years old, and I’m just seventeen and that party was only seven years ago.’

‘You’ve been in love a lot since then,’ Ed said.

‘I haven’t,’ she protested indignantly. ‘I’ve had a lot of silly stories started about me, without any foundation, usually by girls who were jealous.’

‘Jealous of what?’

‘Don’t get fresh,’ she said tartly. ‘Dance me near Lillian.’

Dudley Knowleton had just cut in on Lillian. Josephine spoke to her friend; then waiting until their turns would bring them face to face over a space of seconds, she smiled at Knowleton. This time she made sure that smile intersected as well as met glance, that he passed beside the circumference of her fragrant charm. If this had been named like French perfume of a later day it might have been called 'Please'. He bowed and smiled back; a minute later he cut in on her.

It was in an eddy in a corner of the room and she danced slower so that he adapted himself, and for a moment they went around in a slow circle.

'You looked so sweet leading the march with Adele,' she told him. 'You seemed so serious and kind, as if the others were a lot of children. Adele looked sweet, too.' And she added on an inspiration, 'At school I've taken her for a model.'

'You have!' She saw him conceal his sharp surprise as he said, 'I'll have to tell her that.'

He was handsomer than she had thought, and behind his cordial good manners there was a sort of authority. Though he was correctly attentive to her, she saw his eyes search the room quickly to see if all went well; he spoke quietly, in passing, to the orchestra leader, who came down deferentially to the edge of his dais. Last man for Bones. Josephine knew what that meant — her father had been Bones. Ridgeway Saunders and the rest of the Loving Brothers' Association would certainly not be Bones. She wondered, if there had been a Bones for girls, whether she would be tapped — or Adele Craw with her ankles, symbol of solidity.

Come on o-ver here.

Want to have you near;

Get a wel-come heart-y.

Come on join the part-y.

'I wonder how many boys here have taken you for a model,' she said. 'If I were a boy you'd be exactly what I'd like to be. Except I'd be terribly bothered having girls falling in love with me all the time.'

‘They don’t,’ he said simply. ‘They never have.’

‘Oh yes — but they hide it because they’re so impressed with you, and they’re afraid of Adele.’

‘Adele wouldn’t object.’ And he added hastily, ‘ — if it ever happened. Adele doesn’t believe in being serious about such things.’

‘Are you engaged to her?’

He stiffened a little. ‘I don’t believe in being engaged till the right time comes.’

‘Neither do I,’ agreed Josephine readily. ‘I’d rather have one good friend than a hundred people hanging around being mushy all the time.’

‘Is that what that crowd does that keeps following you around tonight?’

‘What crowd?’ she asked innocently.

‘The fifty per cent of the sophomore class that’s rushing you.’

‘A lot of parlour snakes,’ she said ungratefully.

Josephine was radiantly happy now as she turned beautifully through the newly enchanted hall in the arms of the chairman of the prom committee. Even this extra time with him she owed to the awe which he inspired in her entourage; but a man cut in eventually and there was a sharp fall in her elation. The man was impressed that Dudley Knowleton had danced with her; he was more respectful, and his modulated admiration bored her. In a little while, she hoped, Dudley Knowleton would cut back, but as midnight passed, dragging on another hour with it, she wondered if after all it had only been a courtesy to a girl from Adele’s school. Since then Adele had probably painted him a neat little landscape of Josephine’s past. When finally he approached her she grew tense and watchful, a state which made her exteriorly pliant and tender and quiet. But instead of dancing he drew her into the edge of a row of boxes.

‘Adele had an accident on the cloakroom steps. She turned her ankle a little and tore her stocking on a nail. She’d like to borrow a pair from you because you’re staying near here and we’re way out at the Lawn Club.’

‘Of course.’

‘I’ll run over with you — I have a car outside.’

‘But you’re busy; you mustn’t bother.’

‘Of course I’ll go with you.’

There was thaw in the air; a hint of thin and lucid spring hovered delicately around the elms and cornices of buildings whose bareness and coldness had so depressed her the week before. The night had a quality of asceticism, as if the essence of masculine struggle were seeping everywhere through the little city where men of three centuries had brought their energies and aspirations for winnowing. And Dudley Knowleton sitting beside her, dynamic and capable, was symbolic of it all. It seemed that she had never met a man before.

‘Come in, please,’ she said as he went up the steps of the house with her. ‘They’ve made it very comfortable.’

There was an open fire burning in the dark parlour. When she came downstairs with the stockings she went in and stood beside him, very still for a moment, watching it with him. Then she looked up, still silent, looked down, looked at him again.

‘Did you get the stockings?’ he asked, moving a little.

‘Yes,’ she said breathlessly. ‘Kiss me for being so quick.’

He laughed as if she said something witty and moved towards the door. She was smiling and her disappointment was deeply hidden as they got into the car.

‘It’s been wonderful meeting you,’ she told him. ‘I can’t tell you how many ideas I’ve gotten from what you said.’

‘But I haven’t any ideas.’

‘You have. All that about not getting engaged till the proper time comes. I haven’t had much opportunity to talk to a man like you. Otherwise my ideas

would be different, I guess. I've just realized that I've been wrong about a lot of things. I used to want to be exciting. Now I want to help people.'

'Yes,' he agreed, 'that's very nice.'

He seemed about to say more when they arrived at the armoury. In their absence supper had begun; and crossing the great floor by his side, conscious of many eyes regarding them, Josephine wondered if people thought that they had been up to something.

'We're late,' said Knowleton when Adele went off to put on the stockings. 'The man you're with has probably given you up long ago. You'd better let me get you something here.'

'That would be too divine.'

Afterwards, back on the floor again, she moved in a sweet aura of abstraction. The followers of several departed belles merged with hers until now no girl on the floor was cut in on with such frequency. Even Miss Brereton's nephew, Ernest Waterbury, danced with her in stiff approval. Danced? With a tentative change of pace she simply swung from man to man in a sort of hands-right-and-left around the floor. She felt a sudden need to relax, and as if in answer to her mood a new man was presented, a tall, sleek Southerner with a persuasive note:

'You lovely creacha. I been strainin my eyes watchin your cameo face floatin round. You stand out above all these othuz like an Amehken Beauty Rose over a lot of field daisies.'

Dancing with him a second time, Josephine hearkened to his pleadings.

'All right. Let's go outside.'

'It wasn't outdaws I was considering,' he explained as they left the floor. 'I happen to have a mortgage on a nook right hee in the building.'

'All right.'

Book Chaffee, of Alabama, led the way through the cloak-room, through a passage to an inconspicuous door.

‘This is the private apartment of my friend Sergeant Boone, instructor of the battery. He wanted to be particularly sure it’d be used as a nook tonight and not a reading room or anything like that.’

Opening the door he turned on a dim light; she came in and shut it behind her, and they faced each other.

‘Mighty sweet,’ he murmured. His tall face came down, his long arms wrapped around her tenderly, and very slowly so that their eyes met for quite a long time, he drew her up to him. Josephine kept thinking that she had never kissed a Southern boy before.

They started apart at the sudden sound of a key turning in the lock outside. Then there was a muffled snicker followed by retreating footsteps, and Book sprang for the door and wrenched at the handle just as Josephine noticed that this was not only Sergeant Boone’s parlour; it was his bedroom as well.

‘Who was it?’ she demanded. ‘Why did they lock us in?’

‘Some funny boy. I’d like to get my hands on him.’

‘Will he come back?’

Book sat down on the bed to think. ‘I couldn’t say. Don’t even know who it was. But if somebody on the committee came along it wouldn’t look too good, would it?’

Seeing her expression change, he came over and put his arm around her. ‘Don’t you worry, honey. We’ll fix it.’

She returned his kiss, briefly but without distraction. Then she broke away and went into the next apartment, which was hung with boots, uniform coats and various military equipment.

‘There’s a window up here,’ she said. It was high in the wall and had not been opened for a long time. Book mounted on a chair and forced it ajar.

‘About ten feet down,’ he reported, after a moment, ‘but there’s a big pile of snow just underneath. You might get a nasty fall and you’ll sure soak your shoes and stockin’s.’

‘We’ve got to get out,’ Josephine said sharply.

‘We’d better wait and give this funny man a chance — ’

‘I won’t wait. I want to get out. Look — throw out all the blankets from the bed and I’ll jump on that: or you jump first and spread them over the pile of snow.’

After that it was merely exciting. Carefully Book Chaffee wiped the dust from the window to protect her dress; then they were struck silent by a footstep that approached — and passed the outer door. Book jumped, and she heard him kicking profanely as he waded out of the soft drift below. He spread the blankets. At the moment when Josephine swung her legs out the window, there was the sound of voices outside the door and the key turned again in the lock. She landed softly, reaching for his hand, and convulsed with laughter they ran and skidded down the half block towards the corner, and reaching the entrance to the armoury, they stood panting for a moment, breathing in the fresh night. Book was reluctant to go inside.

‘Why don’t you let me conduct you where you’re stayin? We can sit around and sort of recuperate.’

She hesitated, drawn towards him by the community of their late predicament; but something was calling her inside, as if the fulfilment of her elation awaited her there.

‘No,’ she decided.

As they went in she collided with a man in a great hurry, and looked up to recognize Dudley Knowleton.

‘So sorry,’ he said. ‘Oh hello — ’

‘Won’t you dance me over to my box?’ she begged him impulsively. ‘I’ve torn my dress.’

As they started off he said abstractedly: ‘The fact is, a little mischief has come up and the buck has been passed to me. I was going along to see about it.’

Her heart raced wildly and she felt the need of being another sort of person immediately.

‘I can’t tell you how much it’s meant meeting you. It would be wonderful to have one friend I could be serious with without being all mushy and sentimental. Would you mind if I wrote you a letter — I mean, would Adele mind?’

‘Lord, no!’ His smile had become utterly unfathomable to her. As they reached the box she thought of one more thing:

‘Is it true that the baseball team is training at Hot Springs during Easter?’

‘Yes. You going there?’

‘Yes. Good night, Mr Knowleton.’

But she was destined to see him once more. It was outside the men’s coat room, where she waited among a crowd of other pale survivors and their paler mothers, whose wrinkles had doubled and tripled with the passing night. He was explaining something to Adele, and Josephine heard the phrase, ‘The door was locked, and the window open — ’

Suddenly it occurred to Josephine that, meeting her coming in damp and breathless, he must have guessed at the truth — and Adele would doubtless confirm his suspicion. Once again the spectre of her old enemy, the plain and jealous girl, arose before her. Shutting her mouth tight together she turned away.

But they had seen her, and Adele called to her in her cheerful ringing voice:

‘Come say good night. You were so sweet about the stockings. Here’s a girl you won’t find doing shoddy, silly things, Dudley.’ Impulsively she leaned and kissed Josephine on the cheek. ‘You’ll see I’m right, Dudley — next year she’ll be the most respected girl in school.’

As things go in the interminable days of early March, what happened next happened quickly. The annual senior dance at Miss Brereton's school came on a night soaked through with spring, and all the junior girls lay awake listening to the sighing tunes from the gymnasium. Between the numbers, when boys up from New Haven and Princeton wandered about the grounds, cloistered glances looked down from dark open windows upon the vague figures.

Not Josephine, though she lay awake like the others. Such vicarious diversions had no place in the sober patterns she was spinning now from day to day; yet she might as well have been in the forefront of those who called down to the men and threw notes and entered into conversations, for destiny had suddenly turned against her and was spinning a dark web of its own.

Lit-tle lady, don't be depressed and blue,

After all, we're both in the same can-oo —

Dudley Knowleton was over in the gymnasium fifty yards away, but proximity to a man did not thrill her as it would have done a year ago — not, at least, in the same way. Life, she saw now, was a serious matter, and in the modest darkness a line of a novel ceaselessly recurred to her: 'He is a man fit to be the father of my children'. What were the seductive graces, the fast lines of a hundred parlour snakes compared to such realities. One couldn't go on forever kissing comparative strangers behind half-closed doors.

Under her pillow now were two letters, answers to her letters. They spoke in a bold round hand of the beginning of baseball practice; they were glad Josephine felt as she did about things; and the writer certainly looked forward to seeing her at Easter. Of all the letters she had ever received they were the most difficult from which to squeeze a single drop of heart's blood — one couldn't even read the 'Yours' of the subscription as 'Your' — but Josephine knew them by heart. They were precious because he had taken the time to write them; they were eloquent in the very postage stamp because he used so few.

She was restless in her bed — the music had begun again in the gymnasium:

Oh, my love, I've waited so long for you,

Oh, my love, I'm singing this song for you —

Oh-h-h —

From the next room there was light laughter, and then from below a male voice, and a long interchange of comic whispers. Josephine recognized Lillian's laugh and the voices of two other girls. She could imagine them as they lay across the window in their nightgowns, their heads just showing from the open window. 'Come right down,' one boy kept saying. 'Don't be formal — come, just as you are.'

There was a sudden silence, then a quick crunching of footsteps on gravel, a suppressed snicker and a scurry, and the sharp, protesting groan of several beds in the next room and the banging of a door down the hall. Trouble for somebody, maybe. A few minutes later Josephine's door half opened, she caught a glimpse of Miss Kwain against the dim corridor light, and then the door closed.

The next afternoon Josephine and four other girls, all of whom denied having breathed so much as a word into the night, were placed on probation. There was absolutely nothing to do about it. Miss Kwain had recognized their faces in the window and they were all from two rooms. It was an injustice, but it was nothing compared to what happened next. One week before Easter vacation the school motored off on a one-day trip to inspect a milk farm — all save the ones on probation. Miss Chambers, who sympathized with Josephine's misfortune, enlisted her services in entertaining Mr Ernest Waterbury, who was spending a week-end with his aunt. This was only vaguely better than nothing, for Mr Waterbury was a very dull, very priggish young man. He was so dull and so priggish that the following morning Josephine was expelled from school.

It happened like this: they had strolled in the grounds, they had sat down at a garden table and had tea. Ernest Waterbury had expressed a desire to see something in the chapel, just a few minutes before his aunt's car rolled up the drive. The chapel was reached by descending winding mock-medieval stairs; and, her shoes still wet from the garden, Josephine had slipped on

the top step and fallen five feet directly into Mr Waterbury's unwilling arms, where she lay helpless, convulsed with irresistible laughter. It was in this position that Miss Brereton and the visiting trustee had found them.

'But I had nothing to do with it!' declared the ungallant Mr Waterbury. Flustered and outraged, he was packed back to New Haven, and Miss Brereton, connecting this with last week's sin, proceeded to lose her head. Josephine, humiliated and furious, lost hers, and Mr Perry, who happened to be in New York, arrived at the school the same night. At his passionate indignation, Miss Brereton collapsed and retracted, but the damage was done, and Josephine packed her trunk. Unexpectedly, monstrously, just as it had begun to mean something, her school life was over.

For the moment all her feelings were directed against Miss Brereton, and the only tears she shed at leaving were of anger and resentment. Riding with her father up to New York, she saw that while at first he had instinctively and whole-heartedly taken her part, he felt also a certain annoyance with her misfortune.

'We'll all survive,' he said. 'Unfortunately, even that old idiot Miss Brereton will survive. She ought to be running a reform school.' He brooded for a moment. 'Anyhow, your mother arrives tomorrow and you and she go down to Hot Springs as you planned.'

'Hot Springs!' Josephine cried, in a choked voice. 'Oh, no!'

'Why not?' he demanded in surprise. 'It seems the best thing to do. Give it a chance to blow over before you go back to Chicago.'

'I'd rather go to Chicago,' said Josephine breathlessly. 'Daddy, I'd much rather go to Chicago.'

'That's absurd. Your mother's started East and the arrangements are all made. At Hot Springs you can get out and ride and play golf and forget that old she-devil —'

'Isn't there another place in the East we could go? There's people I know going to Hot Springs who'll know all about this, people that I don't want to meet — girls from school.'

‘Now, Jo, you keep your chin up — this is one of those times. Sorry I said that about letting it blow over in Chicago; if we hadn’t made other plans we’d go back and face every old shrew and gossip in town right away. When anybody slinks off in a corner they think you’ve been up to something bad. If anybody says anything to you, you tell them the truth — what I said to Miss Brereton. You tell them she said you could come back and I damn well wouldn’t let you go back.’

‘They won’t believe it.’

There would be, at all events, four days of respite at Hot Springs before the vacations of the schools. Josephine passed this time taking golf lessons from a professional so newly arrived from Scotland that he surely knew nothing of her misadventure; she even went riding with a young man one afternoon, feeling almost at home with him after his admission that he had flunked out of Princeton in February — a confidence, however, which she did not reciprocate in kind. But in the evenings, despite the young man’s importunity, she stayed with her mother, feeling nearer to her than she ever had before.

But one afternoon in the lobby Josephine saw by the desk two dozen good-looking young men waiting by a stack of hat cases and bags, and knew that what she dreaded was at hand. She ran upstairs and with an invented headache dined there that night, but after dinner she walked restlessly around their apartment. She was ashamed not only of her situation but of her reaction to it. She had never felt any pity for the unpopular girls who skulked in dressing-rooms because they could attract no partners on the floor, or for girls who were outsiders at Lake Forest, and now she was like them — hiding miserably out of life. Alarmed lest already the change was written in her face, she paused in front of the mirror, fascinated as ever by what she found there.

‘The darn fools!’ she said aloud. And as she said it her chin went up and the faint cloud about her eyes lifted. The phrases of the myriad love letters she had received passed before her eyes; behind her, after all, was the reassurance of a hundred lost and pleading faces, of innumerable tender

and pleading voices. Her pride flooded back into her till she could see the warm blood rushing up into her cheeks.

There was a knock at the door — it was the Princeton boy.

‘How about slipping downstairs?’ he proposed. ‘There’s a dance. It’s full of E-lies, the whole Yale baseball team. I’ll pick up one of them and introduce you and you’ll have a big time. How about it?’

‘All right, but I don’t want to meet anybody. You’ll just have to dance with me all evening.’

‘You know that suits me.’

She hurried into a new spring evening dress of the frailest fairy blue. In the excitement of seeing herself in it, it seemed as if she had shed the old skin of winter and emerged a shining chrysalis with no stain; and going downstairs her feet fell softly just off the beat of the music from below. It was a tune from a play she had seen a week ago in New York, a tune with a future — ready for gaieties as yet unthought of, lovers not yet met. Dancing off, she was certain that life had innumerable beginnings. She had hardly gone ten steps when she was cut in upon by Dudley Knowleton.

‘Why, Josephine!’ He had never used her first name before — he stood holding her hand. ‘Why, I’m so glad to see you! I’ve been hoping and hoping you’d be here.’

She soared skyward on a rocket of surprise and delight. He was actually glad to see her — the expression on his face was obviously sincere. Could it be possible that he hadn’t heard?

‘Adele wrote me you might be here. She wasn’t sure.’

— Then he knew and didn’t care; he liked her anyhow.

‘I’m in sackcloth and ashes,’ she said.

‘Well, they’re very becoming to you.’

‘You know what happened — ’ she ventured.

‘I do. I wasn’t going to say anything, but it’s generally agreed that Waterbury behaved like a fool — and it’s not going to be much help to him in the elections next month. Look — I want you to dance with some men who are just starving for a touch of beauty.’

Presently she was dancing with, it seemed to her, the entire team at once. Intermittently Dudley Knowleton cut back in, as well as the Princeton man, who was somewhat indignant at this unexpected competition. There were many girls from many schools in the room, but with an admirable team spirit the Yale men displayed a sharp prejudice in Josephine’s favour; already she was pointed out from the chairs along the wall.

But interiorly she was waiting for what was coming, for the moment when she would walk with Dudley Knowleton into the warm, Southern night. It came naturally, just at the end of a number, and they strolled along an avenue of early-blooming lilacs and turned a corner and another corner . . .

‘You were glad to see me, weren’t you?’ Josephine said.

‘Of course.’

‘I was afraid at first. I was sorriest about what happened at school because of you. I’d been trying so hard to be different — because of you.’

‘You mustn’t think of that school business any more. Everybody that matters knows you got a bad deal. Forget it and start over.’

‘Yes,’ she agreed tranquilly. She was happy. The breeze and the scent of lilacs — that was she, lovely and intangible; the rustic bench where they sat and the trees — that was he, rugged and strong beside her, protecting her.

‘I’d thought so much of meeting you here,’ she said after a minute. ‘You’d been so good for me, that I thought maybe in a different way I could be good for you — I mean I know ways of having a good time that you don’t know. For instance, we’ve certainly got to go horseback riding by moonlight some night. That’ll be fun.’

He didn’t answer.

‘I can really be very nice when I like somebody — that’s really not often,’ she interpolated hastily, ‘not seriously. But I mean when I do feel seriously that a boy and I are really friends I don’t believe in having a whole mob of other boys hanging around taking up time. I like to be with him all the time, all day and all evening, don’t you?’

He stirred a little on the bench; he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, looking at his strong hands. Her gently modulated voice sank a note lower.

‘When I like anyone I don’t even like dancing. It’s sweeter to be alone.’

Silence for a moment.

‘Well, you know’ — he hesitated, frowning — ‘as a matter of fact, I’m mixed up in a lot of engagements made some time ago with some people.’ He floundered about unhappily. ‘In fact, I won’t even be at the hotel after tomorrow. I’ll be at the house of some people down the valley — a sort of house party. As a matter of fact, Adele’s getting here tomorrow.’

Absorbed in her own thoughts, she hardly heard him at first, but at the name she caught her breath sharply.

‘We’re both to be at this house party while we’re here, and I imagine it’s more or less arranged what we’re going to do. Of course, in the daytime I’ll be here for baseball practice.’

‘I see.’ Her lips were quivering. ‘You won’t be — you’ll be with Adele.’

‘I think that — more or less — I will. She’ll — want to see you, of course.’

Another silence while he twisted his big fingers and she helplessly imitated the gesture.

‘You were just sorry for me,’ she said. ‘You like Adele — much better.’

‘Adele and I understand each other. She’s been more or less my ideal since we were children together.’

‘And I’m not your kind of girl?’ Josephine’s voice trembled with a sort of fright. ‘I suppose because I’ve kissed a lot of boys and got a reputation for speed and raised the deuce.’

‘It isn’t that.’

‘Yes, it is,’ she declared passionately. ‘I’m just paying for things.’ She stood up. ‘You’d better take me back inside so I can dance with the kind of boys that like me.’

She walked quickly down the path, tears of misery streaming from her eyes. He overtook her by the steps, but she only shook her head and said, ‘Excuse me for being so fresh. I’ll grow up — I got what was coming to me — it’s all right.’

A little later when she looked around the floor for him he had gone — and Josephine realized with a shock that for the first time in her life, she had tried for a man and failed. But, save in the very young, only love begets love, and from the moment Josephine had perceived that his interest in her was merely kindness she realized the wound was not in her heart but in her pride. She would forget him quickly, but she would never forget what she had learned from him. There were two kinds of men, those you played with and those you might marry. And as this passed through her mind, her restless eyes wandered casually over the group of stags, resting very lightly on Mr Gordon Tinsley, the current catch of Chicago, reputedly the richest young man in the Middle West. He had never paid any attention to young Josephine until tonight. Ten minutes ago he had asked her to go driving with him tomorrow.

But he did not attract her — and she decided to refuse. One mustn’t run through people, and, for the sake of a romantic half-hour, trade a possibility that might develop — quite seriously — later, at the proper time. She did not know that this was the first mature thought that she had ever had in her life, but it was.

The orchestra were packing their instruments and the Princeton man was still at her ear, still imploring her to walk out with him into the night. Josephine knew without cogitation which sort of man he was — and the

moon was bright even on the windows. So with a certain sense of relaxation she took his arm and they strolled out to the pleasant bower she had so lately quitted, and their faces turned towards each other, like little moons under the great white ones which hovered high over the Blue Ridge; his arm dropped softly about her yielding shoulder.

‘Well?’ he whispered.

‘Well?’

ONE TRIP ABROAD

I

Saturday Evening Post (11 October 1930)

In the afternoon the air became black with locusts, and some of the women shrieked, sinking to the floor of the motorbus and covering their hair with traveling rugs. The locusts were coming north, eating everything in their path, which was not so much in that part of the world; they were flying silently and in straight lines, flakes of black snow. But none struck the windshield or tumbled into the car, and presently humorists began holding out their hands, trying to catch some. After ten minutes the cloud thinned out, passed, and the women emerged from the blankets, disheveled and feeling silly. And everyone talked together.

Everyone talked; it would have been absurd not to talk after having been through a swarm of locusts on the edge of the Sahara. The Smyrna-American talked to the British widow going down to Biskra to have one last fling with an as-yet-unencountered sheik. The member of the San Francisco Stock Exchange talked shyly to the author. "Aren't you an author?" he said. The father and daughter from Wilmington talked to the cockney airman who was going to fly to Timbuctoo. Even the French chauffeur turned about and explained in a loud, clear voice: "Bumblebees," which sent the trained nurse from New York into shriek after shriek of hysterical laughter.

Amongst the unsubtle rushing together of the travelers there was one interchange more carefully considered. Mr. and Mrs. Liddell Miles, turning as one person, smiled and spoke to the young American couple in the seat behind:

"Didn't catch any in your hair?"

The young couple smiled back politely.

"No. We survived that plague."

They were in their twenties, and there was still a pleasant touch of bride and groom upon them. A handsome couple; the man rather intense and sensitive, the girl arrestingly light of hue in eyes and hair, her face without shadows, its living freshness modulated by a lovely confident calm. Mr. and Mrs. Miles did not fail to notice their air of good breeding, of a specifically “swell” background, expressed both by their unsophistication and by their ingrained reticence that was not stiffness. If they held aloof, it was because they were sufficient to each other, while Mr. and Mrs. Miles’ aloofness toward the other passengers was a conscious mask, a social attitude, quite as public an affair in its essence as the ubiquitous advances of the Smyrna-American, who was snubbed by all.

The Mileses had, in fact, decided that the young couple were “possible” and, bored with themselves, were frankly approaching them.

“Have you been to Africa before? It’s been so utterly fascinating! Are you going on to Tunis?”

The Mileses, if somewhat worn away inside by fifteen years of a particular set in Paris, had undeniable style, even charm, and before the evening arrival at the little oasis town of Bou Saada they had all four become companionable. They uncovered mutual friends in New York and, meeting for a cocktail in the bar of the Hotel Transatlantique, decided to have dinner together.

As the young Kellys came downstairs later, Nicole was conscious of a certain regret that they had accepted, realizing that now they were probably committed to seeing a certain amount of their new acquaintances as far as Constantine, where their routes diverged.

In the eight months of their marriage she had been so very happy that it seemed like spoiling something. On the Italian liner that had brought them to Gibraltar they had not joined the groups that leaned desperately on one another in the bar; instead, they seriously studied French, and Nelson worked on business contingent on his recent inheritance of half a million dollars. Also he painted a picture of a smokestack. When one member of the gay crowd in the bar disappeared permanently into the Atlantic just this side

of the Azores, the young Kellys were almost glad, for it justified their aloof attitude.

But there was another reason Nicole was sorry they had committed themselves. She spoke to Nelson about it: "I passed that couple in the hall just now."

"Who — the Mileses?"

"No, that young couple — about our age — the ones that were on the other motorbus, that we thought looked so nice, in Bir Rabalou after lunch, in the camel market."

"They did look nice."

"Charming," she said emphatically; "the girl and man, both. I'm almost sure I've met the girl somewhere before."

The couple referred to were sitting across the room at dinner, and Nicole found her eyes drawn irresistibly toward them. They, too, now had companions, and again Nicole, who had not talked to a girl of her own age for two months, felt a faint regret. The Mileses, being formally sophisticated and frankly snobbish, were a different matter. They had been to an alarming number of places and seemed to know all the flashing phantoms of the newspapers.

They dined on the hotel veranda under a sky that was low and full of the presence of a strange and watchful God; around the corners of the hotel the night already stirred with the sounds of which they had so often read but that were even so hysterically unfamiliar — drums from Senegal, a native flute, the selfish, effeminate whine of a camel, the Arabs pattering past in shoes made of old automobile tires, the wail of Magian prayer.

At the desk in the hotel, a fellow passenger was arguing monotonously with the clerk about the rate of exchange, and the inappropriateness added to the detachment which had increased steadily as they went south.

Mrs. Miles was the first to break the lingering silence; with a sort of impatience she pulled them with her, in from the night and up to the table.

“We really should have dressed. Dinner’s more amusing if people dress, because they feel differently in formal clothes. The English know that.”

“Dress here?” her husband objected. “I’d feel like that man in the ragged dress suit we passed today, driving the flock of sheep.”

“I always feel like a tourist if I’m not dressed.”

“Well, we are, aren’t we?” asked Nelson.

“I don’t consider myself a tourist. A tourist is somebody who gets up early and goes to cathedrals and talks about scenery.”

Nicole and Nelson, having seen all the official sights from Fez to Algiers, and taken reels of moving pictures and felt improved, confessed themselves, but decided that their experiences on the trip would not interest Mrs. Miles.

“Every place is the same,” Mrs. Miles continued. “The only thing that matters is who’s there. New scenery is fine for half an hour, but after that you want your own kind to see. That’s why some places have a certain vogue, and then the vogue changes and the people move on somewhere else. The place itself really never matters.”

“But doesn’t somebody first decide that the place is nice?” objected Nelson. “The first ones go there because they like the place.”

“Where were you going this spring?” Mrs. Miles asked.

“We thought of San Remo, or maybe Sorrento. We’ve never been to Europe before.”

“My children, I know both Sorrento and San Remo, and you won’t stand either of them for a week. They’re full of the most awful English, reading the Daily Mail and waiting for letters and talking about the most incredibly dull things. You might as well go to Brighton or Bournemouth and buy a white poodle and a sunshade and walk on the pier. How long are you staying in Europe?”

“We don’t know; perhaps several years.” Nicole hesitated. “Nelson came into a little money, and we wanted a change. When I was young, my father had asthma and I had to live in the most depressing health resorts with him

for years; and Nelson was in the fur business in Alaska and he loathed it; so when we were free we came abroad. Nelson's going to paint and I'm going to study singing." She looked triumphantly at her husband. "So far, it's been absolutely gorgeous."

Mrs. Miles decided, from the evidence of the younger woman's clothes, that it was quite a bit of money, and their enthusiasm was infectious.

"You really must go to Biarritz," she advised them. "Or else come to Monte Carlo."

"They tell me there's a great show here," said Miles, ordering champagne. "The Ouled Naïls. The concierge says they're some kind of tribe of girls who come down from the mountains and learn to be dancers, and what not, till they've collected enough gold to go back to their mountains and marry. Well, they give a performance tonight."

Walking over to the Café of the Ouled Naïls afterward, Nicole regretted that she and Nelson were not strolling alone through the ever-lower, ever-softer, ever-brighter night. Nelson had reciprocated the bottle of champagne at dinner, and neither of them was accustomed to so much. As they drew near the sad flute she didn't want to go inside, but rather to climb to the top of a low hill where a white mosque shone clear as a planet through the night. Life was better than any show; closing in toward Nelson, she pressed his hand.

The little cave of a café was filled with the passengers from the two busses. The girls — light-brown, flat-nosed Berbers with fine, deep-shaded eyes — were already doing each one her solo on the platform. They wore cotton dresses, faintly reminiscent of Southern mammies; under these their bodies writhed in a slow nautch, culminating in a stomach dance, with silver belts bobbing wildly and their strings of real gold coins tinkling on their necks and arms. The flute player was also a comedian; he danced, burlesquing the girls. The drummer, swathed in goatskins like a witch doctor, was a true black from the Sudan.

Through the smoke of cigarettes each girl went in turn through the finger movement, like piano playing in the air — outwardly facile, yet, after a few

moments, so obviously exacting — and then through the very simply languid yet equally precise steps of the feet — these were but preparation to the wild sensuality of the culminated dance.

Afterward there was a lull. Though the performance seemed not quite over, most of the audience gradually got up to go, but there was a whispering in the air.

“What is it?” Nicole asked her husband.

“Why, I believe — it appears that for a consideration the Ouled Naïls dance in more or less — ah — Oriental style — in very little except jewelry.”

“Oh.”

“We’re all staying,” Mr. Miles assured her jovially. “After all, we’re here to see the real customs and manners of the country; a little prudishness shouldn’t stand in our way.”

Most of the men remained, and several of the women. Nicole stood up suddenly.

“I’ll wait outside,” she said.

“Why not stay, Nicole? After all, Mrs. Miles is staying.”

The flute player was making preliminary flourishes. Upon the raised dais two pale brown children of perhaps fourteen were taking off their cotton dresses. For an instant Nicole hesitated, torn between repulsion and the desire not to appear to be a prig. Then she saw another young American woman get up quickly and start for the door. Recognizing the attractive young wife from the other bus, her own decision came quickly and she followed.

Nelson hurried after her. “I’m going if you go,” he said, but with evident reluctance.

“Please don’t bother. I’ll wait with the guide outside.”

“Well — ” The drum was starting. He compromised: “I’ll only stay a minute. I want to see what it’s like.”

Waiting in the fresh night, she found that the incident had hurt her — Nelson's not coming with her at once, giving as an argument the fact that Mrs. Miles was staying. From being hurt, she grew angry and made signs to the guide that she wanted to return to the hotel.

Twenty minutes later, Nelson appeared, angry with the anxiety at finding her gone, as well as to hide his guilt at having left her. Incredulous with themselves, they were suddenly in a quarrel.

Much later, when there were no sounds at all in Bou Saada and the nomads in the market place were only motionless bundles rolled up in their burnouses, she was asleep upon his shoulder. Life is progressive, no matter what our intentions, but something was harmed, some precedent of possible nonagreement was set. It was a love match, though, and it could stand a great deal. She and Nelson had passed lonely youths, and now they wanted the taste and smell of the living world; for the present they were finding it in each other.

A month later they were in Sorrento, where Nicole took singing lessons and Nelson tried to paint something new into the Bay of Naples. It was the existence they had planned and often read about. But they found, as so many have found, that the charm of idyllic interludes depends upon one person's "giving the party" — which is to say, furnishing the background, the experience, the patience, against which the other seems to enjoy again the spells of pastoral tranquillity recollected from childhood. Nicole and Nelson were at once too old and too young, and too American, to fall into immediate soft agreement with a strange land. Their vitality made them restless, for as yet his painting had no direction and her singing no immediate prospect of becoming serious. They said they were not "getting anywhere" — the evenings were long, so they began to drink a lot of *vin de Capri* at dinner.

The English owned the hotel. They were aged, come South for good weather and tranquillity; Nelson and Nicole resented the mild tenor of their days. Could people be content to talk eternally about the weather, promenade the same walks, face the same variant of macaroni at dinner

month after month? They grew bored, and Americans bored are already in sight of excitement. Things came to head all in one night.

Over a flask of wine at dinner they decided to go to Paris, settle in an apartment and work seriously. Paris promised metropolitan diversion, friends of their own age, a general intensity that Italy lacked. Eager with new hopes, they strolled into the salon after dinner, when, for the tenth time, Nelson noticed an ancient and enormous mechanical piano and was moved to try it.

Across the salon sat the only English people with whom they had had any connection — Gen. Sir Evelyne Fragelle and Lady Fragelle. The connection had been brief and unpleasant — seeing them walking out of the hotel in peignoirs to swim, she had announced, over quite a few yards of floor space, that it was disgusting and shouldn't be allowed.

But that was nothing compared with her response to the first terrific bursts of sound from the electric piano. As the dust of years trembled off the keyboard at the vibration, she shot galvanically forward with the sort of jerk associated with the electric chair. Somewhat stunned himself by the sudden din of Waiting for the Robert E. Lee, Nelson had scarcely sat down when she projected herself across the room, her train quivering behind her, and, without glancing at the Kellys, turned off the instrument.

It was one of those gestures that are either plainly justified, or else outrageous. For a moment Nelson hesitated uncertainly; then, remembering Lady Fragelle's arrogant remark about his bathing suit, he returned to the instrument in her still-billowing wake and turned it on again.

The incident had become international. The eyes of the entire salon fell eagerly upon the protagonists, watching for the next move. Nicole hurried after Nelson, urging him to let the matter pass, but it was too late. From the outraged English table there arose, joint by joint, Gen. Sir Evelyne Fragelle, faced with perhaps his most crucial situation since the relief of Ladysmith.

“T'lee outrageous! — 't'lee outrageous!”

“I beg your pardon,” said Nelson.

“Here for fifteen years!” screamed Sir Evelyne to himself. “Never heard of anyone doing such a thing before!”

“I gathered that this was put here for the amusement of the guests.”

Scorning to answer, Sir Evelyne knelt, reached for the catch, pushed it the wrong way, whereupon the speed and volume of the instrument tripled until they stood in a wild pandemonium of sound; Sir Evelyne livid with military emotions, Nelson on the point of maniacal laughter.

In a moment the firm hand of the hotel manager settled the matter; the instrument gulped and stopped, trembling a little from its unaccustomed outburst, leaving behind it a great silence in which Sir Evelyne turned to the manager.

“Most outrageous affair ever heard of in my life. My wife turned it off once, and he” — this was his first acknowledgment of Nelson’s identity as distinct from the instrument — “he put it on again!”

“This is a public room in a hotel,” Nelson protested. “The instrument is apparently here to be used.”

“Don’t get in an argument,” Nicole whispered. “They’re old.”

But Nelson said, “If there’s any apology, it’s certainly due to me.”

Sir Evelyne’s eye was fixed menacingly upon the manager, waiting for him to do his duty. The latter thought of Sir Evelyne’s fifteen years of residence, and cringed.

“It is not the habitude to play the instrument in the evening. The clients are each one quiet on his or her table.”

“American cheek!” snapped Sir Evelyne.

“Very well,” Nelson said; “we’ll relieve the hotel of our presence tomorrow.”

As a reaction from this incident, as a sort of protest against Sir Evelyne Fragelle, they went not to Paris but to Monte Carlo after all. They were through with being alone.

II

A little more than two years after the Kellys' first visit to Monte Carlo, Nicole woke up one morning into what, though it bore the same name, had become to her a different place altogether.

In spite of hurried months in Paris or Biarritz, it was now home to them. They had a villa, they had a large acquaintance among the spring and summer crowd — a crowd which, naturally, did not include people on chartered trips or the shore parties from Mediterranean cruises; these latter had become for them “tourists.”

They loved the Riviera in full summer with many friends there and the nights open and full of music. Before the maid drew the curtains this morning to shut out the glare, Nicole saw from her window the yacht of T. F. Golding, placid among the swells of the Monacan Bay, as if constantly bound on a romantic voyage not dependent upon actual motion.

The yacht had taken the slow tempo of the coast; it had gone no farther than to Cannes and back all summer, though it might have toured the world. The Kellys were dining on board that night.

Nicole spoke excellent French; she had five new evening dresses and four others that would do; she had her husband; she had two men in love with her, and she felt sad for one of them. She had her pretty face. At 10:30 she was meeting a third man, who was just beginning to be in love with her “in a harmless way.” At one she was having a dozen charming people to luncheon. All that.

“I’m happy,” she brooded toward the bright blinds. “I’m young and good-looking, and my name is often in the paper as having been here and there, but really I don’t care about shi-shi. I think it’s all awfully silly, but if you do want to see people, you might as well see the chic, amusing ones; and if people call you a snob, it’s envy, and they know it and everybody knows it.”

She repeated the substance of this to Oscar Dane on the Mont Agel golf course two hours later, and he cursed her quietly.

“Not at all,” he said. “You’re just getting to be an old snob. Do you call that crowd of drunks you run with amusing people? Why, they’re not even very swell. They’re so hard that they’ve shifted down through Europe like nails in a sack of wheat, till they stick out of it a little into the Mediterranean Sea.”

Annoyed, Nicole fired a name at him, but he answered: “Class C. A good solid article for beginners.”

“The Colbys — anyway, her.”

“Third flight.”

“Marquis and Marquise de Kalb.”

“If she didn’t happen to take dope and he didn’t have other peculiarities.”

“Well, then, where are the amusing people?” she demanded impatiently.

“Off by themselves somewhere. They don’t hunt in herds, except occasionally.”

“How about you? You’d snap up an invitation from every person I named. I’ve heard stories about you wilder than any you can make up. There’s not a man that’s known you six months that would take your check for ten dollars. You’re a sponge and a parasite and everything — ”

“Shut up for a minute,” he interrupted. “I don’t want to spoil this drive. . . . I just don’t like to see you kid yourself,” he continued. “What passes with you for international society is just about as hard to enter nowadays as the public rooms at the Casino; and if I can make my living by sponging off it, I’m still giving twenty times more than I get. We dead heats are about the only people in it with any stuff, and we stay with it because we have to.”

She laughed, liking him immensely, wondering how angry Nelson would be when he found that Oscar had walked off with his nail scissors and his copy of the New York Herald this morning.

“Anyhow,” she thought afterward, as she drove home toward luncheon, “we’re getting out of it all soon, and we’ll be serious and have a baby. After this last summer.”

Stopping for a moment at a florist's, she saw a young woman coming out with an armful of flowers. The young woman glanced at her over the heap of color, and Nicole perceived that she was extremely smart, and then that her face was familiar. It was someone she had known once, but only slightly; the name had escaped her, so she did not nod, and forgot the incident until that afternoon.

They were twelve for luncheon: The Goldings' party from the yacht, Liddell and Cardine Miles, Mr. Dane — seven different nationalities she counted; among them an exquisite young French-woman, Madame Delauney, whom Nicole referred to lightly as "Nelson's girl." Noel Delauney was perhaps her closest friend; when they made up foursomes for golf or for trips, she paired off with Nelson; but today, as Nicole introduced her to someone as "Nelson's girl," the bantering phrase filled Nicole with distaste.

She said aloud at luncheon: "Nelson and I are going to get away from it all."

Everybody agreed that they, too, were going to get away from it all.

"It's all right for the English," someone said, "because they're doing a sort of dance of death — you know, gayety in the doomed fort, with the Sepoys at the gate. You can see it by their faces when they dance — the intensity. They know it and they want it, and they don't see any future. But you Americans, you're having a rotten time. If you want to wear the green hat or the crushed hat, or whatever it is, you always have to get a little tipsy."

"We're going to get away from it all," Nicole said firmly, but something within her argued: "What a pity — this lovely blue sea, this happy time." What came afterward? Did one just accept a lessening of tension? It was somehow Nelson's business to answer that. His growing discontent that he wasn't getting anywhere ought to explode into a new life for both of them, or rather a new hope and content with life. That secret should be his masculine contribution.

"Well, children, good-by."

"It was a great luncheon."

"Don't forget about getting away from it all."

“See you when — ”

The guests walked down the path toward their cars. Only Oscar, just faintly flushed on liqueurs, stood with Nicole on the veranda, talking on and on about the girl he had invited up to see his stamp collection. Momentarily tired of people, impatient to be alone, Nicole listened for a moment and then, taking a glass vase of flowers from the luncheon table, went through the French windows into the dark, shadowy villa, his voice following her as he talked on and on out there.

It was when she crossed the first salon, still hearing Oscar's monologue on the veranda, that she began to hear another voice in the next room, cutting sharply across Oscar's voice.

“Ah, but kiss me again,” it said, stopped; Nicole stopped, too, rigid in the silence, now broken only by the voice on the porch.

“Be careful.” Nicole recognized the faint French accent of Noel Delauney.

“I'm tired of being careful. Anyhow, they're on the veranda.”

“No, better the usual place.”

“Darling, sweet darling.”

The voice of Oscar Dane on the veranda grew weary and stopped and, as if thereby released from her paralysis, Nicole took a step — forward or backward, she did not know which. At the sound of her heel on the floor, she heard the two people in the next room breaking swiftly apart.

Then she went in. Nelson was lighting a cigarette; Noel, with her back turned, was apparently hunting for hat or purse on a chair. With blind horror rather than anger, Nicole threw, or rather pushed away from her, the glass vase which she carried. If at anyone, it was at Nelson she threw it, but the force of her feeling had entered the inanimate thing; it flew past him, and Noel Delauney, just turning about, was struck full on the side of her head and face.

“Say, there!” Nelson cried. Noel sank slowly into the chair before which she stood, her hand slowly rising to cover the side of her face. The jar rolled unbroken on the thick carpet, scattering its flowers.

“You look out!” Nelson was at Noel’s side, trying to take the hand away to see what had happened.

“*C’est liquide,*” gasped Noel in a whisper. “*Est-ce que c’est le sang?*”

He forced her hand away, and cried breathlessly, “No, it’s just water!” and then, to Oscar, who had appeared in the doorway: “Get some cognac!” and to Nicole: “You fool, you must be crazy!”

Nicole, breathing hard, said nothing. When the brandy arrived, there was a continuing silence, like that of people watching an operation, while Nelson poured a glass down Noel’s throat. Nicole signaled to Oscar for a drink, and, as if afraid to break the silence without it, they all had a brandy. Then Noel and Nelson spoke at once:

“If you can find my hat — ”

“This is the silliest — ”

“ — I shall go immediately.”

“ — thing I ever saw; I— ”

They all looked at Nicole, who said: “Have her car drive right up to the door.” Oscar departed quickly.

“Are you sure you don’t want to see a doctor?” asked Nelson anxiously.

“I want to go.”

A minute later, when the car had driven away, Nelson came in and poured himself another glass of brandy. A wave of subsiding tension flowed over him, showing in his face; Nicole saw it, and saw also his gathering will to make the best he could of it.

“I want to know just why you did that,” he demanded. “No, don’t go, Oscar.” He saw the story starting out into the world.

“What possible reason — ”

“Oh, shut up!” snapped Nicole.

“If I kissed Noel, there’s nothing so terrible about it. It’s of absolutely no significance.”

She made a contemptuous sound. “I heard what you said to her.”

“You’re crazy.”

He said it as if she were crazy, and wild rage filled her.

“You liar! All this time pretending to be so square, and so particular what I did, and all the time behind my back you’ve been playing around with that little — ”

She used a serious word, and as if maddened with the sound of it, she sprang toward his chair. In protection against this sudden attack, he flung up his arm quickly, and the knuckles of his open hand struck across the socket of her eye. Covering her face with her hand as Noel had done ten minutes previously, she fell sobbing to the floor.

“Hasn’t this gone far enough?” Oscar cried.

“Yes,” admitted Nelson, “I guess it has.”

“You go on out on the veranda and cool off.”

He got Nicole to a couch and sat beside her, holding her hand.

“Brace up — brace up, baby,” he said, over and over. “What are you — Jack Dempsey? You can’t go around hitting French women; they’ll sue you.”

“He told her he loved her,” she gasped hysterically. “She said she’d meet him at the same place. . . . Has he gone there now?”

“He’s out on the porch, walking up and down, sorry as the devil that he accidentally hit you, and sorry he ever saw Noel Delauney.”

“Oh, yes!”

“You might have heard wrong, and it doesn’t prove a thing, anyhow.”

After twenty minutes, Nelson came in suddenly and sank down on his knees by the side of his wife. Mr. Oscar Dane, reënforced in his idea that he gave much more than he got, backed discreetly and far from unwillingly to the door.

In another hour, Nelson and Nicole, arm in arm, emerged from their villa and walked slowly down to the Café de Paris. They walked instead of driving, as if trying to return to the simplicity they had once possessed, as if they were trying to unwind something that had become visibly tangled. Nicole accepted his explanations, not because they were credible, but because she wanted passionately to believe them. They were both very quiet and sorry.

The Café de Paris was pleasant at that hour, with sunset drooping through the yellow awnings and the red parasols as through stained glass. Glancing about, Nicole saw the young woman she had encountered that morning. She was with a man now, and Nelson placed them immediately as the young couple they had seen in Algeria, almost three years ago.

“They’ve changed,” he commented. “I suppose we have, too, but not so much. They’re harder-looking and he looks dissipated. Dissipation always shows in light eyes rather than in dark ones. The girl is *tout ce qu’il y a de chic*, as they say, but there’s a hard look in her face too.”

“I like her.”

“Do you want me to go and ask them if they are that same couple?”

“No! That’d be like lonesome tourists do. They have their own friends.”

At that moment people were joining them at their table.

“Nelson, how about tonight?” Nicole asked a little later. “Do you think we can appear at the Goldings’ after what’s happened?”

“We not only can but we’ve got to. If the story’s around and we’re not there, we’ll just be handing them a nice juicy subject of conversation. . . . Hello! What on earth — ”

Something strident and violent had happened across the café; a woman screamed and the people at one table were all on their feet, surging back

and forth like one person. Then the people at the other tables were standing and crowding forward; for just a moment the Kellys saw the face of the girl they had been watching, pale now, and distorted with anger. Panic-stricken, Nicole plucked at Nelson's sleeve.

"I want to get out. I can't stand any more today. Take me home. Is everybody going crazy?"

On the way home, Nelson glanced at Nicole's face and perceived with a start that they were not going to dinner on the Goldings' yacht after all. For Nicole had the beginnings of a well-defined and unmistakable black eye — an eye that by eleven o'clock would be beyond the aid of all the cosmetics in the principality. His heart sank and he decided to say nothing about it until they reached home.

III

There is some wise advice in the catechism about avoiding the occasions of sin, and when the Kellys went up to Paris a month later they made a conscientious list of the places they wouldn't visit any more and the people they didn't want to see again. The places included several famous bars, all the night clubs except one or two that were highly decorous, all the early-morning clubs of every description, and all summer resorts that made whoopee for its own sake — whoopee triumphant and unrestrained — the main attraction of the season.

The people they were through with included three-fourths of those with whom they had passed the last two years. They did this not in snobbishness, but for self-preservation, and not without a certain fear in their hearts that they were cutting themselves off from human contacts forever.

But the world is always curious, and people become valuable merely for their inaccessibility. They found that there were others in Paris who were only interested in those who had separated from the many. The first crowd they had known was largely American, salted with Europeans; the second was largely European, peppered with Americans. This latter crowd was "society," and here and there it touched the ultimate *milieu*, made up of

individuals of high position, of great fortune, very occasionally of genius, and always of power. Without being intimate with the great, they made new friends of a more conservative type. Moreover, Nelson began to paint again; he had a studio, and they visited the studios of Brancusi and Leger and Deschamps. It seemed that they were more part of something than before, and when certain gaudy rendezvous were mentioned, they felt a contempt for their first two years in Europe, speaking of their former acquaintances as "that crowd" and as "people who waste your time."

So, although they kept their rules, they entertained frequently at home and they went out to the houses of others. They were young and handsome and intelligent; they came to know what did go and what did not go, and adapted themselves accordingly. Moreover, they were naturally generous and willing, within the limits of common sense, to pay.

When one went out one generally drank. This meant little to Nicole, who had a horror of losing her *soigné* air, losing a touch of bloom or a ray of admiration, but Nelson, thwarted somewhere, found himself quite as tempted to drink at these small dinners as in the more frankly rowdy world. He was not a drunk, he did nothing conspicuous or sodden, but he was no longer willing to go out socially without the stimulus of liquor. It was with the idea of bringing him to a serious and responsible attitude that Nicole decided after a year in Paris, that the time had come to have a baby.

This was coincidental with their meeting Count Chiki Sarolai. He was an attractive relic of the Austrian court, with no fortune or pretense to any, but with solid social and financial connections in France. His sister was married to the Marquis de la Clos d'Hirondelle, who, in addition to being of the ancient noblesse, was a successful banker in Paris. Count Chiki roved here and there, frankly sponging, rather like Oscar Dane, but in a different sphere.

His penchant was Americans; he hung on their words with a pathetic eagerness, as if they would sooner or later let slip their mysterious formula for making money. After a casual meeting, his interest gravitated to the Kellys. During Nicole's months of waiting he was in the house continually, tirelessly interested in anything that concerned American crime, slang,

finance or manners. He came in for a luncheon or dinner when he had no other place to go, and with tacit gratitude he persuaded his sister to call on Nicole, who was immensely flattered.

It was arranged that when Nicole went to the hospital he would stay at the *appartement* and keep Nelson company — an arrangement of which Nicole didn't approve, since they were inclined to drink together. But the day on which it was decided, he arrived with news of one of his brother-in-law's famous canal-boat parties on the Seine, to which the Kellys were to be invited and which, conveniently enough, was to occur three weeks after the arrival of the baby. So, when Nicole moved out to the American Hospital Count Chiki moved in.

The baby was a boy. For a while Nicole forgot all about people and their human status and their value. She even wondered at the fact that she had become such a snob, since everything seemed trivial compared with the new individual that, eight times a day, they carried to her breast.

After two weeks she and the baby went back to the apartment, but Chiki and his valet stayed on. It was understood, with that subtlety the Kellys had only recently begun to appreciate, that he was merely staying until after his brother-in-law's party, but the apartment was crowded and Nicole wished him gone. But her old idea, that if one had to see people they might as well be the best, was carried out in being invited to the De la Clos d'Hirondelles'.

As she lay in her chaise longue the day before the event, Chiki explained the arrangements, in which he had evidently aided.

"Everyone who arrives must drink two cocktails in the American style before they can come aboard — as a ticket of admission."

"But I thought that very fashionable French — Faubourg St. Germain and all that — didn't drink cocktails."

"Oh, but my family is very modern. We adopt many American customs."

"Who'll be there?"

"Everyone! Everyone in Paris."

Great names swam before her eyes. Next day she could not resist dragging the affair into conversation with her doctor. But she was rather offended at the look of astonishment and incredulity that came into his eyes.

“Did I understand you aright?” he demanded. “Did I understand you to say that you were going to a ball tomorrow?”

“Why, yes,” she faltered. “Why not?”

“My dear lady, you are not going to stir out of the house for two more weeks; you are not going to dance or do anything strenuous for two more after that.”

“That’s ridiculous!” she cried. “It’s been three weeks already! Esther Sherman went to America after — ”

“Never mind,” he interrupted. “Every case is different. There is a complication which makes it positively necessary for you to follow my orders.”

“But the idea is that I’ll just go for two hours, because of course I’ll have to come home to Sonny — ”

“You’ll not go for two minutes.”

She knew, from the seriousness of his tone, that he was right, but, perversely, she did not mention the matter to Nelson. She said, instead, that she was tired, that possibly she might not go, and lay awake that night measuring her disappointment against her fear. She woke up for Sonny’s first feeding, thinking to herself: “But if I just take ten steps from a limousine to a chair and just sit half an hour — ”

At the last minute the pale green evening dress from Callets, draped across a chair in her bedroom, decided her. She went.

Somewhere, during the shuffle and delay on the gangplank while the guests went aboard and were challenged and drank down their cocktails with attendant gayety, Nicole realized that she had made a mistake. There was, at any rate, no formal receiving line and, after greeting their hosts, Nelson found her a chair on deck, where presently her faintness disappeared.

Then she was glad she had come. The boat was hung with fragile lanterns, which blended with the pastels of the bridges and the reflected stars in the dark Seine, like a child's dream out of the Arabian Nights. A crowd of hungry-eyed spectators were gathered on the banks. Champagne moved past in platoons like a drill of bottles, while the music, instead of being loud and obtrusive, drifted down from the upper deck like frosting dripping over a cake. She became aware presently that they were not the only Americans there — across the deck were the Liddell Mileses, whom she had not seen for several years.

Other people from that crowd were present, and she felt a faint disappointment. What if this was not the marquis' best party? She remembered her mother's second days at home. She asked Chiki, who was at her side, to point out celebrities, but when she inquired about several people whom she associated with that set, he replied vaguely that they were away, or coming later, or could not be there. It seemed to her that she saw across the room the girl who had made the scene in the Café de Paris at Monte Carlo, but she could not be sure, for with the faint almost imperceptible movement of the boat, she realized that she was growing faint again. She sent for Nelson to take her home.

"You can come right back, of course. You needn't wait for me, because I'm going right to bed."

He left her in the hands of the nurse, who helped her upstairs and aided her to undress quickly.

"I'm desperately tired," Nicole said. "Will you put my pearls away?"

"Where?"

"In the jewel box on the dressing table."

"I don't see it," said the nurse after a minute.

"Then it's in a drawer."

There was a thorough rummaging of the dressing table, without result.

“But of course it’s there.” Nicole attempted to rise, but fell back, exhausted. “Look for it, please, again. Everything is in it — all my mother’s things and my engagement things.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Kelly. There’s nothing in this room that answers to that description.”

“Wake up the maid.”

The maid knew nothing; then, after a persistent cross-examination, she did know something. Count Sarolai’s valet had gone out, carrying his suitcase, half an hour after madame left the house.

Writhing in sharp and sudden pain, with a hastily summoned doctor at her side, it seemed to Nicole hours before Nelson came home. When he arrived, his face was deathly pale and his eyes were wild. He came directly into her room.

“What do you think?” he said savagely. Then he saw the doctor. “Why, what’s the matter?”

“Oh, Nelson, I’m sick as a dog and my jewel box is gone, and Chiki’s valet has gone. I’ve told the police. . . . Perhaps Chiki would know where the man — ”

“Chiki will never come in this house again,” he said slowly. “Do you know whose party that was? Have you got any idea whose party that was?” He burst into wild laughter. “It was our party — our party, do you understand? We gave it — we didn’t know it, but we did.”

“*Maintenant, monsieur, il ne faut pas exciter madame* — ” the doctor began.

“I thought it was odd when the marquis went home early, but I didn’t suspect till the end. They were just guests — Chiki invited all the people. After it was over, the caterers and musicians began to come up and ask me where to send their bills. And that damn Chiki had the nerve to tell me he thought I knew all the time. He said that all he’d promised was that it would be his brother-in-law’s sort of party, and that his sister would be there. He said perhaps I was drunk, or perhaps I didn’t understand French — as if we’d ever talked anything but English to him.”

“Don’t pay!” she said. “I wouldn’t think of paying.”

“So I said, but they’re going to sue — the boat people and the others. They want twelve thousand dollars.”

She relaxed suddenly. “Oh, go away!” she cried. “I don’t care! I’ve lost my jewels and I’m sick, sick!”

IV

This is the story of a trip abroad, and the geographical element must not be slighted. Having visited North Africa, Italy, the Riviera, Paris and points in between, it was not surprising that eventually the Kellys should go to Switzerland. Switzerland is a country where very few things begin, but many things end.

Though there was an element of choice in their other ports of call, the Kellys went to Switzerland because they had to. They had been married a little more than four years when they arrived one spring day at the lake that is the center of Europe — a placid, smiling spot with pastoral hillsides, a backdrop of mountains and waters of postcard blue, waters that are a little sinister beneath the surface with all the misery that has dragged itself here from every corner of Europe. Weariness to recuperate and death to die. There are schools, too, and young people splashing at the sunny plages; there is Bonivard’s dungeon and Calvin’s city, and the ghosts of Byron and Shelley still sail the dim shores by night; but the Lake Geneva that Nelson and Nicole came to was the dreary one of sanatoriums and rest hotels.

For, as if by some profound sympathy that had continued to exist beneath the unlucky destiny that had pursued their affairs, health had failed them both at the same time; Nicole lay on the balcony of a hotel coming slowly back to life after two successive operations, while Nelson fought for life against jaundice in a hospital two miles away. Even after the reserve force of twenty-nine years had pulled him through, there were months ahead during which he must live quietly. Often they wondered why, of all those who sought pleasure over the face of Europe, this misfortune should have come to them.

“There’ve been too many people in our lives,” Nelson said. “We’ve never been able to resist people. We were so happy the first year when there weren’t any people.”

Nicole agreed. “If we could ever be alone — really alone — we could make up some kind of life for ourselves. We’ll try, won’t we, Nelson?”

But there were other days when they both wanted company desperately, concealing it from each other. Days when they eyed the obese, the wasted, the crippled and the broken of all nationalities who filled the hotel, seeking for one who might be amusing. It was a new life for them, turning on the daily visits of their two doctors, the arrival of the mail and newspapers from Paris, the little walk into the hillside village or occasionally the descent by funicular to the pale resort on the lake, with its *Kursaal*, its grass beach, its tennis clubs and sight-seeing busses. They read Tauchnitz editions and yellow-jacketed Edgar Wallaces; at a certain hour each day they watched the baby being given its bath; three nights a week there was a tired and patient orchestra in the lounge after dinner, that was all.

And sometimes there was a booming from the vine-covered hills on the other side of the lake, which meant that cannons were shooting at hail-bearing clouds, to save the vineyard from an approaching storm; it came swiftly, first falling from the heavens and then falling again in torrents from the mountains, washing loudly down the roads and stone ditches; it came with a dark, frightening sky and savage filaments of lightning and crashing, world-splitting thunder, while ragged and destroyed clouds fled along before the wind past the hotel. The mountains and the lake disappeared completely; the hotel crouched alone amid tumult and chaos and darkness.

It was during such a storm, when the mere opening of a door admitted a tornado of rain and wind into the hall, that the Kellys for the first time in months saw someone they knew. Sitting downstairs with other victims of frayed nerves, they became aware of two new arrivals — a man and woman whom they recognized as the couple, first seen in Algiers, who had crossed their path several times since. A single unexpressed thought flashed through Nelson and Nicole. It seemed like destiny that at last here in this desolate place they should know them, and watching, they saw other

couples eying them in the same tentative way. Yet something held the Kellys back. Had they not just been complaining that there were too many people in their lives?

Later, when the storm had dozed off into a quiet rain, Nicole found herself near the girl on the glass veranda. Under cover of reading a book, she inspected the face closely. It was an inquisitive face, she saw at once, possibly calculating; the eyes, intelligent enough, but with no peace in them, swept over people in a single quick glance as though estimating their value. "Terrible egoist," Nicole thought, with a certain distaste. For the rest, the cheeks were wan, and there were little pouches of ill health under the eyes; these combining with a certain flabbiness of arms and legs to give an impression of unwholesomeness. She was dressed expensively, but with a hint of slovenliness, as if she did not consider the people of the hotel important.

On the whole, Nicole decided she did not like her; she was glad that they had not spoken, but she was rather surprised that she had not noticed these things when the girl crossed her path before.

Telling Nelson her impression at dinner, he agreed with her.

"I ran into the man in the bar, and I noticed we both took nothing but mineral water, so I started to say something. But I got a good look at his face in the mirror and I decided not to. His face is so weak and self-indulgent that it's almost mean — the kind of face that needs half a dozen drinks really to open the eyes and stiffen the mouth up to normal."

After dinner the rain stopped and the night was fine outside. Eager for the air, the Kellys wandered down into the dark garden; on their way they passed the subjects of their late discussion, who withdrew abruptly down a side path.

"I don't think they want to know us any more than we do them," Nicole laughed.

They loitered among the wild rosebushes and the beds of damp-sweet, indistinguishable flowers. Below the hotel, where the terrace fell a thousand feet to the lake, stretched a necklace of lights that was Montreux and

Vevey, and then, in a dim pendant, Lausanne; a blurred twinkling across the lake was Evian and France. From somewhere below — probably the *Kursaal* — came the sound of full-bodied dance music — American, they guessed, though now they heard American tunes months late, mere distant echoes of what was happening far away.

Over the Dent du Midi, over a black bank of clouds that was the rearguard of the receding storm, the moon lifted itself and the lake brightened; the music and the far-away lights were like hope, like the enchanted distance from which children see things. In their separate hearts Nelson and Nicole gazed backward to a time when life was all like this. Her arm went through his quietly and drew him close.

“We can have it all again,” she whispered. “Can’t we try, Nelson?”

She paused as two dark forms came into the shadows nearby and stood looking down at the lake below.

Nelson put his arm around Nicole and pulled her closer.

“It’s just that we don’t understand what’s the matter,” she said. “Why did we lose peace and love and health, one after the other? If we knew, if there was anybody to tell us, I believe we could try. I’d try so hard.”

The last clouds were lifting themselves over the Bernese Alps. Suddenly, with a final intensity, the west flared with pale white lightning. Nelson and Nicole turned, and simultaneously the other couple turned, while for an instant the night was as bright as day. Then darkness and a last low peal of thunder, and from Nicole a sharp, terrified cry. She flung herself against Nelson; even in the darkness she saw that his face was as white and strained as her own.

“Did you see?” she cried in a whisper. “Did you see them?”

“Yes!”

“They’re us! They’re us! Don’t you see?”

Trembling, they clung together. The clouds merged into the dark mass of mountains; looking around after a moment, Nelson and Nicole saw that they were alone together in the tranquil moonlight.

THE HOTEL CHILD

I

Saturday Evening Post (31 January 1931)

It is a place where one's instinct is to give a reason for being there — "Oh, you see, I'm here because — " Failing that, you are faintly suspect, because this corner of Europe does not draw people; rather, it accepts them without too many inconvenient questions — live and let live. Routes cross here — people bound for private *cliniques* or tuberculosis resorts in the mountains, people who are no longer *persona grata* in Italy or France. And if that were all —

Yet on a gala night at the Hotel des Trois Mondes a new arrival would scarcely detect the current beneath the surface. Watching the dancing there would be a gallery of Englishwomen of a certain age, with neckbands, dyed hair and faces powdered pinkish gray; a gallery of American women of a certain age, with snowy-white transformations, black dresses and lips of cherry red. And most of them with their eyes swinging right or left from time to time to rest upon the ubiquitous Fifi. The entire hotel had been made aware that Fifi had reached the age of eighteen that night.

Fifi Schwartz. An exquisitely, radiantly beautiful Jewess whose fine, high forehead sloped gently up to where her hair, bordering it like an armorial shield, burst into lovelocks and waves and curlicues of soft dark red. Her eyes were bright, big, clear, wet and shining; the color of her cheeks and lips was real, breaking close to the surface from the strong young pump of her heart. Her body was so assertively adequate that one cynic had been heard to remark that she always looked as if she had nothing on underneath her dresses; but he was probably wrong, for Fifi had been as thoroughly equipped for beauty by man as by God. Such dresses — cerise for Chanel, mauve for Molyneux, pink for Patou; dozens of them, tight at the hips, swaying, furling, folding just an eighth of an inch off the dancing floor. Tonight she was a woman of thirty in dazzling black, with long white gloves

dripping from her forearms. "Such ghastly taste," the whispers said. "The stage, the shop window, the manikins' parade. What can her mother be thinking? But, then, look at her mother."

Her mother sat apart with a friend and thought about Fifi and Fifi's brother, and about her other daughters, now married, whom she considered to have been even prettier than Fifi. Mrs. Schwartz was a plain woman; she had been a Jewess a long time, and it was a matter of effortless indifference to her what was said by the groups around the room. Another large class who did not care were the young men — dozens of them. They followed Fifi about all day in and out of motorboats, night clubs, inland lakes, automobiles, tea rooms and funiculars, and they said, "Hey, look, Fifi!" and showed off for her, or said, "Kiss me, Fifi," or even, "Kiss me again, Fifi," and abused her and tried to be engaged to her.

Most of them, however, were too young, since this little city, through some illogical reasoning, is supposed to have an admirable atmosphere as an educational center.

Fifi was not critical, nor was she aware of being criticized herself. Tonight the gallery in the great, crystal, horseshoe room made observations upon her birthday party, being somewhat querulous about Fifi's entrance. The table had been set in the last of a string of dining rooms, each accessible from the central hall. But Fifi, her black dress shouting and halloing for notice, came in by way of the first dining room, followed by a whole platoon of young men of all possible nationalities and crosses, and at a sort of little run that swayed her lovely hips and tossed her lovely head, led them bumpily through the whole vista, while old men choked on fish bones, old women's facial muscles sagged, and the protest rose to a roar in the procession's wake.

They need not have resented her so much. It was a bad party, because Fifi thought she had to entertain everybody and be a dozen people, so she talked to the entire table and broke up every conversation that started, no matter how far away from her. So no one had a good time, and the people in the hotel needn't have minded so much that she was young and terribly happy.

Afterward, in the salon, many of the supernumerary males floated off with a temporary air to other tables. Among these was young Count Stanislas Borowki, with his handsome, shining brown eyes of a stuffed deer, and his black hair already dashed with distinguished streaks like the keyboard of a piano. He went to the table of some people of position named Taylor and sat down with just a faint sigh, which made them smile.

“Was it ghastly?” he was asked.

The blond Miss Howard who was traveling with the Taylors was almost as pretty as Fifi and stitched up with more consideration. She had taken pains not to make Miss Schwartz’s acquaintance, although she shared several of the same young men. The Taylors were career people in the diplomatic service and were now on their way to London, after the League Conference at Geneva. They were presenting Miss Howard at court this season. They were very Europeanized Americans; in fact, they had reached a position where they could hardly be said to belong to any nation at all; certainly not to any great power, but perhaps to a sort of Balkanlike state composed of people like themselves. They considered that Fifi was as much of a gratuitous outrage as a new stripe in the flag.

The tall Englishwoman with the long cigarette holder and the half-paralyzed Pekingese presently got up, announcing to the Taylors that she had an engagement in the bar, and strolled away, carrying her paralyzed Pekingese and causing, as she passed, a chilled lull in the seething baby talk that raged around Fifi’s table.

About midnight, Mr. Weicker, the assistant manager, looked into the bar, where Fifi’s phonograph roared new German tangoes into the smoke and clatter. He had a small face that looked into things quickly, and lately he had taken a cursory glance into the bar every night. But he had not come to admire Fifi; he was engaged in an inquiry as to why matters were not going well at the Hotel des Trois Mondes this summer.

There was, of course, the continually sagging American Stock Exchange. With so many hotels begging to be filled, the clients had become finicky, exigent, quick to complain, and Mr. Weicker had had many fine decisions to make recently. One large family had departed because of a night-going

phonograph belonging to Lady Capps-Karr. Also there was presumably a thief operating in the hotel; there had been complaints about pocketbooks, cigarette cases, watches and rings. Guests sometimes spoke to Mr. Weicker as if they would have liked to search his pockets. There were empty suites that need not have been empty this summer.

His glance fell dourly, in passing, upon Count Borowki, who was playing pool with Fifi. Count Borowki had not paid his bill for three weeks. He had told Mr. Weicker that he was expecting his mother, who would arrange everything. Then there was Fifi, who attracted an undesirable crowd — young students living on pensions who often charged drinks, but never paid for them. Lady Capps-Karr, on the contrary, was a *grande cliente*; one could count three bottles of whisky a day for herself and entourage, and her father in London was good for every drop of it. Mr. Weicker decided to issue an ultimatum about Borowki's bill this very night, and withdrew. His visit had lasted about ten seconds.

Count Borowki put away his cue and came close to Fifi, whispering something. She seized his hand and pulled him to a dark corner near the phonograph.

“My American dream girl,” he said. “We must have you painted in Budapest the way you are tonight. You will hang with the portraits of my ancestors in my castle in Transylvania.”

One would suppose that a normal American girl, who had been to an average number of moving pictures, would have detected a vague ring of familiarity in Count Borowki's persistent wooing. But the Hotel des Trois Mondes was full of people who were actually rich and noble, people who did fine embroidery or took cocaine in closed apartments and meanwhile laid claim to European thrones and half a dozen mediatized German principalities, and Fifi did not choose to doubt the one who paid court to her beauty. Tonight she was surprised at nothing: not even his precipitate proposal that they get married this very week.

“Mamma doesn't want that I should get married for a year. I only said I'd be engaged to you.”

“But my mother wants me to marry. She is hard-boiling, as you Americans say; she brings pressure to bear that I marry Princess This and Countess That.”

Meanwhile Lady Capps-Karr was having a reunion across the room. A tall, stooped Englishman, dusty with travel, had just opened the door of the bar, and Lady Capps-Karr, with a caw of “Bopes!” had flung herself upon him: “Bopes, I say!”

“Capps, darling. Hi, there, Rafe — ” this to her companion. “Fancy running into you, Capps.”

“Bopes! Bopes!”

Their exclamations and laughter filled the room, and the bartender whispered to an inquisitive American that the new arrival was the Marquis Kinkallow.

Bopes stretched himself out in several chairs and a sofa and called for the barman. He announced that he had driven from Paris without a stop and was leaving next morning to meet the only woman he had ever loved, in Milan. He did not look in a condition to meet anyone.

“Oh, Bopes, I’ve been so blind,” said Lady Capps-Karr pathetically. “Day after day after day. I flew here from Cannes, meaning to stay one day, and I ran into Rafe here and some other Americans I knew, and it’s been two weeks, and now all my tickets to Malta are void. Stay here and save me! Oh, Bopes! Bopes! Bopes!”

The Marquis Kinkallow glanced with tired eyes about the bar.

“Ah, who is that?” he demanded. “The lovely Jewess? And who is that item with her?”

“She’s an American,” said the daughter of a hundred earls. “The man is a scoundrel of some sort, but apparently he’s a cat of the stripe; he’s a great pal of Schenzi, in Vienna. I sat up till five the other night playing two-handed *chemin de fer* with him here in the bar and he owes me a mille Swiss.”

“Have to have a word with that wench,” said Bopes twenty minutes later. “You arrange it for me, Rafe, that’s a good chap.”

Ralph Berry had met Miss Schwartz, and, as the opportunity for the introduction now presented itself, he rose obligingly. The opportunity was that a *chasseur* had just requested Count Borowki’s presence in the office; he managed to beat two or three young men to her side.

“The Marquis Kinkallow is so anxious to meet you. Can’t you come and join us?”

Fifi looked across the room, her fine brow wrinkling a little. Something warned her that her evening was full enough already. Lady Capps-Karr had never spoken to her; Fifi believed she was jealous of her clothes.

“Can’t you bring him over here?”

A minute later Bopes sat down beside Fifi with a shadow of fine tolerance settling on his face. This was nothing he could help; in fact, he constantly struggled against it, but it was something that happened to his expression when he met Americans. “The whole thing is too much for me,” it seemed to say. “Compare my confidence with your uncertainty, my sophistication with your naïveté, and yet the whole world has slid into your power.” Of later years he found that his tone, unless carefully guarded, held a smoldering resentment.

Fifi eyed him brightly and told him about her glamorous future.

“Next I’m going to Paris,” she said, announcing the fall of Rome, “to, maybe, study at the Sorbonne. Then, maybe, I’ll get married; you can’t tell. I’m only eighteen. I had eighteen candles on my birthday cake tonight. I wish you could have been here. . . . I’ve had marvelous offers to go on the stage, but of course a girl on the stage gets talked about so.”

“What are you doing tonight?” asked Bopes.

“Oh, lots more boys are coming in later. Stay around and join the party.”

“I thought you and I might do something. I’m going to Milan tomorrow.”

Across the room, Lady Capps-Karr was tense with displeasure at the desertion.

“After all,” she protested, “a chep’s a chep, and a chum’s a chum, but there are certain things that one simply doesn’t do. I never saw Bopes in such frightful condition.”

She stared at the dialogue across the room.

“Come along to Milan with me,” the marquis was saying. “Come to Tibet or Hindustan. We’ll see them crown the King of Ethiopia. Anyhow, let’s go for a drive right now.”

“I got too many guests here. Besides, I don’t go out to ride with people the first time I meet them. I’m supposed to be engaged. To a Hungarian count. He’d be furious and would probably challenge you to a duel.”

Mrs. Schwartz, with an apologetic expression, came across the room to Fifi.

“John’s gone,” she announced. “He’s up there again.”

Fifi gave a yelp of annoyance. “He gave me his word of honor he would not go.”

“Anyhow, he went. I looked in his room and his hat’s gone. It was that champagne at dinner.” She turned to the marquis. “John is not a vicious boy, but vurry, vurry weak.”

“I suppose I’ll have to go after him,” said Fifi resignedly.

“I hate to spoil your good time tonight, but I don’t know what else. Maybe this gentleman would go with you. You see, Fifi is the only one that can handle him. His father is dead and it really takes a man to handle a boy.”

“Quite,” said Bopes.

“Can you take me?” Fifi asked. “It’s just up in town to a café.”

He agreed with alacrity. Out in the September night, with her fragrance seeping through an ermine cape, she explained further:

“Some Russian woman’s got hold of him; she claims to be a countess, but she’s only got one silver-fox fur, that she wears with everything. My brother’s just nineteen, so whenever he’s had a couple glasses champagne he says he’s going to marry her, and mother worries.”

Bopes’ arm dropped impatiently around her shoulder as they started up the hill to the town.

Fifteen minutes later the car stopped at a point several blocks beyond the café and Fifi stepped out. The marquis’ face was now decorated by a long, irregular finger-nail scratch that ran diagonally across his cheek, traversed his nose in a few sketchy lines and finished in a sort of grand terminal of tracks upon his lower jaw.

“I don’t like to have anybody get so foolish,” Fifi explained. “You needn’t wait. We can get a taxi.”

“Wait!” cried the marquis furiously. “For a common little person like you? They tell me you’re the laughingstock of the hotel, and I quite understand why.”

Fifi hurried along the street and into the café, pausing in the door until she saw her brother. He was a reproduction of Fifi without her high warmth; at the moment he was sitting at a table with a frail exile from the Caucasus and two Serbian consumptives. Fifi waited for her temper to rise to an executive pitch; then she crossed the dance floor, conspicuous as a thundercloud in her bright black dress.

“Mamma sent me after you, John. Get your coat.”

“Oh, what’s biting her?” he demanded, with a vague eye.

“Mamma says you should come along.”

He got up unwillingly. The two Serbians rose also; the countess never moved; her eyes, sunk deep in Mongol cheek bones, never left Fifi’s face; her head crouched in the silver-fox fur which Fifi knew represented her brother’s last month’s allowance. As John Schwartz stood there swaying unsteadily the orchestra launched into *Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss*. Diving into

the confusion of the table, Fifi emerged with her brother's arm, marched him to the coat room and then out toward the taxi stand.

It was late, the evening was over, her birthday was over, and driving back to the hotel, with John slumped against her shoulder, Fifi felt a sudden depression. By virtue of her fine health she had never been a worrier, and certainly the Schwartz family had lived so long against similar backgrounds that Fifi felt no insufficiency in the Hotel des Trois Mondes as cloud and community — and yet the evening was suddenly all wrong. Didn't evenings sometimes end on a high note and not fade out vaguely in bars? After ten o'clock every night she felt she was the only real being in a colony of ghosts, that she was surrounded by utterly intangible figures who retreated whenever she stretched out her hand.

The doorman assisted her brother to the elevator. Stepping in, Fifi saw, too late, that there were two other people inside. Before she could pull John out again, they had both brushed past her as if in fear of contamination. Fifi heard "Mercy!" from Mrs. Taylor and "How revolting!" from Miss Howard. The elevator mounted. Fifi held her breath until it stopped at her floor.

It was, perhaps, the impact of this last encounter that caused her to stand very still just inside the door of the dark apartment. Then she had the sense that someone else was there in the blackness ahead of her, and after her brother had stumbled forward and thrown himself on a sofa, she still waited.

"Mamma," she called, but there was no answer; only a sound fainter than a rustle, like a shoe scraped along the floor.

A few minutes later, when her mother came upstairs, they called the *valet de chambre* and went through the rooms together, but there was no one. Then they stood side by side in the open door to their balcony and looked out on the lake with the bright cluster of Evian on the French shore and the white caps of snow on the mountains.

"I think we've been here long enough," said Mrs. Schwartz suddenly. "I think I'll take John back to the States this fall."

Fifi was aghast. “But I thought John and I were going to the Sorbonne in Paris?”

“How can I trust him in Paris? And how could I leave you behind alone there?”

“But we’re used to living in Europe now. Why did I learn to talk French? Why, mamma, we don’t even know any people back home any more.”

“We can always meet people. We always have.”

“But you know it’s different; everybody is so bigoted there. A girl hasn’t the chance to meet the same sort of men, even if there were any. Everybody just watches everything you do.”

“So they do here,” said her mother. “That Mr. Weicker just stopped me in the hall; he saw you come in with John, and he talked to me about how you must keep out of the bar, you were so young. I told him you only took lemonade, but he said it didn’t matter; scenes like tonight made people leave the hotel.”

“Oh, how perfectly mean!”

“So I think we better go back home.”

The empty word rang desolately in Fifi’s ears. She put her arms around her mother’s waist, realizing that it was she and not her mother, with her mother’s clear grip on the past, who was completely lost in the universe. On the sofa her brother snored, having already entered the world of the weak, of the leaners together, and found its fetid and mercurial warmth sufficient. But Fifi kept looking at the alien sky, knowing that she could pierce it and find her own way through envy and corruption. For the first time she seriously considered marrying Borowki immediately.

“Do you want to go downstairs and say good night to the boys?” suggested her mother. “There’s lots of them still there asking where you are.”

But the Furies were after Fifi now — after her childish complacency and her innocence, even after her beauty — out to break it all down and drag it in

any convenient mud. When she shook her head and walked sullenly into her bedroom, they had already taken something from her forever.

II

The following morning Mrs. Schwartz went to Mr. Weicker's office to report the loss of two hundred dollars in American money. She had left the sum on her chiffonier upon retiring; when she awoke, it was gone. The door of the apartment had been bolted, but in the morning the bolt was found drawn, and yet neither of her children was awake. Fortunately, she had taken her jewels to bed with her in a chamois sack.

Mr. Weicker decided that the situation must be handled with care. There were not a few guests in the hotel who were in straitened circumstances and inclined to desperate remedies, but he must move slowly. In America one has money or hasn't; in Europe the heir to a fortune may be unable to stand himself a haircut until the collapse of a fifth cousin, yet be a sure risk and not to be lightly offended. Opening the office copy of the Almanack de Gotha, Mr. Weicker found Stanislas Karl Joseph Borowki hooked firmly on to the end of a line older than the crown of St. Stephen. This morning, in riding clothes that were smart as a hussar's uniform, he had gone riding with the utterly correct Miss Howard. On the other hand, there was no doubt as to who had been robbed, and Mr. Weicker's indignation began to concentrate on Fifi and her family, who might have saved him this trouble by taking themselves off some time ago. It was even conceivable that the dissipated son, John, had nipped the money.

In all events, the Schwartzes were going home. For three years they had lived in hotels — in Paris, Florence, St. Raphael, Como, Vichy, La Baule, Lucerne, Baden-Baden and Biarritz. Everywhere there had been schools — always new schools — and both children spoke in perfect French and scrawny fragments of Italian. Fifi had grown from a large-featured child of fourteen to a beauty; John had grown into something rather dismal and lost. Both of them played bridge, and somewhere Fifi had picked up tap dancing. Mrs. Schwartz felt that it was all somehow unsatisfactory, but she did not

know why. So, two days after Fifi's party, she announced that they would pack their trunks, go to Paris for some new fall clothes and then go home.

That same afternoon Fifi came to the bar to get her phonograph, left there the night of her party. She sat up on a high stool and talked to the barman while she drank a ginger ale.

"Mother wants to take me back to America, but I'm not going."

"What will you do?"

"Oh, I've got a little money of my own, and then I may get married." She sipped her ginger ale moodily.

"I hear you had some money stolen," he remarked. "How did it happen?"

"Well, Count Borowki thinks the man got into the apartment early and hid in between the two doors between us and the next apartment. Then, when we were asleep, he took the money and walked out."

"Ha!"

Fifi sighed. "Well, you probably won't see me in the bar any more."

"We'll miss you, Miss Schwartz."

Mr. Weicker put his head in the door, withdrew it and then came in slowly.

"Hello," said Fifi coldly.

"A-ha, young lady." He wagged his finger at her with affected facetiousness. "Didn't you know I spoke to your mother about your coming in to the bar? It's merely for your own good."

"I'm just having a ginger ale," she said indignantly.

"But no one can tell what you're having. It might be whisky or what not. It is the other guests who complain."

She stared at him indignantly — the picture was so different from her own — of Fifi as the lively center of the hotel, of Fifi in clothes that ravished the eye, standing splendid and unattainable amid groups of adoring men. Suddenly Mr. Weicker's obsequious, but hostile, face infuriated her.

“We’re getting out of this hotel!” she flared up. “I never saw such a narrow-minded bunch of people in my life; always criticizing everybody and making up terrible things about them, no matter what they do themselves. I think it would be a good thing if the hotel caught fire and burned down with all the nasty cats in it.”

Banging down her glass, she seized the phonograph case and stalked out of the bar.

In the lobby a porter sprang to help her, but she shook her head and hurried on through the salon, where she came upon Count Borowki.

“Oh, I’m so furious!” she cried. “I never saw so many old cats! I just told Mr. Weicker what I thought of them!”

“Did someone dare to speak rudely to you?”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter. We’re going away.”

“Going away!” He started. “When?”

“Right away. I don’t want to, but mamma says we’ve got to.”

“I must talk to you seriously about this,” he said. “I just called your room. I have brought you a little engagement present.”

Her spirits returned as she took the handsome gold-and-ivory cigarette case engraved with her initials.

“How lovely!”

“Now, listen; what you tell me makes it more important that I talk to you immediately. I have just received another letter from my mother. They have chosen a girl for me in Budapest — a lovely girl, rich and beautiful and of my own rank who would be very happy at the match, but I am in love with you. I would never have thought it possible, but I have lost my heart to an American.”

“Well, why not?” said Fifi, indignantly. “They call girls beautiful here if they have one good feature. And then, if they’ve got nice eyes or hair, they’re usually bow-legged or haven’t got nice teeth.”

“There is no flaw or fault in you.”

“Oh, yes,” said Fifi modestly. “I got a sort of big nose. Would you know I was Jewish?”

With a touch of impatience, Borowki came back to his argument: “So they are bringing pressure to bear for me to marry. Questions of inheritance depend on it.”

“Besides, my forehead is too high,” observed Fifi abstractedly. “It’s so high it’s got sort of wrinkles in it. I knew an awfully funny boy who used to call me ‘the highbrow.’”

“So the sensible thing,” pursued Borowki, “is for us to marry immediately. I tell you frankly there are other American girls not far from here who wouldn’t hesitate.”

“Mamma would be about crazy,” Fifi said.

“I’ve thought about that too,” he answered her eagerly. “Don’t tell her. If we drove over the border tonight we could be married tomorrow morning. Then we come back and you show your mother the little gilt coronets painted on your luggage. My own personal opinion is that she’ll be delighted. There you are, off her hands, with social position second to none in Europe. In my opinion, your mother has probably thought of it already, and may be saying to herself: ‘Why don’t those two young people just take matters into their own hands and save me all the fuss and expense of a wedding?’ I think she would like us for being so hard-boiled.”

He broke off impatiently as Lady Capps-Karr, emerging from the dining room with her Pekingese, surprised them by stopping at their table. Count Borowki was obliged to introduce them. As he had not known of the Marquis Kinkallow’s defection the other evening, nor that His Lordship had taken a wound to Milan the following morning, he had no suspicion of what was coming.

“I’ve noticed Miss Schwartz,” said the Englishwoman in a clear, concise voice. “And of course I’ve noticed Miss Schwartz’s clothes.”

“Won’t you sit down?” said Fifi.

“No, thank you.” She turned to Borowki. “Miss Schwartz’s clothes make us all appear somewhat drab. I always refuse to dress elaborately in hotels. It seems such rotten taste. Don’t you think so?”

“I think people always ought to look nice,” said Fifi, flushing.

“Naturally. I merely said that I consider it rotten taste to dress elaborately, save in the houses of one’s friends.”

She said “Good-by-e-e” to Borowki and moved on, emitting a mouthed cloud of smoke and a faint fragrance of whisky.

The insult had been as stinging as the crack of a whip, and as Fifi’s pride of her wardrobe was swept away from her, she heard all the comments that she had not heard, in one great resurgent whisper. Then they said that she wore her clothes here because she had nowhere else to wear them. That was why the Howard girl considered her vulgar and did not care to know her.

For an instant her anger flamed up against her mother for not telling her, but she saw that her mother did not know either.

“I think she’s so dowdy,” she forced herself to say aloud, but inside she was quivering. “What is she, anyhow? I mean, how high is her title? Very high?”

“She’s the widow of a baronet.”

“Is that high?” Fifi’s face was rigid. “Higher than a countess?”

“No. A countess is much higher — infinitely higher.” He moved his chair closer and began to talk intently.

Half an hour later Fifi got up with indecision on her face.

“At seven you’ll let me know definitely,” Borowki said, “and I’ll be ready with a car at ten.”

Fifi nodded. He escorted her across the room and saw her vanish into a dark hall mirror in the direction of the lift.

As he turned away, Lady Capps-Karr, sitting alone over her coffee, spoke to him:

“I want a word with you. Did you, by some slip of the tongue, suggest to Weicker that in case of difficulties I would guarantee your bills?”

Borowki flushed. “I may have said something like that, but — ”

“Well, I told him the truth — that I never laid eyes on you until a fortnight ago.”

“I, naturally, turned to a person of equal rank — ”

“Equal rank! What cheek! The only titles left are English titles. I must ask you not to make use of my name again.”

He bowed. “Such inconveniences will soon be for me a thing of the past.”

“Are you getting off with that vulgar little American?”

“I beg your pardon,” he said stiffly.

“Don’t be angry. I’ll stand you a whisky-and-soda. I’m getting in shape for Bopes Kinkallow, who’s just telephoned he’s tottering back here.”

Meanwhile, upstairs, Mrs. Schwartz was saying to Fifi: “Now that I know we’re going away I’m getting excited about it. It will be so nice seeing the Hirsts and Mrs. Bell and Amy and Marjorie and Gladys again, and the new baby. You’ll be happy, too; you’ve forgotten how they’re like. You and Gladys used to be great friends. And Marjorie — ”

“Oh, mamma, don’t talk about it,” cried Fifi miserably. “I can’t go back.”

“We needn’t stay. If John was in a college like his father wanted, we could, maybe, go to California.”

But for Fifi all the romance of life was rolled up into the last three impressionable years in Europe. She remembered the tall guardsmen in Rome and the old Spaniard who had first made her conscious of her beauty at the Villa d’Este at Como, and the French naval aviator at St. Raphael who had dropped her a note from his plane into their garden, and the feeling that she had sometimes, when she danced with Borowki, that he was dressed in gleaming boots and a white-furred dolman.

She had seen many American moving pictures and she knew that the girls there always married the faithful boy from the old home town, and after that there was nothing.

“I won’t go,” she said aloud.

Her mother turned with a pile of clothes in her arms. “What talk is that from you, Fifi? You think I could leave you here alone?” As Fifi didn’t answer, she continued, with an air of finality: “That talk doesn’t sound nice from you. Now you stop fretting and saying such things, and get me this list of things uptown.”

But Fifi had decided. It was Borowki, then, and the chance of living fully and adventurously. He could go into the diplomatic service, and then one day when they encountered Lady Capps-Karr and Miss Howard at a legation ball, she could make audible the observation that for the moment seemed so necessary to her: “I hate people who always look as if they were going to or from a funeral.”

“So run along,” her mother continued. “And look in at that café and see if John is up there, and take him to tea.”

Fifi accepted the shopping list mechanically. Then she went into her room and wrote a little note to Borowki which she would leave with the concierge on the way out.

Coming out, she saw her mother struggling with a trunk, and felt terribly sorry for her. But there were Amy and Gladys in America, and Fifi hardened herself.

She walked out and down the stairs, remembering halfway that in her distraction she had omitted an official glance in the mirror; but there was a large mirror on the wall just outside the grand salon, and she stopped in front of that instead.

She was beautiful — she learned that once more, but now it made her sad. She wondered whether the dress she wore this afternoon was in bad taste, whether it would minister to the superiority of Miss Howard or Lady Capps-

Karr. It seemed to her a lovely dress, soft and gentle in cut, but in color a hard, bright, metallic powder blue.

Then a sudden sound broke the stillness of the gloomy hall and Fifi stood suddenly breathless and motionless.

III

At eleven o'clock Mr. Weicker was tired, but the bar was in one of its periodical riots and he was waiting for it to quiet down. There was nothing to do in the stale office or the empty lobby; and the salon, where all day he held long conversations with lonely English and American women, was deserted; so he went out the front door and began to make the circuit of the hotel. Whether due to his circumambient course or to his frequent glances up at the twinkling bedroom lights and into the humble, grilled windows of the kitchen floor, the promenade gave him a sense of being in control of the hotel, of being adequately responsible, as though it were a ship and he was surveying it from a quarterdeck.

He went past a flood of noise and song from the bar, past a window where two bus boys sat on a bunk and played cards over a bottle of Spanish wine. There was a phonograph somewhere above, and a woman's form blocked out a window; then there was the quiet wing, and turning the corner, he arrived back at his point of departure. And in front of the hotel, under the dim porte-cochère light, he saw Count Borowki.

Something made him stop and watch — something incongruous — Borowki, who couldn't pay his bill, had a car and a chauffeur. He was giving the chauffeur some sort of detailed instructions, and then Mr. Weicker perceived that there was a bag in the front seat, and came forward into the light.

"You are leaving us, Count Borowki?"

Borowki started at the voice. "For the night only," he answered. "I'm going to meet my mother."

"I see."

Borowki looked at him reproachfully. "My trunk and hat box are in my room, you'll discover. Did you think I was running away from my bill?"

"Certainly not. I hope you will have a pleasant journey and find your mother well."

But inside he took the precaution of dispatching a *valet de chambre* to see if the baggage was indeed there, and even to give it a thoughtful heft, lest its kernel were departed.

He dozed for perhaps an hour. When he woke up, the night concierge was pulling at his arm and there was a strong smell of smoke in the lobby. It was some moments before he could get it through his head that one wing of the hotel was on fire.

Setting the concierge at the alarms, he rushed down the hall to the bar, and through the smoke that poured from the door he caught sight of the burning billiard table and the flames licking along the floor and flaring up in alcoholic ecstasy every time a bottle on the shelves cracked with the heat. As he hastily retreated he met a line of half-dressed *chasseurs* and bus boys already struggling up from the lower depths with buckets of water. The concierge shouted that the fire department was on its way. He put two men at the telephones to awaken the guests, and as he ran back to form a bucket line at the danger point, he thought for the first time of Fifi.

Blind rage consumed him — with a precocious Indianlike cruelty she had carried out her threat. Ah, he would deal with that later; there was still law in the country. Meanwhile a clangor outdoors announced that the engines had arrived, and he made his way back through the lobby, filled now with men in pajamas carrying brief cases, and women in bedclothes carrying jewel boxes and small dogs; the number swelling every minute and the talk rising from a cadence heavy with sleep to the full staccato buzz of an afternoon *soirée*.

A *chasseur* called Mr. Weicker to the phone, but the manager shook him off impatiently.

"It's the commissioner of police," the boy persisted. "He says you must speak to him."

With an exclamation, Mr. Weicker hurried into the office. “Allo!”

“I’m calling from the station. Is this the manager?”

“Yes, but there’s a fire here.”

“Have you among your guests a man calling himself Count Borowki?”

“Why, yes — ”

“We’re bringing him there for identification. He was picked up on the road on some information we received.”

“But — ”

“We picked up a girl with him. We’re bringing them both down there immediately.”

“I tell you — ”

The receiver clicked briskly in his ear and Mr. Weicker hurried back to the lobby, where the smoke was diminishing. The reassuring pumps had been at work for five minutes and the bar was a wet charred ruin. Mr. Weicker began passing here and there among the guests, tranquilizing and persuading; the phone operators began calling the rooms again, advising such guests as had not appeared that it was safe to go back to bed; and then, at the continued demands for an explanation, he thought again of Fifi, and this time of his own accord he hurried to the phone.

Mrs. Schwartz’s anxious voice answered; Fifi wasn’t there. That was what he wanted to know. He rang off brusquely. There was the story, and he could not have wished for anything more sordidly complete — an incendiary blaze and an attempted elopement with a man wanted by the police. It was time for paying, and all the money of America couldn’t make any difference. If the season was ruined, at least Fifi would have no more seasons at all. She would go to a girls’ institution where the prescribed uniform was rather plainer than any clothing she had ever worn.

As the last of the guests departed into the elevators, leaving only a few curious rummagers among the soaked débris, another procession came in by the front door. There was a man in civilian clothes and a little wall of

policemen with two people behind. The commissionaire spoke and the screen of policemen parted.

“I want you to identify these two people. Has this man been staying here under the name of Borowki?”

Mr. Weicker looked. “He has.”

“He’s been wanted for a year in Italy, France and Spain. And this girl?”

She was half hidden behind Borowki, her head hanging, her face in shadow. Mr. Weicker craned toward her eagerly. He was looking at Miss Howard.

A wave of horror swept over Mr. Weicker. Again he craned his head forward, as if by the intensity of his astonishment he could convert her into Fifi, or look through her and find Fifi. But this would have been difficult, for Fifi was far away. She was in front of the café, assisting the stumbling and reluctant John Schwartz into a taxi. “I should say you can’t go back. Mother says you should come right home.”

IV

Count Borowki took his incarceration with a certain grace, as though, having lived so long by his own wits, there was a certain relief in having his days planned by an external agency. But he resented the lack of intercourse with the outer world, and was overjoyed when, on the fourth day of his imprisonment, he was led forth to find Lady Capps-Karr.

“After all,” she said, “a chep’s a chep and a chum’s a chum, whatever happens. Luckily, our consul here is a friend of my father’s, or they wouldn’t have let me see you. I even tried to get you out on bail, because I told them you went to Oxford for a year and spoke English perfectly, but the brutes wouldn’t listen.”

“I’m afraid there’s no use,” said Count Borowki gloomily. “When they’ve finished trying me I’ll have had a free journey all over Europe.”

“But that’s not the only outrageous thing,” she continued. “Those idiots have thrown Bopes and me out of the Trois Mondes, and the authorities are trying to get us to leave the city.”

“What for?”

“They’re trying to put the full blame of that tiresome fire on us.”

“Did you start it?”

“We did set some brandy on fire because we wanted to cook some potato chips in alcohol, and the bartender had gone to bed and left us there. But you’d think, from the way the swine talk, that we’d come there with the sole idea of burning everyone in their beds. The whole thing’s an outrage and Bopes is furious. He says he’ll never come here again. I went to the consulate and they agreed that the whole affair was perfectly disgraceful, and they’ve wired the Foreign Office.”

Borowki considered for a moment. “If I could be born over again,” he said slowly, “I think without any doubt I should choose to be born an Englishman.”

“I could choose to be anything but an American! By the way, the Taylors are not presenting Miss Howard at court because of the disgraceful way the newspapers played up the matter.”

“What puzzles me is what made Fifi suspicious,” said Borowki.

“Then it was Miss Schwartz who blabbed?”

“Yes. I thought I had convinced her to come with me, and I knew that if she didn’t, I had only to snap my fingers to the other girl. . . . That very afternoon Fifi visited the jeweler’s and discovered I’d paid for the cigarette case with a hundred-dollar American note I’d lifted from her mother’s chiffonier. She went straight to the police.”

“Without coming to you first! After all, a chep’s a chep — ”

“But what I want to know is what made her suspicious enough to investigate, what turned her against me.”

Fifi, at that moment sitting on a high stool in a hotel bar in Paris and sipping a lemonade, was answering that very question to an interested bartender.

“I was standing in the hall looking in the mirror,” she said, “and I heard him talking to the English lady — the one who set the hotel on fire. And I heard him say, ‘After all, my one nightmare is that she’ll turn out to look like her mother.’” Fifi’s voice blazed with indignation. “Well, you’ve seen my mother, haven’t you?”

“Yes, and a very fine woman she is.”

“After that I knew there was something the matter with him, and I wondered how much he’d paid for the cigarette case. So I went up to see. They showed me the bill he paid with.”

“And you will go to America now?” the barman asked.

Fifi finished her glass; the straw made a gurgling sound in the sugar at the bottom.

“We’ve got to go back and testify, and we’ll stay a few months anyhow.” She stood up. “Bye-bye; I’ve got a fitting.”

They had not got her — not yet. The Furies had withdrawn a little and stood in the background with a certain gnashing of teeth. But there was plenty of time.

Yet, as Fifi tottered out through the lobby, her face gentle with new hopes, as she went out looking for completion under the impression that she was going to the *couturier*, there was a certain doubt among the eldest and most experienced of the Furies if they would get her, after all.

BABYLON REVISITED

I

Saturday Evening Post (21 February 1931)

“And where’s Mr. Campbell?” Charlie asked.

“Gone to Switzerland. Mr. Campbell’s a pretty sick man, Mr. Wales.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. And George Hardt?” Charlie inquired.

“Back in America, gone to work.”

“And where is the Snow Bird?”

“He was in here last week. Anyway, his friend, Mr. Schaeffer, is in Paris.”

Two familiar names from the long list of a year and a half ago. Charlie scribbled an address in his notebook and tore out the page.

“If you see Mr. Schaeffer, give him this,” he said. “It’s my brother-in-law’s address. I haven’t settled on a hotel yet.”

He was not really disappointed to find Paris was so empty. But the stillness in the Ritz bar was strange and portentous. It was not an American bar any more — he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it. It had gone back into France. He felt the stillness from the moment he got out of the taxi and saw the doorman, usually in a frenzy of activity at this hour, gossiping with a *chasseur* by the servants’ entrance.

Passing through the corridor, he heard only a single, bored voice in the once-clamorous women’s room. When he turned into the bar he travelled the twenty feet of green carpet with his eyes fixed straight ahead by old habit; and then, with his foot firmly on the rail, he turned and surveyed the room, encountering only a single pair of eyes that fluttered up from a newspaper in the corner. Charlie asked for the head barman, Paul, who in the latter days of the bull market had come to work in his own custom-built

car — disembarking, however, with due nicety at the nearest corner. But Paul was at his country house today and Alix giving him information.

“No, no more,” Charlie said, “I’m going slow these days.”

Alix congratulated him: “You were going pretty strong a couple of years ago.”

“I’ll stick to it all right,” Charlie assured him. “I’ve stuck to it for over a year and a half now.”

“How do you find conditions in America?”

“I haven’t been to America for months. I’m in business in Prague, representing a couple of concerns there. They don’t know about me down there.”

Alix smiled.

“Remember the night of George Hardt’s bachelor dinner here?” said Charlie. “By the way, what’s become of Claude Fessenden?”

Alix lowered his voice confidentially: “He’s in Paris, but he doesn’t come here any more. Paul doesn’t allow it. He ran up a bill of thirty thousand francs, charging all his drinks and his lunches, and usually his dinner, for more than a year. And when Paul finally told him he had to pay, he gave him a bad check.”

Alix shook his head sadly.

“I don’t understand it, such a dandy fellow. Now he’s all bloated up — ” He made a plump apple of his hands.

Charlie watched a group of strident queens installing themselves in a corner.

“Nothing affects them,” he thought. “Stocks rise and fall, people loaf or work, but they go on forever.” The place oppressed him. He called for the dice and shook with Alix for the drink.

“Here for long, Mr. Wales?”

“I’m here for four or five days to see my little girl.”

“Oh-h! You have a little girl?”

Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain. It was late afternoon and the streets were in movement; the *bistros* gleamed. At the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines he took a taxi. The Place de la Concorde moved by in pink majesty; they crossed the logical Seine, and Charlie felt the sudden provincial quality of the Left Bank.

Charlie directed his taxi to the Avenue de l’Opera, which was out of his way. But he wanted to see the blue hour spread over the magnificent façade, and imagine that the cab horns, playing endlessly the first few bars of *La Plus que Lent*, were the trumpets of the Second Empire. They were closing the iron grill in front of Brentano’s Book-store, and people were already at dinner behind the trim little bourgeois hedge of Duval’s. He had never eaten at a really cheap restaurant in Paris. Five-course dinner, four francs fifty, eighteen cents, wine included. For some odd reason he wished that he had.

As they rolled on to the Left Bank and he felt its sudden provincialism, he thought, “I spoiled this city for myself. I didn’t realize it, but the days came along one after another, and then two years were gone, and everything was gone, and I was gone.”

He was thirty-five, and good to look at. The Irish mobility of his face was sobered by a deep wrinkle between his eyes. As he rang his brother-in-law’s bell in the Rue Palatine, the wrinkle deepened till it pulled down his brows; he felt a cramping sensation in his belly. From behind the maid who opened the door darted a lovely little girl of nine who shrieked “Daddy!” and flew up, struggling like a fish, into his arms. She pulled his head around by one ear and set her cheek against his.

“My old pie,” he said.

“Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, dads, dads, dads!”

She drew him into the salon, where the family waited, a boy and girl his daughter’s age, his sister-in-law and her husband. He greeted Marion with his voice pitched carefully to avoid either feigned enthusiasm or dislike, but her response was more frankly tepid, though she minimized her expression of unalterable distrust by directing her regard toward his child. The two men

clasped hands in a friendly way and Lincoln Peters rested his for a moment on Charlie's shoulder.

The room was warm and comfortably American. The three children moved intimately about, playing through the yellow oblongs that led to other rooms; the cheer of six o'clock spoke in the eager smacks of the fire and the sounds of French activity in the kitchen. But Charlie did not relax; his heart sat up rigidly in his body and he drew confidence from his daughter, who from time to time came close to him, holding in her arms the doll he had brought.

"Really extremely well," he declared in answer to Lincoln's question. "There's a lot of business there that isn't moving at all, but we're doing even better than ever. In fact, damn well. I'm bringing my sister over from America next month to keep house for me. My income last year was bigger than it was when I had money. You see, the Czechs —"

His boasting was for a specific purpose; but after a moment, seeing a faint restiveness in Lincoln's eye, he changed the subject:

"Those are fine children of yours, well brought up, good manners."

"We think Honoria's a great little girl too."

Marion Peters came back from the kitchen. She was a tall woman with worried eyes, who had once possessed a fresh American loveliness. Charlie had never been sensitive to it and was always surprised when people spoke of how pretty she had been. From the first there had been an instinctive antipathy between them.

"Well, how do you find Honoria?" she asked.

"Wonderful. I was astonished how much she's grown in ten months. All the children are looking well."

"We haven't had a doctor for a year. How do you like being back in Paris?"

"It seems very funny to see so few Americans around."

“I’m delighted,” Marion said vehemently. “Now at least you can go into a store without their assuming you’re a millionaire. We’ve suffered like everybody, but on the whole it’s a good deal pleasanter.”

“But it was nice while it lasted,” Charlie said. “We were a sort of royalty, almost infallible, with a sort of magic around us. In the bar this afternoon” — he stumbled, seeing his mistake — “there wasn’t a man I knew.”

She looked at him keenly. “I should think you’d have had enough of bars.”

“I only stayed a minute. I take one drink every afternoon, and no more.”

“Don’t you want a cocktail before dinner?” Lincoln asked.

“I take only one drink every afternoon, and I’ve had that.”

“I hope you keep to it,” said Marion.

Her dislike was evident in the coldness with which she spoke, but Charlie only smiled; he had larger plans. Her very aggressiveness gave him an advantage, and he knew enough to wait. He wanted them to initiate the discussion of what they knew had brought him to Paris.

At dinner he couldn’t decide whether Honoria was most like him or her mother. Fortunate if she didn’t combine the traits of both that had brought them to disaster. A great wave of protectiveness went over him. He thought he knew what to do for her. He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything wore out.

He left soon after dinner, but not to go home. He was curious to see Paris by night with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days. He bought a *strapontin* for the Casino and watched Josephine Baker go through her chocolate arabesques.

After an hour he left and strolled toward Montmartre, up the Rue Pigalle into the Place Blanche. The rain had stopped and there were a few people in evening clothes disembarking from taxis in front of cabarets, and *cocottes* prowling singly or in pairs, and many Negroes. He passed a lighted door from which issued music, and stopped with the sense of

familiarity; it was Bricktop's, where he had parted with so many hours and so much money. A few doors farther on he found another ancient rendezvous and incautiously put his head inside. Immediately an eager orchestra burst into sound, a pair of professional dancers leaped to their feet and a maître d'hôtel swooped toward him, crying, "Crowd just arriving, sir!" But he withdrew quickly.

"You have to be damn drunk," he thought.

Zelli's was closed, the bleak and sinister cheap hotels surrounding it were dark; up in the Rue Blanche there was more light and a local, colloquial French crowd. The Poet's Cave had disappeared, but the two great mouths of the Café of Heaven and the Café of Hell still yawned — even devoured, as he watched, the meager contents of a tourist bus — a German, a Japanese, and an American couple who glanced at him with frightened eyes.

So much for the effort and ingenuity of Montmartre. All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale, and he suddenly realized the meaning of the word "dissipate" — to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something. In the little hours of the night every move from place to place was an enormous human jump, an increase of paying for the privilege of slower and slower motion.

He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab.

But it hadn't been given for nothing.

It had been given, even the most wildly squandered sum, as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember — his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont.

In the glare of a *brasserie* a woman spoke to him. He bought her some eggs and coffee, and then, eluding her encouraging stare, gave her a twenty-franc note and took a taxi to his hotel.

He woke upon a fine fall day — football weather. The depression of yesterday was gone and he liked the people on the streets. At noon he sat opposite Honoria at Le Grand Vatel, the only restaurant he could think of not reminiscent of champagne dinners and long luncheons that began at two and ended in a blurred and vague twilight.

“Now, how about vegetables? Oughtn’t you to have some vegetables?”

“Well, yes.”

“Here’s *épinards* and *chou-fleur* and carrots and *haricots*.”

“I’d like *chou-fleur*.”

“Wouldn’t you like to have two vegetables?”

“I usually only have one at lunch.”

The waiter was pretending to be inordinately fond of children. “*Qu’elle est mignonne la petite? Elle parle exactement comme une Française.*”

“How about dessert? Shall we wait and see?”

The waiter disappeared. Honoria looked at her father expectantly.

“What are we going to do?”

“First, we’re going to that toy store in the Rue Saint-Honoré and buy you anything you like. And then we’re going to the vaudeville at the Empire.”

She hesitated. “I like it about the vaudeville, but not the toy store.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you brought me this doll.” She had it with her. “And I’ve got lots of things. And we’re not rich any more, are we?”

“We never were. But today you are to have anything you want.”

“All right,” she agreed resignedly.

When there had been her mother and a French nurse he had been inclined to be strict; now he extended himself, reached out for a new tolerance; he must be both parents to her and not shut any of her out of communication.

“I want to get to know you,” he said gravely. “First let me introduce myself. My name is Charles J. Wales, of Prague.”

“Oh, daddy!” her voice cracked with laughter.

“And who are you, please?” he persisted, and she accepted a role immediately: “Honorina Wales, Rue Palatine, Paris.”

“Married or single?”

“No, not married. Single.”

He indicated the doll. “But I see you have a child, madame.”

Unwilling to disinherit it, she took it to her heart and thought quickly: “Yes, I’ve been married, but I’m not married now. My husband is dead.”

He went on quickly, “And the child’s name?”

“Simone. That’s after my best friend at school.”

“I’m very pleased that you’re doing so well at school.”

“I’m third this month,” she boasted. “Elsie” — that was her cousin — “is only about eighteenth, and Richard is about at the bottom.”

“You like Richard and Elsie, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes. I like Richard quite well and I like her all right.”

Cautiously and casually he asked: “And Aunt Marion and Uncle Lincoln — which do you like best?”

“Oh, Uncle Lincoln, I guess.”

He was increasingly aware of her presence. As they came in, a murmur of “. . . adorable” followed them, and now the people at the next table bent all their silences upon her, staring as if she were something no more conscious than a flower.

“Why don’t I live with you?” she asked suddenly. “Because mamma’s dead?”

“You must stay here and learn more French. It would have been hard for daddy to take care of you so well.”

“I don’t really need much taking care of any more. I do everything for myself.”

Going out of the restaurant, a man and a woman unexpectedly hailed him.

“Well, the old Wales!”

“Hello there, Lorraine. . . . Dunc.”

Sudden ghosts out of the past: Duncan Schaeffer, a friend from college. Lorraine Quarrles, a lovely, pale blonde of thirty; one of a crowd who had helped them make months into days in the lavish times of three years ago.

“My husband couldn’t come this year,” she said, in answer to his question.

“We’re poor as hell. So he gave me two hundred a month and told me I could do my worst on that. . . . This your little girl?”

“What about coming back and sitting down?” Duncan asked.

“Can’t do it.” He was glad for an excuse. As always, he felt Lorraine’s passionate, provocative attraction, but his own rhythm was different now.

“Well, how about dinner?” she asked.

“I’m not free. Give me your address and let me call you.”

“Charlie, I believe you’re sober,” she said judicially. “I honestly believe he’s sober, Dunc. Pinch him and see if he’s sober.”

Charlie indicated Honoria with his head. They both laughed.

“What’s your address?” said Duncan sceptically.

He hesitated, unwilling to give the name of his hotel.

“I’m not settled yet. I’d better call you. We’re going to see the vaudeville at the Empire.”

“There! That’s what I want to do,” Lorraine said. “I want to see some clowns and acrobats and jugglers. That’s just what we’ll do, Dunc.”

“We’ve got to do an errand first,” said Charlie. “Perhaps we’ll see you there.”

“All right, you snob. . . . Good-by, beautiful little girl.”

“Good-by.”

Honorina bobbed politely.

Somehow, an unwelcome encounter. They liked him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength.

At the Empire, Honorina proudly refused to sit upon her father’s folded coat. She was already an individual with a code of her own, and Charlie was more and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized utterly. It was hopeless to try to know her in so short a time.

Between the acts they came upon Duncan and Lorraine in the lobby where the band was playing.

“Have a drink?”

“All right, but not up at the bar. We’ll take a table.”

“The perfect father.”

Listening abstractedly to Lorraine, Charlie watched Honorina’s eyes leave their table, and he followed them wistfully about the room, wondering what they saw. He met her glance and she smiled.

“I liked that lemonade,” she said.

What had she said? What had he expected? Going home in a taxi afterward, he pulled her over until her head rested against his chest.

“Darling, do you ever think about your mother?”

“Yes, sometimes,” she answered vaguely.

“I don’t want you to forget her. Have you got a picture of her?”

“Yes, I think so. Anyhow, Aunt Marion has. Why don’t you want me to forget her?”

“She loved you very much.”

“I loved her too.”

They were silent for a moment.

“Daddy, I want to come and live with you,” she said suddenly.

His heart leaped; he had wanted it to come like this.

“Aren’t you perfectly happy?”

“Yes, but I love you better than anybody. And you love me better than anybody, don’t you, now that mummy’s dead?”

“Of course I do. But you won’t always like me best, honey. You’ll grow up and meet somebody your own age and go marry him and forget you ever had a daddy.”

“Yes, that’s true,” she agreed tranquilly.

He didn’t go in. He was coming back at nine o’clock and he wanted to keep himself fresh and new for the thing he must say then.

“When you’re safe inside, just show yourself in that window.”

“All right. Good-by, dads, dads, dads, dads.”

He waited in the dark street until she appeared, all warm and glowing, in the window above and kissed her fingers out into the night.

III

They were waiting. Marion sat behind the coffee service in a dignified black dinner dress that just faintly suggested mourning. Lincoln was walking up and down with the animation of one who had already been talking. They

were as anxious as he was to get into the question. He opened it almost immediately:

“I suppose you know what I want to see you about — why I really came to Paris.”

Marion played with the black stars on her necklace and frowned.

“I’m awfully anxious to have a home,” he continued. “And I’m awfully anxious to have Honoria in it. I appreciate your taking in Honoria for her mother’s sake, but things have changed now” — he hesitated and then continued more forcibly — “changed radically with me, and I want to ask you to reconsider the matter. It would be silly for me to deny that about three years ago I was acting badly — ”

Marion looked up at him with hard eyes.

“ — but all that’s over. As I told you, I haven’t had more than a drink a day for over a year, and I take that drink deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won’t get too big in my imagination. You see the idea?”

“No,” said Marion succinctly.

“It’s a sort of stunt I set myself. It keeps the matter in proportion.”

“I get you,” said Lincoln. “You don’t want to admit it’s got any attraction for you.”

“Something like that. Sometimes I forget and don’t take it. But I try to take it. Anyhow, I couldn’t afford to drink in my position. The people I represent are more than satisfied with what I’ve done, and I’m bringing my sister over from Burlington to keep house for me, and I want awfully to have Honoria too. You know that even when her mother and I weren’t getting along well we never let anything that happened touch Honoria. I know she’s fond of me and I know I’m able to take care of her and — well, there you are. How do you feel about it?”

He knew that now he would have to take a beating. It would last an hour or two hours, and it would be difficult, but if he modulated his inevitable

resentment to the chastened attitude of the reformed sinner, he might win his point in the end.

Keep your temper, he told himself. You don't want to be justified. You want Honoria.

Lincoln spoke first: "We've been talking it over ever since we got your letter last month. We're happy to have Honoria here. She's a dear little thing, and we're glad to be able to help her, but of course that isn't the question — "

Marion interrupted suddenly. "How long are you going to stay sober, Charlie?" she asked.

"Permanently, I hope."

"How can anybody count on that?"

"You know I never did drink heavily until I gave up business and came over here with nothing to do. Then Helen and I began to run around with — "

"Please leave Helen out of it. I can't bear to hear you talk about her like that."

He stared at her grimly; he had never been certain how fond of each other the sisters were in life.

"My drinking only lasted about a year and a half — from the time we came over until I— collapsed."

"It was time enough."

"It was time enough," he agreed.

"My duty is entirely to Helen," she said. "I try to think what she would have wanted me to do. Frankly, from the night you did that terrible thing you haven't really existed for me. I can't help that. She was my sister."

"Yes."

"When she was dying she asked me to look out for Honoria. If you hadn't been in a sanitarium then, it might have helped matters."

He had no answer.

“I’ll never in my life be able to forget the morning when Helen knocked at my door, soaked to the skin and shivering, and said you’d locked her out.”

Charlie gripped the sides of the chair. This was more difficult than he expected; he wanted to launch out into a long expostulation and explanation, but he only said: “The night I locked her out — ” and she interrupted, “I don’t feel up to going over that again.”

After a moment’s silence Lincoln said: “We’re getting off the subject. You want Marion to set aside her legal guardianship and give you Honoria. I think the main point for her is whether she has confidence in you or not.”

“I don’t blame Marion,” Charlie said slowly, “but I think she can have entire confidence in me. I had a good record up to three years ago. Of course, it’s within human possibilities I might go wrong any time. But if we wait much longer I’ll lose Honoria’s childhood and my chance for a home.” He shook his head, “I’ll simply lose her, don’t you see?”

“Yes, I see,” said Lincoln.

“Why didn’t you think of all this before?” Marion asked.

“I suppose I did, from time to time, but Helen and I were getting along badly. When I consented to the guardianship, I was flat on my back in a sanitarium and the market had cleaned me out. I knew I’d acted badly, and I thought if it would bring any peace to Helen, I’d agree to anything. But now it’s different. I’m functioning, I’m behaving damn well, so far as — ”

“Please don’t swear at me,” Marion said.

He looked at her, startled. With each remark the force of her dislike became more and more apparent. She had built up all her fear of life into one wall and faced it toward him. This trivial reproof was possibly the result of some trouble with the cook several hours before. Charlie became increasingly alarmed at leaving Honoria in this atmosphere of hostility against himself; sooner or later it would come out, in a word here, a shake of the head there, and some of that distrust would be irrevocably implanted in Honoria. But he pulled his temper down out of his face and shut it up inside him; he had won

a point, for Lincoln realized the absurdity of Marion's remark and asked her lightly since when she had objected to the word "damn."

"Another thing," Charlie said: "I'm able to give her certain advantages now. I'm going to take a French governess to Prague with me. I've got a lease on a new apartment — "

He stopped, realizing that he was blundering. They couldn't be expected to accept with equanimity the fact that his income was again twice as large as their own.

"I suppose you can give her more luxuries than we can," said Marion. "When you were throwing away money we were living along watching every ten francs. . . . I suppose you'll start doing it again."

"Oh, no," he said. "I've learned. I worked hard for ten years, you know — until I got lucky in the market, like so many people. Terribly lucky. It didn't seem any use working any more, so I quit. It won't happen again."

There was a long silence. All of them felt their nerves straining, and for the first time in a year Charlie wanted a drink. He was sure now that Lincoln Peters wanted him to have his child.

Marion shuddered suddenly; part of her saw that Charlie's feet were planted on the earth now, and her own maternal feeling recognized the naturalness of his desire; but she had lived for a long time with a prejudice — a prejudice founded on a curious disbelief in her sister's happiness, and which, in the shock of one terrible night, had turned to hatred for him. It had all happened at a point in her life where the discouragement of ill health and adverse circumstances made it necessary for her to believe in tangible villainy and a tangible villain.

"I can't help what I think!" she cried out suddenly. "How much you were responsible for Helen's death, I don't know. It's something you'll have to square with your own conscience."

An electric current of agony surged through him; for a moment he was almost on his feet, an unuttered sound echoing in his throat. He hung on to himself for a moment, another moment.

“Hold on there,” said Lincoln uncomfortably. “I never thought you were responsible for that.”

“Helen died of heart trouble,” Charlie said dully.

“Yes, heart trouble.” Marion spoke as if the phrase had another meaning for her.

Then, in the flatness that followed her outburst, she saw him plainly and she knew he had somehow arrived at control over the situation. Glancing at her husband, she found no help from him, and as abruptly as if it were a matter of no importance, she threw up the sponge.

“Do what you like!” she cried, springing up from her chair. “She’s your child. I’m not the person to stand in your way. I think if it were my child I’d rather see her — ” She managed to check herself. “You two decide it. I can’t stand this. I’m sick. I’m going to bed.”

She hurried from the room; after a moment Lincoln said:

“This has been a hard day for her. You know how strongly she feels — ” His voice was almost apologetic: “When a woman gets an idea in her head.”

“Of course.”

“It’s going to be all right. I think she sees now that you — can provide for the child, and so we can’t very well stand in your way or Honoria’s way.”

“Thank you, Lincoln.”

“I’d better go along and see how she is.”

“I’m going.”

He was still trembling when he reached the street, but a walk down the Rue Bonaparte to the quais set him up, and as he crossed the Seine, fresh and new by the quai lamps, he felt exultant. But back in his room he couldn’t sleep. The image of Helen haunted him. Helen whom he had loved so until they had senselessly begun to abuse each other’s love, tear it into shreds. On that terrible February night that Marion remembered so vividly, a slow quarrel had gone on for hours. There was a scene at the Florida, and then he

attempted to take her home, and then she kissed young Webb at a table; after that there was what she had hysterically said. When he arrived home alone he turned the key in the lock in wild anger. How could he know she would arrive an hour later alone, that there would be a snowstorm in which she wandered about in slippers, too confused to find a taxi? Then the aftermath, her escaping pneumonia by a miracle, and all the attendant horror. They were “reconciled,” but that was the beginning of the end, and Marion, who had seen with her own eyes and who imagined it to be one of many scenes from her sister’s martyrdom, never forgot.

Going over it again brought Helen nearer, and in the white, soft light that steals upon half sleep near morning he found himself talking to her again. She said that he was perfectly right about Honoria and that she wanted Honoria to be with him. She said she was glad he was being good and doing better. She said a lot of other things — very friendly things — but she was in a swing in a white dress, and swinging faster and faster all the time, so that at the end he could not hear clearly all that she said.

IV

He woke up feeling happy. The door of the world was open again. He made plans, vistas, futures for Honoria and himself, but suddenly he grew sad, remembering all the plans he and Helen had made. She had not planned to die. The present was the thing — work to do and someone to love. But not to love too much, for he knew the injury that a father can do to a daughter or a mother to a son by attaching them too closely: afterward, out in the world, the child would seek in the marriage partner the same blind tenderness and, failing probably to find it, turn against love and life.

It was another bright, crisp day. He called Lincoln Peters at the bank where he worked and asked if he could count on taking Honoria when he left for Prague. Lincoln agreed that there was no reason for delay. One thing — the legal guardianship. Marion wanted to retain that a while longer. She was upset by the whole matter, and it would oil things if she felt that the situation was still in her control for another year. Charlie agreed, wanting only the tangible, visible child.

Then the question of a governess. Charlie sat in a gloomy agency and talked to a cross Béarnaise and to a buxom Breton peasant, neither of whom he could have endured. There were others whom he would see tomorrow.

He lunched with Lincoln Peters at Griffons, trying to keep down his exultation.

“There’s nothing quite like your own child,” Lincoln said. “But you understand how Marion feels too.”

“She’s forgotten how hard I worked for seven years there,” Charlie said. “She just remembers one night.”

“There’s another thing.” Lincoln hesitated. “While you and Helen were tearing around Europe throwing money away, we were just getting along. I didn’t touch any of the prosperity because I never got ahead enough to carry anything but my insurance. I think Marion felt there was some kind of injustice in it — you not even working toward the end, and getting richer and richer.”

“It went just as quick as it came,” said Charlie.

“Yes, a lot of it stayed in the hands of *chasseurs* and saxophone players and *maîtres d’hôtel* — well, the big party’s over now. I just said that to explain Marion’s feeling about those crazy years. If you drop in about six o’clock tonight before Marion’s too tired, we’ll settle the details on the spot.”

Back at his hotel, Charlie found a *pneumatique* that had been redirected from the Ritz bar where Charlie had left his address for the purpose of finding a certain man.

DEAR CHARLIE: You were so strange when we saw you the other day that I wondered if I did something to offend you. If so, I’m not conscious of it. In fact, I have thought about you too much for the last year, and it’s always been in the back of my mind that I might see you if I came over here.

We did have such good times that crazy spring, like the night you and I stole the butcher’s tricycle, and the time we tried to call on the president and you had the old derby rim and the wire cane. Everybody seems so old lately, but I don’t feel old a bit. Couldn’t we get together some time today for old

time's sake? I've got a vile hang-over for the moment, but will be feeling better this afternoon and will look for you about five in the sweat-shop at the Ritz.

Always devotedly,

LORRAINE.

His first feeling was one of awe that he had actually, in his mature years, stolen a tricycle and pedalled Lorraine all over the Étoile between the small hours and dawn. In retrospect it was a nightmare. Locking out Helen didn't fit in with any other act of his life, but the tricycle incident did — it was one of many. How many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility?

He tried to picture how Lorraine had appeared to him then — very attractive; Helen was unhappy about it, though she said nothing. Yesterday, in the restaurant, Lorraine had seemed trite, blurred, worn away. He emphatically did not want to see her, and he was glad Alix had not given away his hotel address. It was a relief to think, instead, of Honoria, to think of Sundays spent with her and of saying good morning to her and of knowing she was there in his house at night, drawing her breath in the darkness.

At five he took a taxi and bought presents for all the Peters — a piquant cloth doll, a box of Roman soldiers, flowers for Marion, big linen handkerchiefs for Lincoln.

He saw, when he arrived in the apartment, that Marion had accepted the inevitable. She greeted him now as though he were a recalcitrant member of the family, rather than a menacing outsider. Honoria had been told she was going; Charlie was glad to see that her tact made her conceal her excessive happiness. Only on his lap did she whisper her delight and the question "When?" before she slipped away with the other children.

He and Marion were alone for a minute in the room, and on an impulse he spoke out boldly:

“Family quarrels are bitter things. They don’t go according to any rules. They’re not like aches or wounds; they’re more like splits in the skin that won’t heal because there’s not enough material. I wish you and I could be on better terms.”

“Some things are hard to forget,” she answered. “It’s a question of confidence.” There was no answer to this and presently she asked, “When do you propose to take her?”

“As soon as I can get a governess. I hoped the day after tomorrow.”

“That’s impossible. I’ve got to get her things in shape. Not before Saturday.”

He yielded. Coming back into the room, Lincoln offered him a drink.

“I’ll take my daily whisky,” he said.

It was warm here, it was a home, people together by a fire. The children felt very safe and important; the mother and father were serious, watchful. They had things to do for the children more important than his visit here. A spoonful of medicine was, after all, more important than the strained relations between Marion and himself. They were not dull people, but they were very much in the grip of life and circumstances. He wondered if he couldn’t do something to get Lincoln out of his rut at the bank.

A long peal at the door-bell; the *bonne à tout faire* passed through and went down the corridor. The door opened upon another long ring, and then voices, and the three in the salon looked up expectantly; Lincoln moved to bring the corridor within his range of vision, and Marion rose. Then the maid came back along the corridor, closely followed by the voices, which developed under the light into Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrels.

They were gay, they were hilarious, they were roaring with laughter. For a moment Charlie was astounded; unable to understand how they ferreted out the Peters’ address.

“Ah-h-h!” Duncan wagged his finger roguishly at Charlie. “Ah-h-h!”

They both slid down another cascade of laughter. Anxious and at a loss, Charlie shook hands with them quickly and presented them to Lincoln and Marion. Marion nodded, scarcely speaking. She had drawn back a step toward the fire; her little girl stood beside her, and Marion put an arm about her shoulder.

With growing annoyance at the intrusion, Charlie waited for them to explain themselves. After some concentration Duncan said:

“We came to invite you out to dinner. Lorraine and I insist that all this shishi, cagy business ‘bout your address got to stop.”

Charlie came closer to them, as if to force them backward down the corridor.

“Sorry, but I can’t. Tell me where you’ll be and I’ll phone you in half an hour.”

This made no impression. Lorraine sat down suddenly on the side of a chair, and focussing her eyes on Richard, cried, “Oh, what a nice little boy! Come here, little boy.” Richard glanced at his mother, but did not move. With a perceptible shrug of her shoulders, Lorraine turned back to Charlie:

“Come and dine. Sure your cousins won’ mine. See you so sel’om. Or solemn.”

“I can’t,” said Charlie sharply. “You two have dinner and I’ll phone you.”

Her voice became suddenly unpleasant. “All right, we’ll go. But I remember once when you hammered on my door at four A.M. I was enough of a good sport to give you a drink. Come on, Dunc.”

Still in slow motion, with blurred, angry faces, with uncertain feet, they retired along the corridor.

“Good night,” Charlie said.

“Good night!” responded Lorraine emphatically.

When he went back into the salon Marion had not moved, only now her son was standing in the circle of her other arm. Lincoln was still swinging Honoria back and forth like a pendulum from side to side.

“What an outrage!” Charlie broke out. “What an absolute outrage!” Neither of them answered. Charlie dropped into an armchair, picked up his drink, set it down again and said:

“People I haven’t seen for two years having the colossal nerve — ”

He broke off. Marion had made the sound “Oh!” in one swift, furious breath, turned her body from him with a jerk and left the room.

Lincoln set down Honoria carefully.

“You children go in and start your soup,” he said, and when they obeyed, he said to Charlie:

“Marion’s not well and she can’t stand shocks. That kind of people make her really physically sick.”

“I didn’t tell them to come here. They wormed your name out of somebody. They deliberately — ”

“Well, it’s too bad. It doesn’t help matters. Excuse me a minute.”

Left alone, Charlie sat tense in his chair. In the next room he could hear the children eating, talking in monosyllables, already oblivious to the scene between their elders. He heard a murmur of conversation from a farther room and then the ticking bell of a telephone receiver picked up, and in a panic he moved to the other side of the room and out of earshot.

In a minute Lincoln came back. “Look here, Charlie. I think we’d better call off dinner for tonight. Marion’s in bad shape.”

“Is she angry with me?”

“Sort of,” he said, almost roughly. “She’s not strong and — ”

“You mean she’s changed her mind about Honoria?”

“She’s pretty bitter right now. I don’t know. You phone me at the bank tomorrow.”

“I wish you’d explain to her I never dreamed these people would come here. I’m just as sore as you are.”

“I couldn’t explain anything to her now.”

Charlie got up. He took his coat and hat and started down the corridor. Then he opened the door of the dining room and said in a strange voice, “Good night, children.”

Honorio rose and ran around the table to hug him.

“Good night, sweetheart,” he said vaguely, and then trying to make his voice more tender, trying to conciliate something, “Good night, dear children.”

V

Charlie went directly to the Ritz bar with the furious idea of finding Lorraine and Duncan, but they were not there, and he realized that in any case there was nothing he could do. He had not touched his drink at the Peters’, and now he ordered a whisky-and-soda. Paul came over to say hello.

“It’s a great change,” he said sadly. “We do about half the business we did. So many fellows I hear about back in the States lost everything, maybe not in the first crash, but then in the second. Your friend George Hardt lost every cent, I hear. Are you back in the States?”

“No, I’m in business in Prague.”

“I heard that you lost a lot in the crash.”

“I did,” and he added grimly, “but I lost everything I wanted in the boom.”

“Selling short.”

“Something like that.”

Again the memory of those days swept over him like a nightmare — the people they had met travelling; then people who couldn't add a row of figures or speak a coherent sentence. The little man Helen had consented to dance with at the ship's party, who had insulted her ten feet from the table; the women and girls carried screaming with drink or drugs out of public places —

— The men who locked their wives out in the snow, because the snow of twenty-nine wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money.

He went to the phone and called the Peters' apartment; Lincoln answered.

"I called up because this thing is on my mind. Has Marion said anything definite?"

"Marion's sick," Lincoln answered shortly. "I know this thing isn't altogether your fault, but I can't have her go to pieces about it. I'm afraid we'll have to let it slide for six months; I can't take the chance of working her up to this state again."

"I see."

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

He went back to his table. His whisky glass was empty, but he shook his head when Alix looked at it questioningly. There wasn't much he could do now except send Honoria some things; he would send her a lot of things tomorrow. He thought rather angrily that this was just money — he had given so many people money. . . .

"No, no more," he said to another waiter. "What do I owe you?"

He would come back some day; they couldn't make him pay forever. But he wanted his child, and nothing was much good now, beside that fact. He wasn't young any more, with a lot of nice thoughts and dreams to have by himself. He was absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone.

A NEW LEAF

I

Saturday Evening Post (4 July 1931)

It was the first day warm enough to eat outdoors in the Bois de Boulogne, while chestnut blossoms slanted down across the tables and dropped impudently into the butter and the wine. Julia Ross ate a few with her bread and listened to the big goldfish rippling in the pool and the sparrows whirring about an abandoned table. You could see everybody again — the waiters with their professional faces, the watchful Frenchwomen all heels and eyes, Phil Hoffman opposite her with his heart balanced on his fork, and the extraordinarily handsome man just coming out on the terrace.

— *the purple noon's transparent might.*

The breath of the moist air is light

Around each unexpanded bud —

Julia trembled discreetly; she controlled herself; she didn't spring up and call, "Yi-yi-yi-yi! Isn't this grand?" and push the maître d'hôtel into the lily pond. She sat there, a well-behaved woman of twenty-one, and discreetly trembled.

Phil was rising, napkin in hand. "Hi there, Dick!"

"Hi, Phil!"

It was the handsome man; Phil took a few steps forward and they talked apart from the table.

" — seen Carter and Kitty in Spain — "

" — poured on to the Bremen — "

" — so I was going to — "

The man went on, following the head waiter, and Phil sat down.

“Who is that?” she demanded.

“A friend of mine — Dick Ragland.”

“He’s without doubt the handsomest man I ever saw in my life.”

“Yes, he’s handsome,” he agreed without enthusiasm.

“Handsome! He’s an archangel, he’s a mountain lion, he’s something to eat. Just why didn’t you introduce him?”

“Because he’s got the worst reputation of any American in Paris.”

“Nonsense; he must be maligned. It’s all a dirty frame-up — a lot of jealous husbands whose wives got one look at him. Why, that man’s never done anything in his life except lead cavalry charges and save children from drowning.”

“The fact remains he’s not received anywhere — not for one reason but for a thousand.”

“What reasons?”

“Everything. Drink, women, jails, scandals, killed somebody with an automobile, lazy, worthless — ”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” said Julia firmly. “I bet he’s tremendously attractive. And you spoke to him as if you thought so too.”

“Yes,” he said reluctantly, “like so many alcoholics, he has a certain charm. If he’d only make his messes off by himself somewhere — except right in people’s laps. Just when somebody’s taken him up and is making a big fuss over him, he pours the soup down his hostess’ back, kisses the serving maid and passes out in the dog kennel. But he’s done it too often. He’s run through about everybody, until there’s no one left.”

“There’s me,” said Julia.

There was Julia, who was a little too good for anybody and sometimes regretted that she had been quite so well endowed. Anything added to beauty has to be paid for — that is to say, the qualities that pass as substitutes can be liabilities when added to beauty itself. Julia’s brilliant

hazel glance was enough, without the questioning light of intelligence that flickered in it; her irrepressible sense of the ridiculous detracted from the gentle relief of her mouth, and the loveliness of her figure might have been more obvious if she had slouched and postured rather than sat and stood very straight, after the discipline of a strict father.

Equally perfect young men had several times appeared bearing gifts, but generally with the air of being already complete, of having no space for development. On the other hand, she found that men of larger scale had sharp corners and edges in youth, and she was a little too young herself to like that. There was, for instance, this scornful young egotist, Phil Hoffman, opposite her, who was obviously going to be a brilliant lawyer and who had practically followed her to Paris. She liked him as well as anyone she knew, but he had at present all the overbearance of the son of a chief of police.

“Tonight I’m going to London, and Wednesday I sail,” he said. “And you’ll be in Europe all summer, with somebody new chewing on your ear every few weeks.”

“When you’ve been called for a lot of remarks like that you’ll begin to edge into the picture,” Julia remarked. “Just to square yourself, I want you to introduce that man Ragland.”

“My last few hours!” he complained.

“But I’ve given you three whole days on the chance you’d work out a better approach. Be a little civilized and ask him to have some coffee.”

As Mr. Dick Ragland joined them, Julia drew a little breath of pleasure. He was a fine figure of a man, in coloring both tan and blond, with a peculiar luminosity to his face. His voice was quietly intense; it seemed always to tremble a little with a sort of gay despair; the way he looked at Julia made her feel attractive. For half an hour, as their sentences floated pleasantly among the scent of violets and snowdrops, forget-me-nots and pansies, her interest in him grew. She was even glad when Phil said:

“I’ve just thought about my English visa. I’ll have to leave you two incipient love birds together against my better judgment. Will you meet me at the Gare St. Lazare at five and see me off?”

He looked at Julia hoping she'd say, "I'll go along with you now." She knew very well she had no business being alone with this man, but he made her laugh, and she hadn't laughed much lately, so she said: "I'll stay a few minutes; it's so nice and springy here."

When Phil was gone, Dick Ragland suggested a *fine* champagne.

"I hear you have a terrible reputation?" she said impulsively.

"Awful. I'm not even invited out any more. Do you want me to slip on my false mustache?"

"It's so odd," she pursued. "Don't you cut yourself off from all nourishment? Do you know that Phil felt he had to warn me about you before he introduced you? And I might very well have told him not to."

"Why didn't you?"

"I thought you seemed so attractive and it was such a pity."

His face grew bland; Julia saw that the remark had been made so often that it no longer reached him.

"It's none of my business," she said quickly. She did not realize that his being a sort of outcast added to his attraction for her — not the dissipation itself, for never having seen it, it was merely an abstraction — but its result in making him so alone. Something atavistic in her went out to the stranger to the tribe, a being from a world with different habits from hers, who promised the unexpected — promised adventure.

"I'll tell you something else," he said suddenly. "I'm going permanently on the wagon on June fifth, my twenty-eighth birthday. I don't have fun drinking any more. Evidently I'm not one of the few people who can use liquor."

"You sure you can go on the wagon?"

"I always do what I say I'll do. Also I'm going back to New York and go to work."

"I'm really surprised how glad I am." This was rash, but she let it stand.

“Have another *fine*?” Dick suggested. “Then you’ll be gladder still.”

“Will you go on this way right up to your birthday?”

“Probably. On my birthday I’ll be on the Olympic in mid-ocean.”

“I’ll be on that boat too!” she exclaimed.

“You can watch the quick change; I’ll do it for the ship’s concert.”

The tables were being cleared off. Julia knew she should go now, but she couldn’t bear to leave him sitting with that unhappy look under his smile. She felt, maternally, that she ought to say something to help him keep his resolution.

“Tell me why you drink so much. Probably some obscure reason you don’t know yourself.”

“Oh, I know pretty well how it began.”

He told her as another hour waned. He had gone to the war at seventeen and, when he came back, life as a Princeton freshman with a little black cap was somewhat tame. So he went up to Boston Tech and then abroad to the Beaux Arts; it was there that something happened to him.

“About the time I came into some money I found that with a few drinks I got expansive and somehow had the ability to please people, and the idea turned my head. Then I began to take a whole lot of drinks to keep going and have everybody think I was wonderful. Well, I got plastered a lot and quarreled with most of my friends, and then I met a wild bunch and for a while I was expansive with them. But I was inclined to get superior and suddenly think ‘What am I doing with this bunch?’ They didn’t like that much. And when a taxi that I was in killed a man, I was sued. It was just a graft, but it got in the papers, and after I was released the impression remained that I’d killed him. So all I’ve got to show for the last five years is a reputation that makes mothers rush their daughters away if I’m at the same hotel.”

An impatient waiter was hovering near and she looked at her watch.

“Gosh, we’re to see Phil off at five. We’ve been here all the afternoon.”

As they hurried to the Gare St. Lazare, he asked: "Will you let me see you again; or do you think you'd better not?"

She returned his long look. There was no sign of dissipation in his face, in his warm cheeks, in his erect carriage.

"I'm always fine at lunch," he added, like an invalid.

"I'm not worried," she laughed. "Take me to lunch day after tomorrow."

They hurried up the steps of the Gare St. Lazare, only to see the last carriage of the Golden Arrow disappearing toward the Channel. Julia was remorseful, because Phil had come so far.

As a sort of atonement, she went to the apartment where she lived with her aunt and tried to write a letter to him, but Dick Ragland intruded himself into her thoughts. By morning the effect of his good looks had faded a little; she was inclined to write him a note that she couldn't see him. Still, he had made her a simple appeal and she had brought it all on herself. She waited for him at half-past twelve on the appointed day.

Julia had said nothing to her aunt, who had company for luncheon and might mention his name — strange to go out with a man whose name you couldn't mention. He was late and she waited in the hall, listening to the echolalia of chatter from the luncheon party in the dining room. At one she answered the bell.

There in the outer hall stood a man whom she thought she had never seen before. His face was dead white and erratically shaven, his soft hat was crushed bunlike on his head, his shirt collar was dirty, and all except the band of his tie was out of sight. But at the moment when she recognized the figure as Dick Ragland she perceived a change which dwarfed the others into nothing; it was in his expression. His whole face was one prolonged sneer — the lids held with difficulty from covering the fixed eyes, the drooping mouth drawn up over the upper teeth, the chin wabbling like a made-over chin in which the paraffin had run — it was a face that both expressed and inspired disgust.

"H'lo," he muttered.

For a minute she drew back from him; then, at a sudden silence from the dining room that gave on the hall, inspired by the silence in the hall itself, she half pushed him over the threshold, stepped out herself and closed the door behind them.

“Oh-h-h!” she said in a single, shocked breath.

“Haven’t been home since yest’day. Got involve’ on a party at — ”

With repugnance, she turned him around by his arm and stumbled with him down the apartment stairs, passing the concierge’s wife, who peered out at them curiously from her glass room. Then they came out into the bright sunshine of the Rue Guynemer.

Against the spring freshness of the Luxembourg Gardens opposite, he was even more grotesque. He frightened her; she looked desperately up and down the street for a taxi, but one turning the corner of the Rue de Vaugirard disregarded her signal.

“Where’ll we go lunch?” he asked.

“You’re in no shape to go to lunch. Don’t you realize? You’ve got to go home and sleep.”

“I’m all right. I get a drink I’ll be fine.”

A passing cab slowed up at her gesture.

“You go home and go to sleep. You’re not fit to go anywhere.”

As he focused his eyes on her, realizing her suddenly as something fresh, something new and lovely, something alien to the smoky and turbulent world where he had spent his recent hours, a faint current of reason flowed through him. She saw his mouth twist with vague awe, saw him make a vague attempt to stand up straight. The taxi yawned.

“Maybe you’re right. Very sorry.”

“What’s your address?”

He gave it and then tumbled into a corner, his face still struggling toward reality. Julia closed the door.

When the cab had driven off, she hurried across the street and into the Luxembourg Gardens as if someone were after her.

II

Quite by accident, she answered when he telephoned at seven that night. His voice was strained and shaking:

“I suppose there’s not much use apologizing for this morning. I didn’t know what I was doing, but that’s no excuse. But if you could let me see you for a while somewhere tomorrow — just for a minute — I’d like the chance of telling you in person how terribly sorry — ”

“I’m busy tomorrow.”

“Well, Friday then, or any day.”

“I’m sorry, I’m very busy this week.”

“You mean you don’t ever want to see me again?”

“Mr. Ragland, I hardly see the use of going any further with this. Really, that thing this morning was a little too much. I’m very sorry. I hope you feel better. Good-by.”

She put him entirely out of her mind. She had not even associated his reputation with such a spectacle — a heavy drinker was someone who sat up late and drank champagne and maybe in the small hours rode home singing. This spectacle at high noon was something else again. Julia was through.

Meanwhile there were other men with whom she lunched at Ciro’s and danced in the Bois. There was a reproachful letter from Phil Hoffman in America. She liked Phil better for having been so right about this. A fortnight passed and she would have forgotten Dick Ragland, had she not heard his name mentioned with scorn in several conversations. Evidently he had done such things before.

Then, a week before she was due to sail, she ran into him in the booking department of the White Star Line. He was as handsome — she could hardly believe her eyes. He leaned with an elbow on the desk, his fine figure erect, his yellow gloves as stainless as his clear, shining eyes. His strong, gay personality had affected the clerk who served him with fascinated deference; the stenographers behind looked up for a minute and exchanged a glance. Then he saw Julia; she nodded, and with a quick, wincing change of expression he raised his hat.

They were together by the desk a long time and the silence was oppressive.

“Isn’t this a nuisance?” she said.

“Yes,” he said jerkily, and then: “You going by the Olympic?”

“Oh, yes.”

“I thought you might have changed.”

“Of course not,” she said coldly.

“I thought of changing; in fact, I was here to ask about it.”

“That’s absurd.”

“You don’t hate the sight of me? So it’ll make you seasick when we pass each other on the deck?”

She smiled. He seized his advantage:

“I’ve improved somewhat since we last met.”

“Don’t talk about that.”

“Well then, you have improved. You’ve got the loveliest costume on I ever saw.”

This was presumptuous, but she felt herself shimmering a little at the compliment.

“You wouldn’t consider a cup of coffee with me at the café next door, just to recover from this ordeal?”

How weak of her to talk to him like this, to let him make advances. It was like being under the fascination of a snake.

“I’m afraid I can’t.” Something terribly timid and vulnerable came into his face, twisting a little sinew in her heart. “Well, all right,” she shocked herself by saying.

Sitting at the sidewalk table in the sunlight, there was nothing to remind her of that awful day two weeks ago. Jekyll and Hyde. He was courteous, he was charming, he was amusing. He made her feel, oh, so attractive! He presumed on nothing.

“Have you stopped drinking?” she asked.

“Not till the fifth.”

“Oh!”

“Not until I said I’d stop. Then I’ll stop.”

When Julia rose to go, she shook her head at his suggestion of a further meeting.

“I’ll see you on the boat. After your twenty-eighth birthday.”

“All right; one more thing: It fits in with the high price of crime that I did something inexcusable to the one girl I’ve ever been in love with in my life.”

She saw him the first day on board, and then her heart sank into her shoes as she realized at last how much she wanted him. No matter what his past was, no matter what he had done. Which was not to say that she would ever let him know, but only that he moved her chemically more than anyone she had ever met, that all other men seemed pale beside him.

He was popular on the boat; she heard that he was giving a party on the night of his twenty-eighth birthday. Julia was not invited; when they met they spoke pleasantly, nothing more.

It was the day after the fifth that she found him stretched in his deck chair looking wan and white. There were wrinkles on his fine brow and around his eyes, and his hand, as he reached out for a cup of bouillon, was trembling.

He was still there in the late afternoon, visibly suffering, visibly miserable. After three times around, Julia was irresistibly impelled to speak to him:

“Has the new era begun?”

He made a feeble effort to rise, but she motioned him not to and sat on the next chair.

“You look tired.”

“I’m just a little nervous. This is the first day in five years that I haven’t had a drink.”

“It’ll be better soon.”

“I know,” he said grimly.

“Don’t weaken.”

“I won’t.”

“Can’t I help you in any way? Would you like a bromide?”

“I can’t stand bromides,” he said almost crossly. “No, thanks, I mean.”

Julia stood up: “I know you feel better alone. Things will be brighter tomorrow.”

“Don’t go, if you can stand me.”

Julia sat down again.

“Sing me a song — can you sing?”

“What kind of a song?”

“Something sad — some sort of blues.”

She sang him Libby Holman’s “This is how the story ends,” in a low, soft voice.

“That’s good. Now sing another. Or sing that again.”

“All right. If you like, I’ll sing to you all afternoon.”

III

The second day in New York he called her on the phone. "I've missed you so," he said. "Have you missed me?"

"I'm afraid I have," she said reluctantly.

"Much?"

"I've missed you a lot. Are you better?"

"I'm all right now. I'm still just a little nervous, but I'm starting work tomorrow. When can I see you?"

"When you want."

"This evening then. And look — say that again."

"What?"

"That you're afraid you have missed me."

"I'm afraid that I have," Julia said obediently.

"Missed me," he added.

"I'm afraid I have missed you."

"All right. It sounds like a song when you say it."

"Good-by, Dick."

"Good-by, Julia dear."

She stayed in New York two months instead of the fortnight she had intended, because he would not let her go. Work took the place of drink in the daytime, but afterward he must see Julia.

Sometimes she was jealous of his work when he telephoned that he was too tired to go out after the theater. Lacking drink, night life was less than nothing to him — something quite spoiled and well lost. For Julia, who never drank, it was a stimulus in itself — the music and the parade of

dresses and the handsome couple they made dancing together. At first they saw Phil Hoffman once in a while; Julia considered that he took the matter rather badly; then they didn't see him any more.

A few unpleasant incidents occurred. An old schoolmate, Esther Cary, came to her to ask if she knew of Dick Ragland's reputation. Instead of growing angry, Julia invited her to meet Dick and was delighted with the ease with which Esther's convictions were changed. There were other, small, annoying episodes, but Dick's misdemeanors had, fortunately, been confined to Paris and assumed here a far-away unreality. They loved each other deeply now — the memory of that morning slowly being effaced from Julia's imagination — but she wanted to be sure.

"After six months, if everything goes along like this, we'll announce our engagement. After another six months we'll be married."

"Such a long time," he mourned.

"But there were five years before that," Julia answered. "I trust you with my heart and with my mind, but something else says wait. Remember, I'm also deciding for my children."

Those five years — oh, so lost and gone.

In August, Julia went to California for two months to see her family. She wanted to know how Dick would get along alone. They wrote every day; his letters were by turns cheerful, depressed, weary and hopeful. His work was going better. As things came back to him, his uncle had begun really to believe in him, but all the time he missed his Julia so. It was when an occasional note of despair began to appear that she cut her visit short by a week and came East to New York.

"Oh, thank God you're here!" he cried as they linked arms and walked out of the Grand Central station. "It's been so hard. Half a dozen times lately I've wanted to go on a bust and I had to think of you, and you were so far away."

"Darling — darling, you're so tired and pale. You're working too hard."

"No, only that life is so bleak alone. When I go to bed my mind churns on and on. Can't we get married sooner?"

“I don’t know; we’ll see. You’ve got your Julia near you now, and nothing matters.”

After a week, Dick’s depression lifted. When he was sad, Julia made him her baby, holding his handsome head against her breast, but she liked it best when he was confident and could cheer her up, making her laugh and feel taken care of and secure. She had rented an apartment with another girl and she took courses in biology and domestic science in Columbia. When deep fall came, they went to football games and the new shows together, and walked through the first snow in Central Park, and several times a week spent long evenings together in front of her fire. But time was going by and they were both impatient. Just before Christmas, an unfamiliar visitor — Phil Hoffman — presented himself at her door. It was the first time in many months. New York, with its quality of many independent ladders set side by side, is unkind to even the meetings of close friends; so, in the case of strained relations, meetings are easy to avoid.

And they were strange to each other. Since his expressed skepticism of Dick, he was automatically her enemy; on another count, she saw that he had improved, some of the hard angles were worn off; he was now an assistant district attorney, moving around with increasing confidence through his profession.

“So you’re going to marry Dick?” he said. “When?”

“Soon now. When mother comes East.”

He shook his head emphatically. “Julia, don’t marry Dick. This isn’t jealousy — I know when I am licked — but it seems awful for a lovely girl like you to take a blind dive into a lake full of rocks. What makes you think that people change their courses? Sometimes they dry up or even flow into a parallel channel, but I’ve never known anybody to change.”

“Dick’s changed.”

“Maybe so. But isn’t that an enormous ‘maybe’? If he was unattractive and you liked him, I’d say go ahead with it. Maybe I’m all wrong, but it’s so darn obvious that what fascinates you is that handsome pan of his and those attractive manners.”

“You don’t know him,” Julia answered loyally. “He’s different with me. You don’t know how gentle he is, and responsive. Aren’t you being rather small and mean?”

“Hm.” Phil thought for a moment. “I want to see you again in a few days. Or perhaps I’ll speak to Dick.”

“You let Dick alone,” she cried. “He has enough to worry him without your nagging him. If you were his friend you’d try to help him instead of coming to me behind his back.”

“I’m your friend first.”

“Dick and I are one person now.”

But three days later Dick came to see her at an hour when he would usually have been at the office.

“I’m here under compulsion,” he said lightly, “under threat of exposure by Phil Hoffman.”

Her heart dropping like a plummet. “Has he given up?” she thought. “Is he drinking again?”

“It’s about a girl. You introduced me to her last summer and told me to be very nice to her — Esther Cary.”

Now her heart was beating slowly.

“After you went to California I was lonesome and I ran into her. She’d liked me that day, and for a while we saw quite a bit of each other. Then you came back and I broke it off. It was a little difficult; I hadn’t realized that she was so interested.”

“I see.” Her voice was starved and aghast.

“Try and understand. Those terribly lonely evenings. I think if it hadn’t been for Esther, I’d have fallen off the wagon. I never loved her — I never loved anybody but you — but I had to see somebody who liked me.”

He put his arm around her, but she felt cold all over and he drew away.

“Then any woman would have done,” Julia said slowly. “It didn’t matter who.”

“No!” he cried.

“I stayed away so long to let you stand on your own feet and get back your self-respect by yourself.”

“I only love you, Julia.”

“But any woman can help you. So you don’t really need me, do you?”

His face wore that vulnerable look that Julia had seen several times before; she sat on the arm of his chair and ran her hand over his cheek.

“Then what do you bring me?” she demanded. “I thought that there’d be the accumulated strength of having beaten your weakness. What do you bring me now?”

“Everything I have.”

She shook her head. “Nothing. Just your good looks — and the head waiter at dinner last night had that.”

They talked for two days and decided nothing. Sometimes she would pull him close and reach up to his lips that she loved so well, but her arms seemed to close around straw.

“I’ll go away and give you a chance to think it over,” he said despairingly. “I can’t see any way of living without you, but I suppose you can’t marry a man you don’t trust or believe in. My uncle wanted me to go to London on some business — ”

The night he left, it was sad on the dim pier. All that kept her from breaking was that it was not an image of strength that was leaving her; she would be just as strong without him. Yet as the murky lights fell on the fine structure of his brow and chin, as she saw the faces turn toward him, the eyes that followed him, an awful emptiness seized her and she wanted to say: “Never mind, dear; we’ll try it together.”

But try what? It was human to risk the toss between failure and success, but to risk the desperate gamble between adequacy and disaster —

“Oh, Dick, be good and be strong and come back to me. Change, change, Dick — change!”

“Good-by, Julia — good-by.”

She last saw him on the deck, his profile cut sharp as a cameo against a match as he lit a cigarette.

IV

It was Phil Hoffman who was to be with her at the beginning and the end. It was he who broke the news as gently as it could be broken. He reached her apartment at half-past eight and carefully threw away the morning paper outside. Dick Ragland had disappeared at sea.

After her first wild burst of grief, he became purposely a little cruel.

“He knew himself. His will had given out; he didn’t want life any more. And, Julia, just to show you how little you can possibly blame yourself, I’ll tell you this: He’d hardly gone to his office for four months — since you went to California. He wasn’t fired because of his uncle; the business he went to London on was of no importance at all. After his first enthusiasm was gone he’d given up.”

She looked at him sharply. “He didn’t drink, did he? He wasn’t drinking?”

For a fraction of a second Phil hesitated. “No, he didn’t drink; he kept his promise — he held on to that.”

“That was it,” she said. “He kept his promise and he killed himself doing it.”

Phil waited uncomfortably.

“He did what he said he would and broke his heart doing it,” she went on chokingly. “Oh, isn’t life cruel sometimes — so cruel, never to let anybody off. He was so brave — he died doing what he said he’d do.”

Phil was glad he had thrown away the newspaper that hinted of Dick's gay evening in the bar — one of many gay evenings that Phil had known of in the past few months. He was relieved that was over, because Dick's weakness had threatened the happiness of the girl he loved; but he was terribly sorry for him — even understanding how it was necessary for him to turn his maladjustment to life toward one mischief or another — but he was wise enough to leave Julia with the dream that she had saved out of wreckage.

There was a bad moment a year later, just before their marriage, when she said:

“You'll understand the feeling I have and always will have about Dick, won't you, Phil? It wasn't just his good looks. I believed in him — and I was right in a way. He broke rather than bent; he was a ruined man, but not a bad man. In my heart I knew when I first looked at him.”

Phil winced, but he said nothing. Perhaps there was more behind it than they knew. Better let it all alone in the depths of her heart and the depths of the sea.

EMOTIONAL BANKRUPTCY

I

Saturday Evening Post (15 August 1931)

“There’s that nut with the spyglass again,” remarked Josephine. Lillian Hammel unhooked a lace sofa cushion from her waist and came to the window. “He’s standing back so we can’t see him. He’s looking at the room above.”

The peeper was working from a house on the other side of narrow Sixty-eighth Street, all unconscious that his activities were a matter of knowledge and, lately, of indifference to the pupils of Miss Truby’s finishing school. They had even identified him as the undistinguished but quite proper young man who issued from the house with a brief case at eight every morning, apparently oblivious of the school across the street.

“What a horrible person,” said Lillian.

“They’re all the same,” Josephine said. “I’ll bet almost every man we know would do the same thing, if he had a telescope and nothing to do in the afternoon. I’ll bet Louie Randall would, anyhow.”

“Josephine, is he actually following you to Princeton?” Lillian asked.

“Yes, dearie.”

“Doesn’t he think he’s got his nerve?”

“He’ll get away with it,” Josephine assured her.

“Won’t Paul be wild?”

“I can’t worry about that. I only know half a dozen boys at Princeton, and with Louie I know I’ll have at least one good dancer to depend on. Paul’s too short for me, and he’s a bum dancer anyhow.”

Not that Josephine was very tall; she was an exquisite size for seventeen and of a beauty that was flowering marvelously day by day into something richer and warmer. People gasped nowadays, whereas a year ago they would merely have stared, and scarcely glanced at her a year before that. She was manifestly to be the spectacular débutante of Chicago next year, in spite of the fact that she was an egotist who played not for popularity but for individual men. While Josephine always recovered, the men frequently didn't — her mail from Chicago, from New Haven, from the Yale Battery on the border, averaged a dozen letters a day.

This was in the fall of 1916, with the thunder of far-off guns already growing louder on the air. When the two girls started for the Princeton prom two days later, they carried with them the Poems of Alan Seeger, supplemented by copies of Smart Set and Snappy Stories, bought surreptitiously at the station news stand. When compared to a seventeen-year-old girl of today, Lillian Hammel was an innocent; Josephine Perry, however, belonged to the ages.

They read nothing en route save a few love epigrams beginning: "A woman of thirty is — " The train was crowded and a sustained, excited chatter flowed along the aisles of the coaches. There were very young girls in a gallantly concealed state of terror; there were privately bored girls who would never see twenty-five again; there were unattractive girls, blandly unconscious of what was in store; and there were little, confident parties who felt as though they were going home.

"They say it's not like Yale," said Josephine. "They don't do things so elaborately here. They don't rush you from place to place, from one tea to another, like they do at New Haven."

"Will you ever forget that divine time last spring?" exclaimed Lillian.

They both sighed.

"At least there'll be Louie Randall," said Josephine.

There would indeed be Louie Randall, whom Josephine had seen fit to invite herself, without the formality of telling her Princeton escort that he was coming. The escort, at that moment pacing up and down at the station

platform with many other young men, was probably under the impression that it was his party. But he was wrong; it was Josephine's party; even Lillian was coming with another Princeton man, named Martin Munn, whom Josephine had thoughtfully provided. "Please ask her," she had written. "We'll manage to see a lot of each other, if you do, because the man I'm coming with isn't really very keen about me, so he won't mind."

But Paul Dempster cared a lot; so much so that when the train came puffing up from the Junction he gulped a full pint of air, which is a mild form of swooning. He had been devoted to Josephine for a year — long after her own interest had waned — he had long lost any power of judging her objectively; she was become simply a projection of his own dreams, a radiant, nebulous mass of light.

But Josephine saw Paul clearly enough as they stepped off the train. She gave herself up to him immediately, as if to get it over with, to clear the decks for more vital action.

"So thrilled — so thrilled! So darling to ask me!" Immemorial words, still doing service after fifteen years.

She took his arm snugly, settling it in hers with a series of little readjustments, as if she wanted it right because it was going to be there forever.

"I bet you're not glad to see me at all," she whispered. "I'll bet you've forgotten me. I know you."

Rudimentary stuff, but it sent Paul Dempster into a confused and happy trance. He had the adequate surface of nineteen, but, within, all was still in a ferment of adolescence.

He could only answer gruffly: "Big chance." And then: "Martin had a chemistry lab. He'll meet us at the club."

Slowly the crowd of youth swirled up the steps and beneath Blair arch, floating in an autumn dream and scattering the yellow leaves with their feet. Slowly they moved between stretches of greensward under the elms and

cloisters, with breath misty upon the crisp evening, following the hope that lay just ahead, the goal of happiness almost reached.

They sat before a big fire in the Witherspoon Club, the largest of those undergraduate mansions for which Princeton is famous. Martin Munn, Lillian's escort, was a quiet, handsome boy whom Josephine had met several times, but whose sentimental nature she had not explored. Now, with the phonograph playing *Down Among the Sheltering Palms*, with the soft orange light of the great room glowing upon the scattered groups, who seemed to have brought in the atmosphere of infinite promise from outside, Josephine looked at him appraisingly. A familiar current of curiosity coursed through her; already her replies to Paul had grown abstracted. But still in the warm enchantment of the walk from the station, Paul did not notice. He was far from guessing that he had already been served his ration; of special attention he would get no more. He was now cast for another rôle.

At the exact moment when it was suggested that they dress for dinner the party became aware of an individual who had just entered the club and was standing by the entrance looking not exactly at home, for he blinked about unfamiliarly, but not in the least ill at ease. He was tall, with long, dancing legs, and his face was that of an old, experienced weasel to whom no henhouse was impregnable.

"Why, Louie Randall!" exclaimed Josephine in a tone of astonishment.

She talked to him for a moment as if unwillingly, and then introduced him all around, meanwhile whispering to Paul: "He's a boy from New Haven. I never dreamed he'd follow me down here."

Randall within a few minutes was somehow one of the party. He had a light and witty way about him; no dark suspicions had penetrated Paul's mind.

"Oh, by the way," said Louie Randall, "I wonder if I can find a place to change my clothes. I've got a suitcase outside."

There was a pause. Josephine was apparently uninterested. The pause grew difficult, and Paul heard himself saying: "You can change in my room if you want to."

“I don’t want to put you out.”

“Not at all.”

Josephine raised her eyebrows at Paul, disclaiming responsibility for the man’s presumption; a moment later, Randall said: “Do you live near here?”

“Pretty near.”

“Because I have a taxi and I could take you there if you’re going to change, and you could show me where it is. I don’t want to put you out.”

The repetition of this ambiguous statement suggested that otherwise Paul might find his belongings in the street. He rose unwillingly; he did not hear Josephine whisper to Martin Munn: “Please don’t you go yet.” But Lillian did, and without minding at all. Her love affairs never conflicted with Josephine’s, which is why they had been intimate friends so long. When Louie Randall and his involuntary host had departed, she excused herself and went to dress upstairs.

“I’d like to see all over the clubhouse,” suggested Josephine. She felt the old excitement mounting in her pulse, felt her cheeks begin to glow like an electric heater.

“These are the private dining rooms,” Martin explained as they walked around. . . . “The billiard room. . . . The squash courts. . . . This library is modeled on something in a Cercersion monastery in — in India or somewhere. . . . This” — he opened a door and peered in — “this is the president’s room, but I don’t know where the light is.”

Josephine walked in with a little laugh. “It’s very nice in here,” she said. “You can’t see anything at all. Oh, what have I run into? Come and save me!”

When they emerged a few minutes later, Martin smoothed back his hair hurriedly.

“You darling!” he said.

Josephine made a funny little clicking sound.

“What is it?” he demanded. “Why have you got such a funny look on your face?”

Josephine didn't answer.

“Have I done something? Are you angry? You look as if you'd seen a ghost,” he said.

“You haven't done anything,” she answered, and added, with an effort: “You were — sweet.” She shuddered. “Show me my room, will you?”

“How strange,” she was thinking. “He's so attractive, but I didn't enjoy kissing him at all. For the first time in my life — even when it was a man I didn't especially care for — I had no feeling about him at all. I've often been bored afterward, but at the time it's always meant something.”

The experience depressed her more than she could account for. This was only her second prom, but neither before nor after did she ever enjoy one so little. She had never been more enthusiastically rushed, but through it all she seemed to float in a detached dream. The men were not individuals tonight, but dummies; men from Princeton, men from New Haven, new men, old beaus — were all as unreal as sticks. She wondered if her face wore that bovine expression she had often noted on the faces of stupid and apathetic girls.

“It's a mood,” she told herself. “I'm just tired.”

But next day, at a bright and active luncheon, she seemed to herself to have less vivacity than the dozen girls who boasted wanly that they hadn't gone to bed at all. After the football game she walked with Paul Dempster to the station, trying contritely to give him the last end of the week-end, as she had given him the beginning.

“Then why won't you go to the theater with us tonight?” he was pleading. “That was the understanding in my letter. We were to come to New York with you and all go to the theater.”

“Because,” she explained patiently, “Lillian and I have to be back to school by eight. That's the only condition on which we were allowed to come.”

“Oh, hell,” he said. “I’ll bet you’re doing something tonight with that Randall.”

She denied this scornfully, but Paul was suddenly realizing that Randall had dined with them, Randall had slept upon his couch, and Randall, though at the game he had sat on the Yale side of the field, was somehow with them now.

His was the last face that Paul saw as the train pulled out for the Junction.

He had thanked Paul very graciously and asked him to stay with him if he was ever in New Haven.

Nevertheless, if the miserable Princetonian had witnessed a scene in the Pennsylvania Station an hour later, his pain would have been moderated, for now Louie Randall was arguing bitterly:

“But why not take a chance? The chaperon doesn’t know what time you have to be in.”

“We do.”

When finally he had accepted the inevitable and departed, Josephine sighed and turned to Lillian.

“Where are we going to meet Wallie and Joe? At the Ritz?”

“Yes, and we’d better hurry,” said Lillian. “The Follies begin at nine.”

II

It had been like that for almost a year — a game played with technical mastery, but with the fire and enthusiasm gone — and Josephine was still a month short of eighteen. One evening during Thanksgiving vacation, as they waited for dinner in the library of Christine Dicer’s house on Gramercy Park, Josephine said to Lillian:

“I keep thinking how excited I’d have been a year ago. A new place, a new dress, meeting new men.”

“You’ve been around too much, dearie; you’re blasé.”

Josephine bridled impatiently: “I hate that word, and it’s not true. I don’t care about anything in the world except men, and you know it. But they’re not like they used to be. . . . What are you laughing at?”

“When you were six years old they were different?”

“They were. They used to have more spirit when we played drop-the-handkerchief — even the little lkeys that used to come in the back gate. The boys at dancing school were so exciting; they were all so sweet. I used to wonder what it would be like to kiss every one of them, and sometimes it was wonderful. And then came Travis and Tony Harker and Ridge Saunders and Ralph and John Bailey, and finally I began to realize that I was doing it all. They were nothing, most of them — not heroes or men of the world or anything I thought. They were just easy. That sounds conceited, but it’s true.”

She paused for a moment.

“Last night in bed I was thinking of the sort of man I really could love, but he’d be different from anybody I’ve ever met. He’d have to have certain things. He wouldn’t necessarily be very handsome, but pleasant looking; and with a good figure, and strong. Then he’d have to have some kind of position in the world, or else not care whether he had one or not; if you see what I mean. He’d have to be a leader, not just like everybody else. And dignified, but very pash, and with lots of experience, so I’d believe everything he said or thought was right. And every time I looked at him I’d have to get that thrill I sometimes get out of a new man; only with him I’d have to get it over and over every time I looked at him, all my life.”

“And you’d want him to be very much in love with you. That’s what I’d want first of all.”

“Of course,” said Josephine abstractedly, “but principally I’d want to be always sure of loving him. It’s much more fun to love someone than to be loved by someone.”

There were footsteps in the hall outside and a man walked into the room. He was an officer in the uniform of the French aviation — a glove-fitting tunic of horizon blue, and boots and belt that shone like mirrors in the lamplight. He was young, with gray eyes that seemed to be looking off into the distance, and a red-brown military mustache. Across his left breast was a line of colored ribbons, and there were gold-embroidered stripes on his arms and wings on his collar.

“Good evening,” he said courteously. “I was directed in here. I hope I’m not breaking into something.”

Josephine did not move; from head to foot she saw him, and as she watched he seemed to come nearer, filling her whole vision. She heard Lillian’s voice, and then the officer’s voice, saying:

“My name’s Dicer; I’m Christine’s cousin. Do you mind if I smoke a cigarette?”

He didn’t sit down. He moved about the room and turned over a magazine, not oblivious to their presence, but as if respecting their conversation. But when he saw that silence had fallen, he sat against a table near them with his arms folded and smiled at them.

“You’re in the French army,” Lillian ventured.

“Yes, I’ve just got back, and very glad to be here.”

He didn’t look glad, Josephine noticed. He looked as if he wanted to get out now, but had no place to go to.

For the first time in her life she felt no confidence. She had absolutely nothing to say. She hoped the emptiness that she had felt ever since her soul poured suddenly out toward his beautiful image didn’t show in her face. She made her lips into a smile, and kept thinking how once, long ago, Travis de Coppet had worn his uncle’s opera cloak to dancing school and suddenly seemed like a man out of the great world. So, now, the war overseas had gone on so long, touched us so little, save for confining us to our own shores, that it had a legendary quality about it, and the figure before her seemed to have stepped out of a gigantic red fairy tale.

She was glad when the other dinner guests came and the room filled with people, strangers she could talk to or laugh with or yawn at, according to their deserts. She despised the girls fluttering around Captain Dicer, but she admired him for not showing by a flicker of his eye that he either enjoyed it or hated it. Especially she disliked a tall, possessive blonde who once passed, her hand on his arm; he should have flicked away with a handkerchief the contamination of his immaculateness.

They went in to dinner; he was far away from her, and she was glad. All she could see of him was his blue cuff farther up the table when he reached for a glass, but she felt that they were alone together, none the less because he did not know.

The man next to her gave her the superfluous information that he was a hero:

“He’s Christine’s cousin, brought up in France, and joined at the beginning of the war. He was shot down behind the German lines and escaped by jumping off a train. There was a lot about it in the papers. I think he’s over here on some kind of propaganda work. . . . Great horseman too. Everybody likes him.”

After dinner she sat quietly while two men talked over her, sat persistently willing him to come to her. Ah, but she would be so nice, avoiding any curiosity or sentimentality about his experiences, avoiding any of the things that must have bored and embarrassed him since he had been home. She heard the voices around him:

“Captain Dicer. . . . Germans crucify all the Canadian soldiers they capture. . . . How much longer do you think the war . . . to be behind the enemy lines. . . . Were you frightened?” And then a heavy, male voice telling him about it, between puffs of a cigar: “The way I see it, Captain Dicer, neither side is getting anywhere. It strikes me they’re afraid of each other.”

It seemed a long time later that he came over to her, but at just the right moment, when there was a vacant seat beside her and he could slip into it.

“I wanted to talk to the prettiest girl for a while. I’ve wanted to all evening; it’s been pretty heavy going.”

Josephine wanted to lean against the shining leather of his belt, and more, she wanted to take his head in her lap. All her life had pointed toward this moment. She knew what he wanted, and gave it to him; not words, but a smile of warmth and delight — a smile that said, “I’m yours for the asking; I’m won.” It was not a smile that undervalued herself, because through its beauty it spoke for both of them, expressed all the potential joy that existed between them.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m a girl.”

“I thought you were a flower. I wondered why they put you on a chair.”

“*Vive la France*,” answered Josephine demurely. She dropped her eyes to his chest. “Do you collect stamps, too, or only coins?”

He laughed. “It’s good to meet an American girl again. I hoped they’d at least put me across from you at table, so I could rest my eyes on you.”

“I could see your cuff.”

“I could see your arm. At least — yes, I thought it was your green bracelet.”

Later he suggested: “Why couldn’t you come out with me one of these evenings?”

“It’s not done. I’m still in school.”

“Well, some afternoon then. I’d like to go to a tea-dance place and hear some new tunes. The newest thing I know is *Waiting for the Robert E. Lee*.”

“My nurse used to sing me to sleep with it.”

“When could you?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to make up a party. Your aunt, Mrs. Dicer, is very strict.”

“I keep forgetting,” he agreed. “How old are you?”

“Eighteen,” she said, anticipating by a month.

That was the point at which they were interrupted and the evening ended for her. The other young men in dinner coats looked like people in mourning beside the banner of his uniform. Some of them were persistent about Josephine, but she was in a reverie of horizon blue and she wanted to be alone.

“This is it at last,” something whispered inside her.

Later that night and next day, she still moved in a trance. Another day more and she would see him — forty-eight hours, forty, thirty. The very word “blasé” made her laugh; she had never known such excitement, such expectation. The blessed day itself was a haze of magic music and softly lit winter rooms, of automobiles where her knee trembled against the top lacing of his boot. She was proud of the eyes that followed them when they danced; she was proud of him even when he was dancing with another girl.

“He may think I’m too young,” she thought anxiously. “That’s why he won’t say anything. If he did, I’d leave school; I’d run away with him tonight.”

School opened next day and Josephine wrote home:

DEAR MOTHER: I wonder if I can’t spend part of the vacation in New York. Christine Dicer wants me to stay a week with her, which would still leave me a full ten days in Chicago. One reason is that the Metropolitan is putting on Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and if I come home right away I can only see the *Rheingold*. Also there are two evening dresses that aren’t finished —

The answer came by return post:

. . . because, in the first place, your eighteenth birthday falls then, and your father would feel very badly, because it would be the first birthday you hadn’t passed with us; and, in the second place, I’ve never met the Dicers; and, thirdly, I’ve planned a little dance for you and I need your help; and, lastly, I can’t believe that the reasons you give are your real ones. During Christmas week the Chicago Grand Opera Company is giving —

Meanwhile Capt. Edward Dicer had sent flowers and several formal little notes that sounded to her like translations from the French. She was self-

conscious, answering them; so she did it in slang. His French education and his years in the war while America was whirling toward the Jazz Age had made him, though he was only twenty-three, seem of a more formal, more courteous generation than her own. She wondered what he would think of such limp exotics as Travis de Coppet, or Book Chaffee, or Louie Randall. Two days before vacation he wrote asking when her train left for the West. That was something, and for seventy-two hours she lived on it, unable to turn her attention to the masses of Christmas invitations and unheeded letters that she had meant to answer before leaving. But on the day itself, Lillian brought her a marked copy of *Town Tattle* that, from its ragged appearance, had already been passed around the school.

It is rumored that a certain Tuxedo papa who was somewhat irascible about the marital choice of a previous offspring views with equanimity the fact that his remaining daughter is so often in company with a young man fresh from his exploits in the French army.

Captain Dicer did not come to the train. He sent no flowers. Lillian, who loved Josephine like part of herself, wept in their compartment. Josephine comforted her, saying: "But listen, darling; it's all the same to me. I didn't have a chance, being in school like we were. It's all right." But she was awake hours and hours after Lillian was asleep.

III

Eighteen — it was to have meant so many things: When I'm eighteen I can — Until a girl's eighteen — You'll see things differently when you're eighteen.

That, at least, was true. Josephine saw her vacation invitations as so many overdue bills. Abstractedly she counted them as she always had before — twenty-eight dances, nineteen dinner and theater parties, fifteen tea dances and receptions, a dozen luncheons, a few miscellaneous bids, ranging from early breakfast for the Yale Glee Club to a bob party at Lake Forest — seventy-eight in all, and with the small dance she was giving herself, seventy-nine. Seventy-nine promises of gayety, seventy-nine offers to share

fun with her. Patiently she sat down, choosing and weighing, referring doubtful cases to her mother.

“You seem a little white and tired,” her mother said.

“I’m wasting away. I’ve been jilted.”

“That won’t worry you very long. I know my Josephine. Tonight at the Junior League german you’ll meet the most marvelous men.”

“No, I won’t, mother. The only hope for me is to get married. I’ll learn to love him and have his children and scratch his back — ”

“Josephine!”

“I know two girls who married for love who told me they were supposed to scratch their husbands’ backs and send out the laundry. But I’ll go through with it, and the sooner the better.”

“Every girl feels like that sometimes,” said her mother cheerfully. “Before I was married I had three or four beaus, and I honestly liked each one of them as well as the others. Each one had certain qualities I liked, and I worried about it so long that it didn’t seem worth while; I might as well have counted eenie, meenie, mynie, mo. Then one day when I was feeling lonely your father came to take me driving, and from that day I never had a single doubt. Love isn’t like it is in books.”

“But it is,” said Josephine gloomily. “At least for me it always has been.”

For the first time it seemed to her more peaceful to be with a crowd than to be alone with a man. The beginning of a line wearied her; how many lines had she listened to in three years? New men were pointed out as exciting, were introduced, and she took pleasure in freezing them to unhappiness with languid answers and wandering glances. Ancient admirers looked favorably upon the metamorphosis, grateful for a little overdue time at last. Josephine was glad when the holiday drew to a close. Returning from a luncheon one gray afternoon, the day after New Year’s, she thought that for once it was nice to think she had nothing to do until dinner. Kicking off her overshoes in the hall, she found herself staring at something on the table

that at first seemed a projection of her own imagination. It was a card fresh from a case — MR. EDWARD DICER.

Instantly the world jerked into life, spun around dizzily and came to rest on a new world. The hall where he must have stood throbbed with life; she pictured his straight figure against the open door, and thought how he must have stood with his hat and cane in hand. Outside the house, Chicago, permeated with his presence, pulsed with the old delight. She heard the phone ring in the downstairs lounge and, still in her fur coat, ran for it.

“Hello!”

“Miss Josephine, please.”

“Oh, hello!”

“Oh. This is Edward Dicer.”

“I saw your card.”

“I must have just missed you.”

What did the words matter when every word was winged and breathless?

“I’m only here for the day. Unfortunately, I’m tied up for dinner tonight with the people I’m visiting.”

“Can you come over now?”

“If you like.”

“Come right away.”

She rushed upstairs to change her dress, singing for the first time in weeks. She sang:

“*Where’s my shoes?*”

Where’s my new gray shoes, shoes, shoes?

I think I put them here,

But I guess — oh, where the deuce — ”

Dressed, she was at the head of the stairs when the bell rang.

“Never mind,” she called to the maid; “I’ll answer.”

She opened upon Mr. and Mrs. Warren Dillon. They were old friends and she hadn’t seen them before, this Christmas.

“Josephine! We came to meet Constance here, but we hoped we’d have a glimpse of you; but you’re rushing around so.”

Aghast, she led the way into the library. “What time is sister meeting you?” she asked when she could.

“Oh, in half an hour, if she isn’t delayed.”

She tried to be especially polite, to atone in advance for what impoliteness might be necessary later. In five minutes the bell rang again; there was the romantic figure on the porch, cut sharp and clear against the bleak sky; and up the steps behind him came Travis de Coppet and Ed Bement.

“Stay!” she whispered quickly. “These people will all go.”

“I’ve two hours,” he said. “Of course, I’ll wait if you want me to.”

She wanted to throw her arms around him then, but she controlled herself, even her hands. She introduced everyone, she sent for tea. The men asked Edward Dicer questions about the war and he parried them politely but restlessly.

After half an hour he asked Josephine: “Have you the time? I must keep track of my train.”

They might have noticed the watch on his own wrist and taken the hint, but he fascinated them all, as though they had isolated a rare specimen and were determined to find out all about it. Even had they realized Josephine’s state of mind, it would have seemed to them that she was selfish to want something of such general interest for her own.

The arrival of Constance, her married sister, did not help matters; again Dicer was caught up into the phenomenon of human curiosity. As the clock in the hall struck six, he shot a desperate glance at Josephine. With a

belated appreciation of the situation, the group broke itself up. Constance took the Dillons upstairs to the other sitting room, the two young men went home.

Silence, save for the voices fading off on the stairs, the automobile crunching away on the snow outside. Before a word was said, Josephine rang for the maid, and instructing her that she was not at home, closed the door into the hall. Then she went and sat down on the couch next to him and clasped her hands and waited.

“Thank God,” he said. “I thought if they stayed another minute — ”

“Wasn’t it terrible?”

“I came out here because of you. The night you left New York I was ten minutes late getting to the train because I was detained at the French propaganda office. I’m not much good at letters. Since then I’ve thought of nothing but getting out here to see you.”

“I felt sad.” But not now; now she was thinking that in a moment she would be in his arms, feeling the buttons of his tunic press bruisingly against her, feeling his diagonal belt as something that bound them both and made her part of him. There were no doubts, no reservations, he was everything she wanted.

“I’m over here for six months more — perhaps a year. Then, if this damned war goes on, I’ll have to go back. I suppose I haven’t really got the right — ”

“Wait — wait!” she cried. She wanted a moment longer to taste, to feel fully her happiness. “Wait,” she repeated, putting her hand on his. She felt every object in the room vividly; she saw the seconds passing, each one carrying a load of loveliness toward the future. “All right; now tell me.”

“Just that I love you,” he whispered. She was in his arms, her hair against his cheek. “We haven’t known each other long, and you’re only eighteen, but I’ve learned to be afraid of waiting.”

Now she leaned her head back until she was looking up at him, supported by his arm. Her neck curved gracefully, full and soft, and she leaned in toward his shoulder, as she knew how, so that her lips were every minute closer to

him. "Now," she thought. He gave a funny little sigh and pulled her face up to his.

After a minute she leaned away from him and twisted herself upright.

"Darling — darling — darling," he said.

She looked at him, stared at him. Gently he pulled her over again and kissed her. This time, when she sat up, she rose and went across the room, where she opened a dish of almonds and dropped some in her mouth. Then she came back and sat beside him, looking straight ahead, then darting a sudden glance at him.

"What are you thinking, darling, darling Josephine?" She didn't answer; he put both hands over hers. "What are you feeling, then?"

As he breathed, she could hear the faint sound of his leather belt moving on his shoulder; she could feel his strong, kind handsome eyes looking at her; she could feel his proud self feeding on glory as others feed on security; she heard the jingle of spurs ring in his strong, rich, compelling voice.

"I feel nothing at all," she said.

"What do you mean?" He was startled.

"Oh, help me!" she cried. "Help me!"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Kiss me again."

He kissed her. This time he held on to her and looked down into her face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You mean you don't love me?"

"I don't feel anything."

"But you did love me."

"I don't know."

He let her go. She went across the room and sat down.

“I don’t understand,” he said after a minute.

“I think you’re perfect,” she said, her lips quivering.

“But I’m not — thrilling to you?”

“Oh, yes, very thrilling. I was thrilled all afternoon.”

“Then what is it, darling?”

“I don’t know. When you kissed me I wanted to laugh.” It made her sick to say this, but a desperate, interior honesty drove her on. She saw his eyes change, saw him withdrawing a little from her. “Help me,” she repeated.

“Help you how? You’ll have to be more definite. I love you; I thought perhaps you loved me. That’s all. If I don’t please you — ”

“But you do. You’re everything — you’re everything I’ve always wanted.” Her voice continued inside herself: “But I’ve had everything.”

“But you simply don’t love me.”

“I’ve got nothing to give you. I don’t feel anything at all.”

He got up abruptly. He felt her vast, tragic apathy pervading the room, and it set up an indifference in him now, too — a lot of things suddenly melted out of him.

“Good-by.”

“You won’t help me,” she murmured abstractedly.

“How in the devil can I help you?” he answered impatiently. “You feel indifferent to me. You can’t change that, but neither can I. Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

She was very tired and lay face downward on the couch with that awful, awful realization that all the old things are true. One cannot both spend and have. The love of her life had come by, and looking in her empty basket, she had found not a flower left for him — not one. After a while she wept.

“Oh, what have I done to myself?” she wailed. “What have I done? What have I done?”

A FREEZE-OUT

I

Saturday Evening Post (19 December 1931)

Here and there in a sunless corner skulked a little snow under a veil of coal specks, but the men taking down storm windows were laboring in shirt sleeves and the turf was becoming firm underfoot.

In the streets, dresses dyed after fruit, leaf and flower emerged from beneath the shed somber skins of animals; now only a few old men wore mousy caps pulled down over their ears. That was the day Forrest Winslow forgot the long fret of the past winter as one forgets inevitable afflictions, sickness, and war, and turned with blind confidence toward the summer, thinking he already recognized in it all the summers of the past — the golfing, sailing, swimming summers.

For eight years Forrest had gone East to school and then to college; now he worked for his father in a large Minnesota city. He was handsome, popular and rather spoiled in a conservative way, and so the past year had been a comedown. The discrimination that had picked Scroll and Key at New Haven was applied to sorting furs; the hand that had signed the Junior Prom expense checks had since rocked in a sling for two months with mild *dermatitis venenata*. After work, Forrest found no surcease in the girls with whom he had grown up. On the contrary, the news of a stranger within the tribe stimulated him and during the transit of a popular visitor he displayed a convulsive activity. So far, nothing had happened; but here was summer.

On the day spring broke through and summer broke through — it is much the same thing in Minnesota — Forrest stopped his coupé in front of a music store and took his pleasant vanity inside. As he said to the clerk, “I want some records,” a little bomb of excitement exploded in his larynx, causing an unfamiliar and almost painful vacuum in his upper diaphragm.

The unexpected detonation was caused by the sight of a corn-colored girl who was being waited on across the counter.

She was a stalk of ripe corn, but bound not as cereals are but as a rare first edition, with all the binder's art. She was lovely and expensive, and about nineteen, and he had never seen her before. She looked at him for just an unnecessary moment too long, with so much self-confidence that he felt his own rush out and away to join hers — ". . . from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Then her head swayed forward and she resumed her inspection of a catalogue.

Forrest looked at the list a friend had sent him from New York. Unfortunately, the first title was: "When Voo-do-o-do Meets Boop-boop-a-doop, There'll Soon be a Hot-Cha-Cha." Forrest read it with horror. He could scarcely believe a title could be so repulsive.

Meanwhile the girl was asking: "Isn't there a record of Prokofiev's 'Fils Prodigue'?"

"I'll see, madam." The saleswoman turned to Forrest.

"When Voo — " Forrest began, and then repeated, "When Voo — "

There was no use; he couldn't say it in front of that nymph of the harvest across the table.

"Never mind that one," he said quickly. "Give me 'Huggable — "

Again he broke off.

"Huggable, Kissable You'?" suggested the clerk helpfully, and her assurance that it was very nice suggested a humiliating community of taste.

"I want Stravinsky's 'Fire Bird,'" said the other customer, "and this album of Chopin waltzes."

Forrest ran his eye hastily down the rest of his list: "Digga Diggity," "Ever So Goosy," "Bunkey Doodle I Do."

"Anybody would take me for a moron," he thought. He crumpled up the list and fought for air — his own kind of air, the air of casual superiority.

“I’d like,” he said coldly, “Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight Sonata.’”

There was a record of it at home, but it didn’t matter. It gave him the right to glance at the girl again and again. Life became interesting; she was the loveliest concoction; it would be easy to trace her. With the “Moonlight Sonata” wrapped face to face with “Huggable, Kissable You,” Forrest quitted the shop.

There was a new book store down the street, and here also he entered, as if books and records could fill the vacuum that spring was making in his heart. As he looked among the lifeless words of many titles together, he was wondering how soon he could find her, and what then.

“I’d like a hard-boiled detective story,” he said.

A weary young man shook his head with patient reproof; simultaneously, a spring draft from the door blew in with it the familiar glow of cereal hair.

“We don’t carry detective stories or stuff like that,” said the young man in an unnecessarily loud voice. “I imagine you’ll find it at a department store.”

“I thought you carried books,” said Forrest feebly.

“Books, yes, but not that kind.” The young man turned to wait on his other customer.

As Forrest stalked out, passing within the radius of the girl’s perfume, he heard her ask:

“Have you got anything of Louis Arragon’s, either in French or in translation?”

“She’s just showing off,” he thought angrily. “They skip right from Peter Rabbit to Marcel Proust these days.”

Outside, parked just behind his own adequate coupé, he found an enormous silver-colored roadster of English make and custom design. Disturbed, even upset, he drove homeward through the moist, golden afternoon.

The Winslows lived in an old, wide-verandaed house on Crest Avenue — Forrest’s father and mother, his great-grandmother and his sister Eleanor.

They were solid people as that phrase goes since the war. Old Mrs. Forrest was entirely solid; with convictions based on a way of life that had worked for eighty-four years. She was a character in the city; she remembered the Sioux war and she had been in Stillwater the day the James brothers shot up the main street.

Her own children were dead and she looked on these remoter descendants from a distance, oblivious of the forces that had formed them. She understood that the Civil War and the opening up of the West were forces, while the free-silver movement and the World War had reached her only as news. But she knew that her father, killed at Cold Harbor, and her husband, the merchant, were larger in scale than her son or her grandson. People who tried to explain contemporary phenomena to her seemed, to her, to be talking against the evidence of their own senses. Yet she was not atrophied; last summer she had traveled over half of Europe with only a maid.

Forrest's father and mother were something else again. They had been in the susceptible middle thirties when the cocktail party and its concomitants arrived in 1921. They were divided people, leaning forward and backward. Issues that presented no difficulty to Mrs. Forrest caused them painful heat and agitation. Such an issue arose before they had been five minutes at table that night.

"Do you know the Rikkers are coming back?" said Mrs. Winslow. "They've taken the Warner house." She was a woman with many uncertainties, which she concealed from herself by expressing her opinions very slowly and thoughtfully, to convince her own ears. "It's a wonder Dan Warner would rent them his house. I suppose Cathy thinks everybody will fall all over themselves."

"What Cathy?" asked old Mrs. Forrest.

"She was Cathy Chase. Her father was Reynold Chase. She and her husband are coming back here."

"Oh, yes."

"I scarcely knew her," continued Mrs. Winslow, "but I know that when they were in Washington they were pointedly rude to everyone from Minnesota

— went out of their way. Mary Cowan was spending a winter there, and she invited Cathy to lunch or tea at least half a dozen times. Cathy never appeared.”

“I could beat that record,” said Pierce Winslow. “Mary Cowan could invite me a hundred times and I wouldn’t go.”

“Anyhow,” pursued his wife slowly, “in view of all the scandal, it’s just asking for the cold shoulder to come out here.”

“They’re asking for it, all right,” said Winslow. He was a Southerner, well liked in the city, where he had lived for thirty years. “Walter Hannan came in my office this morning and wanted me to second Rikker for the Kennemore Club. I said: ‘Walter, I’d rather second Al Capone.’ What’s more, Rikker’ll get into the Kennemore Club over my dead body.”

“Walter had his nerve. What’s Chauncey Rikker to you? It’ll be hard to get anyone to second him.”

“Who are they?” Eleanor asked. “Somebody awful?”

She was eighteen and a *débutante*. Her current appearances at home were so rare and brief that she viewed such table topics with as much detachment as her great-grandmother.

“Cathy was a girl here; she was younger than I was, but I remember that she was always considered fast. Her husband, Chauncey Rikker, came from some little town upstate.”

“What did they do that was so awful?”

“Rikker went bankrupt and left town,” said her father. “There were a lot of ugly stories. Then he went to Washington and got mixed up in the alien-property scandal; and then he got in trouble in New York — he was in the bucket-shop business — but he skipped out to Europe. After a few years the chief Government witness died and he came back to America. They got him for a few months for contempt of court.” He expanded into eloquent irony: “And now, with true patriotism, he comes back to his beautiful Minnesota, a product of its lovely woods, its rolling wheat fields — ”

Forrest called him impatiently: “Where do you get that, father? When did two Kentuckians ever win Nobel prizes in the same year? And how about an upstate boy named Lind — ”

“Have the Rikkers any children?” Eleanor asked.

“I think Cathy has a daughter about your age, and a boy about sixteen.”

Forrest uttered a small, unnoticed exclamation. Was it possible? French books and Russian music — that girl this afternoon had lived abroad. And with the probability his resentment deepened — the daughter of a crook putting on all that dog! He sympathized passionately with his father’s refusal to second Rikker for the Kennemore Club.

“Are they rich?” old Mrs. Forrest suddenly demanded.

“They must be well off if they took Dan Warner’s house.”

“Then they’ll get in all right.”

“They won’t get into the Kennemore Club,” said Pierce Winslow. “I happen to come from a state with certain traditions.”

“I’ve seen the bottom rail get to be the top rail many times in this town,” said the old lady blandly.

“But this man’s a criminal, grandma,” explained Forrest. “Can’t you see the difference? It isn’t a social question. We used to argue at New Haven whether we’d shake hands with Al Capone if we met him — ”

“Who is Al Capone?” asked Mrs. Forrest.

“He’s another criminal, in Chicago.”

“Does he want to join the Kennemore Club too?”

They laughed, but Forrest had decided that if Rikker came up for the Kennemore Club, his father’s would not be the only black ball in the box.

Abruptly it became full summer. After the last April storm someone came along the street one night, blew up the trees like balloons, scattered bulbs

and shrubs like confetti, opened a cage full of robins and, after a quick look around, signaled up the curtain upon a new backdrop of summer sky.

Tossing back a strayed baseball to some kids in a vacant lot, Forrest's fingers, on the stitched seams of the stained leather cover, sent a wave of ecstatic memories to his brain. One must hurry and get there — "there" was now the fairway of the golf course, but his feeling was the same. Only when he teed off at the eighteenth that afternoon did he realize that it wasn't the same, that it would never be enough any more. The evening stretched large and empty before him, save for the set pieces of a dinner party and bed.

While he waited with his partner for a match to play off, Forrest glanced at the tenth tee, exactly opposite and two hundred yards away.

One of the two figures on the ladies' tee was addressing her ball; as he watched, she swung up confidently and cracked a long drive down the fairway.

"Must be Mrs. Horrick," said his friend. "No other woman can drive like that."

At that moment the sun glittered on the girl's hair and Forrest knew who it was; simultaneously, he remembered what he must do this afternoon. That night Chauncey Rikker's name was to come up before the membership committee on which his father sat, and before going home, Forrest was going to pass the clubhouse and leave a certain black slip in a little box. He had carefully considered all that; he loved the city where his people had lived honorable lives for five generations. His grandfather had been a founder of this club in the 90's when it went in for sailboat racing instead of golf, and when it took a fast horse three hours to trot out here from town. He agreed with his father that certain people were without the pale. Tightening his face, he drove his ball two hundred yards down the fairway, where it curved gently into the rough.

The eighteenth and tenth holes were parallel and faced in opposite directions. Between tees they were separated by a belt of trees forty feet wide. Though Forrest did not know it, Miss Rikker's hostess, Helen Hannan,

had dubbed into this same obscurity, and as he went in search of his ball he heard female voices twenty feet away.

“You’ll be a member after tonight,” he heard Helen Hannan say, “and then you can get some real competition from Stella Horrick.”

“Maybe I won’t be a member,” said a quick, clear voice. “Then you’ll have to come and play with me on the public links.”

“Alida, don’t be absurd.”

“Why? I played on the public links in Buffalo all last spring. For the moment there wasn’t anywhere else. It’s like playing on some courses in Scotland.”

“But I’d feel so silly. . . . Oh, gosh, let’s let the ball go.”

“There’s nobody behind us. As to feeling silly — if I cared about public opinion any more, I’d spend my time in my bedroom.” She laughed scornfully. “A tabloid published a picture of me going to see father in prison. And I’ve seen people change their tables away from us on steamers, and once I was cut by all the American girls in a French school. . . . Here’s your ball.”

“Thanks. . . . Oh, Alida, it seems terrible.”

“All the terrible part is over. I just said that so you wouldn’t be too sorry for us if people didn’t want us in this club. I wouldn’t care; I’ve got a life of my own and my own standard of what trouble is. It wouldn’t touch me at all.”

They passed out of the clearing and their voices disappeared into the open sky on the other side. Forrest abandoned the search for his lost ball and walked toward the caddie house.

“What a hell of a note,” he thought. “To take it out on a girl that had nothing to do with it” — which was what he was doing this minute as he went up toward the club. “No,” he said to himself abruptly, “I can’t do it. Whatever her father may have done, she happens to be a lady. Father can do what he feels he has to do, but I’m out.”

After lunch the next day, his father said rather diffidently: “I see you didn’t do anything about the Rikkens and the Kennemore Club.”

“No.”

“It’s just as well,” said his father. “As a matter of fact, they got by. The club has got rather mixed anyhow in the last five years — a good many queer people in it. And, after all, in a club you don’t have to know anybody you don’t want to. The other people on the committee felt the same way.”

“I see,” said Forrest dryly. “Then you didn’t argue against the Rikkers?”

“Well, no. The thing is I do a lot of business with Walter Hannan, and it happened yesterday I was obliged to ask him rather a difficult favor.”

“So you traded with him.” To both father and son, the word “traded” sounded like traitor.

“Not exactly. The matter wasn’t mentioned.”

“I understand,” Forrest said. But he did not understand, and some old childhood faith in his father died at that moment.

II

To snub anyone effectively one must have him within range. The admission of Chauncey Rikker to the Kennemore Club and, later, to the Downtown Club was followed by angry talk and threats of resignation that simulated the sound of conflict, but there was no indication of a will underneath. On the other hand, unpleasantness in crowds is easy, and Chauncey Rikker was a facile object for personal dislike; moreover, a recurrent echo of the bucket-shop scandal sounded from New York, and the matter was reviewed in the local newspapers, in case anyone had missed it. Only the liberal Hannan family stood by the Rikkers, and their attitude aroused considerable resentment, and their attempt to launch them with a series of small parties proved a failure. Had the Rikkers attempted to “bring Alida out,” it would have been for the inspection of a motley crowd indeed, but they didn’t.

When, occasionally during the summer, Forrest encountered Alida Rikker, they crossed eyes in the curious way of children who don’t know each other. For a while he was haunted by her curly yellow head, by the golden-brown

defiance of her eyes; then he became interested in another girl. He wasn't in love with Jane Drake, though he thought he might marry her. She was "the girl across the street"; he knew her qualities, good and bad, so that they didn't matter. She had an essential reality underneath, like a relative. It would please their families. Once, after several highballs and some casual necking, he almost answered seriously when she provoked him with "But you don't really care about me"; but he sat tight and next morning was relieved that he had. Perhaps in the dull days after Christmas — Meanwhile, at the Christmas dances among the Christmas girls he might find the ecstasy and misery, the infatuation that he wanted. By autumn he felt that his predestined girl was already packing her trunk in some Eastern or Southern city.

It was in his more restless mood that one November Sunday he went to a small tea. Even as he spoke to his hostess he felt Alida Rikker across the firelit room; her glowing beauty and her unexplored novelty pressed up against him, and there was a relief in being presented to her at last. He bowed and passed on, but there had been some sort of communication. Her look said that she knew the stand that his family had taken, that she didn't mind, and was even sorry to see him in such a silly position, for she knew that he admired her. His look said: "Naturally, I'm sensitive to your beauty, but you see how it is; we've had to draw the line at the fact that your father is a dirty dog, and I can't withdraw from my present position."

Suddenly in a silence, she was talking, and his ears swayed away from his own conversation.

"... Helen had this odd pain for over a year and, of course, they suspected cancer. She went to have an X ray; she undressed behind a screen, and the doctor looked at her through the machine, and then he said, 'But I told you to take off all your clothes,' and Helen said, 'I have.' The doctor looked again, and said, 'Listen, my dear, I brought you into the world, so there's no use being modest with me. Take off everything.' So Helen said, 'I've got every stitch off; I swear.' But the doctor said, 'You have not. The X ray shows me a safety pin in your brassiere.' Well, they finally found out that she'd been suspected of swallowing a safety pin when she was two years old."

The story, floating in her clear, crisp voice upon the intimate air, disarmed Forrest. It had nothing to do with what had taken place in Washington or New York ten years before. Suddenly he wanted to go and sit near her, because she was the tongue of flame that made the firelight vivid. Leaving, he walked for an hour through feathery snow, wondering again why he couldn't know her, why it was his business to represent a standard.

“Well, maybe I'll have a lot of fun some day doing what I ought to do,” he thought ironically — “when I'm fifty.”

The first Christmas dance was the charity ball at the armory. It was a large, public affair; the rich sat in boxes. Everyone came who felt he belonged, and many out of curiosity, so the atmosphere was tense with a strange haughtiness and aloofness.

The Rikkers had a box. Forrest, coming in with Jane Drake, glanced at the man of evil reputation and at the beaten woman frozen with jewels who sat beside him. They were the city's villains, gaped at by the people of reserved and timid lives. Oblivious of the staring eyes, Alida and Helen Hannan held court for several young men from out of town. Without question, Alida was incomparably the most beautiful girl in the room.

Several people told Forrest the news — the Rikkers were giving a big dance after New Year's. There were written invitations, but these were being supplemented by oral ones. Rumor had it that one had merely to be presented to any Rikker in order to be bidden to the dance.

As Forrest passed through the hall, two friends stopped him and with a certain hilarity introduced him to a youth of seventeen, Mr. Teddy Rikker.

“We're giving a dance,” said the young man immediately. “January third. Be very happy if you could come.”

Forrest was afraid he had an engagement.

“Well, come if you change your mind.”

“Horrible kid, but shrewd,” said one of his friends later. “We were feeding him people, and when we brought up a couple of saps, he looked at them

and didn't say a word. Some refuse and a few accept and most of them stall, but he goes right on; he's got his father's crust."

Into the highways and byways. Why didn't the girl stop it? He was sorry for her when he found Jane in a group of young women reveling in the story.

"I hear they asked Bodman, the undertaker, by mistake, and then took it back."

"Mrs. Carleton pretended she was deaf."

"There's going to be a carload of champagne from Canada."

"Of course, I won't go, but I'd love to, just to see what happens. There'll be a hundred men to every girl — and that'll be meat for her."

The accumulated malice repelled him, and he was angry at Jane for being part of it. Turning away, his eyes fell on Alida's proud form swaying along a wall, watched the devotion of her partners with an unpleasant resentment. He did not know that he had been a little in love with her for many months. Just as two children can fall in love during a physical struggle over a ball, so their awareness of each other had grown to surprising proportions.

"She's pretty," said Jane. "She's not exactly overdressed, but considering everything, she dresses too elaborately."

"I suppose she ought to wear sackcloth and ashes or half mourning."

"I was honored with a written invitation, but, of course, I'm not going."

"Why not?"

Jane looked at him in surprise. "You're not going."

"That's different. I would if I were you. You see, you don't care what her father did."

"Of course, I care."

"No, you don't. And all this small meanness just debases the whole thing. Why don't they let her alone? She's young and pretty and she's done nothing wrong."

Later in the week he saw Alida at the Hannans' dance and noticed that many men danced with her. He saw her lips moving, heard her laughter, caught a word or so of what she said; irresistibly he found himself guiding partners around in her wake. He envied visitors to the city who didn't know who she was.

The night of the Rikkens' dance he went to a small dinner; before they sat down at table he realized that the others were all going on to the Rikkens'. They talked of it as a sort of comic adventure; insisted that he come too.

"Even if you weren't invited, it's all right," they assured him. "We were told we could bring anyone. It's just a free-for-all; it doesn't put you under any obligations. Norma Nash is going and she didn't invite Alida Rikker to her party. Besides, she's really very nice. My brother's quite crazy about her. Mother is worried sick, because he says he wants to marry her."

Clasping his hand about a new highball, Forrest knew that if he drank it he would probably go. All his reasons for not going seemed old and tired, and, fatally, he had begun to seem absurd to himself. In vain he tried to remember the purpose he was serving, and found none. His father had weakened on the matter of the Kennemore Club. And now suddenly he found reasons for going — men could go where their women could not.

"All right," he said.

The Rikkens' dance was in the ballroom of the Minnekada Hotel. The Rikkens' gold, ill-gotten, tainted, had taken the form of a forest of palms, vines and flowers. The two orchestras moaned in pergolas lit with fireflies, and many-colored spotlights swept the floor, touching a buffet where dark bottles gleamed. The receiving line was still in action when Forrest's party came in, and Forrest grinned ironically at the prospect of taking Chauncey Rikker by the hand. But at the sight of Alida, her look that at last fell frankly on him, he forgot everything else.

"Your brother was kind enough to invite me," he said.

"Oh, yes," she was polite, but vague; not at all overwhelmed by his presence. As he waited to speak to her parents, he started, seeing his sister in a group of dancers. Then, one after another, he identified people he

knew: it might have been any one of the Christmas dances; all the younger crowd were there. He discovered abruptly that he and Alida were alone; the receiving line had broken up. Alida glanced at him questioningly and with a certain amusement.

So he danced out on the floor with her, his head high, but slightly spinning. Of all things in the world, he had least expected to lead off the Chauncey Ridders' ball.

III

Next morning his first realization was that he had kissed her; his second was a feeling of profound shame for his conduct of the evening. Lord help him, he had been the life of the party; he had helped to run the cotillion. From the moment when he danced out on the floor, coolly meeting the surprised and interested glances of his friends, a mood of desperation had come over him. He rushed Alida Rikker, until a friend asked him what Jane was going to say. "What business is it of Jane's?" he demanded impatiently. "We're not engaged." But he was impelled to approach his sister and ask her if he looked all right.

"Apparently," Eleanor answered, "but when in doubt, don't take any more."

So he hadn't. Exteriorly he remained correct, but his libido was in a state of wild extroversion. He sat with Alida Rikker and told her he had loved her for months.

"Every night I thought of you just before you went to sleep," his voice trembled with insincerity, "I was afraid to meet you or speak to you. Sometimes I'd see you in the distance moving along like a golden chariot, and the world would be good to live in."

After twenty minutes of this eloquence, Alida began to feel exceedingly attractive. She was tired and rather happy, and eventually she said:

"All right, you can kiss me if you want to, but it won't mean anything. I'm just not in that mood."

But Forrest had moods enough for both; he kissed her as if they stood together at the altar. A little later he had thanked Mrs. Rikker with deep emotion for the best time he had ever had in his life.

It was noon, and as he groped his way upright in bed, Eleanor came in in her dressing gown.

“How are you?” she asked.

“Awful.”

“How about what you told me coming back in the car? Do you actually want to marry Alida Rikker?”

“Not this morning.”

“That’s all right then. Now, look: the family are furious.”

“Why?” he asked with some redundancy.

“Both you and I being there. Father heard that you led the cotillion. My explanation was that my dinner party went, and so I had to go; but then you went too!”

Forrest dressed and went down to Sunday dinner. Over the table hovered an atmosphere of patient, puzzled, unworldly disappointment. Finally Forrest launched into it:

“Well, we went to Al Capone’s party and had a fine time.”

“So I’ve heard,” said Pierce Winslow dryly. Mrs. Winslow said nothing.

“Everybody was there — the Kayes, the Schwanes, the Martins and the Blacks. From now on, the Rikkers are pillars of society. Every house is open to them.”

“Not this house,” said his mother. “They won’t come into this house.” And after a moment: “Aren’t you going to eat anything, Forrest?”

“No, thanks. I mean, yes, I am eating.” He looked cautiously at his plate.

“The girl is very nice. There isn’t a girl in town with better manners or more stuff. If things were like they were before the war, I’d say — ”

He couldn't think exactly what it was he would have said; all he knew was that he was now on an entirely different road from his parents'.

"This city was scarcely more than a village before the war," said old Mrs. Forrest.

"Forrest means the World War, granny," said Eleanor.

"Some things don't change," said Pierce Winslow. Both he and Forrest thought of the Kennemore Club matter and, feeling guilty, the older man lost his temper:

"When people start going to parties given by a convicted criminal, there's something serious the matter with them."

"We won't discuss it any more at table," said Mrs. Winslow hastily.

About four, Forrest called a number on the telephone in his room. He had known for some time that he was going to call a number.

"Is Miss Rikker at home? . . . Oh, hello. This is Forrest Winslow."

"How are you?"

"Terrible. It was a good party."

"Wasn't it?"

"Too good. What are you doing?"

"Entertaining two awful hangovers."

"Will you entertain me too?"

"I certainly will. Come on over."

The two young men could only groan and play sentimental music on the phonograph, but presently they departed; the fire leaped up, day went out behind the windows, and Forrest had rum in his tea.

"So we met at last," he said.

"The delay was all yours."

“Damn prejudice,” he said. “This is a conservative city, and your father being in this trouble — ”

“I can’t discuss my father with you.”

“Excuse me. I only wanted to say that I’ve felt like a fool lately for not knowing you. For cheating myself out of the pleasure of knowing you for a silly prejudice,” he blundered on. “So I decided to follow my own instincts.”

She stood up suddenly. “Good-by, Mr. Winslow.”

“What? Why?”

“Because it’s absurd for you to come here as if you were doing me a favor. And after accepting our hospitality, to remind me of my father’s troubles is simply bad manners.”

He was on his feet, terribly upset. “That isn’t what I meant. I said I had felt that way, and I despised myself for it. Please don’t be sore.”

“Then don’t be condescending.” She sat back in her chair. Her mother came in, stayed only a moment, and threw Forrest a glance of resentment and suspicion as she left. But her passage through had brought them together, and they talked frankly for a long time.

“I ought to be upstairs dressing.”

“I ought to have gone an hour ago, and I can’t.”

“Neither can I.”

With the admission they had traveled far. At the door he kissed her unreluctant lips and walked home, throwing futile buckets of reason on the wild fire.

Less than two weeks later it happened. In a car parked in a blizzard he poured out his worship, and she lay on his chest, sighing, “Oh, me too — me too.”

Already Forrest’s family knew where he went in the evenings; there was a frightened coolness, and one morning his mother said:

“Son, you don’t want to throw yourself away on some girl that isn’t up to you. I thought you were interested in Jane Drake.”

“Don’t bring that up. I’m not going to talk about it.”

But it was only a postponement. Meanwhile the days of this February were white and magical, the nights were starry and crystalline. The town lay under a cold glory; the smell of her furs was incense, her bright cheeks were flames upon a northern altar. An ecstatic pantheism for his land and its weather welled up in him. She had brought him finally back to it; he would live here always.

“I want you so much that nothing can stand in the way of that,” he said to Alida. “But I owe my parents a debt that I can’t explain to you. They did more than spend money on me; they tried to give me something more intangible — something that their parents had given them and that they thought was worth handing on. Evidently it didn’t take with me, but I’ve got to make this as easy as possible for them.” He saw by her face that he had hurt her. “Darling — ”

“Oh, it frightens me when you talk like that,” she said. “Are you going to reproach me later? It would be awful. You’ll have to get it out of your head that you’re doing anything wrong. My standards are as high as yours, and I can’t start out with my father’s sins on my shoulders.” She thought for a moment. “You’ll never be able to reconcile it all like a children’s story. You’ve got to choose. Probably you’ll have to hurt either your family or hurt me.”

A fortnight later the storm broke at the Winslow house. Pierce Winslow came home in a quiet rage and had a session behind closed doors with his wife. Afterward she knocked at Forrest’s door.

“Your father had a very embarrassing experience today. Chauncey Rikker came up to him in the Downtown Club and began talking about you as if you were on terms of some understanding with his daughter. Your father walked away, but we’ve got to know. Are you serious about Miss Rikker?”

“I want to marry her,” he said.

“Oh, Forrest!”

She talked for a long time, recapitulating, as if it were a matter of centuries, the eighty years that his family had been identified with the city; when she passed from this to the story of his father’s health, Forrest interrupted:

“That’s all so irrelevant, mother. If there was anything against Alida personally, what you say would have some weight, but there isn’t.”

“She’s overdressed; she runs around with everybody — ”

“She isn’t a bit different from Eleanor. She’s absolutely a lady in every sense. I feel like a fool even discussing her like this. You’re just afraid it’ll connect you in some way with the Rikkers.”

“I’m not afraid of that,” said his mother, annoyed. “Nothing would ever do that. But I’m afraid that it’ll separate you from everything worth while, everybody that loves you. It isn’t fair for you to upset our lives, let us in for disgraceful gossip — ”

“I’m to give up the girl I love because you’re afraid of a little gossip.”

The controversy was resumed next day, with Pierce Winslow debating. His argument was that he was born in old Kentucky, that he had always felt uneasy at having begotten a son upon a pioneer Minnesota family, and that this was what he might have expected. Forrest felt that his parents’ attitude was trivial and disingenuous. Only when he was out of the house, acting against their wishes, did he feel any compunction. But always he felt that something precious was being frayed away — his youthful companionship with his father and his love and trust for his mother. Hour by hour he saw the past being irreparably spoiled, and save when he was with Alida, he was deeply unhappy.

One spring day when the situation had become unendurable, with half the family meals taken in silence, Forrest’s great-grandmother stopped him on the stair landing and put her hand on his arm.

“Has this girl really a good character?” she asked, her fine, clear, old eyes resting on his.

“Of course she has, grandma.”

“Then marry her.”

“Why do you say that?” Forrest asked curiously.

“It would stop all this nonsense and we could have some peace. And I’ve been thinking I’d like to be a great-great-grandmother before I die.”

Her frank selfishness appealed to him more than the righteousness of the others. That night he and Alida decided to be married the first of June, and telephoned the announcement to the papers.

Now the storm broke in earnest. Crest Avenue rang with gossip — how Mrs. Rikker had called on Mrs. Winslow, who was not at home. How Forrest had gone to live in the University Club. How Chauncey Rikker and Pierce Winslow had had words in the Downtown Club.

It was true that Forrest had gone to the University Club. On a May night, with summer sounds already gathered on the window screens, he packed his trunk and his suitcases in the room where he had lived as a boy. His throat contracted and he smeared his face with his dusty hand as he took a row of golf cups off the mantelpiece, and he choked to himself: “If they won’t take Alida, then they’re not my family any more.”

As he finished packing, his mother came in.

“You’re not really leaving.” Her voice was stricken.

“I’m moving to the University Club.”

“That’s so unnecessary. No one bothers you here. You do what you want.”

“I can’t bring Alida here.”

“Father — ”

“Hell with father!” he said wildly.

She sat down on the bed beside him. “Stay here, Forrest. I promise not to argue with you any more. But stay here.”

“I can’t.”

“I can’t have you go!” she wailed. “It seems as if we’re driving you out, and we’re not!”

“You mean it looks as though you were driving me out.”

“I don’t mean that.”

“Yes, you do. And I want to say that I don’t think you and father really care a hang about Chauncey Rikker’s moral character.”

“That’s not true, Forrest. I hate people that behave badly and break the laws. My own father would never have let Chauncey Rikker — ”

“I’m not talking about your father. But neither you nor my father care a bit what Chauncey Rikker did. I bet you don’t even know what it was.”

“Of course I know. He stole some money and went abroad, and when he came back they put him in prison.”

“They put him in prison for contempt of court.”

“Now you’re defending him, Forrest.”

“I’m not! I hate his guts; undoubtedly he’s a crook. But I tell you it was a shock to me to find that father didn’t have any principles. He and his friends sit around the Downtown Club and pan Chauncey Rikker, but when it comes to keeping him out of a club, they develop weak spines.”

“That was a small thing.”

“No, it wasn’t. None of the men of father’s age have any principles. I don’t know why. I’m willing to make an allowance for an honest conviction, but I’m not going to be booed by somebody that hasn’t got any principles and simply pretends to have.”

His mother sat helplessly, knowing that what he said was true. She and her husband and all their friends had no principles. They were good or bad according to their natures; often they struck attitudes remembered from the past, but they were never sure as her father or her grandfather had been sure. Confusedly she supposed it was something about religion. But how could you get principles just by wishing for them?

The maid announced the arrival of a taxi.

“Send up Olsen for my baggage,” said Forrest; then to his mother, “I’m not taking the coupé; I left the keys. I’m just taking my clothes. I suppose father will let me keep my job down town.”

“Forrest, don’t talk that way. Do you think your father would take your living away from you, no matter what you did?”

“Such things have happened.”

“You’re hard and difficult,” she wept. “Please stay here a little longer, and perhaps things will be better and father will get a little more reconciled. Oh, stay, stay! I’ll talk to father again. I’ll do my best to fix things.”

“Will you let me bring Alida here?”

“Not now. Don’t ask me that. I couldn’t bear — ”

“All right,” he said grimly.

Olsen came in for the bags. Crying and holding on to his coat sleeve, his mother went with him to the front door.

“Won’t you say good-by to father?”

“Why? I’ll see him tomorrow in the office.”

“Forrest, I was thinking, why don’t you go to a hotel instead of the University Club?”

“Why, I thought I’d be more comfortable — ” Suddenly he realized that his presence would be less conspicuous at a hotel. Shutting up his bitterness inside him, he kissed his mother roughly and went to the cab.

Unexpectedly, it stopped by the corner lamp-post at a hail from the sidewalk, and the May twilight yielded up Alida, miserable and pale.

“What is it?” he demanded.

“I had to come,” she said. “Stop the car. I’ve been thinking of you leaving your house on account of me, and how you loved your family — the way I’d like to love mine — and I thought how terrible it was to spoil all that. Listen,

Forrest! Wait! I want you to go back. Yes, I do. We can wait. We haven't any right to cause all this pain. We're young. I'll go away for a while, and then we'll see."

He pulled her toward him by her shoulders.

"You've got more principles than the whole bunch of them," he said. "Oh, my girl, you love me and, gosh, it's good that you do!"

IV

It was to be a house wedding, Forrest and Alida having vetoed the Rikkers' idea that it was to be a sort of public revenge. Only a few intimate friends were invited.

During the week before the wedding, Forrest deduced from a series of irresolute and ambiguous telephone calls that his mother wanted to attend the ceremony, if possible. Sometimes he hoped passionately she would; at others it seemed unimportant.

The wedding was to be at seven. At five o'clock Pierce Winslow was walking up and down the two interconnecting sitting rooms of his house.

"This evening," he murmured, "my only son is being married to the daughter of a swindler."

He spoke aloud so that he could listen to the words, but they had been evoked so often in the past few months that their strength was gone and they died thinly upon the air.

He went to the foot of the stairs and called: "Charlotte!" No answer. He called again, and then went into the dining room, where the maid was setting the table.

"Is Mrs. Winslow out?"

"I haven't seen her come in, Mr. Winslow."

Back in the sitting room he resumed his walking; unconsciously he was walking like his father, the judge, dead thirty years ago; he was parading his dead father up and down the room.

“You can’t bring that woman into this house to meet your mother. Bad blood is bad blood.”

The house seemed unusually quiet. He went upstairs and looked into his wife’s room, but she was not there; old Mrs. Forrest was slightly indisposed; Eleanor, he knew, was at the wedding.

He felt genuinely sorry for himself as he went downstairs again. He knew his role — the usual evening routine carried out in complete obliviousness of the wedding — but he needed support, people begging him to relent, or else deferring to his wounded sensibilities. This isolation was different; it was almost the first isolation he had ever felt, and like all men who are fundamentally of the group, of the herd, he was incapable of taking a strong stand with the inevitable loneliness that it implied. He could only gravitate toward those who did.

“What have I done to deserve this?” he demanded of the standing ash tray. “What have I failed to do for my son that lay within my power?”

The maid came in. “Mrs. Winslow told Hilda she wouldn’t be here for dinner, and Hilda didn’t tell me.”

The shameful business was complete. His wife had weakened, leaving him absolutely alone. For a moment he expected to be furiously angry with her, but he wasn’t; he had used up his anger exhibiting it to others. Nor did it make him feel more obstinate, more determined; it merely made him feel silly.

“That’s it. I’ll be the goat. Forrest will always hold it against me, and Chauncey Rikker will be laughing up his sleeve.”

He walked up and down furiously.

“So I’m left holding the bag. They’ll say I’m an old grouch and drop me out of the picture entirely. They’ve licked me. I suppose I might as well be graceful about it.” He looked down in horror at the hat he held in his hand.

“I can’t — I can’t bring myself to do it, but I must. After all, he’s my only son. I couldn’t bear that he should hate me. He’s determined to marry her, so I might as well put a good face on the matter.”

In sudden alarm he looked at his watch, but there was still time. After all, it was a large gesture he was making, sacrificing his principles in this manner. People would never know what it cost him.

An hour later, old Mrs. Forrest woke up from her doze and rang for her maid. “Where’s Mrs. Winslow?”

“She’s not in for dinner. Everybody’s out.”

The old lady remembered.

“Oh, yes, they’ve gone over to get married. Give me my glasses and the telephone book. . . . Now, I wonder how you spell Capone.”

“Rikker, Mrs. Forrest.”

In a few minutes she had the number. “This is Mrs. Hugh Forrest,” she said firmly. “I want to speak to young Mrs. Forrest Winslow. . . . No, not to Miss Rikker; to Mrs. Forrest Winslow.” As there was as yet no such person, this was impossible. “Then I will call after the ceremony,” said the old lady.

When she called again, in an hour, the bride came to the phone. “This is Forrest’s great-grandmother. I called up to wish you every happiness and to ask you to come and see me when you get back from your trip if I’m still alive.”

“You’re very sweet to call, Mrs. Forrest.”

“Take good care of Forrest, and don’t let him get to be a ninny like his father and mother. God bless you.”

“Thank you.”

“All right. Good-by, Miss Capo — Good-by, my dear.”

Having done her whole duty, Mrs. Forrest hung up the receiver.

SIX OF ONE —

Redbook (February 1932)

Barnes stood on the wide stairs looking down through a wide hall into the living-room of the country place and at the group of youths. His friend Schofield was addressing some benevolent remarks to them, and Barnes did not want to interrupt; as he stood there, immobile, he seemed to be drawn suddenly into rhythm with the group below; he perceived them as statuesque beings, set apart, chiseled out of the Minnesota twilight that was setting on the big room.

In the first place all five, the two young Schofields and their friends, were fine-looking boys, very American, dressed in a careless but not casual way over well-set-up bodies, and with responsive faces open to all four winds. Then he saw that they made a design, the faces profile upon profile, the heads blond and dark, turning toward Mr. Schofield, the erect yet vaguely lounging bodies, never tense but ever ready under the flannels and the soft angora wool sweaters, the hands placed on other shoulders, as if to bring each one into the solid freemasonry of the group. Then suddenly, as though a group of models posing for a sculptor were being dismissed, the composition broke and they all moved toward the door. They left Barnes with a sense of having seen something more than five young men between sixteen and eighteen going out to sail or play tennis or golf, but having gained a sharp impression of a whole style, a whole mode of youth, something different from his own less assured, less graceful generation, something unified by standards that he didn't know. He wondered vaguely what the standards of 1920 were, and whether they were worth anything — had a sense of waste, of much effort for a purely esthetic achievement. Then Schofield saw him and called him down into the living-room.

“Aren't they a fine bunch of boys?” Schofield demanded. “Tell me, did you ever see a finer bunch?”

“A fine lot,” agreed Barnes, with a certain lack of enthusiasm. He felt a sudden premonition that his generation in its years of effort had made possible a Periclean age, but had evolved no prospective Pericles. They had set the scene: was the cast adequate?

“It isn’t just because two of them happen to be mine,” went on Schofield. “It’s self-evident. You couldn’t match that crowd in any city in the country. First place, they’re such a husky lot. Those two little Kavenaughs aren’t going to be big men — more like their father; but the oldest one could make any college hockey-team in the country right now.”

“How old are they?” asked Barnes.

“Well, Howard Kavenaugh, the oldest, is nineteen — going to Yale next year. Then comes my Wister — he’s eighteen, also going to Yale next year. You liked Wister, didn’t you? I don’t know anybody who doesn’t. He’d make a great politician, that kid. Then there’s a boy named Larry Patt who wasn’t here today — he’s eighteen too, and he’s State golf champion. Fine voice too; he’s trying to get in Princeton.”

“Who’s the blond-haired one who looks like a Greek god?”

“That’s Beau Lebaume. He’s going to Yale, too, if the girls will let him leave town. Then there’s the other Kavenaugh, the stocky one — he’s going to be an even better athlete than his brother. And finally there’s my youngest, Charley; he’s sixteen,” Schofield sighed reluctantly. “But I guess you’ve heard all the boasting you can stand.”

“No, tell me more about them — I’m interested. Are they anything more than athletes?”

“Why, there’s not a dumb one in the lot, except maybe Beau Lebaume; but you can’t help liking him anyhow. And every one of them’s a natural leader. I remember a few years ago a tough gang tried to start something with them, calling them ‘candies’ — well, that gang must be running yet. They sort of remind me of young knights. And what’s the matter with their being athletes? I seem to remember you stroking the boat at New London, and that didn’t keep you from consolidating railroad systems and — ”

“I took up rowing because I had a sick stomach,” said Barnes. “By the way, are these boys all rich?”

“Well, the Kavenaughes are, of course; and my boys will have something.”

Barnes’ eyes twinkled.

“So I suppose since they won’t have to worry about money, they’re brought up to serve the State,” he suggested. “You spoke of one of your sons having a political talent and their all being like young knights, so I suppose they’ll go out for public life and the army and navy.”

“I don’t know about that,” Schofield’s voice sounded somewhat alarmed. “I think their fathers would be pretty disappointed if they didn’t go into business. That’s natural, isn’t it?”

“It’s natural, but it isn’t very romantic,” said Barnes good-humoredly.

“You’re trying to get my goat,” said Schofield. “Well, if you can match that — ”

“They’re certainly an ornamental bunch,” admitted Barnes. “They’ve got what you call glamour. They certainly look like the cigarette ads in the magazine; but — ”

“But you’re an old sour-belly,” interrupted Schofield. “I’ve explained that these boys are all well-rounded. My son Wister led his class at school this year, but I was a darn’ sight prouder that he got the medal for best all-around boy.”

The two men faced each other with the uncut cards of the future on the table before them. They had been in college together, and were friends of many years’ standing. Barnes was childless, and Schofield was inclined to attribute his lack of enthusiasm to that.

“I somehow can’t see them setting the world on fire, doing better than their fathers,” broke out Barnes suddenly. “The more charming they are, the harder it’s going to be for them. In the East people are beginning to realize what wealthy boys are up against. Match them? Maybe not now.” He leaned forward, his eyes lighting up. “But I could pick six boys from any high-school

in Cleveland, give them an education, and I believe that ten years from this time your young fellows here would be utterly outclassed. There's so little demanded of them, so little expected of them — what could be softer than just to have to go on being charming and athletic?"

"I know your idea," objected Schofield scoffingly. "You'd go to a big municipal high-school and pick out the six most brilliant scholars — "

"I'll tell you what I'll do — " Barnes noticed that he had unconsciously substituted "I will" for "I would," but he didn't correct himself. "I'll go to the little town in Ohio, where I was born — there probably aren't fifty or sixty boys in the high-school there, and I wouldn't be likely to find six geniuses out of that number."

"And what?"

"I'll give them a chance. If they fail, the chance is lost. That is a serious responsibility, and they've got to take it seriously. That's what these boys haven't got — they're only asked to be serious about trivial things." He thought for a moment. "I'm going to do it."

"Do what?"

"I'm going to see."

A fortnight later he was back in the small town in Ohio where he had been born, where, he felt, the driving emotions of his own youth still haunted the quiet streets. He interviewed the principal of the high-school, who made suggestions; then by the, for Barnes, difficult means of making an address and afterward attending a reception, he got in touch with teachers and pupils. He made a donation to the school, and under cover of this found opportunities of watching the boys at work and at play.

It was fun — he felt his youth again. There were some boys that he liked immediately, and he began a weeding-out process, inviting them in groups of five or six to his mother's house, rather like a fraternity rushing freshman. When a boy interested him, he looked up his record and that of his family — and at the end of a fortnight he had chosen five boys.

In the order in which he chose them, there was first Otto Schlach, a farmer's son who had already displayed extraordinary mechanical aptitude and a gift for mathematics. Schlach was highly recommended by his teachers, and he welcomed the opportunity offered him of entering the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

A drunken father left James Matsko as his only legacy to the town of Barnes' youth. From the age of twelve, James had supported himself by keeping a newspaper-and-candy store with a three-foot frontage; and now at seventeen he was reputed to have saved five hundred dollars. Barnes found it difficult to persuade him to study money and banking at Columbia, for Matsko was already assured of his ability to make money. But Barnes had prestige as the town's most successful son, and he convinced Matsko that otherwise he would lack frontage, like his own place of business.

Then there was Jack Stubbs, who had lost an arm hunting, but in spite of this handicap played on the high-school football team. He was not among the leaders in studies; he had developed no particular bent; but the fact that he had overcome that enormous handicap enough to play football — to tackle and to catch punts — convinced Barnes that no obstacles would stand in Jack Stubbs' way.

The fourth selection was George Winfield, who was almost twenty. Because of the death of his father, he had left school at fourteen, helped to support his family for four years, and then, things being better, he had come back to finish high-school. Barnes felt, therefore, that Winfield would place a serious value on an education.

Next came a boy whom Barnes found personally antipathetic. Louis Ireland was at once the most brilliant scholar and most difficult boy at school. Untidy, insubordinate and eccentric, Louis drew scurrilous caricatures behind his Latin book, but when called upon inevitably produced a perfect recitation. There was a big talent nascent somewhere in him — it was impossible to leave him out.

The last choice was the most difficult. The remaining boys were mediocrities, or at any rate they had so far displayed no qualities that set them apart. For a time Barnes, thinking patriotically of his old university,

considered the football captain, a virtuosic halfback who would have been welcome on any Eastern squad; but that would have destroyed the integrity of the idea.

He finally chose a younger boy, Gordon Vandervere, of a rather higher standing than the others. Vandervere was the handsomest and one of the most popular boys in school. He had been intended for college, but his father, a harassed minister, was glad to see the way made easy.

Barnes was content with himself; he felt godlike in being able to step in to mold these various destinies. He felt as if they were his own sons, and he telegraphed Schofield in Minneapolis:

HAVE CHOSEN HALF A DOZEN OF THE OTHER, AND AM BACKING THEM AGAINST THE WORLD.

And now, after all this biography, the story begins. . . .

The continuity of the frieze is broken. Young Charley Schofield had been expelled from Hotchkiss. It was a small but painful tragedy — he and four other boys, nice boys, popular boys, broke the honor system as to smoking. Charley's father felt the matter deeply, varying between disappointment about Charley and anger at the school. Charley came home to Minneapolis in a desperate humor and went to the country day-school while it was decided what he was to do.

It was still undecided in midsummer. When school was over, he spent his time playing golf, or dancing at the Minnekada Club — he was a handsome boy of eighteen, older than his age, with charming manners, with no serious vices, but with a tendency to be easily influenced by his admirations. His principal admiration at the time was Gladys Irving, a young married woman scarcely two years older than himself. He rushed her at the club dances, and felt sentimentally about her, though Gladys on her part was in love with her husband and asked from Charley only the confirmation of her own youth and charm that a belle often needs after her first baby.

Sitting out with her one night on the veranda of the Lafayette Club, Charley felt a necessity to boast to her, to pretend to be more experienced, and so more potentially protective.

“I’ve seen a lot of life for my age,” he said. “I’ve done things I couldn’t even tell you about.”

Gladys didn’t answer.

“In fact last week — ” he began, and thought better of it. “In any case I don’t think I’ll go to Yale next year — I’d have to go East right away, and tutor all summer. If I don’t go, there’s a job open in Father’s office; and after Wister goes back to college in the fall, I’ll have the roadster to myself.”

“I thought you were going to college,” Gladys said coldly.

“I was. But I’ve thought things over, and now I don’t know. I’ve usually gone with older boys, and I feel older than boys my age. I like older girls, for instance.” When Charley looked at her then suddenly, he seemed unusually attractive to her — it would be very pleasant to have him here, to cut in on her at dances all summer. But Gladys said:

“You’d be a fool to stay here.”

“Why?”

“You started something — you ought to go through with it. A few years running around town, and you won’t be good for anything.”

“You think so,” he said indulgently.

Gladys didn’t want to hurt him or to drive him away from her; yet she wanted to say something stronger.

“Do you think I’m thrilled when you tell me you’ve had a lot of dissipated experience? I don’t see how anybody could claim to be your friend and encourage you in that. If I were you, I’d at least pass your examinations for college. Then they can’t say you just lay down after you were expelled from school.”

“You think so?” Charley said, unruffled, and in his grave, precocious manner, as though he were talking to a child. But she had convinced him, because he was in love with her and the moon was around her. “*Oh me, oh my, oh you,*” was the last music they had danced to on the Wednesday before, and so it was one of those times.

Had Gladys let him brag to her, concealing her curiosity under a mask of companionship, if she had accepted his own estimate of himself as a man formed, no urging of his father's would have mattered. As it was, Charley passed into college that fall, thanks to a girl's tender reminiscences and her own memories of the sweetness of youth's success in young fields.

And it was well for his father that he did. If he had not, the catastrophe of his older brother Wister that autumn would have broken Schofield's heart. The morning after the Harvard game the New York papers carried a headline:

YALE BOYS AND FOLLIES GIRLS IN

MOTOR CRASH NEAR RYE

IRENE DALEY IN GREENWICH HOSPITAL THREATENS BEAUTY SUIT

MILLIONAIRE'S SON INVOLVED

The four boys came up before the dean a fortnight later. Wister Schofield, who had driven the car, was called first.

"It was not your car, Mr. Schofield," the dean said. "It was Mr. Kavanaugh's car, wasn't it?"

"Yes sir."

"How did you happen to be driving?"

"The girls wanted me to. They didn't feel safe."

"But you'd been drinking too, hadn't you?"

"Yes, but not so much."

"Tell me this," asked the dean: "Haven't you ever driven a car when you'd been drinking — perhaps drinking even more than you were that night?"

"Why — perhaps once or twice, but I never had any accidents. And this was so clearly unavoidable — "

"Possibly," the dean agreed; "but we'll have to look at it this way: Up to this time you had no accidents even when you deserved to have them. Now

you've had one when you didn't deserve it. I don't want you to go out of here feeling that life or the University or I myself haven't given you a square deal, Mr. Schofield. But the newspapers have given this a great deal of prominence, and I'm afraid that the University will have to dispense with your presence."

Moving along the frieze to Howard Kavanaugh, the dean's remarks to him were substantially the same.

"I am particularly sorry in your case, Mr. Kavanaugh. Your father has made substantial gifts to the University, and I took pleasure in watching you play hockey with your usual brilliance last winter."

Howard Kavanaugh left the office with uncontrollable tears running down his cheeks.

Since Irene Daley's suit for her ruined livelihood, her ruined beauty, was directed against the owner and the driver of the automobile, there were lighter sentences for the other two occupants of the car. Beau Lebaume came into the dean's office with his arm in a sling and his handsome head swathed in bandages and was suspended for the remainder of the current year. He took it jauntily and said good-bye to the dean with as cheerful a smile as could show through the bandages. The last case, however, was the most difficult. George Winfield, who had entered high-school late because work in the world had taught him the value of an education, came in looking at the floor.

"I can't understand your participation in this affair," said the dean. "I know your benefactor, Mr. Barnes, personally. He told me how you left school to go to work, and how you came back to it four years later to continue your education, and he felt that your attitude toward life was essentially serious. Up to this point you have a good record here at New Haven, but it struck me several months ago that you were running with a rather gay crowd, boys with a great deal of money to spend. You are old enough to realize that they couldn't possibly give you as much in material ways as they took away from you in others. I've got to give you a year's suspension. If you come back, I have every hope you'll justify the confidence that Mr. Barnes reposed in you."

“I won’t come back,” said Winfield. “I couldn’t face Mr. Barnes after this. I’m not going home.”

At the suit brought by Irene Daley, all four of them lied loyally for Wister Schofield. They said that before they hit the gasoline pump they had seen Miss Daley grab the wheel. But Miss Daley was in court, with her face, familiar to the tabloids, permanently scarred; and her counsel exhibited a letter canceling her recent moving-picture contract. The students’ case looked bad; so in the intermission, on their lawyer’s advice, they settled for forty thousand dollars. Wister Schofield and Howard Kavenaugh were snapped by a dozen photographers leaving the courtroom, and served up in flaming notoriety next day.

That night, Wister, the three Minneapolis boys, Howard and Beau Lebaume started for home. George Winfield said good-by to them in the Pennsylvania station; and having no home to go to, walked out into New York to start life over.

Of all Barnes’ protégés, Jack Stubbs with his one arm was the favorite. He was the first to achieve fame — when he played on the tennis team at Princeton, the rotogravure section carried pictures showing how he threw the ball from his racket in serving. When he was graduated, Barnes took him into his own office — he was often spoken of as an adopted son. Stubbs, together with Schlach, now a prominent consulting engineer, were the most satisfactory of his experiments, although James Matsko at twenty-seven had just been made a partner in a Wall Street brokerage house. Financially he was the most successful of the six, yet Barnes found himself somewhat repelled by his hard egoism. He wondered, too, if he, Barnes, had really played any part in Matsko’s career — did it after all matter whether Matsko was a figure in metropolitan finance or a big merchant in the Middle West, as he would have undoubtedly become without any assistance at all.

One morning in 1930 he handed Jack Stubbs a letter that led to a balancing up of the book of boys.

“What do you think of this?”

The letter was from Louis Ireland in Paris. About Louis they did not agree, and as Jack read, he prepared once more to intercede in his behalf.

MY DEAR SIR:

After your last communication, made through your bank here and enclosing a check which I hereby acknowledge, I do not feel that I am under any obligation to write you at all. But because the concrete fact of an object's commercial worth may be able to move you, while you remain utterly insensitive to the value of an abstract idea — because of this I write to tell you that my exhibition was an unqualified success. To bring the matter even nearer to your intellectual level, I may tell you that I sold two pieces — a head of Lalette, the actress, and a bronze animal group — for a total of seven thousand francs (\$280.00). Moreover I have commissions which will take me all summer — I enclose a piece about me cut from CAHIERS D'ART, which will show you that whatever your estimate of my abilities and my career, it is by no means unanimous.

This is not to say that I am ungrateful for your well-intentioned attempt to “educate” me. I suppose that Harvard was no worse than any other polite finishing school — the years that I wasted there gave me a sharp and well-documented attitude on American life and institutions. But your suggestions that I come to America and make standardized nymphs for profiteers' fountains was a little too much —

Stubbs looked up with a smile.

“Well,” Barnes said, “what do you think? Is he crazy — or now that he has sold some statues, does it prove that I'm crazy?”

“Neither one,” laughed Stubbs. “What you objected to in Louis wasn't his talent. But you never got over that year he tried to enter a monastery and then got arrested in the Sacco-Vanzetti demonstrations, and then ran away with the professor's wife.”

“He was just forming himself,” said Barnes dryly, “just trying his little wings. God knows what he's been up to abroad.”

“Well, perhaps he’s formed now,” Stubbs said lightly. He had always liked Louis Ireland — privately he resolved to write and see if he needed money.

“Anyhow, he’s graduated from me,” announced Barnes. “I can’t do any more to help him or hurt him. Suppose we call him a success, though that’s pretty doubtful — let’s see how we stand. I’m going to see Schofield out in Minneapolis next week, and I’d like to balance accounts. To my mind, the successes are you, Otto Schlach, James Matsko, — whatever you and I may think of him as a man, — and let’s assume that Louis Ireland is going to be a great sculptor. That’s four. Winfield’s disappeared. I’ve never had a line from him.”

“Perhaps he’s doing well somewhere.”

“If he were doing well, I think he’d let me know. We’ll have to count him as a failure so far as my experiment goes. Then there’s Gordon Vandervere.”

Both were silent for a moment.

“I can’t make it out about Gordon,” Barnes said. “He’s such a nice fellow, but since he left college, he doesn’t seem to come through. He was younger than the rest of you, and he had the advantage of two years at Andover before he went to college, and at Princeton he knocked them cold, as you say. But he seems to have worn his wings out — for four years now he’s done nothing at all; he can’t hold a job; he can’t get his mind on his work, and he doesn’t seem to care. I’m about through with Gordon.”

At this moment Gordon was announced over the phone.

“He asked for an appointment,” explained Barnes. “I suppose he wants to try something new.”

A personable young man with an easy and attractive manner strolled in to the office.

“Good afternoon, Uncle Ed. Hi there, Jack!” Gordon sat down. “I’m full of news.”

“About what?” asked Barnes.

“About myself.”

“I know. You’ve just been appointed to arrange a merger between J. P. Morgan and the Queensborough Bridge.”

“It’s a merger,” agreed Vandervere, “but those are not the parties to it. I’m engaged to be married.”

Barnes glowered.

“Her name,” continued Vandervere, “is Esther Crosby.”

“Let me congratulate you,” said Barnes ironically. “A relation of H. B. Crosby, I presume.”

“Exactly,” said Vandervere unruffled. “In fact, his only daughter.”

For a moment there was silence in the office. Then Barnes exploded.

”You’re going to marry H. B. Crosby’s daughter? Does he know that last month you retired by request from one of his banks?”

“I’m afraid he knows everything about me. He’s been looking me over for four years. You see, Uncle Ed,” he continued cheerfully, “Esther and I got engaged during my last year at Princeton — my roommate brought her down to a house-party, but she switched over to me. Well, quite naturally Mr. Crosby wouldn’t hear of it until I’d proved myself.”

“Proved yourself!” repeated Barnes. “Do you consider that you’ve proved yourself?”

“Well — yes.”

“How?”

“By waiting four years. You see, either Esther or I might have married anybody else in that time, but we didn’t. Instead we sort of wore him away. That’s really why I haven’t been able to get down to anything. Mr. Crosby is a strong personality, and it took a lot of time and energy wearing him away. Sometimes Esther and I didn’t see each other for months, so she couldn’t eat; so then thinking of that I couldn’t eat, so then I couldn’t work — ”

“And you mean he’s really given his consent?”

“He gave it last night.”

“Is he going to let you loaf?”

“No. Esther and I are going into the diplomatic service. She feels that the family has passed through the banking phase.” He winked at Stubbs. “I’ll look up Louis Ireland when I get to Paris, and send Uncle Ed a report.”

Suddenly Barnes roared with laughter.

“Well, it’s all in the lottery-box,” he said. “When I picked out you six, I was a long way from guessing — ” He turned to Stubbs and demanded: “Shall we put him under *failure* or under *success*?”

“A howling success,” said Stubbs. “Top of the list.”

A fortnight later Barnes was with his old friend Schofield in Minneapolis. He thought of the house with the six boys as he had last seen it — now it seemed to bear scars of them, like the traces that pictures leave on a wall that they have long protected from the mark of time. Since he did not know what had become of Schofield’s sons, he refrained from referring to their conversation of ten years before until he knew whether it was dangerous ground. He was glad of his reticence later in the evening when Schofield spoke of his elder son, Wister.

“Wister never seems to have found himself — and he was such a high-spirited kid! He was the leader of every group he went into; he could always make things go. When he was young, our houses in town and at the lake were always packed with young people. But after he left Yale, he lost interest in things — got sort of scornful about everything. I thought for a while that it was because he drank too much, but he married a nice girl and she took that in hand. Still, he hasn’t any ambition — he talked about country life, so I bought him a silver-fox farm, but that didn’t go; and I sent him to Florida during the boom, but that wasn’t any better. Now he has an interest in a dude-ranch in Montana; but since the depression — ”

Barnes saw his opportunity and asked:

“What became of those friends of your sons’ that I met one day?”

“Let’s see — I wonder who you mean. There was Kavanaugh — you know, the flour people — he was here a lot. Let’s see — he eloped with an Eastern girl, and for a few years he and his wife were the leaders of the gay crowd here — they did a lot of drinking and not much else. It seems to me I heard the other day that Howard’s getting a divorce. Then there was the younger brother — he never could get into college. Finally he married a manicurist, and they live here rather quietly. We don’t hear much about them.”

They had had a glamour about them, Barnes remembered; they had been so sure of themselves, individually, as a group; so high-spirited, a frieze of Greek youths, graceful of body, ready for life.

“Then Larry Patt, you might have met him here. A great golfer. He couldn’t stay in college — there didn’t seem to be enough fresh air there for Larry.” And he added defensively: “But he capitalized what he could do — he opened a sporting-goods store and made a good thing of it, I understand. He has a string of three or four.”

“I seem to remember an exceptionally handsome one.”

“Oh — Beau Lebaume. He was in that mess at New Haven too. After that he went to pieces — drink and what-not. His father’s tried everything, and now he won’t have anything more to do with him.” Schofield’s face warmed suddenly; his eyes glowed. “But let me tell you, I’ve got a boy — my Charley! I wouldn’t trade him for the lot of them — he’s coming over presently, and you’ll see. He had a bad start, got into trouble at Hotchkiss — but did he quit? Never. He went back and made a fine record at New Haven, senior society and all that. Then he and some other boys took a trip around the world, and then he came back here and said: ‘All right, Father, I’m ready — when do I start?’ I don’t know what I’d do without Charley. He got married a few months back, a young widow he’d always been in love with; and his mother and I are still missing him, though they come over often — ”

Barnes was glad about this, and suddenly he was reconciled at not having any sons in the flesh — one out of two made good, and sometimes better, and sometimes nothing; but just going along getting old by yourself when you’d counted on so much from sons —

“Charley runs the business,” continued Schofield. “That is, he and a young man named Winfield that Wister got me to take on five or six years ago. Wister felt responsible about him, felt he’d got him into this trouble at New Haven — and this boy had no family. He’s done well here.”

Another one of Barnes’ six accounted for! He felt a surge of triumph, but he saw he must keep it to himself; a little later when Schofield asked him if he’d carried out his intention of putting some boys through college, he avoided answering. After all, any given moment has its value; it can be questioned in the light of after-events, but the moment remains. The young princes in velvet gathered in lovely domesticity around the queen amid the hush of rich draperies may presently grow up to be Pedro the Cruel or Charles the Mad, but the moment of beauty was there. Back there ten years, Schofield had seen his sons and their friends as samurai, as something shining and glorious and young, perhaps as something he had missed from his own youth. There was later a price to be paid by those boys, all too fulfilled, with the whole balance of their life pulled forward into their youth so that everything afterward would inevitably be anticlimax; these boys brought up as princes with none of the responsibilities of princes! Barnes didn’t know how much their mothers might have had to do with it, what their mothers may have lacked.

But he was glad that his friend Schofield had one true son.

His own experiment — he didn’t regret it, but he wouldn’t have done it again. Probably it proved something, but he wasn’t quite sure what. Perhaps that life is constantly renewed, and glamour and beauty make way for it; and he was glad that he was able to feel that the republic could survive the mistakes of a whole generation, pushing the waste aside, sending ahead the vital and the strong. Only it was too bad and very American that there should be all that waste at the top; and he felt that he would not live long enough to see it end, to see great seriousness in the same skin with great opportunity — to see the race achieve itself at last.

FAMILY IN THE WIND

I

The Saturday Evening Post (4 June, 1932)

The two men drove up the hill toward the blood-red sun. The cotton fields bordering the road were thin and withered, and no breeze stirred in the pines.

“When I am totally sober,” the doctor was saying — “I mean when I am totally sober — I don’t see the same world that you do. I’m like a friend of mine who had one good eye and got glasses made to correct his bad eye; the result was that he kept seeing elliptical suns and falling off tilted curbs, until he had to throw the glasses away. Granted that I am thoroughly anaesthetized the greater part of the day — well, I only undertake work that I know I can do when I am in that condition.”

“Yeah,” agreed his brother Gene uncomfortably. The doctor was a little tight at the moment and Gene could find no opening for what he had to say. Like so many Southerners of the humbler classes, he had a deep-seated courtesy, characteristic of all violent and passionate lands — he could not change the subject until there was a moment’s silence, and Forrest would not shut up.

“I’m very happy,” he continued, “or very miserable. I chuckle or I weep alcoholically and, as I continue to slow up, life accommodatingly goes faster, so that the less there is of myself inside, the more diverting becomes the moving picture without. I have cut myself off from the respect of my fellow man, but I am aware of a compensatory cirrhosis of the emotions. And because my sensitivity, my pity, no longer has direction, but fixes itself on whatever is at hand, I have become an exceptionally good fellow — much more so than when I was a good doctor.”

As the road straightened after the next bend and Gene saw his house in the distance, he remembered his wife's face as she had made him promise, and he could wait no longer: "Forrest, I got a thing — "

But at that moment the doctor brought his car to a sudden stop in front of a small house just beyond a grove of pines. On the front steps a girl of eight was playing with a gray cat.

"This is the sweetest little kid I ever saw," the doctor said to Gene, and then to the child, in a grave voice: "Helen, do you need any pills for kitty?"

The little girl laughed.

"Well, I don't know," she said doubtfully. She was playing another game with the cat now and this came as rather an interruption.

"Because kitty telephoned me this morning," the doctor continued, "and said her mother was neglecting her and couldn't I get her a trained nurse from Montgomery."

"She did not." The little girl grabbed the cat close indignantly; the doctor took a nickle from his pocket and tossed it to the steps.

"I recommend a good dose of milk," he said as he put the car into gear. "Good night, Helen."

"Good night, doctor."

As they drove off, Gene tried again: "Listen; stop," he said. "Stop here a little way down. . . . Here."

The doctor stopped the car and the brothers faced each other. They were alike as to robustness of figure and a certain asceticism of feature and they were both in their middle forties; they were unlike in that the doctor's glasses failed to conceal the veined, weeping eyes of a soak, and that he wore corrugated city wrinkles; Gene's wrinkles bounded fields, followed the lines of rooftrees, of poles propping up sheds. His eyes were a fine, furry blue. But the sharpest contrast lay in the fact that Gene Janney was a country man while Dr. Forrest Janney was obviously a man of education.

"Well?" the doctor asked.

“You know Pinky’s at home,” Gene said, looking down the road.

“So I hear,” the doctor answered noncommittally.

“He got in a row in Birmingham and somebody shot him in the head.” Gene hesitated. “We got Doc Behrer because we thought maybe you wouldn’t — maybe you wouldn’t — ”

“I wouldn’t,” agreed Doctor Janney blandly.

“But look, Forrest; here’s the thing,” Gene insisted. “You know how it is — you often say Doc Behrer doesn’t know nothing. Shucks, I never thought he was much either. He says the bullet’s pressing on the — pressing on the brain, and he can’t take it out without causin’ a hemmering, and he says he doesn’t know whether we could get him to Birmingham or Montgomery, or not, he’s so low. Doc wasn’t no help. What we want — ”

“No,” said his brother, shaking his head. “No.”

“I just want you to look at him and tell us what to do,” Gene begged. “He’s unconscious, Forrest. He wouldn’t know you; you’d hardly know him. Thing is his mother’s about crazy.”

“She’s in the grip of a purely animal instinct.” The doctor took from his hip a flask containing half water and half Alabama corn, and drank. “You and I know that boy ought to been drowned the day he was born.”

Gene flinched. “He’s bad,” he admitted, “but I don’t know — You see him lying there — ”

As the liquor spread over the doctor’s insides he felt an instinct to do something, not to violate his prejudices but simply to make some gesture, to assert his own moribund but still struggling will to power.

“All right, I’ll see him,” he said. “I’ll do nothing myself to help him, because he ought to be dead. And even his death wouldn’t make up for what he did to Mary Decker.”

Gene Janney pursed his lips. “Forrest, you sure about that?”

“Sure about it!” exclaimed the doctor. “Of course I’m sure. She died of starvation; she hadn’t had more than a couple cups of coffee in a week. And if you looked at her shoes, you could see she’d walked for miles.”

“Doc Behrer says — ”

“What does he know? I performed the autopsy the day they found her on the Birmingham Highway. There was nothing the matter with her but starvation. That — that” — his voice shook with feeling — “that Pinky got tired of her and turned her out, and she was trying to get home. It suits me fine that he was invalided home himself a couple of weeks later.”

As he talked, the doctor had plunged the car savagely into gear and let the clutch out with a jump; in a moment they drew up before Gene Janney’s home.

It was a square frame house with a brick foundation and a well-kept lawn blocked off from the farm, a house rather superior to the buildings that composed the town of Bending and the surrounding agricultural area, yet not essentially different in type or in its interior economy. The last of the plantation houses in this section of Alabama had long disappeared, the proud pillars yielding to poverty, rot and rain.

Gene’s wife, Rose, got up from her rocking-chair on the porch.

“Hello, doc.” She greeted him a little nervously and without meeting his eyes. “You been a stranger here lately.”

The doctor met her eyes for several seconds. “How do you do, Rose,” he said. “Hi, Edith. . . . Hi, Eugene” — this to the little boy and girl who stood beside their mother; and then: “Hi, Butch!” to the stocky youth of nineteen who came around the corner of the house hugging a round stone.

“Goin to have a sort of low wall along the front here — kind of neater,” Gene explained.

All of them had a lingering respect for the doctor. They felt reproachful toward him because they could no longer refer to him as their celebrated relative — “one of the bess surgeons up in Montgomery, yes, suh” — but there was his learning and the position he had once occupied in the larger

world, before he had committed professional suicide by taking to cynicism and drink. He had come home to Bending and bought a half interest in the local drug store two years ago, keeping up his license, but practising only when sorely needed.

“Rose,” said Gene, “doc says he’ll take a look at Pinky.”

Pinky Janney, his lips curved mean and white under a new beard, lay in bed in a darkened room. When the doctor removed the bandage from his head, his breath blew into a low groan, but his paunchy body did not move. After a few minutes, the doctor replaced the bandage and, with Gene and Rose, returned to the porch.

“Behrer wouldn’t operate?” he asked.

“No.”

“Why didn’t they operate in Birmingham?”

“I don’t know.”

“H’m.” The doctor put on his hat. “That bullet ought to come out, and soon. It’s pressing against the carotid sheath. That’s the — anyhow, you can’t get him to Montgomery with that pulse.”

“What’ll we do?” Gene’s question carried a little tail of silence as he sucked his breath back.

“Get Behrer to think it over. Or else get somebody in Montgomery. There’s about a 25 per cent chance that the operation would save him; without the operation he hasn’t any chance at all.”

“Who’ll we get in Montgomery?” asked Gene.

“Any good surgeon would do it. Even Behrer could do it if he had any nerve.”

Suddenly Rose Janney came close to him, her eyes straining and burning with an animal maternalism. She seized his coat where it hung open.

“Doc, you do it! You can do it. You know you were as good a surgeon as any of em once. Please, doc, you go on do it.”

He stepped back a little so that her hands fell from his coat, and held out his own hands in front of him.

“See how they tremble?” he said with elaborate irony. “Look close and you’ll see. I wouldn’t dare operate.”

“You could do it all right,” said Gene hastily, “with a drink to stiffen you up.”

The doctor shook his head and said, looking at Rose: “No. You see, my decisions are not reliable, and if anything went wrong, it would seem to be my fault.” He was acting a little now — he chose his words carefully. “I hear that when I found that Mary Decker died of starvation, my opinion was questioned on the ground that I was a drunkard.”

“I didn’t say that,” lied Rose breathlessly.

“Certainly not. I just mention it to show how careful I’ve got to be.” He moved down the steps. “Well, my advice is to see Behrer again, or, failing that, get somebody from the city. Good night.”

But before he had reached the gate, Rose came tearing after him, her eyes white with fury.

“I did say you were a drunkard!” she cried. “When you said Mary Decker died of starvation, you made it out as if it was Pinky’s fault — you, swilling yourself full of corn all day! How can anybody tell whether you know what you’re doing or not? Why did you think so much about Mary Decker, anyhow — a girl half your age? Everybody saw how she used to come in your drug store and talk to you — ”

Gene, who had followed, seized her arms. “Shut up now, Rose. . . . Drive along, Forrest.”

Forrest drove along, stopping at the next bend to drink from his flask. Across the fallow cotton fields he could see the house where Mary Decker had lived, and had it been six months before, he might have detoured to ask her why she hadn’t come into the store that day for her free soda, or to delight her with a sample cosmetic left by a salesman that morning. He had not told Mary Decker how he felt about her; never intended to — she was seventeen, he was forty-five, and he no longer dealt in futures — but only

after she ran away to Birmingham with Pinky Janney, did he realize how much his love for her had counted in his lonely life.

His thoughts went back to his brother's house.

"Now, if I were a gentleman," he thought, "I wouldn't have done like that. And another person might have been sacrificed to that dirty dog, because if he died afterward Rose would say I killed him."

Yet he felt pretty bad as he put his car away; not that he could have acted differently, but just that it was all so ugly.

He had been home scarcely ten minutes when a car creaked to rest outside and Butch Janney came in. His mouth was set tight and his eyes were narrowed as though to permit of no escape to the temper that possessed him until it should be unleashed upon its proper objective.

"Hi, Butch."

"I want to tell you, Uncle Forrest, you can't talk to my mother thataway. I'll kill you, you talk to my mother like that!"

"Now shut up, Butch, and sit down," said the doctor sharply.

"She's already bout sick on account of Pinky, and you come over and talk to her like that."

"Your mother did all the insulting that was done, Butch. I just took it."

"She doesn't know what she's saying and you ought to understand that."

The doctor thought a minute. "Butch, what do you think of Pinky?"

Butch hesitated uncomfortably. "Well, I can't say I ever thought so much of him" — his tone changed defiantly — "but after all, he's my own brother —"

"Wait a minute, Butch. What do you think of the way he treated Mary Decker?"

But Butch had shaken himself free, and now he let go the artillery of his rage:

“That ant the point; the point is anybody that doesn’t do right to my mother has me to answer to. It’s only fair when you got all the education — ”

“I got my education myself, Butch.”

“I don’t care. We’re going to try again to get Doc Behrer to operate or get us some fellow from the city. But if we can’t, I’m coming and get you, and you’re going to take that bullet out if I have to hold a gun to you while you do it.” He nodded, panting a little; then he turned and went out and drove away.

“Something tells me,” said the doctor to himself, “that there’s no more peace for me in Chilton County.” He called to his colored boy to put supper on the table. Then he rolled himself a cigarette and went out on the back stoop.

The weather had changed. The sky was now overcast and the grass stirred restlessly and there was a sudden flurry of drops without a sequel. A minute ago it had been warm, but now the moisture on his forehead was suddenly cool, and he wiped it away with his handkerchief. There was a buzzing in his ears and he swallowed and shook his head. For a moment he thought he must be sick; then suddenly the buzzing detached itself from him, grew into a swelling sound, louder and ever nearer, that might have been the roar of an approaching train.

II

Butch Janney was halfway home when he saw it — a huge, black, approaching cloud whose lower edge bumped the ground. Even as he stared at it vaguely, it seemed to spread until it included the whole southern sky, and he saw pale electric fire in it [had heard an increasing roar.] He was in a strong wind now; blown débris, bits of broken branches, splinters, larger objects unidentifiable in the growing darkness, flew by him. Instinctively he got out of his car and, by now hardly able to stand against the wind, ran for a bank, or rather found himself thrown and pinned against a bank. Then for a minute, two minutes, he was in the black centre of pandemonium.

First there was the sound, and he was part of the sound, so engulfed in it and possessed by it that he had no existence apart from it. It was not a collection of sounds, it was just Sound itself; a great screeching bow drawn across the chords of the universe. The sound and force were inseparable. The sound as well as the force held him to what he felt was the bank like a man crucified. Somewhere in this first moment his face, pinned sideways, saw his automobile make a little jump, spin halfway around and then go bobbing off over a field in a series of great helpless leaps. Then began the bombardment, the sound dividing its sustained cannon note into the cracks of a gigantic machine gun. He was only half-conscious as he felt himself become part of one of those cracks, felt himself lifted away from the bank to tear through space, through a blinding, lacerating mass of twigs and branches, and then, for an incalculable time, he knew nothing at all.

His body hurt him. He was lying between two branches in the top of a tree; the air was full of dust and rain, and he could hear nothing; it was a long time before he realized that the tree he was in had been blown down and that his involuntary perch among the pine needles was only five feet from the ground.

“Say, man!” he cried aloud, outraged. “Say, man! Say, what a wind! Say, man!”

Made acute by pain and fear, he guessed that he had been standing on the tree’s root and had been catapulted by the terrific wrench as the big pine was torn from the earth. Feeling over himself, he found that his left ear was caked full of dirt, as if someone had wanted to take an impression of the inside. His clothes were in rags, his coat had torn on the back seam, and he could feel where, as some stray gust tried to undress him, it had cut into him under the arms.

Reaching the ground, he set off in the direction of his father’s house, but it was a new and unfamiliar landscape he traversed. The Thing — he did not know it was a tornado — had cut a path a quarter of a mile wide, and he was confused, as the dust slowly settled, by vistas he had never seen before. It was unreal that Bending church tower should be visible from here; there had been groves of trees between.

But where was here? For he should be close to the Baldwin house; only as he tripped over great piles of boards, like a carelessly kept lumberyard, did Butch realize that there was no more Baldwin house, and then, looking around wildly, that there was no Necrawney house on the hill, no Peltzer house below it. There was not a light, not a sound, save the rain falling on the fallen trees.

He broke into a run. When he saw the bulk of his father's house in the distance, he gave a "Hey!" of relief, but coming closer, he realized that something was missing. There were no outhouses and the built-on wing that held Pinky's room had been sheared completely away.

"Mother!" he called. "Dad!" There was no answer; a dog bounded out of the yard and licked his hand. . . .

. . . It was full dark twenty minutes later when Doc Janney stopped his car in front of his own drug store in Bending. The electric lights had gone out, but there were men with lanterns in the street, and in a minute a small crowd had collected around him. He unlocked the door hurriedly.

"Somebody break open the old Wiggins Hospital." He pointed across the street. "I've got six badly injured in my car. I want some fellows to carry em in. Is Doc Behrer here?"

"Here he is," offered eager voices out of the darkness as the doctor, case in hand, came through the crowd. The two men stood face to face by lantern light, forgetting that they disliked each other.

"God knows how many more there's going to be," said Doc Janney. "I'm getting dressing and disinfectant. There'll be a lot of fractures — " He raised his voice, "Somebody bring me a barrel!"

"I'll get started over there," said Doc Behrer. "There's about half a dozen more crawled in."

"What's been done?" demanded Doc Janney of the men who followed him into the drug store. "Have they called Birmingham and Montgomery?"

"The telephone wires are down, but the telegraph got through."

“Well, somebody get Doctor Cohen from Wettala, and tell any people who have automobiles to go up the Willard Pike and cut across toward Corsica and all through those roads there. There’s not a house left at the crossroads by the nigger store. I passed a lot of folks walking in, all of them hurt, but I didn’t have room for anybody else.” As he talked he was throwing bandages, disinfectant and drugs into a blanket. “I thought I had a lot more stuff than this in stock! And wait!” he called. “Somebody drive out and look down in that hollow where the Wooleys live. Drive right across the fields — the road’s blocked. . . . Now, you with the cap — Ed Jenks, ain’t it?”

“Yes, doc.”

“You see what I got here? You collect everything in the store that looks like this and bring it across the way, understand?”

“Yes, doc.”

As the doctor went out into the street, the victims were streaming into town — a woman on foot with a badly injured child, a buckboard full of groaning Negroes, frantic men gasping terrible stories. Everywhere confusion and hysteria mounted in the dimly illumined darkness. A mud-covered reporter from Birmingham drove up in a sidecar, the wheels crossing the fallen wires and brushwood that clogged the street, and there was the siren of a police car from Cooper, thirty miles away.

Already a crowd pressed around the doors of the hospital, closed these three months for lack of patients. The doctor squeezed past the mêlée of white faces and established himself in the nearest ward, grateful for the waiting row of old iron beds. Doctor Behrer was already at work across the hall.

“Get me half a dozen lanterns,” he ordered.

“Doctors Behrer wants iodine and adhesive.”

“All right, there it is. . . . Here, you, Shinkey, stand by the door and keep everybody out except cases that can’t walk. Somebody run over and see if there ain’t some candles in the grocery store.”

The street outside was full of sound now — the cries of women, the contrary directions of volunteer gangs trying to clear the highway, the tense staccato of people rising to an emergency. A little before midnight arrived the first unit of the Red Cross. But the three doctors, presently joined by two others from near-by villages, had lost track of time long before that. The dead began to be brought in by ten o'clock; there were twenty, twenty-five, thirty, forty — the list grew. Having no more needs, these waited, as became simple husbandmen, in a garage behind, while the stream of injured — hundreds of them — flowed through the old hospital built to house only a score. The storm had dealt out fractures of the leg, collar bone, ribs and hip, lacerations of the back, elbows, ears, eyelids, nose; there were wounds from flying planks, and odd splinters in odd places, and a scalped man, who would recover to grow a new head of hair. Living or dead, Doc Janney knew every face, almost every name.

“Don’t you fret now. Billy’s all right. Hold still and let me tie this. People are drifting in every minute, but it’s so consarned dark they can’t find ’em — All right, Mrs. Oakey. That’s nothing. Ev here’ll touch it with iodine. . . . Now let’s see this man.”

Two o'clock. The old doctor from Wettala gave out, but now there were fresh men from Montgomery to take his place. Upon the air of the room, heavy with disinfectant, floated the ceaseless babble of human speech reaching the doctor dimly through layer after layer of increasing fatigue:

“ . . . Over and over — just rolled me over and over. Got hold of a bush and the bush came along too.”

”Jeff! Where’s Jeff?”

“ . . . I bet that pig sailed a hundred yards — ”

“ — just stopped the train in time. All the passengers got out and helped pull the poles — ”

“Where’s Jeff?”

“He says, ‘Let’s get down cellar,’ and I says, ‘We ain’t got no cellar’ — ”

“ — If there’s no more stretchers, find some light doors.”

“ . . . Five seconds? Say, it was more like five minutes!”

At some time he heard that Gene and Rose had been seen with their two youngest children. He had passed their house on the way in and, seeing it standing, hurried on. The Janney family had been lucky; the doctor's own house was outside the sweep of the storm.

Only as he saw the electric lights go on suddenly in the streets and glimpsed the crowd waiting for hot coffee in front of the Red Cross did the doctor realize how tired he was.

“You better go rest,” a young man was saying. “I'll take this side of the room. I've got two nurses with me.”

“All right — all right. I'll finish this row.”

The injured were being evacuated to the cities by train as fast as their wounds were dressed, and their places taken by others. He had only two beds to go — in the first one he found Pinky Janney.

He put his stethoscope to the heart. It was beating feebly. That he, so weak, so nearly gone, had survived this storm at all was remarkable. How he had got there, who had found him and carried him, was a mystery in itself. The doctor went over the body; there were small contusions and lacerations, two broken fingers, the dirt-filled ears that marked every case — nothing else. For a moment the doctor hesitated, but even when he closed his eyes, the image of Mary Decker seemed to have receded, eluding him. Something purely professional that had nothing to do with human sensibilities had been set in motion inside him, and he was powerless to head it off. He held out his hands before him; they were trembling slightly.

“Hell's bells!” he muttered.

He went out of the room and around the corner of the hall, where he drew from his pocket the flask containing the last of the corn and water he had had in the afternoon. He emptied it. Returning to the ward, he disinfected two instruments and applied a local anaesthetic to a square section at the base of Pinky's skull where the wound had healed over the bullet. He called

a nurse to his side and then, scalpel in hand, knelt on one knee beside his nephew's bed.

III

Two days later the doctor drove slowly around the mournful countryside. He had withdrawn from the emergency work after the first desperate night, feeling that his status as a pharmacist might embarrass his collaborators. But there was much to be done in bringing the damage to outlying sections under the aegis of the Red Cross, and he devoted himself to that.

The path of the demon was easy to follow. It had pursued an irregular course on its seven-league boots, cutting cross country, through woods, or even urbanely keeping to roads until they curved, when it went off on its own again. Sometimes the trail could be traced by cotton fields, apparently in full bloom, but this cotton came from the insides of hundreds of quilts and mattresses redistributed in the fields by the storm.

At a lumber pile that had lately been a Negro cabin, he stopped a moment to listen to a dialogue between two reporters and two shy pickaninnies. The old grandmother, her head bandaged, sat among the ruins, gnawing some vague meat and moving her rocker ceaselessly.

"But where is the river you were blown across?" one of the reporters demanded.

"There."

"Where?"

The pickaninnies looked to their grandmother for aid.

"Right there behind you-all," spoke up the old woman.

The newspapermen looked disgustedly at a muddy stream four yards wide.

"That's no river."

"That's a Menada River, we always calls it ever since I was a gull. Yes, suh, that's a Menada River. An them two boys was blowed right across it an set

down on the othah side just as pretty, 'thout any hurt at all. Chimney fell on me," she concluded, feeling her head.

"Do you mean to say that's all it was?" demanded the younger reporter indignantly. "That's the river they were blow across! And one hundred and twenty million people have been led to believe — "

"That's all right, boys," interrupted Doc Janney. "That's a right good river for these parts. And it'll get bigger as those little fellahs get older."

He tossed a quarter to the old woman and drove on.

Passing a country church, he stopped and counted the new brown mounds that marred the graveyard. He was nearing the centre of the holocaust now. There was the Howden house where three had been killed; there remained a gaunt chimney, a rubbish heap and a scarecrow surviving ironically in the kitchen garden. In the ruins of the house across the way a rooster strutted on top of a piano, reigning vociferously over an estate of trunks, boots, cans, books, calendars, rugs, chairs and window frames, a twisted radio and a legless sewing machine. Everywhere there was bedding — blankets, mattresses, bent springs, shredded padding — he had not realized how much of people's lives was spent in bed. Here and there, cows and horses, often stained with disinfectant, were grazing again in the fields. At intervals there were Red Cross tents, and sitting by one of these, with the gray cat in her arms, the doctor came upon little Helen Kilrain. The usual lumber pile, like a child's building game knocked down in a fit of temper, told the story.

"Hello, dear," he greeted her, his heart sinking. "How did kitty like the tornado?"

"She didn't."

"What did she do?"

"She meowed."

"Oh."

"She wanted to get away, but I hanged on to her and she scratched me — see?"

He glanced at the Red Cross tent. “Who’s taking care of you?”

“The lady from the Red Cross and Mrs. Wells,” she answered. “My father got hurt. He stood over me so it wouldn’t fall on me, and I stood over kitty. He’s in the hospital in Birmingham. When he comes back, I guess he’ll build our house again.”

The doctor winced. He knew that her father would build no more houses; he had died that morning. She was alone, and she did not know she was alone. Around her stretched the dark universe, impersonal, inconscient. Her lovely little face looked up at him confidently as he asked: “You got any kin anywhere, Helen?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’ve got kitty, anyhow, haven’t you?”

“It’s just a cat,” she admitted calmly, but anguished by her own betrayal of her love, she hugged it closer.

“Taking care of a cat must be pretty hard.”

“Oh, no,” she said hurriedly. “It isn’t any trouble at all. It doesn’t eat hardly anything.”

He put his hand in his pocket, and then changed his mind suddenly.

“Dear, I’m coming back and see you later — later today. You take good care of kitty now, won’t you?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered lightly.

The doctor drove on. He stopped next at a house that had escaped damaged. Walt Cupps, the owner, was cleaning a shotgun on his front porch.

“What’s that, Walt? Going to shoot up the next tornado?”

“Ain’t going to be a next tornado.”

“You can’t tell. Just take a look at that sky now. It’s getting mighty dark.”

Walt laughed and slapped his gun. "Not for a hundred years, anyhow. This here is for looters. There's a lot of 'em around, and not all black either. Wish when you go to town that you'd tell 'em to scatter some militia out here."

"I'll tell em now. You come out all right?"

"I did, thank God. With six of us in the house. It took off one hen, and probably it's still carrying it around somewhere."

The doctor drove on toward town, overcome by a feeling of uneasiness he could not define.

"It's the weather," he thought. "It's the same kind of feel in the air there was last Saturday."

For a month the doctor had felt an urge to go away permanently. Once this countryside had seemed to promise peace. When the impetus that had lifted him temporarily out of tired old stock was exhausted, he had come back here to rest, to watch the earth put forth, and live on simple, pleasant terms with his neighbors. Peace! He knew that the present family quarrel would never heal, nothing would ever be the same; it would all be bitter forever. And he had seen the placid countryside turned into a land of mourning. There was no peace here. Move on!

On the road he overtook Butch Janney walking to town.

"I was coming to see you," said Butch, frowning. "You operated on Pinky after all, didn't you?"

"Jump in. . . . Yes, I did. How did you know?"

"Doc Behrer told us." He shot a quick look at the doctor, who did not miss the quality of suspicion in it. "They don't think he'll last out the day."

"I'm sorry for your mother."

Butch laughed unpleasantly. "Yes, you are."

"I said I'm sorry for your mother," said the doctor sharply.

"I heard you."

They drove for a moment in silence.

“Did you find your automobile?”

“Did I?” Butch laughed ruefully. “I found something — I don’t know whether you’d call it a car any more. And, you know, I could of had tornado insurance for twenty-five cents.” His voice trembled indignantly: “Twenty-five cents — but who would ever of thought of getting tornado insurance?”

It was growing darker; there was a thin crackle of thunder far to the southward.

“Well, all I hope,” said Butch with narrowed glance, “is that you hadn’t been drinking anything when you operated on Pinky.”

“You know, Butch,” the doctor said slowly, “that was a pretty dirty trick of mine to bring that tornado here.”

He had not expected the sarcasm to hit home, but he expected a retort — when suddenly he caught sight of Butch’s face. It was fish-white, the mouth was open, the eyes fixed and staring, and from the throat came a mewling sound. Limply he raised one hand before him, and then the doctor saw.

Less than a mile away, an enormous, top-shaped black cloud filled the sky and bore toward them, dipping and swirling, and in front of it sailed already a heavy, singing wind.

“It’s come back!” the doctor yelled.

Fifty yards ahead of them was the old iron bridge spanning Bilby Creek. He stepped hard on the accelerator and drove for it. The fields were full of running figures headed in the same direction. Reaching the bridge, he jumped out and yanked Butch’s arm.

“Get out, you fool! Get out!”

A nerveless mass stumbled from the car; in a moment they were in a group of half a dozen, huddled in the triangular space that the bridge made with the shore.

“Is it coming here?”

“No, it’s turning!”

“We had to leave grampa!”

“Oh, save me, save me! Jesus save me! Help me!”

“Jesus save my soul!”

There was a quick rush of wind outside, sending little tentacles under the bridge with a curious tension in them that made the doctor’s skin crawl. Then immediately there was a vacuum, with no more wind, but a sudden thrush of rain. The doctor crawled to the edge of the bridge and put his head up cautiously.

“It’s passed,” he said. “We only felt the edge; the centre went way to the right of us.”

He could see it plainly; for a second he could even distinguish objects in it — shrubbery and small trees, planks and loose earth. Crawling farther out, he produced his watch and tried to time it, but the thick curtain of rain blotted it from sight.

Soaked to the skin, he crawled back underneath. Butch lay shivering in the farthest corner, and the doctor shook him.

“It went in the direction of your house!” the doctor cried. “Pull yourself together! Who’s there?”

“No one,” Butch groaned. “They’re all down with Pinky.”

The rain had changed to hail now; first small pellets, then larger ones, and larger, until the sound of their fall upon the iron bridge was an ear-splitting tattoo.

The spared wretches under the bridge were slowly recovering, and in the relief there were titters of hysterical laughter. After a certain point of strain, the nervous system makes its transitions without dignity or reason. Even the doctor felt the contagion.

“This is worse than a calamity,” he said dryly. “It’s getting to be a nuisance.”

IV

There were to be no more tornadoes in Alabama that spring. The second one — it was popularly thought to be the first one come back; for to the people of Chilton County it had become a personified force, definite as a pagan god — took a dozen houses, Gene Janney's among them, and injured about thirty people. But this time — perhaps because everyone had developed some scheme of self-protection — there were no fatalities. It made its last dramatic bow by sailing down the main street of Bending, prostrating the telephone poles and crushing in the fronts of three shops, including Doc Janney's drug store.

At the end of a week, houses were going up again, made of the old boards; and before the end of the long, lush Alabama summer the grass would be green again on all the graves. But it will be years before the people of the country cease to reckon events as happening "before the tornado" or "after the tornado," — and for many families things will never be the same.

Doctor Janney decided that this was as good a time to leave as any. He sold the remains of his drug store, gutted alike by charity and catastrophe, and turned over his house to his brother until Gene could rebuild his own. He was going up to the city by train, for his car had been rammed against a tree and couldn't be counted on for much more than the trip to the station.

Several times on the way in he stopped by the roadside to say good-by — once it was to Walter Cupps.

"So it hit you, after all," he said, looking at the melancholy back house which alone marked the site.

"It's pretty bad," Walter answered. "But just think; they was six of us in or about the house and not one was injured. I'm content to give thanks to God for that."

"You were lucky there, Walt," the doctor agreed. "Do you happen to have heard whether the Red Cross took little Helen Kilrain to Montgomery or to Birmingham?"

“To Montgomery. Say, I was there when she came into town with that cat, tryin’ to get somebody to bandage up its paw. She must of walked miles through that rain and hail, but all that mattered to her was her kitty. Bad as I felt, I couldn’t help laughin’ at how spunky she was.”

The doctor was silent for a moment. “Do you happen to recollect if she has any people left?”

“I don’t, suh,” Walter replied, “but I think as not.”

At his brother’s place, the doctor made his last stop. They were all there, even the youngest, working among the ruins; already Butch had a shed erected to house the salvage of their goods. Save for this the most orderly thing surviving was the pattern of round white stone which was to have inclosed the garden.

The doctor took a hundred dollars in bills from his pocket and handed it to Gene.

“You can pay it back sometime, but don’t strain yourself,” he said. “It’s money I got from the store.” He cut off Gene’s thanks: “Pack up my books carefully when I send for ’em.”

“You reckon to practice medicine up there, Forrest?”

“I’ll maybe try it.”

The brothers held on to each other’s hands for a moment; the two youngest children came up to say good-by. Rose stood in the background in an old blue dress — she had no money to wear black for her eldest son.

“Good-by, Rose,” said the doctor.

“Good-by,” she responded, and then added in a dead voice, “Good luck to you, Forrest.”

For a moment he was tempted to say something conciliatory, but he saw it was no use. He was up against the maternal instinct, the same force that had sent little Helen through the storm with her injured cat.

At the station he bought a one-way ticket to Montgomery. The village was drab under the sky of a retarded spring, and as the train pulled out, it was odd to think that six months ago it had seemed to him as good a place as any other.

He was alone in the white section of the day coach; presently he felt for a bottle on his hip and drew it forth. "After all, a man of forty-five is entitled to more artificial courage when he starts over again." He began thinking of Helen. "She hasn't got any kin. I guess she's my little girl now."

He patted the bottle, then looked down at it as if in surprise.

"Well, we'll have to put you aside for a while, old friend. Any cat that's worth all that trouble and care is going to need a lot of grade-B milk."

He settled down in his seat, looking out the window. In his memory of that terrible week the winds still sailed about him, came in as draughts through the corridor of the car — winds of the world — cyclones, hurricane, tornadoes — grey and black, expected or unforeseen, some from the sky, some from the caves of hell.

But he would not let them touch Helen again — if he could help it.

He dozed momentarily, but a haunting dream woke him: "*Daddy stood over me and I stood over Kitty.*"

"All right, Helen," he said aloud, for he often talked to himself, "I guess the old brig can keep afloat a little longer — in any wind."

WHAT A HANDSOME PAIR!

I

Saturday Evening Post (27 August 1932)

At four o'clock on a November afternoon in 1902, Teddy Van Beck got out of a hansom cab in front of a brownstone house on Murray Hill. He was a tall, round-shouldered young man with a beaked nose and soft brown eyes in a sensitive face. In his veins quarreled the blood of colonial governors and celebrated robber barons; in him the synthesis had produced, for that time and place, something different and something new.

His cousin, Helen Van Beck, waited in the drawing-room. Her eyes were red from weeping, but she was young enough for it not to detract from her glossy beauty — a beauty that had reached the point where it seemed to contain in itself the secret of its own growth, as if it would go on increasing forever. She was nineteen and, contrary to the evidence, she was extremely happy.

Teddy put his arm around her and kissed her cheek, and found it changing into her ear as she turned her face away. He held her for a moment, his own enthusiasm chilling; then he said:

“You don't seem very glad to see me.”

Helen had a premonition that this was going to be one of the memorable scenes of her life, and with unconscious cruelty she set about extracting from it its full dramatic value. She sat in a corner of the couch, facing an easy-chair.

“Sit there,” she commanded, in what was then admired as a “regal manner,” and then, as Teddy straddled the piano stool: “No, don't sit there. I can't talk to you if you're going to revolve around.”

“Sit on my lap,” he suggested.

“No.”

Playing a one-handed flourish on the piano, he said, "I can listen better here."

Helen gave up hopes of beginning on the sad and quiet note.

"This is a serious matter, Teddy. Don't think I've decided it without a lot of consideration. I've got to ask you — to ask you to release me from our understanding."

"What?" Teddy's face paled with shock and dismay.

"I'll have to tell you from the beginning. I've realized for a long time that we have nothing in common. You're interested in your music, and I can't even play chopsticks." Her voice was weary as if with suffering; her small teeth tugged at her lower lip.

"What of it?" he demanded, relieved. "I'm musician enough for both. You wouldn't have to understand banking to marry a banker, would you?"

"This is different," Helen answered. "What would we do together? One important thing is that you don't like riding; you told me you were afraid of horses."

"Of course I'm afraid of horses," he said, and added reminiscently: "They try to bite me."

"It makes it so — "

"I've never met a horse — socially, that is — who didn't try to bite me. They used to do it when I put the bridle on; then, when I gave up putting the bridle on, they began reaching their heads around trying to get at my calves."

The eyes of her father, who had given her a Shetland at three, glistened, cold and hard, from her own.

"You don't even like the people I like, let alone the horses," she said.

"I can stand them. I've stood them all my life."

"Well, it would be a silly way to start a marriage. I don't see any grounds for mutual — mutual — "

“Riding?”

“Oh, not that.” Helen hesitated, and then said in an unconvinced tone, “Probably I’m not clever enough for you.”

“Don’t talk such stuff!” He demanded some truth: “Who’s the man?”

It took her a moment to collect herself. She had always resented Teddy’s tendency to treat women with less ceremony than was the custom of the day. Often he was an unfamiliar, almost frightening young man.

“There is someone,” she admitted. “It’s someone I’ve always known slightly, but about a month ago, when I went to Southampton, I was — thrown with him.”

“Thrown from a horse?”

“Please, Teddy,” she protested gravely. “I’d been getting more unhappy about you and me, and whenever I was with him everything seemed all right.” A note of exaltation that she would not conceal came into Helen’s voice. She rose and crossed the room, her straight, slim legs outlined by the shadows of her dress. “We rode and swam and played tennis together — did the things we both liked to do.”

He stared into the vacant space she had created for him. “Is that all that drew you to this fellow?”

“No, it was more than that. He was thrilling to me like nobody ever has been.” She laughed. “I think what really started me thinking about it was one day we came in from riding and everybody said aloud what a nice pair we made.”

“Did you kiss him?”

She hesitated. “Yes, once.”

He got up from the piano stool. “I feel as if I had a cannon ball in my stomach,” he exclaimed.

The butler announced Mr. Stuart Oldhorne.

“Is he the man?” Teddy demanded tensely.

She was suddenly upset and confused. “He should have come later. Would you rather go without meeting him?”

But Stuart Oldhorne, made confident by his new sense of proprietorship, had followed the butler.

The two men regarded each other with a curious impotence of expression; there can be no communication between men in that position, for their relation is indirect and consists in how much each of them has possessed or will possess of the woman in question, so that their emotions pass through her divided self as through a bad telephone connection.

Stuart Oldhorne sat beside Helen, his polite eyes never leaving Teddy. He had the same glowing physical power as she. He had been a star athlete at Yale and a Rough Rider in Cuba, and was the best young horseman on Long Island. Women loved him not only for his points but for a real sweetness of temper.

“You’ve lived so much in Europe that I don’t often see you,” he said to Teddy. Teddy didn’t answer and Stuart Oldhorne turned to Helen: “I’m early; I didn’t realize — ”

“You came at the right time,” said Teddy rather harshly. “I stayed to play you my congratulations.”

To Helen’s alarm, he turned and ran his fingers over the keyboard. Then he began.

What he was playing, neither Helen nor Stuart knew, but Teddy always remembered. He put his mind in order with a short résumé of the history of music, beginning with some chords from *The Messiah* and ending with Debussy’s *La Plus Que Lent*, which had an evocative quality for him, because he had first heard it the day his brother died. Then, pausing for an instant, he began to play more thoughtfully, and the lovers on the sofa could feel that they were alone — that he had left them and had no more traffic with them — and Helen’s discomfort lessened. But the flight, the elusiveness of the music, piqued her, gave her a feeling of annoyance. If Teddy had played the current sentimental song from *Erminie*, and had played it with feeling, she would have understood and been moved, but he was plunging her suddenly

into a world of mature emotions, whither her nature neither could nor wished to follow.

She shook herself slightly and said to Stuart: "Did you buy the horse?"

"Yes, and at a bargain. . . . Do you know I love you?"

"I'm glad," she whispered.

The piano stopped suddenly. Teddy closed it and swung slowly around: "Did you like my congratulations?"

"Very much," they said together.

"It was pretty good," he admitted. "That last was only based on a little counterpoint. You see, the idea of it was that you make such a handsome pair."

He laughed unnaturally; Helen followed him out into the hall.

"Good-by, Teddy," she said. "We're going to be good friends, aren't we?"

"Aren't we?" he repeated. He winked without smiling, and with a clicking, despairing sound of his mouth, went out quickly.

For a moment Helen tried vainly to apply a measure to the situation, wondering how she had come off with him, realizing reluctantly that she had never for an instant held the situation in her hands. She had a dim realization that Teddy was larger in scale; then the very largeness frightened her and, with relief and a warm tide of emotion, she hurried into the drawing-room and the shelter of her lover's arms.

Their engagement ran through a halcyon summer. Stuart visited Helen's family at Tuxedo, and Helen visited his family in Wheatley Hills. Before breakfast, their horses' hoofs sedately scattered the dew in sentimental glades, or curtained them with dust as they raced on dirt roads. They bought a tandem bicycle and pedaled all over Long Island — which Mrs. Cassius Ruthven, a contemporary Cato, considered "rather fast" for a couple not yet married. They were seldom at rest, but when they were, they reminded people of His Move on a Gibson pillow.

Helen's taste for sport was advanced for her generation. She rode nearly as well as Stuart and gave him a decent game in tennis. He taught her some polo, and they were golf crazy when it was still considered a comic game. They liked to feel fit and cool together. They thought of themselves as a team, and it was often remarked how well mated they were. A chorus of pleasant envy followed in the wake of their effortless glamour.

They talked.

"It seems a pity you've got to go to the office," she would say. "I wish you did something we could do together, like taming lions."

"I've always thought that in a pinch I could make a living breeding and racing horses," said Stuart.

"I know you could, you darling."

In August he brought a Thomas automobile and toured all the way to Chicago with three other men. It was an event of national interest and their pictures were in all the papers. Helen wanted to go, but it wouldn't have been proper, so they compromised by driving down Fifth Avenue on a sunny September morning, one with the fine day and the fashionable crowd, but distinguished by their unity, which made them each as strong as two.

"What do you suppose?" Helen demanded. "Teddy sent me the oddest present — a cup rack."

Stuart laughed. "Obviously, he means that all we'll ever do is win cups."

"I thought it was rather a slam," Helen ruminated. "I saw that he was invited to everything, but he didn't answer a single invitation. Would you mind very much stopping by his apartment now? I haven't seen him for months and I don't like to leave anything unpleasant in the past."

He wouldn't go in with her. "I'll sit and answer questions about the auto from passers-by."

The door was opened by a woman in a cleaning cap, and Helen heard the sound of Teddy's piano from the room beyond. The woman seemed reluctant to admit her.

“He said don’t interrupt him, but I suppose if you’re his cousin — ”

Teddy welcomed her, obviously startled and somewhat upset, but in a minute he was himself again.

“I won’t marry you,” he assured her. “You’ve had your chance.”

“All right,” she laughed.

“How are you?” He threw a pillow at her. “You’re beautiful! Are you happy with this — this centaur? Does he beat you with his riding crop?” He peered at her closely. “You look a little duller than when I knew you. I used to whip you up to a nervous excitement that bore a resemblance to intelligence.”

“I’m happy, Teddy. I hope you are.”

“Sure, I’m happy; I’m working. I’ve got MacDowell on the run and I’m going to have a shebang at Carnegie Hall next September.” His eyes became malicious. “What did you think of my girl?”

“Your girl?”

“The girl who opened the door for you.”

“Oh, I thought it was a maid.” She flushed and was silent.

He laughed. “Hey, Betty!” he called. “You were mistaken for the maid!”

“And that’s the fault of my cleaning on Sunday,” answered a voice from the next room.

Teddy lowered his voice. “Do you like her?” he demanded.

“Teddy!” She teetered on the arm of the sofa, wondering whether she should leave at once.

“What would you think if I married her?” he asked confidentially.

“Teddy!” She was outraged; it had needed but a glance to place the woman as common. “You’re joking. She’s older than you. . . . You wouldn’t be such a fool as to throw away your future that way.”

He didn’t answer.

“Is she musical?” Helen demanded. “Does she help you with your work?”

“She doesn’t know a note. Neither did you, but I’ve got enough music in me for twenty wives.”

Visualizing herself as one of them, Helen rose stiffly.

“All I can ask you is to think how your mother would have felt — and those who care for you. . . . Good-by, Teddy.”

He walked out the door with her and down the stairs.

“As a matter of fact, we’ve been married for two months,” he said casually. “She was a waitress in a place where I used to eat.”

Helen felt that she should be angry and aloof, but tears of hurt vanity were springing to her eyes.

“And do you love her?”

“I like her; she’s a good person and good for me. Love is something else. I loved you, Helen, and that’s all dead in me for the present. Maybe it’s coming out in my music. Some day I’ll probably love other women — or maybe there’ll never be anything but you. Good-by, Helen.”

The declaration touched her. “I hope you’ll be happy, Teddy. Bring your wife to the wedding.”

He bowed noncommittally. When she had gone, he returned thoughtfully to his apartment.

“That was the cousin that I was in love with,” he said.

“And was it?” Betty’s face, Irish and placid, brightened with interest. “She’s a pretty thing.”

“She wouldn’t have been as good for me as a nice peasant like you.”

“Always thinking of yourself, Teddy Van Beck.”

He laughed. “Sure I am, but you love me, anyhow?”

“That’s a big wur-red.”

“All right. I’ll remember that when you come begging around for a kiss. If my grandfather knew I married a bog trotter, he’d turn over in his grave. Now get out and let me finish my work.”

He sat at the piano, a pencil behind his ear. Already his face was resolved, composed, but his eyes grew more intense minute by minute, until there was a glaze in them, behind which they seemed to have joined his ears in counting and hearing. Presently there was no more indication in his face that anything had occurred to disturb the tranquillity of his Sunday morning.

II

Mrs. Cassius Ruthven and a friend, veils flung back across their hats, sat in their auto on the edge of the field.

“A young woman playing polo in breeches.” Mrs. Ruthven sighed. “Amy Van Beck’s daughter. I thought when Helen organized the Amazons she’d stop at divided skirts. But her husband apparently has no objections, for there he stands, egging her on. Of course, they always have liked the same things.”

“A pair of thoroughbreds, those two,” said the other woman complacently, meaning that she admitted them to be her equals. “You’d never look at them and think that anything had gone wrong.”

She was referring to Stuart’s mistake in the panic of 1907. His father had bequeathed him a precarious situation and Stuart had made an error of judgment. His honor was not questioned and his crowd stood by him loyally, but his usefulness in Wall Street was over and his small fortune was gone.

He stood in a group of men with whom he would presently play, noting things to tell Helen after the game — she wasn’t turning with the play soon enough and several times she was unnecessarily ridden off at important moments. Her ponies were sluggish — the penalty for playing with borrowed mounts — but she was, nevertheless, the best player on the field, and in the last minute she made a save that brought applause.

“Good girl! Good girl!”

Stuart had been delegated with the unpleasant duty of chasing the women from the field. They had started an hour late and now a team from New Jersey was waiting to play; he sensed trouble as he cut across to join Helen and walked beside her toward the stables. She was splendid, with her flushed cheeks, her shining, triumphant eyes, her short, excited breath. He temporized for a minute.

“That was good — that last,” he said.

“Thanks. It almost broke my arm. Wasn’t I pretty good all through?”

“You were the best out there.”

“I know it.”

He waited while she dismounted and handed the pony to a groom.

“Helen, I believe I’ve got a job.”

“What is it?”

“Don’t jump on the idea till you think it over. Gus Myers wants me to manage his racing stables. Eight thousand a year.”

Helen considered. “It’s a nice salary; and I bet you could make yourself up a nice string from his ponies.”

“The principal thing is that I need the money; I’d have as much as you and things would be easier.”

“You’d have as much as me,” Helen repeated. She almost regretted that he would need no more help from her. “But with Gus Myers, isn’t there a string attached? Wouldn’t he expect a boost up?”

“He probably would,” answered Stuart bluntly, “and if I can help him socially, I will. As a matter of fact, he wants me at a stag dinner tonight.”

“All right, then,” Helen said absently. Still hesitating to tell her her game was over, Stuart followed her glance toward the field, where a runabout had driven up and parked by the ropes.

“There’s your old friend, Teddy,” he remarked dryly — “or rather, your new friend, Teddy. He’s taking a sudden interest in polo. Perhaps he thinks the horses aren’t biting this summer.”

“You’re not in a very good humor,” protested Helen. “You know, if you say the word, I’ll never see him again. All I want in the world is for you and I to be together.”

“I know,” he admitted regretfully. “Selling horses and giving up clubs put a crimp in that. I know the women all fall for Teddy, now he’s getting famous, but if he tries to fool around with you I’ll break his piano over his head. . . . Oh, another thing,” he began, seeing the men already riding on the field. “About your last chukker — ”

As best he could, he put the situation up to her. He was not prepared for the fury that swept over her.

“But it’s an outrage! I got up the game and it’s been posted on the bulletin board for three days.”

“You started an hour late.”

“And do you know why?” she demanded. “Because your friend Joe Morgan insisted that Celie ride sidesaddle. He tore her habit off her three times, and she only got here by climbing out the kitchen window.”

“I can’t do anything about it.”

“Why can’t you? Weren’t you once a governor of this club? How can women ever expect to be any good if they have to quit every time the men want the field? All the men want is for the women to come up to them in the evening and tell them what a beautiful game they played!”

Still raging and blaming Stuart, she crossed the field to Teddy’s car. He got out and greeted her with concentrated intensity:

“I’ve reached the point where I can neither sleep nor eat from thinking of you. What point is that?”

There was something thrilling about him that she had never been conscious of in the old days; perhaps the stories of his philanderings had made him more romantic to her.

“Well, don’t think of me as I am now,” she said. “My face is getting rougher every day and my muscles lean out of an evening dress like a female impersonator. People are beginning to refer to me as handsome instead of pretty. Besides, I’m in a vile humor. It seems to me women are always just edged out of everything.”

Stuart’s game was brutal that afternoon. In the first five minutes, he realized that Teddy’s runabout was no longer there, and his long slugs began to tally from all angles. Afterward, he bumped home across country at a gallop; his mood was not assuaged by a note handed him by the children’s nurse:

DEAR: Since your friends made it possible for us to play, I wasn’t going to sit there just dripping; so I had Teddy bring me home. And since you’ll be out to dinner, I’m going into New York with him to the theater. I’ll either be out on the theater train or spend the night at mother’s.

HELEN.

Stuart went upstairs and changed into his dinner coat. He had no defense against the unfamiliar claws of jealousy that began a slow dissection of his insides. Often Helen had gone to plays or dances with other men, but this was different. He felt toward Teddy the faint contempt of the physical man for the artist, but the last six months had bruised his pride. He perceived the possibility that Helen might be seriously interested in someone else.

He was in a bad humor at Gus Myers’ dinner — annoyed with his host for talking so freely about their business arrangement. When at last they rose from the table, he decided that it was no go and called Myers aside.

“Look here. I’m afraid this isn’t a good idea, after all.”

“Why not?” His host looked at him in alarm. “Are you going back on me? My dear fellow — ”

“I think we’d better call it off.”

“And why, may I ask? Certainly I have the right to ask why.”

Stuart considered. “All right, I’ll tell you. When you made that little speech, you mentioned me as if you had somehow bought me, as if I was a sort of employee in your office. Now, in the sporting world that doesn’t go; things are more — more democratic. I grew up with all these men here tonight, and they didn’t like it any better than I did.”

“I see,” Mr. Myers reflected carefully — “I see.” Suddenly he clapped Stuart on the back. “That is exactly the sort of thing I like to be told; it helps me. From now on I won’t mention you as if you were in my — as if we had a business arrangement. Is that all right?”

After all, the salary was eight thousand dollars.

“Very well, then,” Stuart agreed. “But you’ll have to excuse me tonight. I’m catching a train to the city.”

“I’ll put an automobile at your disposal.”

At ten o’clock he rang the bell of Teddy’s apartment on Forty-eighth Street.

“I’m looking for Mr. Van Beck,” he said to the woman who answered the door. “I know he’s gone to the theater, but I wonder if you can tell me — ” Suddenly he guessed who the woman was. “I’m Stuart Oldhorne,” he explained. “I married Mr. Van Beck’s cousin.”

“Oh, come in,” said Betty pleasantly. “I know all about who you are.”

She was just this side of forty, stoutish and plain of face, but full of a keen, brisk vitality. In the living room they sat down.

“You want to see Teddy?”

“He’s with my wife and I want to join them after the theater. I wonder if you know where they went?”

“Oh, so Teddy’s with your wife.” There was a faint, pleasant brogue in her voice. “Well, now, he didn’t say exactly where he’d be tonight.”

“Then you don’t know?”

“I don’t — not for the life of me,” she admitted cheerfully. “I’m sorry.”

He stood up, and Betty saw the thinly hidden anguish in his face. Suddenly she was really sorry.

“I did hear him say something about the theater,” she said ruminatively.

“Now sit down and let me think what it was. He goes out so much and a play once a week is enough for me, so that one night mixes up with the others in my head. Didn’t your wife say where to meet them?”

“No. I only decided to come in after they’d started. She said she’d catch the theater train back to Long Island or go to her mother’s.”

“That’s it,” Betty said triumphantly, striking her hands together like cymbals.

“That’s what he said when he called up — that he was putting a lady on the theater train for Long Island, and would be home himself right afterward. We’ve had a child sick and it’s driven things from my mind.”

“I’m very sorry I bothered you under those conditions.”

“It’s no bother. Sit down. It’s only just after ten.”

Feeling easier, Stuart relaxed a little and accepted a cigar.

“No, if I tried to keep up with Teddy, I’d have white hair by now,” Betty said.

“Of course, I go to his concerts, but often I fall asleep — not that he ever knows it. So long as he doesn’t take too much to drink and knows where his home is, I don’t bother about where he wanders.” As Stuart’s face grew serious again, she changed her tone: “All and all, he’s a good husband to me and we have a happy life together, without interfering with each other. How would he do working next to the nursery and groaning at every sound? And how would I do going to Mrs. Ruthven’s with him, and all of them talking about high society and high art?”

A phrase of Helen’s came back to Stuart: “Always together — I like for us to do everything together.”

“You have children, haven’t you, Mr. Oldhorne?”

“Yes. My boy’s almost big enough to sit a horse.”

“Ah, yes; you’re both great for horses.”

“My wife says that as soon as their legs are long enough to reach stirrups, she’ll be interested in them again.” This didn’t sound right to Stuart and he modified it: “I mean she always has been interested in them, but she never let them monopolize her or come between us. We’ve always believed that marriage ought to be founded on companionship, on having the same interests. I mean, you’re musical and you help your husband.”

Betty laughed. “I wish Teddy could hear that. I can’t read a note or carry a tune.”

“No?” He was confused. “I’d somehow got the impression that you were musical.”

“You can’t see why else he’d have married me?”

“Not at all. On the contrary.”

After a few minutes, he said good night, somehow liking her. When he had gone, Betty’s expression changed slowly to one of exasperation; she went to the telephone and called her husband’s studio:

“There you are, Teddy. Now listen to me carefully. I know your cousin is with you and I want to talk with her. . . . Now, don’t lie. You put her on the phone. Her husband has been here, and if you don’t let me talk to her, it might be a serious matter.”

She could hear an unintelligible colloquy, and then Helen’s voice:

“Hello.”

“Good evening, Mrs. Oldhorne. Your husband came here, looking for you and Teddy. I told him I didn’t know which play you were at, so you’d better be thinking which one. And I told him Teddy was leaving you at the station in time for the theater train.”

“Oh, thank you very much. We — ”

“Now, you meet your husband or there’s trouble for you, or I’m no judge of men. And — wait a minute. Tell Teddy, if he’s going to be up late, that Josie’s sleeping light, and he’s not to touch the piano when he gets home.”

Betty heard Teddy come in at eleven, and she came into the drawing-room smelling of camomile vapor. He greeted her absently; there was a look of suffering in his face and his eyes were bright and far away.

“You call yourself a great musician, Teddy Van Beck,” she said, “but it seems to me you’re much more interested in women.”

“Let me alone, Betty.”

“I do let you alone, but when the husbands start coming here, it’s another matter.”

“This was different, Betty. This goes way back into the past.”

“It sounds like the present to me.”

“Don’t make any mistake about Helen,” he said. “She’s a good woman.”

“Not through any fault of yours, I know.”

He sank his head wearily in his hands. “I’ve tried to forget her. I’ve avoided her for six years. And then, when I met her a month ago, it all rushed over me. Try and understand, Bet. You’re my best friend; you’re the only person that ever loved me.”

“When you’re good I love you,” she said.

“Don’t worry. It’s over. She loves her husband; she just came to New York with me because she’s got some spite against him. She follows me a certain distance just like she always has, and then — Anyhow, I’m not going to see her any more. Now go to bed, Bet. I want to play for a while.”

He was on his feet when she stopped him. “You’re not to touch the piano tonight.”

“Oh, I forgot about Josie,” he said remorsefully. “Well, I’ll drink a bottle of beer and then I’ll come to bed.”

He came close and put his arm around her. "Dear Bet, nothing could ever interfere with us."

"You're a bad boy, Teddy," she said. "I wouldn't ever be so bad to you."

"How do you know, Bet? How do you know what you'd do?"

He smoothed down her plain brown hair, knowing for the thousandth time that she had none of the world's dark magic for him, and that he couldn't live without her for six consecutive hours. "Dear Bet," he whispered. "Dear Bet."

III

The Oldhorns were visiting. In the last four years, since Stuart had terminated his bondage to Gus Myers, they had become visiting people. The children visited Grandmother Van Beck during the winter and attended school in New York. Stuart and Helen visited friends in Asheville, Aiken and Palm Beach, and in the summer usually occupied a small cottage on someone's Long Island estate. "My dear, it's just standing there empty. I wouldn't dream of accepting any rent. You'll be doing us a favor by occupying it."

Usually, they were; they gave out a great deal of themselves in that eternal willingness and enthusiasm which makes a successful guest — it became their profession. Moving through a world that was growing rich with the war in Europe, Stuart had somewhere lost his way. Twice playing brilliant golf in the national amateur, he accepted a job as professional at a club which his father had helped to found. He was restless and unhappy.

This week-end they were visiting a pupil of his. As a consequence of a mixed foursome, the Oldhorns went upstairs to dress for dinner surcharged with the unpleasant accumulation of many unsatisfactory months. In the afternoon, Stuart had played with their hostess and Helen with another man — a situation which Stuart always dreaded, because it forced him into competition with Helen. He had actually tried to miss that putt on the eighteenth — to just miss it. But the ball dropped in the cup. Helen went

through the superficial motions of a good loser, but she devoted herself pointedly to her partner for the rest of the afternoon.

Their expressions still counterfeited amusement as they entered their room.

When the door closed, Helen's pleasant expression faded and she walked toward the dressing table as though her own reflection was the only decent company with which to forgather. Stuart watched her, frowning.

"I know why you're in a rotten humor," he said; "though I don't believe you know yourself."

"I'm not in a rotten humor," Helen responded in a clipped voice.

"You are; and I know the real reason — the one you don't know. It's because I holed that putt this afternoon."

She turned slowly, incredulously, from the mirror.

"Oh, so I have a new fault! I've suddenly become, of all things, a poor sport!"

"It's not like you to be a poor sport," he admitted, "but otherwise why all this interest in other men, and why do you look at me as if I'm — well, slightly gamy?"

"I'm not aware of it."

"I am." He was aware, too, that there was always some man in their life now — some man of power and money who paid court to Helen and gave her the sense of solidity which he failed to provide. He had no cause to be jealous of any particular man, but the pressure of many was irritating. It annoyed him that on so slight a grievance, Helen should remind him by her actions that he no longer filled her entire life.

"If Anne can get any satisfaction out of winning, she's welcome to it," said Helen suddenly.

"Isn't that rather petty? She isn't in your class; she won't qualify for the third flight in Boston."

Feeling herself in the wrong, she changed her tone.

“Oh, that isn’t it,” she broke out. “I just keep wishing you and I could play together like we used to. And now you have to play with dubs, and get their wretched shots out of traps. Especially” — she hesitated — “especially when you’re so unnecessarily gallant.”

The faint contempt in her voice, the mock jealousy that covered a growing indifference was apparent to him. There had been a time when, if he danced with another woman, Helen’s stricken eyes followed him around the room.

“My gallantry is simply a matter of business,” he answered. “Lessons have brought in three hundred a month all summer. How could I go to see you play at Boston next week, except that I’m going to coach other women?”

“And you’re going to see me win,” announced Helen. “Do you know that?”

“Naturally, I want nothing more,” Stuart said automatically. But the unnecessary defiance in her voice repelled him, and he suddenly wondered if he really cared whether she won or not.

At the same moment, Helen’s mood changed and for a moment she saw the true situation — that she could play in amateur tournaments and Stuart could not, that the new cups in the rack were all hers now, that he had given up the fiercely competitive sportsmanship that had been the breath of life to him in order to provide necessary money.

“Oh, I’m so sorry for you, Stuart!” There were tears in her eyes. “It seems such a shame that you can’t do the things you love, and I can. Perhaps I oughtn’t to play this summer.”

“Nonsense,” he said. “You can’t sit home and twirl your thumbs.”

She caught at this: “You wouldn’t want me to. I can’t help being good at sports; you taught me nearly all I know. But I wish I could help you.”

“Just try to remember I’m your best friend. Sometimes you act as if we were rivals.”

She hesitated, annoyed by the truth of his words and unwilling to concede an inch; but a wave of memories rushed over her, and she thought how

brave he was in his eked-out, pieced-together life; she came and threw her arms around him.

“Darling, darling, things are going to be better. You’ll see.”

Helen won the finals in the tournament at Boston the following week. Following around with the crowd, Stuart was very proud of her. He hoped that instead of feeding her egotism, the actual achievement would make things easier between them. He hated the conflict that had grown out of their wanting the same excellences, the same prizes from life.

Afterward he pursued her progress toward the clubhouse, amused and a little jealous of the pack that fawned around her. He reached the club among the last, and a steward accosted him. “Professionals are served in the lower grill, please,” the man said.

“That’s all right. My name’s Oldhorne.”

He started to walk by, but the man barred his way.

“Sorry, sir. I realize that Mrs. Oldhorne’s playing in the match, but my orders are to direct the professionals to the lower grill, and I understand you are a professional.”

“Why, look here — ” Stuart began, wildly angry, and stopped. A group of people were listening. “All right; never mind,” he said gruffly, and turned away.

The memory of the experience rankled; it was the determining factor that drove him, some weeks later, to a momentous decision. For a long time he had been playing with the idea of joining the Canadian Air Force, for service in France. He knew that his absence would have little practical bearing on the lives of Helen and the children; happening on some friends who were also full of the restlessness of 1915, the matter was suddenly decided. But he had not counted on the effect upon Helen; her reaction was not so much one of grief or alarm, but as if she had been somehow outwitted.

“But you might have told me!” she wailed. “You leave me dangling; you simply take yourself away without any warning.”

Once again Helen saw him as the bright and intolerably blinding hero, and her soul winced before him as it had when they first met. He was a warrior; for him, peace was only the interval between wars, and peace was destroying him. Here was the game of games beckoning him — Without throwing over the whole logic of their lives, there was nothing she could say.

“This is my sort of thing,” he said confidently, younger with his excitement. “A few more years of this life and I’d go to pieces, take to drink. I’ve somehow lost your respect, and I’ve got to have that, even if I’m far away.”

She was proud of him again; she talked to everyone of his impending departure. Then, one September afternoon, she came home from the city, full of the old feeling of comradeship and bursting with news, to find him buried in an utter depression.

“Stuart,” she cried, “I’ve got the — ” She broke off. “What’s the matter, darling? Is something the matter?”

He looked at her dully. “They turned me down,” he said.

“What?”

“My left eye.” He laughed bitterly. “Where that dub cracked me with the brassie. I’m nearly blind in it.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?”

“Nothing.”

“Stuart!” She stared at him aghast. “Stuart, and I was going to tell you! I was saving it for a surprise. Elsa Prentice has organized a Red Cross unit to serve with the French, and I joined it because I thought it would be wonderful if we both went. We’ve been measured for uniforms and bought our outfits, and we’re sailing the end of next week.”

IV

Helen was a blurred figure among other blurred figures on a boat deck, dark against the threat of submarines. When the ship had slid out into the obscure future, Stuart walked eastward along Fifty-seventh Street. His grief at the severance of many ties was a weight he carried in his body, and he walked slowly, as if adjusting himself to it. To balance this there was a curious sensation of lightness in his mind. For the first time in twelve years he was alone, and the feeling came over him that he was alone for good; knowing Helen and knowing war, he could guess at the experiences she would go through, and he could not form any picture of a renewed life together afterward. He was discarded; she had proved the stronger at last. It seemed very strange and sad that his marriage should have such an ending.

He came to Carnegie Hall, dark after a concert, and his eye caught the name of Theodore Van Beck, large on the posted bills. As he stared at it, a green door opened in the side of the building and a group of people in evening dress came out. Stuart and Teddy were face to face before they recognized each other.

“Hello, there!” Teddy cried cordially. “Did Helen sail?”

“Just now.”

“I met her on the street yesterday and she told me. I wanted you both to come to my concert. Well, she’s quite a heroine, going off like that. . . . Have you met my wife?”

Stuart and Betty smiled at each other.

“We’ve met.”

“And I didn’t know it,” protested Teddy. “Women need watching when they get toward their dotage. . . . Look here, Stuart; we’re having a few people up to the apartment. No heavy music or anything. Just supper and a few débutantes to tell me I was divine. It will do you good to come. I imagine you’re missing Helen like the devil.”

“I don’t think I— ”

“Come along. They’ll tell you you’re divine too.”

Realizing that the invitation was inspired by kindness, Stuart accepted. It was the sort of gathering he had seldom attended, and he was surprised to meet so many people he knew. Teddy played the lion in a manner at once assertive and skeptical. Stuart listened as he enlarged to Mrs. Cassius Ruthven on one of his favorite themes:

“People tried to make marriages coöperative and they’ve ended by becoming competitive. Impossible situation. Smart men will get to fight shy of ornamental women. A man ought to marry somebody who’ll be grateful, like Betty here.”

“Now don’t talk so much, Theodore Van Beck,” Betty interrupted. “Since you’re such a fine musician, you’d do well to express yourself with music instead of rash words.”

“I don’t agree with your husband,” said Mrs. Ruthven. “English girls hunt with their men and play politics with them on absolutely equal terms, and it tends to draw them together.”

“It does not,” insisted Teddy. “That’s why English society is the most disorganized in the world. Betty and I are happy because we haven’t any qualities in common at all.”

His exuberance grated on Stuart, and the success that flowed from him swung his mind back to the failure of his own life. He could not know that his life was not destined to be a failure. He could not read the fine story that three years later would be carved proud above his soldier’s grave, or know that his restless body, which never spared itself in sport or danger, was destined to give him one last proud gallop at the end.

“They turned me down,” he was saying to Mrs. Ruthven. “I’ll have to stick to Squadron A, unless we get drawn in.”

“So Helen’s gone.” Mrs. Ruthven looked at him, reminiscing. “I’ll never forget your wedding. You were both so handsome, so ideally suited to each other. Everybody spoke of it.”

Stuart remembered; for the moment it seemed that he had little else that it was fun to remember.

“Yes,” he agreed, nodding his head thoughtfully, “I suppose we were a handsome pair.”

CRAZY SUNDAY

I

American Mercury (October 1932)

It was Sunday — not a day, but rather a gap between two other days. Behind, for all of them, lay sets and sequences, the long waits under the crane that swung the microphone, the hundred miles a day by automobiles to and fro across a county, the struggles of rival ingenuities in the conference rooms, the ceaseless compromise, the clash and strain of many personalities fighting for their lives. And now Sunday, with individual life starting up again, with a glow kindling in eyes that had been glazed with monotony the afternoon before. Slowly as the hours waned they came awake like “Puppenfeen” in a toy shop: an intense colloquy in a corner, lovers disappearing to neck in a hall. And the feeling of “Hurry, it’s not too late, but for God’s sake hurry before the blessed forty hours of leisure are over.”

Joel Coles was writing continuity. He was twenty-eight and not yet broken by Hollywood. He had had what were considered nice assignments since his arrival six months before and he submitted his scenes and sequences with enthusiasm. He referred to himself modestly as a hack but really did not think of it that way. His mother had been a successful actress; Joel had spent his childhood between London and New York trying to separate the real from the unreal, or at least to keep one guess ahead. He was a handsome man with the pleasant cow-brown eyes that in 1913 had gazed out at Broadway audiences from his mother’s face.

When the invitation came it made him sure that he was getting somewhere. Ordinarily he did not go out on Sundays but stayed sober and took work home with him. Recently they had given him a Eugene O’Neill play destined for a very important lady indeed. Everything he had done so far had pleased Miles Calman, and Miles Calman was the only director on the lot who did not work under a supervisor and was responsible to the money men alone.

Everything was clicking into place in Joel's career. ("This is Mr. Calman's secretary. Will you come to tea from four to six Sunday — he lives in Beverly Hills, number —.")

Joel was flattered. It would be a party out of the top-drawer. It was a tribute to himself as a young man of promise. The Marion Davies' crowd, the high-hats, the big currency numbers, perhaps even Dietrich and Garbo and the Marquise, people who were not seen everywhere, would probably be at Calman's.

"I won't take anything to drink," he assured himself. Calman was audibly tired of rummies, and thought it was a pity the industry could not get along without them.

Joel agreed that writers drank too much — he did himself, but he wouldn't this afternoon. He wished Miles would be within hearing when the cocktails were passed to hear his succinct, unobtrusive, "No, thank you."

Miles Calman's house was built for great emotional moments — there was an air of listening, as if the far silences of its vistas hid an audience, but this afternoon it was thronged, as though people had been bidden rather than asked. Joel noted with pride that only two other writers from the studio were in the crowd, an ennobled limey and, somewhat to his surprise, Nat Keogh, who had evoked Calman's impatient comment on drunks.

Stella Calman (Stella Walker, of course) did not move on to her other guests after she spoke to Joel. She lingered — she looked at him with the sort of beautiful look that demands some sort of acknowledgment and Joe drew quickly on the dramatic adequacy inherited from his mother:

"Well, you look about sixteen! Where's your kiddy car?"

She was visibly pleased; she lingered. He felt that he should say something more, something confident and easy — he had first met her when she was struggling for bits in New York. At the moment a tray slid up and Stella put a cocktail glass into his hand.

"Everybody's afraid, aren't they?" he said, looking at it absently. "Everybody watches for everybody else's blunders, or tries to make sure they're with

people that'll do them credit. Of course that's not true in your house," he covered himself hastily. "I just meant generally in Hollywood."

Stella agreed. She presented several people to Joel as if he were very important. Reassuring himself that Miles was at the other side of the room, Joel drank the cocktail.

"So you have a baby?" he said. "That's the time to look out. After a pretty woman has had her first child, she's very vulnerable, because she wants to be reassured about her own charm. She's got to have some new man's unqualified devotion to prove to herself she hasn't lost anything."

"I never get anybody's unqualified devotion," Stella said rather resentfully.

"They're afraid of your husband."

"You think that's it?" She wrinkled her brow over the idea; then the conversation was interrupted at the exact moment Joel would have chosen.

Her attentions had given him confidence. Not for him to join safe groups, to slink to refuge under the wings of such acquaintances as he saw about the room. He walked to the window and looked out toward the Pacific, colorless under its sluggish sunset. It was good here — the American Riviera and all that, if there were ever time to enjoy it. The handsome, well-dressed people in the room, the lovely girls, and the — well, the lovely girls. You couldn't have everything.

He saw Stella's fresh boyish face, with the tired eyelid that always drooped a little over one eye, moving about among her guests and he wanted to sit with her and talk a long time as if she were a girl instead of a name; he followed her to see if she paid anyone as much attention as she had paid him. He took another cocktail — not because he needed confidence but because she had given him so much of it. Then he sat down beside the director's mother.

"Your son's gotten to be a legend, Mrs. Calman — Oracle and a Man of Destiny and all that. Personally, I'm against him but I'm in a minority. What do you think of him? Are you impressed? Are you surprised how far he's gone?"

“No, I’m not surprised,” she said calmly. “We always expected a lot from Miles.”

“Well now, that’s unusual,” remarked Joel. “I always think all mothers are like Napoleon’s mother. My mother didn’t want me to have anything to do with the entertainment business. She wanted me to go to West Point and be safe.”

“We always had every confidence in Miles.” . . .

He stood by the built-in bar of the dining room with the good-humored, heavy-drinking, highly paid Nat Keogh.

“ — I made a hundred grand during the year and lost forty grand gambling, so now I’ve hired a manager.”

“You mean an agent,” suggested Joel.

“No, I’ve got that too. I mean a manager. I make over everything to my wife and then he and my wife get together and hand me out the money. I pay him five thousand a year to hand me out my money.”

“You mean your agent.”

“No, I mean my manager, and I’m not the only one — a lot of other irresponsible people have him.”

“Well, if you’re irresponsible why are you responsible enough to hire a manager?”

“I’m just irresponsible about gambling. Look here — ”

A singer performed; Joel and Nat went forward with the others to listen.

II

The singing reached Joel vaguely; he felt happy and friendly toward all the people gathered there, people of bravery and industry, superior to a bourgeoisie that outdid them in ignorance and loose living, risen to a position of the highest prominence in a nation that for a decade had wanted

only to be entertained. He liked them — he loved them. Great waves of good feeling flowed through him.

As the singer finished his number and there was a drift toward the hostess to say good-by, Joel had an idea. He would give them “Building It Up,” his own composition. It was his only parlor trick, it had amused several parties and it might please Stella Walker. Possessed by the hunch, his blood throbbing with the scarlet corpuscles of exhibitionism, he sought her.

“Of course,” she cried. “Please! Do you need anything?”

“Someone has to be the secretary that I’m supposed to be dictating to.”

“I’ll be her.”

As the word spread the guests in the hall, already putting on their coats to leave, drifted back and Joel faced the eyes of many strangers. He had a dim foreboding, realizing that the man who had just performed was a famous radio entertainer. Then someone said “Sh!” and he was alone with Stella, the center of a sinister Indian-like half-circle. Stella smiled up at him expectantly — he began.

His burlesque was based upon the cultural limitations of Mr. Dave Silverstein, an independent producer; Silverstein was presumed to be dictating a letter outlining a treatment of a story he had bought.

“ — a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion,” he heard his voice saying, with the intonations of Mr. Silverstein. “But we got to build it up, see?”

A sharp pang of doubt struck through him. The faces surrounding him in the gently molded light were intent and curious, but there was no ghost of a smile anywhere; directly in front the Great Lover of the screen glared at him with an eye as keen as the eye of a potato. Only Stella Walker looked up at him with a radiant, never faltering smile.

“If we make him a Menjou type, then we get a sort of Michael Arlen only with a Honolulu atmosphere.”

Still not a ripple in front, but in the rear a rustling, a perceptible shift toward the left, toward the front door.

“ — then she says she feels this sex appil for him and he burns out and says ‘Oh go on destroy yourself’ — ”

At some point he heard Nat Keogh snicker and here and there were a few encouraging faces, but as he finished he had the sickening realization that he had made a fool of himself in view of an important section of the picture world, upon whose favor depended his career.

For a moment he existed in the midst of a confused silence, broken by a general trek for the door. He felt the undercurrent of derision that rolled through the gossip; then — all this was in the space of ten seconds — the Great Lover, his eye hard and empty as the eye of a needle, shouted “Boo! Boo!” voicing in an overtone what he felt was the mood of the crowd. It was the resentment of the professional toward the amateur, of the community toward the stranger, the thumbs-down of the clan.

Only Stella Walker was still standing near and thanking him as if he had been an unparalleled success, as if it hadn't occurred to her that anyone hadn't liked it. As Nat Keogh helped him into his overcoat, a great wave of self-disgust swept over him and he clung desperately to his rule of never betraying an inferior emotion until he no longer felt it.

“I was a flop,” he said lightly, to Stella. “Never mind, it's a good number when appreciated. Thanks for your coöperation.”

The smile did not leave her face — he bowed rather drunkenly and Nat drew him toward the door. . . .

The arrival of his breakfast awakened him into a broken and ruined world. Yesterday he was himself, a point of fire against an industry, today he felt that he was pitted under an enormous disadvantage, against those faces, against individual contempt and collective sneer. Worse than that, to Miles Calman he was become one of those rummies, stripped of dignity, whom Calman regretted he was compelled to use. To Stella Walker, on whom he had forced a martyrdom to preserve the courtesy of her house — her

opinion he did not dare to guess. His gastric juices ceased to flow and he set his poached eggs back on the telephone table. He wrote:

DEAR MILES: You can imagine my profound self-disgust. I confess to a taint of exhibitionism, but at six o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight! Good God! My apologies to your wife.

Yours ever,

JOEL COLES.

Joel emerged from his office on the lot only to slink like a malefactor to the tobacco store. So suspicious was his manner that one of the studio police asked to see his admission card. He had decided to eat lunch outside when Nat Keogh, confident and cheerful, overtook him.

“What do you mean you're in permanent retirement? What if that Three Piece Suit did boo you?”

“Why, listen,” he continued, drawing Joel into the studio restaurant. “The night of one of his premiers at Grauman's, Joe Squires kicked his tail while he was bowing to the crowd. The ham said Joe'd hear from him later but when Joe called him up at eight o'clock next day and said, 'I thought I was going to hear from you,' he hung up the phone.”

The preposterous story cheered Joel, and he found a gloomy consolation in staring at the group at the next table, the sad, lovely Siamese twins, the mean dwarfs, the proud giant from the circus picture. But looking beyond at the yellow-stained faces of pretty women, their eyes all melancholy and startling with mascara, their ball gowns garish in full day, he saw a group who had been at Calman's and winced.

“Never again,” he exclaimed aloud, “absolutely my last social appearance in Hollywood!”

The following morning a telegram was waiting for him at his office:

You were one of the most agreeable people at our party. Expect you at my sister June's buffet supper next Sunday.

STELLA WALKER CALMAN.

The blood rushed fast through his veins for a feverish minute. Incredulously he read the telegram over.

“Well, that’s the sweetest thing I ever heard of in my life!”

III

Crazy Sunday again. Joel slept until eleven, then he read a newspaper to catch up with the past week. He lunched in his room on trout, avocado salad and a pint of California wine. Dressing for the tea, he selected a pin-check suit, a blue shirt, a burnt orange tie. There were dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. In his second-hand car he drove to the Riviera apartments. As he was introducing himself to Stella’s sister, Miles and Stella arrived in riding clothes — they had been quarrelling fiercely most of the afternoon on all the dirt roads back of Beverly Hills.

Miles Calman, tall, nervous, with a desperate humor and the unhappiest eyes Joel ever saw, was an artist from the top of his curiously shaped head to his niggerish feet. Upon these last he stood firmly — he had never made a cheap picture though he had sometimes paid heavily for the luxury of making experimental flops. In spite of his excellent company, one could not be with him long without realizing that he was not a well man.

From the moment of their entrance Joel’s day bound itself up inextricably with theirs. As he joined the group around them Stella turned away from it with an impatient little tongue click — and Miles Calman said to the man who happened to be next to him:

“Go easy on Eva Goebel. There’s hell to pay about her at home.” Miles turned to Joel, “I’m sorry I missed you at the office yesterday. I spent the afternoon at the analyst’s.”

“You being psychoanalyzed?”

“I have been for months. First I went for claustrophobia, now I’m trying to get my whole life cleared up. They say it’ll take over a year.”

“There’s nothing the matter with your life,” Joel assured him.

“Oh, no? Well, Stella seems to think so. Ask anybody — they can all tell you about it,” he said bitterly.

A girl perched herself on the arm of Miles’ chair; Joel crossed to Stella, who stood disconsolately by the fire.

“Thank you for your telegram,” he said. “It was darn sweet. I can’t imagine anybody as good-looking as you are being so good-humored.”

She was a little lovelier than he had ever seen her and perhaps the unstinted admiration in his eyes prompted her to unload on him — it did not take long, for she was obviously at the emotional bursting point.

“ — and Miles has been carrying on this thing for two years, and I never knew. Why, she was one of my best friends, always in the house. Finally when people began to come to me, Miles had to admit it.”

She sat down vehemently on the arm of Joel’s chair. Her riding breeches were the color of the chair and Joel saw that the mass of her hair was made up of some strands of red gold and some of pale gold, so that it could not be dyed, and that she had on no make-up. She was that good-looking —

Still quivering with the shock of her discovery, Stella found unbearable the spectacle of a new girl hovering over Miles; she led Joel into a bedroom, and seated at either end of a big bed they went on talking. People on their way to the washroom glanced in and made wisecracks, but Stella, emptying out her story, paid no attention. After a while Miles stuck his head in the door and said, “There’s no use trying to explain something to Joel in half an hour that I don’t understand myself and the psychoanalyst says will take a whole year to understand.”

She talked on as if Miles were not there. She loved Miles, she said — under considerable difficulties she had always been faithful to him.

“The psychoanalyst told Miles that he had a mother complex. In his first marriage he transferred his mother complex to his wife, you see — and then his sex turned to me. But when we married the thing repeated itself — he transferred his mother complex to me and all his libido turned toward this other woman.”

Joel knew that this probably wasn't gibberish — yet it sounded like gibberish. He knew Eva Goebel; she was a motherly person, older and probably wiser than Stella, who was a golden child.

Miles now suggested impatiently that Joel come back with them since Stella had so much to say, so they drove out to the mansion in Beverly Hills. Under the high ceilings the situation seemed more dignified and tragic. It was an eerie bright night with the dark very clear outside of all the windows and Stella all rose-gold raging and crying around the room. Joel did not quite believe in picture actresses' grief. They have other preoccupations — they are beautiful rose-gold figures blown full of life by writers and directors, and after hours they sit around and talk in whispers and giggle innuendoes, and the ends of many adventures flow through them.

Sometimes he pretended to listen and instead thought how well she was got up — sleek breeches with a matched set of legs in them, an Italian-colored sweater with a little high neck, and a short brown chamois coat. He couldn't decide whether she was an imitation of an English lady or an English lady was an imitation of her. She hovered somewhere between the realest of realities and the most blatant of impersonations.

"Miles is so jealous of me that he questions everything I do," she cried scornfully. "When I was in New York I wrote him that I'd been to the theater with Eddie Baker. Miles was so jealous he phoned me ten times in one day."

"I was wild," Miles snuffled sharply, a habit he had in times of stress. "The analyst couldn't get any results for a week."

Stella shook her head despairingly. "Did you expect me just to sit in the hotel for three weeks?"

"I don't expect anything. I admit that I'm jealous. I try not to be. I worked on that with Dr. Bridgebane, but it didn't do any good. I was jealous of Joel this afternoon when you sat on the arm of his chair."

"You were?" She started up. "You were! Wasn't there somebody on the arm of your chair? And did you speak to me for two hours?"

"You were telling your troubles to Joel in the bedroom."

“When I think that that woman” — she seemed to believe that to omit Eva Goebel’s name would be to lessen her reality — “used to come here — ”

“All right — all right,” said Miles wearily. “I’ve admitted everything and I feel as bad about it as you do.” Turning to Joel he began talking about pictures, while Stella moved restlessly along the far walls, her hands in her breeches pockets.

“They’ve treated Miles terribly,” she said, coming suddenly back into the conversation as if they’d never discussed her personal affairs. “Dear, tell him about old Beltzer trying to change your picture.”

As she stood hovering protectively over Miles, her eyes flashing with indignation in his behalf, Joel realized that he was in love with her. Stifled with excitement he got up to say good night.

With Monday the week resumed its workaday rhythm, in sharp contrast to the theoretical discussions, the gossip and scandal of Sunday; there was the endless detail of script revision — “Instead of a lousy dissolve, we can leave her voice on the sound track and cut to a medium shot of the taxi from Bell’s angle or we can simply pull the camera back to include the station, hold it a minute and then pan to the row of taxis” — by Monday afternoon Joel had again forgotten that people whose business was to provide entertainment were ever privileged to be entertained. In the evening he phoned Miles’ house. He asked for Miles but Stella came to the phone.

“Do things seem better?”

“Not particularly. What are you doing next Saturday evening?”

“Nothing.”

“The Perrys are giving a dinner and theater party and Miles won’t be here — he’s flying to South Bend to see the Notre Dame-California game. I thought you might go with me in his place.”

After a long moment Joel said, “Why — surely. If there’s a conference I can’t make dinner but I can get to the theater.”

“Then I’ll say we can come.”

Joel walked his office. In view of the strained relations of the Calmans, would Miles be pleased, or did she intend that Miles shouldn't know of it? That would be out of the question — if Miles didn't mention it Joel would. But it was an hour or more before he could get down to work again.

Wednesday there was a four-hour wrangle in a conference room crowded with planets and nebulae of cigarette smoke. Three men and a woman paced the carpet in turn, suggesting or condemning, speaking sharply or persuasively, confidently or despairingly. At the end Joel lingered to talk to Miles.

The man was tired — not with the exaltation of fatigue but life-tired, with his lids sagging and his beard prominent over the blue shadows near his mouth.

“I hear you're flying to the Notre Dame game.”

Miles looked beyond him and shook his head.

“I've given up the idea.”

“Why?”

“On account of you.” Still he did not look at Joel.

“What the hell, Miles?”

“That's why I've given it up.” He broke into a perfunctory laugh at himself.

“I can't tell what Stella might do just out of spite — she's invited you to take her to the Perrys', hasn't she? I wouldn't enjoy the game.”

The fine instinct that moved swiftly and confidently on the set, muddled so weakly and helplessly through his personal life.

“Look, Miles,” Joel said frowning. “I've never made any passes whatsoever at Stella. If you're really seriously cancelling your trip on account of me, I won't go to the Perrys' with her. I won't see her. You can trust me absolutely.”

Miles looked at him, carefully now.

“Maybe.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Anyhow there’d just be somebody else. I wouldn’t have any fun.”

“You don’t seem to have much confidence in Stella. She told me she’d always been true to you.”

“Maybe she has.” In the last few minutes several more muscles had sagged around Miles’ mouth, “But how can I ask anything of her after what’s happened? How can I expect her — ” He broke off and his face grew harder as he said, “I’ll tell you one thing, right or wrong and no matter what I’ve done, if I ever had anything on her I’d divorce her. I can’t have my pride hurt — that would be the last straw.”

His tone annoyed Joel, but he said:

“Hasn’t she calmed down about the Eva Goebel thing?”

“No.” Miles snuffled pessimistically. “I can’t get over it either.”

“I thought it was finished.”

“I’m trying not to see Eva again, but you know it isn’t easy just to drop something like that — it isn’t some girl I kissed last night in a taxi! The psychoanalyst says — ”

“I know,” Joel interrupted. “Stella told me.” This was depressing. “Well, as far as I’m concerned if you go to the game I won’t see Stella. And I’m sure Stella has nothing on her conscience about anybody.”

“Maybe not,” Miles repeated listlessly. “Anyhow I’ll stay and take her to the party. Say,” he said suddenly, “I wish you’d come too. I’ve got to have somebody sympathetic to talk to. That’s the trouble — I’ve influenced Stella in everything. Especially I’ve influenced her so that she likes all the men I like — it’s very difficult.”

“It must be,” Joel agreed.

IV

Joel could not get to the dinner. Self-conscious in his silk hat against the unemployment, he waited for the others in front of the Hollywood Theatre and watched the evening parade: obscure replicas of bright, particular picture stars, spavined men in polo coats, a stomping dervish with the beard and staff of an apostle, a pair of chic Filipinos in collegiate clothes, reminder that this corner of the Republic opened to the seven seas, a long fantastic carnival of young shouts which proved to be a fraternity initiation. The line split to pass two smart limousines that stopped at the curb.

There she was, in a dress like ice-water, made in a thousand pale-blue pieces, with icicles trickling at the throat. He started forward.

“So you like my dress?”

“Where’s Miles?”

“He flew to the game after all. He left yesterday morning — at least I think — ” She broke off. “I just got a telegram from South Bend saying that he’s starting back. I forgot — you know all these people?”

The party of eight moved into the theater.

Miles had gone after all and Joel wondered if he should have come. But during the performance, with Stella a profile under the pure grain of light hair, he thought no more about Miles. Once he turned and looked at her and she looked back at him, smiling and meeting his eyes for as long as he wanted. Between the acts they smoked in the lobby and she whispered:

“They’re all going to the opening of Jack Johnson’s night club — I don’t want to go, do you?”

“Do we have to?”

“I suppose not.” She hesitated. “I’d like to talk to you. I suppose we could go to our house — if I were only sure — ”

Again she hesitated and Joel asked:

“Sure of what?”

“Sure that — oh, I’m haywire I know, but how can I be sure Miles went to the game?”

“You mean you think he’s with Eva Goebel?”

“No, not so much that — but supposing he was here watching everything I do. You know Miles does odd things sometimes. Once he wanted a man with a long beard to drink tea with him and he sent down to the casting agency for one, and drank tea with him all afternoon.”

“That’s different. He sent you a wire from South Bend — that proves he’s at the game.”

After the play they said good night to the others at the curb and were answered by looks of amusement. They slid off along the golden garish thoroughfare through the crowd that had gathered around Stella.

“You see he could arrange the telegrams,” Stella said, “very easily.”

That was true. And with the idea that perhaps her uneasiness was justified, Joel grew angry: if Miles had trained a camera on them he felt no obligations toward Miles. Aloud he said:

“That’s nonsense.”

There were Christmas trees already in the shop windows and the full moon over the boulevard was only a prop, as scenic as the giant boudoir lamps of the corners. On into the dark foliage of Beverly Hills that flamed as eucalyptus by day, Joel saw only the flash of a white face under his own, the arc of her shoulder. She pulled away suddenly and looked up at him.

“Your eyes are like your mother’s,” she said. “I used to have a scrap book full of pictures of her.”

“Your eyes are like your own and not a bit like any other eyes,” he answered.

Something made Joel look out into the grounds as they went into the house, as if Miles were lurking in the shrubbery. A telegram waited on the hall table. She read aloud:

CHICAGO.

Home tomorrow night. Thinking of you. Love.

Miles.

“You see,” she said, throwing the slip back on the table, “he could easily have faked that.” She asked the butler for drinks and sandwiches and ran upstairs, while Joel walked into the empty reception rooms. Strolling about he wandered to the piano where he had stood in disgrace two Sundays before.

“Then we could put over,” he said aloud, “a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion.”

His thoughts jumped to another telegram.

“You were one of the most agreeable people at our party — ”

An idea occurred to him. If Stella’s telegram had been purely a gesture of courtesy then it was likely that Miles had inspired it, for it was Miles who had invited him. Probably Miles had said:

“Send him a wire — he’s miserable — he thinks he’s queered himself.”

It fitted in with “I’ve influenced Stella in everything. Especially I’ve influenced her so that she likes all the men I like.” A woman would do a thing like that because she felt sympathetic — only a man would do it because he felt responsible.

When Stella came back into the room he took both her hands.

“I have a strange feeling that I’m a sort of pawn in a spite game you’re playing against Miles,” he said.

“Help yourself to a drink.”

“And the odd thing is that I’m in love with you anyhow.”

The telephone rang and she freed herself to answer it.

“Another wire from Miles,” she announced. “He dropped it, or it says he dropped it, from the airplane at Kansas City.”

“I suppose he asked to be remembered to me.”

“No, he just said he loved me. I believe he does. He’s so very weak.”

“Come sit beside me,” Joel urged her.

It was early. And it was still a few minutes short of midnight a half-hour later, when Joel walked to the cold hearth, and said tersely:

“Meaning that you haven’t any curiosity about me?”

“Not at all. You attract me a lot and you know it. The point is that I suppose I really do love Miles.”

“Obviously.”

“And tonight I feel uneasy about everything.”

He wasn’t angry — he was even faintly relieved that a possible entanglement was avoided. Still as he looked at her, the warmth and softness of her body thawing her cold blue costume, he knew she was one of the things he would always regret.

“I’ve got to go,” he said. “I’ll phone a taxi.”

“Nonsense — there’s a chauffeur on duty.”

He winced at her readiness to have him go, and seeing this she kissed him lightly and said, “You’re sweet, Joel.” Then suddenly three things happened: he took down his drink at a gulp, the phone rang loud through the house and a clock in the hall struck in trumpet notes.

Nine — ten — eleven — twelve —

V

It was Sunday again. Joel realized that he had come to the theater this evening with the work of the week still hanging about him like cerements. He had made love to Stella as he might attack some matter to be cleaned up hurriedly before the day’s end. But this was Sunday — the lovely, lazy perspective of the next twenty-four hours unrolled before him — every

minute was something to be approached with lulling indirection, every moment held the germ of innumerable possibilities. Nothing was impossible — everything was just beginning. He poured himself another drink.

With a sharp moan, Stella slipped forward inertly by the telephone. Joel picked her up and laid her on the sofa. He squirted soda-water on a handkerchief and slapped it over her face. The telephone mouthpiece was still grinding and he put it to his ear.

“ — the plane fell just this side of Kansas City. The body of Miles Calman has been identified and — ”

He hung up the receiver.

“Lie still,” he said, stalling, as Stella opened her eyes.

“Oh, what’s happened?” she whispered. “Call them back. Oh, what’s happened?”

“I’ll call them right away. What’s your doctor’s name?”

“Did they say Miles was dead?”

“Lie quiet — is there a servant still up?”

“Hold me — I’m frightened.”

He put his arm around her.

“I want the name of your doctor,” he said sternly. “It may be a mistake but I want someone here.”

“It’s Doctor — Oh, God, is Miles dead?”

Joel ran upstairs and searched through strange medicine cabinets for spirits of ammonia. When he came down Stella cried:

“He isn’t dead — I know he isn’t. This is part of his scheme. He’s torturing me. I know he’s alive. I can feel he’s alive.”

“I want to get hold of some close friend of yours, Stella. You can’t stay here alone tonight.”

“Oh, no,” she cried. “I can’t see anybody. You stay. I haven’t got any friend.” She got up, tears streaming down her face. “Oh, Miles is my only friend. He’s not dead — he can’t be dead. I’m going there right away and see. Get a train. You’ll have to come with me.”

“You can’t. There’s nothing to do tonight. I want you to tell me the name of some woman I can call: Lois? Joan? Carmel? Isn’t there somebody?”

Stella stared at him blindly.

“Eva Goebel was my best friend,” she said.

Joel thought of Miles, his sad and desperate face in the office two days before. In the awful silence of his death all was clear about him. He was the only American-born director with both an interesting temperament and an artistic conscience. Meshed in an industry, he had paid with his ruined nerves for having no resilience, no healthy cynicism, no refuge — only a pitiful and precarious escape.

There was a sound at the outer door — it opened suddenly, and there were footsteps in the hall.

“Miles!” Stella screamed. “Is it you, Miles? Oh, it’s Miles.”

A telegraph boy appeared in the doorway.

“I couldn’t find the bell. I heard you talking inside.”

The telegram was a duplicate of the one that had been phoned. While Stella read it over and over, as though it were a black lie, Joel telephoned. It was still early and he had difficulty getting anyone; when finally he succeeded in finding some friends he made Stella take a stiff drink.

“You’ll stay here, Joel,” she whispered, as though she were half-asleep. “You won’t go away. Miles liked you — he said you — ” She shivered violently, “Oh, my God, you don’t know how alone I feel.” Her eyes closed, “Put your arms around me. Miles had a suit like that.” She started bolt upright. “Think of what he must have felt. He was afraid of almost everything, anyhow.”

She shook her head dazedly. Suddenly she seized Joel's face and held it close to hers.

"You won't go. You like me — you love me, don't you? Don't call up anybody. Tomorrow's time enough. You stay here with me tonight."

He stared at her, at first incredulously, and then with shocked understanding. In her dark groping Stella was trying to keep Miles alive by sustaining a situation in which he had figured — as if Miles' mind could not die so long as the possibilities that had worried him still existed. It was a distraught and tortured effort to stave off the realization that he was dead.

Resolutely Joel went to the phone and called a doctor.

"Don't, oh, don't call anybody!" Stella cried. "Come back here and put your arms around me."

"Is Doctor Bales in?"

"Joel," Stella cried. "I thought I could count on you. Miles liked you. He was jealous of you — Joel, come here."

Ah then — if he betrayed Miles she would be keeping him alive — for if he were really dead how could he be betrayed?

" — has just had a very severe shock. Can you come at once, and get hold of a nurse?"

"Joel!"

Now the door-bell and the telephone began to ring intermittently, and automobiles were stopping in front of the door.

"But you're not going," Stella begged him. "You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"No," he answered. "But I'll be back, if you need me."

Standing on the steps of the house which now hummed and palpitated with the life that flutters around death like protective leaves, he began to sob a little in his throat.

“Everything he touched he did something magical to,” he thought. “He even brought that little gamin alive and made her a sort of masterpiece.”

And then:

“What a hell of a hole he leaves in this damn wilderness — already!”

And then with a certain bitterness, “Oh, yes, I’ll be back — I’ll be back!”

ONE INTERNE

I

The Saturday Evening Post (5 November, 1932)

Traditionally, the Coccidian Club show is given on the hottest night of spring, and that year was no exception. Two hundred doctors and students sweltered in the reception rooms of the old narrow house and another two hundred students pressed in at the doors, effectually sealing out any breezes from the Maryland night. The entertainment reached these latter clients only dimly, but refreshment was relayed back to them by a busy bucket brigade. Down cellar, the janitor made his annual guess that the sagging floors would hold up one more time.

Bill Tulliver was the coolest man in the hall. For no special reason he wore a light tunic and carried a crook during the only number in which he took part, the rendition of the witty, scurrilous and interminable song which described the failings and eccentricities of the medical faculty. He sat in comparative comfort on the platform and looked out over the hot sea of faces. The most important doctors were in front — Doctor Ruff, the ophthalmologist; Doctor Lane, the brain surgeon; Doctor Georgi, the stomach specialist; Doctor Barnett, the alchemist of internal medicine; and on the end of the row, with his saintlike face undisturbed by the rivulets of perspiration that poured down the long dome of his head, Doctor Norton, the diagnostician.

Like most young men who had sat under Norton, Bill Tulliver followed him with the intuition of the belly, but with a difference. He knelt to him selfishly as a sort of great giver of life. He wanted less to win his approval than to compel it. Engrossed in his own career, which would begin in earnest when he entered the hospital as an interne in July, his whole life was pointed toward the day when his own guess would be right and Doctor Norton's would be wrong. In that moment he would emancipate himself — he need not base himself on the adding machine-calculating machine-probability machine-St. Francis of Assisi machine any longer.

Bill Tulliver had not arrived unprovoked at this pitch of egotism. He was the fifth in an unbroken series of Dr. William Tullivers who had practised with distinction in the city. His father died last winter; it was not unnatural that even from the womb of school this last scion of a medical tradition should clamor for “self-expression.”

The faculty song, immemorially popular, went on and on. There was a verse about the sanguinary Doctor Lane, about the new names Doctor Brune made up for the new diseases he invented, about the personal idiosyncrasies of Doctor Schwartze and the domestic embroilments of Doctor Gillespie. Doctor Norton, as one of the most popular men on the staff, got off easy. There were some new verses — several that Bill had written himself:

“Herpes Zigler, sad and tired,

Will flunk you out or kill ya,

If you forget Alfonso wired

For dope on hæmophilia.

Bum tiddy-bum-bum,

Tiddy-bum-bum.

Three thousand years ago,

Three thousand years ago.”

He watched Doctor Zigler and saw the wince that puckered up under the laugh. Bill wondered how soon there would be a verse about him, Bill Tulliver, and he tentatively composed one as the chorus thundered on.

After the show the older men departed, the floors were sloshed with beer and the traditional roughhouse usurped the evening. But Bill had fallen solemn and, donning his linen suit, he watched for ten minutes and then left the hot hall. There was a group on the front steps, breathing the sparse air, and another group singing around the lamp-post at the corner. Across the street arose the great bulk of the hospital about which his life revolved.

Between the Michael's Clinic and the Ward's Dispensary arose a round full moon.

The girl — she was hurrying — reached the loiterers at the lamppost at the same moment as Bill. She wore a dark dress and a dark, flopping hat, but Bill got an impression that there was a gayety of cut, if not of color, about her clothes. The whole thing happened in less than a minute; the man turning about — Bill saw that he was not a member of the grand confraternity — and was simply hurling himself into her arms, like a child at its mother.

The girl staggered backward with a frightened cry; and everyone in the group acted at once.

“Are you sure you're all right?”

“Oh, yes,” she gasped. “I think he just passed out and didn't realize he was grabbing at a girl.”

“We'll take him over to the emergency ward and see if he can swallow a stomach pump.”

Bill Tulliver found himself walking along beside the girl.

“Are you sure you're all right?”

“Oh, yes.” She was still breathing hard; her bosom rose, putting out its eternal promises, as if the breath she had taken in were the last breather left in the world.

“Oh, catch it — oh, catch it and take it — oh, catch it,” she sighed. “I realized right away that they were students. I shouldn't have gone by there tonight.”

Her hair, dark and drawn back to her ears, brushed her shoulders. She laughed uncontrollably.

“He was so helpless,” she said. “Lord knows I've seen men helpless — hundreds of them just helpless — but I'll never forget the expression in his face when he decided to — to lean on me.”

Her dark eyes shone with mirth and Bill saw that she was really self-reliant. He stared at her, and the impression of her beauty grew until, uncommitted by a word, by even a formal introduction, he felt himself going out toward her, watching the turn of her lips and the shifting of her cheeks when she smiled . . .

All this was in the three or four minutes that he walked beside her; not till afterward did he realize how profound the impression had been.

As they passed the church-like bulk of the administration building, an open cabriolet slowed down beside them and a man of about thirty-five jumped out. The girl ran toward him.

“Howard!” she cried with excited gayety. “I was attacked. There were some students in front of the Coccidian Club building — ”

The man swung sharply and menacingly toward Bill Tulliver.

“Is this one of them?” he demanded.

“No, no; he’s all right.”

Simultaneously Bill recognized him — it was Dr. Howard Durfee, brilliant among the younger surgeons, heartbreaker and swashbuckler of the staff.

“You haven’t been bothering Miss — ”

She stopped him, but not before Bill had answered angrily:

“I don’t bother people.”

Unappeased, as if Bill were in some way responsible, Doctor Durfee got into his car; the girl got in beside him.

“So long,” she said. “And thanks.” Her eyes shone at Bill with friendly interest, and then, just before the car shot away, she did something else with them — narrowed them a little and then widened them, recognizing by this sign the uniqueness of their relationship. “I see you,” it seemed to say. “You registered. Everything’s possible.”

With the faint fanfare of a new motor, she vanished back into the spring night.

II

Bill was to enter the hospital in July with the first contingent of newly created doctors. He passed the intervening months at Martha's Vineyard, swimming and fishing with Schoatze, his classmate, and returned tense with health and enthusiasm to begin his work.

The red square broiled under the Maryland sun. Bill went in through the administration building where a gigantic Christ gestured in marble pity over the entrance hall. It was by this same portal that Bill's father had entered on his internship thirty years before.

Suddenly Bill was in a condition of shock, his tranquility was rent asunder, he could not have given a rational account as to why he was where he was. A dark-haired girl with great, luminous eyes had started up from the very shadow of the statue, stared at him just long enough to effect this damage, and then with an explosive "Hello!" vanished into one of the offices.

He was still gazing after her, stricken, haywire, scattered and dissolved — when Doctor Norton hailed him:

"I believe I'm addressing William Tulliver the fifth — "

Bill was glad to be reminded who he was.

" — looking somewhat interested in Doctor Durfee's girl," continued Norton.

"Is she?" Bill asked sharply. Then: "Oh, howdedo, Doctor?"

Dr. Norton decided to exercise his wit, of which he had plenty. "In fact we know they spend their days together, and gossip adds the evenings."

"Their days? I should think he'd be too busy."

"He is. As a matter of fact, Miss Singleton induces the state of coma during which he performs his internal sculpture. She's an anaesthetist."

"I see. Then they are — thrown together all day."

“If you regard that as a romantic situation.” Doctor Norton looked at him closely. “Are you settled yet? Can you do something for me right now?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“I know you don’t go on the ward till tomorrow, but I’d like you to go to East Michael and take a P. E. and a history.”

“Certainly.”

“Room 312. I’ve put your methodical friend Schoatze on the trail of another mystery next door.”

Bill hurried to his room on the top of Michael, jumped into a new white uniform, equipped himself with instruments. In his haste he forgot that this was the first time he had performed an inquisition unaided. Outside the door he smoothed himself into a calm, serious manner. He was almost a white apostle when we walked into the room; at least he tried to be.

A paunchy, sallow man of forty was smoking a cigarette in bed.

“Good morning,” Bill said heartily. “How are you this morning?”

“Rotten,” the man said. “That’s why I’m here.”

Bill set down his satchel and approached him like a young cat after its first sparrow.

“What seems to be the trouble?”

“Everything. My head aches, my bones ache, I can’t sleep, I don’t eat, I’ve got fever. My chauffeur ran over me, I mean ran over me, I mean ran me, if you know what I mean. I mean from Washington this morning. I can’t stand those Washington doctors; they don’t talk about anything but politics.”

Bill clapped a thermometer in his mouth and took his pulse. Then he made the routine examination of chest, stomach, throat and the rest. The reflexes were sluggish to the little rubber hammer. Bill sat down beside the bed.

“I’d trade hearts with you any day,” he promised.

“They all say I’ve got a good heart,” agreed the man. “What did you think of Hoover’s speech?”

“I thought you were tired of politics.”

“That’s true, but I got thinking of Hoover while you went over me.”

“About Hoover?”

“About me. What did you find out?”

“We’ll want to make some tests. But you seem pretty sound really.”

“I’m not sound,” the patient snapped. “I’m not sound. I’m a sick man.”

Bill took out a P. E. form and a fountain pen.

“What’s your name?” he began.

“Paul B. Van Schaik.”

“Your nearest relative?”

There was nothing in the case history on which to form any opinion. Mr. Van Schaik had had several children’s diseases. Yesterday morning he was unable to get out of bed and his valet had taken his temperature and found fever.

Bill’s thermometer registered no fever.

“Now we’re going to make just a little prick in your thumb,” he said, preparing glass slides, and when this had been accomplished to the tune of a short, dismal howl from the patient, he added: “We want just a little specimen from your upper arm.”

“You want everything but my tears,” protested the patient.

“We have to investigate all the possibilities,” said Bill sternly, plunging the syringe into the soft upper arm, inspiring more explosive protests from Mr. Van Schaik.

Reflectively Bill replaced his instruments. He had obtained no clue as to what was the matter and he eyed the patient reproachfully.

On a chance, he looked for enlarged cervical glands, and asked him if his parents were alive, and took a last look at throat and teeth.

“Eyes normally prominent,” he wrote down, with a feeling of futility. “Pupils round and equal.”

“That’s all for the moment,” he said. “Try and get some rest.”

“Rest!” cried Mr. Van Schaik indignantly. “That’s just the trouble. I haven’t been able to sleep for three days. I feel worse every minute.”

As Bill went out into the hall, George Schoatze was just emerging from the room next door. His eyes were uncertain and there was sweat upon his brow.

“Finished?” Bill asked.

“Why, yes, in a way. Did Doctor Norton set you a job too?”

“Yeah. Kind of puzzling case in here — contradictory symptoms,” he lied.

“Same here,” said George, wiping his brow. “I’d rather have started out on something more clearly defined, like the ones Robinson gave us in class last year — you know, where there were two possibilities and one probability.”

“Unobliging lot of patients,” agreed Bill.

A student nurse approached him.

“You were just in 312,” she said in a low voice. “I better tell you. I unpacked for the patient, and there was one empty bottle of whisky and one half empty. He asked me to pour him a drink, but I didn’t like to do that without asking a doctor.”

“Quite right,” said Bill stiffly, but he wanted to kiss her hand in gratitude.

Dispatching the specimens to the laboratory, the two internes went in search of Doctor Norton, whom they found in his office.

“Through already? What luck, Tulliver?”

“He’s been on a bust and he’s got a hangover,” Bill blurted out. “I haven’t got the laboratory reports yet, but my opinion is that’s all.”

"I agree with you," said Doctor Norton. "All right, Schoatze; how about the lady in 314?"

"Well, unless it's too deep for me, there's nothing the matter with her at all."

"Right you are," agreed Doctor Norton. "Nerves — and not even enough of them for the Ward clinic. What'll we do with them?"

"Throw em out," said Bill promptly.

"Let them stay," corrected Doctor Norton. "They can afford it. They come to us for protection they don't need, so let them pay for a couple of really sick people over in the free wards. We're not crowded."

Outside the office, Bill and George fastened eyes.

"Humbling us a little," said Bill rather resentfully. "Let's go up to the operating rooms; I want to convince myself all over again that this is a serious profession." He swore. "I suppose for the next few months we'll be feeling the bellies of four-flushers and taking the case histories of women who aren't cases."

"Never mind," said George cautiously. "I was just as glad to start with something simple like — like —"

"Like what?"

"Why, like nothing."

"You're easily pleased," Bill commented.

Ascertaining from a bulletin board that Dr. Howard Durfee was at work in No. 4, they took the elevator to the operating rooms. As they slipped on the gowns, caps, and then the masks, Bill realized how quickly he was breathing.

He saw HER before he saw anything else in the room, except the bright vermilion spot of the operation itself, breaking the universal whiteness of the scene. There was a sway of eyes toward the two internes as they came into the gallery, and Bill picked out her eyes, darker than ever in contrast with the snowy cap and mask, as she sat working the gas machine at the

patient's invisible head. The room was small. The platform on which they stood was raised about four feet, and by leaning out on a glass screen like a windshield, they brought their eyes to within two yards of the surgeon's busy hands.

"It's a neat appendix — not a cut in the muscle," George whispered. "That guy can play lacrosse tomorrow."

Doctor Durfee, busy with catgut, heard him.

"Not this patient," he said. "Too many adhesions."

His hands, trying the catgut, were sure and firm, the fine hands of a pianist, the tough hands of a pitcher combined. Bill thought how insecure, precariously involved, the patient would seem to a layman, and yet how safe he was with those sure hands in an atmosphere so made safe from time itself. Time had stopped at the door of the operating room, too profane to enter here.

Thea Singleton guarded the door of the patient's consciousness, a hand on a pulse, another turning the wheels of the gas machine, as if they were the stops on a silent organ.

There were others in attendance — an assisting surgeon, a nurse who passed instruments, a nurse who made liaison between the table and the supplies — but Bill was absorbed in what subtle relationship there was between Howard Durfee and Thea Singleton; he felt a wild jealousy toward the mask with the brilliant, agile hands.

"I'm going," he said to George.

He saw her that afternoon, and again it was in the shadow of the great stone Christ in the entrance hall. She was in street clothes, and she looked slick and fresh and tantalizingly excitable.

"Of course. You're the man the night of the Coccidian show. And now you're an interne. Wasn't it you who came into Room 4 this morning?"

"Yes. How did it go?"

"Fine. It was Doctor Durfee."

“Yes,” he said with emphasis. “I know it was Doctor Durfee.”

He met her by accident or contrivance half a dozen times in the next fortnight, before he judged he could ask her for a date.

“Why, I suppose so.” She seemed a little surprised. “Let’s see. How about next week — either Tuesday or Wednesday?”

“How about tonight?”

“Oh, not possibly.”

When he called Tuesday at the little apartment she shared with a woman musician from the Peabody Institute, he said:

“What would you like to do? See a picture?”

“No,” she answered emphatically. “If I knew you better I’d say let’s drive about a thousand miles into the country and go swimming in some quarry.” She looked at him quizzically. “You’re not one of those very impulsive internes, are you, that just sweep poor nurses off their feet?”

“On the contrary, I’m scared to death of you,” Bill admitted.

It was a hot night, but the white roads were cool. They found out a little about each other: She was the daughter of an Army officer and had grown up in the Philippines, and in the black-and-silver water of the abandoned quarry she surprised him with such diving as he had never seen a girl do. It was ghostly inside of the black shadow that ringed the glaring moonlight, and their voices echoed loud when they called to each other.

Afterward, with their heads wet and their bodies stung alive, they sat for awhile, unwilling to start back. Suddenly she smiled, and then looked at him without speaking, her lips just barely parted. There was the starlight set upon the brilliant darkness; and there were her pale cool cheeks, and Bill let himself be lost in love for her, as he had so wanted to do.

“We must go,” she said presently.

“Not yet.”

“Oh, yet — very yet — exceedingly yet.”

“Because,” he said after a moment, “you’re Doctor Durfee’s girl?”

“Yes,” she admitted after a moment, “I suppose I’m Doctor Durfee’s girl.”

“Why are you?” he cried.

“Are you in love with me?”

“I suppose I am. Are you in love with Durfee?”

She shook her head. “No, I’m not in love with anybody. I’m just — his girl.”

So the evening that had been at first ecstatic was finally unsatisfactory. This feeling deepened when he found that for his date he had to thank the fact that Durfee was out of town for a few days.

With August and the departure of more doctors on vacation, he found himself very busy. During four years he had dreamed of such work as he was doing, and now it was all disturbed by the ubiquity of “Durfee’s girl.” In vain he searched among the girls in the city, on those Sundays when he could go into the city, for some who would soften the hurt of his unreciprocated emotion. But the city seemed empty of girls, and in the hospital the little probationers in short cuffs had no appeal for him. The truth of his situation was that his initial idealism which had been centred in Doctor Norton had transferred itself to Thea. Instead of a God, it was now a Goddess who symbolized for him the glory and the devotion of his profession; and that she was caught up in an entanglement that bound her away from him, played havoc with his peace of mind.

Diagnosis had become a workaday matter — almost. He had made a few nice guesses and Doctor Norton had given him full credit.

“Nine times out of ten I’ll be right,” Norton said. “The rare thing is so rare that I’m out of the habit of looking for it. That’s where you young men come in; you’re cocked for the rare thing and that one time in ten you find it.”

“It’s a great feeling,” said Bill. “I got a big kick out of that actinomycosis business.”

“You look tired for your age,” said Doctor Norton suddenly. “At twenty-five you shouldn’t be existing entirely on nervous energy, Bill, and that’s what

you're doing. The people you grew up with say they never see you. Why not take a couple of hours a week away from the hospital, if only for the sake of your patients? You took so many chemistry tests of Mr. Doremus that we almost had to give him blood transfusions to build him up again."

"I was right," said Bill eagerly.

"But a little brutal. Everything would have developed in a day or two. Take it gently, like your friend Schoatze. You're going to know a lot about internal medicine some day, but you're trying to rush things."

But Bill was a man driven; he tried more Sunday afternoons with current *débutantes*, but in the middle of a conversation he would find his mind drifting back to those great red building blocks of an Idea, where alone he could feel the pulse of life.

The news that a famous character in politics was leaving the Coast and coming to the hospital for the diagnosis of some obscure malady had the effect of giving him a sudden interest in politics. He looked up the record of the man and followed his journey east, which occupied half a column daily in the newspapers; party issues depended on his survival and eventual recovery.

Then one August afternoon there was an item in the society column which announced the engagement of Helen, *débutante* daughter of Mrs. Truby Ponsonby Day, to Dr. Howard Durfee. Bill's reconciled world turned upside down. After an amount of very real suffering, he had accepted the fact that Thea was the mistress of a brilliant surgeon, but that Dr. Durfee should suddenly cut loose from her was simply incredible.

Immediately he went in search of her, found her issuing from the nurses' ward in street clothes. Her lovely face, with the eyes that held for him all the mystery of people trying, all the splendor of a goal, all reward, all purpose, all satisfaction, was harried with annoyance; she had been stared at and pitied.

"If you like," she answered, when he asked if he could run her home, and then: "Heaven help women! The amount of groaning over my body that took place this afternoon would have been plenty for a war."

“I’m going to help you,” he said. “If that guy has let you down — ”

“Oh, shut up! Up to a few weeks ago I could have married Howard Durfee by nodding my head — that’s just what I wouldn’t tell those women this afternoon. I think you’ve got discretion, and that’ll help you a lot when you’re a doctor.”

“I am a doctor,” he said somewhat stiffly.

“No, you’re just an interne.”

He was indignant and they drove in silence. Then, softening, she turned toward him and touched his arm.

“You happen to be a gentleman,” she said, “which is nice sometimes — though I prefer a touch of genius.”

“I’ve got that,” Bill said doggedly. “I’ve got everything, except you.”

“Come up to the apartment and I’ll tell you something that no one else in this city knows.”

It was a modest apartment but it told him that at some time she had lived in a more spacious world. It was all reduced, as if she had hung on to several cherished things, a Duncan Phyfe table, a brass by Brancusi, two oil portraits of the ‘50’s.

“I was engaged to John Gresham,” she said. “Do you know who he was?”

“Of course,” he said. “I took up the subscription for the bronze tablet to him.”

John Gresham had died by inches from radium poisoning, got by his own experiments.

“I was with him till the end,” Thea went on quickly, “and just before he died he wagged his last finger at me and said, ‘I forbid you to go to pieces. That doesn’t do any good.’ So, like a good little girl, I didn’t go to pieces, but I toughened up instead. Anyhow, that’s why I never could love Howard Durfee the way he wanted to be loved, in spite of his nice swagger and his fine hands.”

“I see.” Overwhelmed by the revelation, Bill tried to adjust himself to it. “I knew there was something far off about you, some sort of — oh, dedication to something I didn’t know about.”

“I’m pretty hard.” She got up impatiently. “Anyhow, I’ve lost a good friend today and I’m cross, so go before I show it. Kiss me good-by if you like.”

“It wouldn’t mean anything at this moment.”

“Yes, it would,” she insisted. “I like to be close to you. I like your clothes.”

Obediently he kissed her, but he felt far off from her and very rebuffed and young as he went out the door.

He awoke next morning with the sense of something important hanging over him; then he remembered. Senator Billings, relayed by crack trains, airplanes and ambulances, was due to arrive during the morning, and the ponderous body which had housed and expelled so much nonsense in thirty years was to be at the mercy of the rational at last.

“I’ll diagnose the old boy,” he thought grimly, “if I have to invent a new disease.”

He went about his routine work with a sense of fatigue that morning. Perhaps Doctor Norton would keep this plum to himself and Bill wouldn’t have a chance at him. But at eleven o’clock he met his senior in a corridor.

“The senator’s come,” he said. “I’ve formed a tentative opinion. You might go in and get his history. Go over him quickly and give him the usual laboratory work-up.”

“All right,” said Bill, but there was no eagerness in his voice. He seemed to have lost all his enthusiasm. With his instruments and a block of history paper, he repaired to the senator’s room.

“Good morning,” he began. “Feeling a little tired after your trip?”

The big barrel of a man rolled toward him.

“Exhausted,” he squeaked unexpectedly. “All in.”

Bill didn't wonder; he felt rather that way himself, as if he had travelled thousands of miles in all sorts of conveyances until his insides, including his brains, were all shaken up together.

He took the case history.

"What's your profession?"

"Legislator."

"Do you use any alcohol?"

The senator raised himself on one arm and thundered, "See here, young man; I'm not going to be heckled! As long as the Eighteenth Amendment —" He subsided.

"Do you use any alcohol?" Bill asked again patiently.

"Why, yes."

"How much?"

"A few drinks every day. I don't count them. Say, if you look in my suitcase you'll find an X-ray of my lungs, taken a few years ago."

Bill found it and stared at it with a sudden feeling that everything was getting a little crazy.

"This is an X-ray of a woman's stomach," he said.

"Oh — well, it must have got mixed up," said the senator. "It must be my wife's."

Bill went into the bathroom to wash his thermometer. When he came back he took the senator's pulse, and was puzzled to find himself regarded in a curious way.

"What's the idea?" the senator demanded. "Are you the patient or am I?" He jerked his hand angrily away from Bill. "Your hand's like ice. And you've put the thermometer in your own mouth."

Only then did Bill realize how sick he was. He pressed the nurse's bell and staggered back to a chair with wave after wave of pain chasing across his abdomen.

III

He awoke with a sense that he had been in bed for many hours. There was fever bumping in his brain, a pervasive weakness in his body, and what had wakened him was a new series of pains in his stomach. Across the room in an armchair sat Dr. George Schoatze, and on his knee was the familiar case-history pad.

"What the hell," Bill said weakly. "What the hell's the matter with me? What happened?"

"You're all right," said George. "You just lie quiet."

Bill tried to sit upright, but found he was too weak.

"Lie quiet!" he repeated incredulously. "What do you think I am — some dumb patient? I asked you what's the matter with me?"

"That's exactly what we're trying to find out. Say, what is your exact age?"

"My age!" Bill cried. "A hundred and ten in the shade! My name's Al Capone and I'm an old hophead. Stick that on your God damn paper and mail it to Santa Claus. I asked you what's the matter with me."

"And I say that's what we're trying to find out," said George, staunch, but a little nervous. "Now, you take it easy."

"Take it easy!" cried Bill. "When I'm burning up with fever and a half-wit interne sits there and asks me how many fillings I've got in my teeth! You take my temperature, and take it right away!"

"All right — all right," said George conciliatingly. "I was just going to."

He put the thermometer in Bill's mouth and felt for the pulse, but Bill mumbled, "I'll shake my ode pulse," and pulled his hand away. After two

minutes George deftly extracted the thermometer and walked with it to the window, an act of treachery that brought Bill's legs out of bed.

"I want to read that thermometer!" he cried. "Now, you look here! I want to know what's on that thermometer!"

George shook it down quickly and put it in its case.

"That isn't the way we do things here," he said.

"Oh, isn't it? Well, then, I'll go somewhere where they've got some sense."

George prepared a syringe and two small plates of glass.

Bill groaned. "Do you think for a moment I'm going to let you do that? I taught you everything you know about blood chemistry. By God, I used to do your lessons for you, and you come here to make some clumsy stab into my arm!"

Perspiring fluently, as was his wont under strain, George rang for a nurse, with the hope that a female presence would have a calming effect on Bill. But it was not the right female.

"Another nitwit!" Bill cried as she came in. "Do you think I'm going to lie here and stand more of this nonsense? Why doesn't somebody do something? Where's Doctor Norton?"

"He'll be here this afternoon."

"This afternoon! I'll probably be dead by this afternoon. Why isn't he here this morning? Off on some social bat and I lie here surrounded by morons who've lost their heads and don't know what to do about it. What are you writing there — that my 'tongue protrudes in mid-line without tremor'? Give me my slippers and bathrobe. I'm going to report you two as specimens for the nerve clinic."

They pressed him down in bed, whence he looked up at George with infinite reproach.

“You, that I explained a whole book of toxicology to, you’re presuming to diagnose me. Well, then, do it! What have I got? Why is my stomach burning up? Is it appendicitis? What’s the white count?”

“How can I find out the white count when — ”

With a sigh of infinite despair at the stupidity of mankind, Bill relaxed, exhausted.

Doctor Norton arrived at two o’clock. His presence should have been reassuring, but by this time the patient was too far gone in nervous tension.

“Look here, Bill,” he said sternly. “What’s all this about not letting George look into your mouth?”

“Because he deliberately gagged me with that stick,” Bill cried. “When I get out of this I’m going to stick a plank down that ugly trap of his.”

“Now, that’ll do. Do you know little Miss Cary has been crying? She says she’s going to give up nursing. She says she’s never been so disillusioned in her life.”

“The same with me. Tell her I’m going to give it up too. After this, I’m going to kill people instead of curing them. Now when I need it nobody has even tried to cure me.”

An hour later Doctor Norton stood up.

“Well, Bill, we’re going to take you at your word and tell you what’s what. I’m laying my cards on the table when I say we don’t know what’s the matter with you. We’ve just got the X-rays from this morning, and it’s pretty certain it’s not the gall bladder. There’s a possibility of acute food poisoning or mesenteric thrombosis, or it may be something we haven’t thought of yet. Give us a chance, Bill.”

With an effort and with the help of a sedative, Bill got himself in comparative control; only to go to pieces again in the morning, when George Schoatze arrived to give him a hypodermoclysis.

“But I can’t stand it,” he raged. “I never could stand being pricked, and you have as much right with a needle as a year-old baby with a machine gun.”

“Doctor Norton has ordered that you get nothing by mouth.”

“Then give it intravenously.”

“This is best.”

“What I’ll do to you when I get well! I’ll inject stuff into you until you’re as big as a barrel! I will! I’ll hire somebody to hold you down!”

Forty-eight hours later, Doctor Norton and Doctor Schoatze had a conference in the former’s office.

“So there we are,” George was saying gloomily. “He just flatly refuses to submit to the operation.”

“H’m.” Doctor Norton considered. “That’ bad.”

“There’s certainly danger of a perforation.”

“And you say that his chief objection — ”

“ — that it was my diagnosis. He says I remembered the word ‘volvulus’ from some lecture and I’m trying to wish it on him.” George added uncomfortably: “He always was domineering, but I never saw anything like *this*. Today he claims it’s acute pancreatitis, but he doesn’t have any convincing reasons.”

“Does he know I agree with your opinion?”

“He doesn’t seem to believe in anybody,” said George uncomfortably. “He keeps fretting about his father; he keeps thinking he could help him if he was alive.”

“I wish that there was someone outside the hospital he had some faith in,” Norton said. An idea came to him: “I wonder — ” He picked up the telephone and said to the operator: “I wish you’d locate Miss Singleton, Doctor Durfee’s anaesthetist. And when she’s free, ask her to come and see me.”

Bill opened his eyes wearily when Thea came into his room at eight that night.

“Oh, it’s you,” he murmured.

She sat on the side of his bed and put her hand on his arm.

“H’lo, Bill,” she said.

“H’lo.”

Suddenly he turned in bed and put both arms around her arm. Her free hand touched his hair.

“You’ve been bad,” she said.

“I can’t help it.”

She sat with him silently for half an hour; then she changed her position so that her arm was under his head. Stooping over him, she kissed him on the brow. He said:

“Being close to you is the first rest I’ve had in four days.”

After a while she said: “Three months ago Doctor Durfee did an operation for volvulus and it was entirely successful.”

“But it isn’t volvulus!” he cried. “Volvulus is when a loop of the intestine gets twisted on itself. It’s a crazy idea of Schoatze’s! He wants to make a trick diagnosis and get a lot of credit.”

“Doctor Norton agrees with him. You must give in, Bill. I’ll be right beside you, as close as I am now.”

Her soft voice was a sedative; he felt his resistance growing weaker; two long tears rolled from his eyes. “I feel so helpless,” he admitted. “How do I know whether George Schoatze has any sense?”

“That’s just childish,” she answered gently. “You’ll profit more by submitting to this than Doctor Schoatze will from his lucky guess.”

He clung to her suddenly. “Afterward, will you be my girl?”

She laughed. “The selfishness! The bargainer! You wouldn’t be very cheerful company if you went around with a twisted intestine.”

He was silent for a moment. "Yesterday I made my will," he said. "I divided what I have between an old aunt and you."

She put her face against his. "You'll make me weep, and it really isn't that serious at all."

"All right then." His white, pinched face relaxed. "Get it over with."

Bill was wheeled upstairs an hour later. Once the matter was decided, all nervousness left him, and he remembered how the hands of Doctor Durfee had given him such a sense of surety last July, and remembered who would be at his head watching over him. He last thought as the gas began was sudden jealousy that Thea and Howard Durfee would be awake and near each other while he was asleep . . .

. . . When he awoke he was being wheeled down a corridor to his room. Doctor Norton and Doctor Schoatze, seeming very cheerful, were by his side.

"H'lo, hello," cried Bill in a daze. "Say, what did they finally discover about Senator Billings?"

"It was only a common cold, Bill," said Doctor Norton. "They've shipped him back west — by dirigible, helicopter and freight elevator."

"Oh," said Bill; and then, after a moment, "I feel terrible."

"You're not terrible," Doctor Norton assured him. "You'll be up on deck in a week. George here is certainly a swell guesser."

"It was a beautiful operation," said George modestly. "That loop would have perforated in another six hours."

"Good anaesthesia job, too," said Doctor Norton, winking at George. "Like a lullaby."

Thea slipped in to see Bill next morning, when he was rested and the soreness was eased and he felt weak but himself again. She sat beside him on the bed.

"I made an awful fool of myself," he confessed.

“A lot of doctors do when they get sick the first time. They go neurotic.”

“I guess everybody’s off me.”

“Not at all. You’ll be in for some kidding probably. Some bright young one wrote this for the Coccidian Club show.” She read from a scrap of paper:

“Interne Tulliver, chloroformed,

Had dreams above his station;

He woke up thinking he’d performed

His own li’l operation.”

“I guess I can stand it,” said Bill. “I can stand anything when you’re around; I’m so in love with you. But I suppose after this you’ll always see me as about high-school age.”

“If you’d had your first sickness at forty you’d have acted the same way.”

“I hear your friend Durfee did a brilliant job, as usual,” he said resentfully.

“Yes,” she agreed; after a minute she added: “He wants to break his engagement and marry me on my own terms.”

His heart stopped beating. “And what did you say?”

“I said No.”

Life resumed itself again.

“Come closer,” he whispered. “Where’s your hand? Will you, anyhow, go swimming with me every night all the rest of September?”

“Every other night.”

“Every night.”

“Well, every hot night,” she compromised.

Thea stood up.

He saw her eyes fix momentarily on some distant spot, linger there for a moment as if she were drawing support from it; then she leaned over him and kissed his hungry lips good-by, and faded back into her own mystery, into those woods where she hunted, with an old suffering and with a memory he could not share.

But what was valuable in it she had distilled; she knew how to pass it along so that it would not disappear. For the moment Bill had had more than his share, and reluctantly he relinquished her.

“This has been my biggest case so far,” he thought sleepily.

The verse to the Coccidian Club song passed through his mind, and the chorus echoed on, singing him into deep sleep:

Bumtidy, bum-bum,

Tiddy-bum-bum.

Three thousand years ago,

Three thousand years ago.

MORE THAN JUST A HOUSE

I

Saturday Evening Post (24 June 1933)

This was the sort of thing Lew was used to — and he'd been around a good deal already. You came into an entrance hall, sometimes narrow New England Colonial, sometimes cautiously spacious. Once in the hall, the host said: "Clare" — or Virginia, or Darling — "this is Mr. Lowrie." The woman said, "How do you do, Mr. Lowrie," and Lew answered, "How do you do, Mrs. Woman." Then the man suggested, "How about a little cocktail?" And Lew lifted his brows apart and said, "Fine," in a tone that implied: "What hospitality — consideration — attention!" Those delicious canapés. "M'm'm! Madame, what are they — broiled feathers? Enough to spoil a stronger appetite than mine."

But Lew was on his way up, with six new suits of clothes, and he was getting into the swing of the thing. His name was up for a downtown club and he had his eye on a very modern bachelor apartment full of wrought-iron swinging gates — as if he were a baby inclined to topple downstairs — when he saved the life of the Gunther girl and his tastes underwent revision.

This was back in 1925, before the Spanish-American — No, before whatever it is that has happened since then. The Gunther girls had got off the train on the wrong side and were walking along arm in arm, with Amanda in the path of an approaching donkey engine. Amanda was rather tall, golden and proud, and the donkey engine was very squat and dark and determined. Lew had no time to speculate upon their respective chances in the approaching encounter; he lunged at Jean, who was nearest him, and as the two sisters clung together, startled, he pulled Amanda out of the iron pathway by such a hair's breadth that a piston cylinder touched her coat.

And so Lew's taste was changed in regard to architecture and interior decoration. At the Gunther house they served tea, hot or iced, sugar buns, gingerbread and hot rolls at half-past four. When he first went there he was

embarrassed by his heroic status — for about five minutes. Then he learned that during the Civil War the grandmother had been saved by her own grandmother from a burning house in Montgomery County, that father had once saved ten men at sea and been recommended for the Carnegie medal, that when Jean was little a man had saved her from the surf at Cape May — that, in fact, all the Gunthers had gone on saving and being saved for the last fifty years and that their real debt to Lew was that now there would be no gap left in the tradition.

This was on the very wide, vine-curtained veranda [“The first thing I’d do would be tear off that monstrosity,” said a visiting architect] which almost completely bounded the big square box of the house, circa 1880. The sisters, three of them, appeared now and then during the time Lew drank tea and talked to the older people. He was only twenty-six himself and he wished Amanda would stay uncovered long enough for him to look at her, but only Bess, the sixteen-year-old sister, was really in sight; in front of the two others interposed a white-flannel screen of young men.

“It was the quickness,” said Mr. Gunther, pacing the long straw rug, “that second of coordination. Suppose you’d tried to warn them — never. Your subconscious mind saw that they were joined together — saw that if you pulled one, you pulled them both. One second, one thought, one motion. I remember in 1904 — ”

“Won’t Mr. Lowrie have another piece of gingerbread?” asked the grandmother.

“Father, why don’t you show Mr. Lowrie the apostles’ spoons?” Bess proposed.

“What?” Her father stopped pacing. “Is Mr. Lowrie interested in old spoons?”

Lew was thinking at the moment of Amanda twisting somewhere between the glare of the tennis courts and the shadow of the veranda, through all the warmth and graciousness of the afternoon.

“Spoons? Oh, I’ve got a spoon, thank you.”

“Apostles’ spoons,” Bess explained. “Father has one of the best collections in America. When he likes anybody enough he shows them the spoons. I thought, since you saved Amanda’s life — ”

He saw little of Amanda that afternoon — talked to her for a moment by the steps while a young man standing near tossed up a tennis racket and caught it by the handle with an impatient bend of his knees at each catch. The sun shopped among the yellow strands of her hair, poured around the rosy tan of her cheeks and spun along the arms that she regarded abstractedly as she talked to him.

“It’s hard to thank a person for saving your life, Mr. Lowrie,” she said. “Maybe you shouldn’t have. Maybe it wasn’t worth saving.”

“Oh, yes, it was,” said Lew, in a spasm of embarrassment.

“Well, I’d like to think so.” She turned to the young man. “Was it, Allen?”

“It’s a good enough life,” Allen admitted, “if you go in for wooly blondes.”

She turned her slender smile full upon Lew for a moment, and then aimed it a little aside, like a pocket torch that might dazzle him. “I’ll always feel that you own me, Mr. Lowrie; my life is forfeit to you. You’ll always have the right to take me back and put me down in front of that engine again.”

Her proud mouth was a little overgracious about being saved, though Lew didn’t realize it; it seemed to Amanda that it might at least have been someone in her own crowd. The Gunthers were a haughty family — haughty beyond all logic, because Mr. Gunther had once been presented at the Court of St. James’s and remained slightly convalescent ever since. Even Bess was haughty, and it was Bess, eventually, who led Lew down to his car.

“It’s a nice place,” she agreed. “We’ve been going to modernize it, but we took a vote and decided to have the swimming pool repaired instead.”

Lew’s eyes lifted over her — she was like Amanda, except for the slightness of her and the childish disfigurement of a small wire across her teeth — up to the house with its decorative balconies outside the windows, its fickle gables, its gold-lettered, Swiss-chalet mottoes, the bulging projections of its

many bays. Uncritically he regarded it; it seemed to him one of the finest houses he had ever known.

“Of course, we’re miles from town, but there’s always plenty of people. Father and mother go South after the Christmas holidays when we go back to school.”

It was more than just a house, Lew decided as he drove away. It was a place where a lot of different things could go on at once — a private life for the older people, a private romance for each girl. Promoting himself, he chose his own corner — a swinging seat behind one of the drifts of vines that cut the veranda into quarters. But this was in 1925, when the ten thousand a year that Lew had come to command did not permit an indiscriminate crossing of social frontiers. He was received by the Gunthers and held at arm’s length by them, and then gradually liked for the qualities that began to show through his awkwardness. A good-looking man on his way up can put directly into action the things he learns; Lew was never again quite so impressed by the suburban houses whose children lived upon rolling platforms in the street.

It was September before he was invited to the Gunthers’ on an intimate scale — and this largely because Amanda’s mother insisted upon it.

“He saved your life. I want him asked to this one little party.”

But Amanda had not forgiven him for saving her life.

“It’s just a dance for friends,” she complained. “Let him come to Jean’s debut in October — everybody’ll think he’s a business acquaintance of father’s. After all, you can be nice to somebody without falling into their arms.”

Mrs. Gunther translated this correctly as: “You can be awful to somebody without their knowing it” — and brusquely overrode her: “You can’t have advantages without responsibilities,” she said shortly.

Life had been opening up so fast for Lew that he had a black dinner coat instead of a purple one. Asked for dinner, he came early; and thinking to give him his share of attention when it was most convenient, Amanda

walked with him into the tangled, out-of-hand garden. She wanted to be bored, but his gentle vitality disarmed her, made her look at him closely for almost the first time.

“I hear everywhere that you’re a young man with a future,” she said.

Lew admitted it. He boasted a little; he did not tell her that he had analyzed the spell which the Gunther house exerted upon him — his father had been gardener on a similar Maryland estate when he was a boy of five. His mother had helped him to remember that when he told her about the Gunthers. And now this garden was shot bright with sunset, with Amanda one of its own flowers in her flowered dress; he told her, in a rush of emotion, how beautiful she was, and Amanda, excited by the prospect of impending hours with another man, let herself encourage him. Lew had never been so happy as in the moment before she stood up from the seat and put her hand on his arm lightly.

“I do like you,” she said. “You’re very handsome. Do you know that?”

The harvest dance took place in an L-shaped space formed by the clearing of three rooms. Thirty young people were there, and a dozen of their elders, but there was no crowding, for the big windows were opened to the veranda and the guests danced against the wide, illimitable night. A country orchestra alternated with the phonograph, there was mildly calculated cider punch, and an air of safety beside the open bookshelves of the library and the oil portraits of the living room, as though this were one of an endless series of dances that had taken place here in the past and would take place again.

“Thought you never would cut in,” Bess said to Lew. “You’d be foolish not to. I’m the best dancer of us three, and I’m much the smartest one. Jean is the jazzy one, the most *chic*, but I think it’s *passé* to be jazzy and play the traps and neck every second boy. Amanda is the beauty, of course. But I’m going to be the Cinderella, Mr. Lowrie. They’ll be the two wicked sisters, and gradually you’ll find I’m the most attractive and get all hot and bothered about me.”

There was an interval of intervals before Lew could maneuver Amanda to his chosen segment of the porch. She was all radiant and shimmering. More than content to be with him, she tried to relax with the creak of the settee. Then instinct told her that something was about to happen.

Lew, remembering a remark of Jean's — "He asked me to marry him, and he hadn't even kissed me" — could yet think of no graceful way to assault Amanda; nevertheless he was determined to tell her tonight that he was in love with her.

"This'll seem sudden," he ventured, "but you might as well know. Please put me down on the list of those who'd like to have a chance."

She was not surprised, but being deep in herself at the moment, she was rather startled. Giving up the idea of relaxing, she sat upright.

"Mr. Lowrie — can I call you by your first name? — can I tell you something? No, I won't — yes, I will, because I like you now. I didn't like you at first. How's that for frankness?"

"Is that what you wanted to tell me?"

"No. Listen. You met Mr. Horton — the man from New York — the tall man with the rather old-looking hair?"

"Yes." Lew felt a pang of premonition in his stomach.

"I'm engaged to him. You're the first to know — except mother suspects. Whee! Now I told you because you saved my life, so you do sort of own me — I wouldn't be here to be engaged, except for you." Then she was honestly surprised at his expression. "Heavens, don't look like that!" She regarded him, pained. "Don't tell me you've been secretly in love with me all these months. Why didn't I know? And now it's too late."

Lew tried a laugh.

"I hardly know you," he confessed. "I haven't had time to fall in love with you."

"Maybe I work quick. Anyhow, if you did, you'll have to forget it and be my friend." Finding his hand, she squeezed it. "A big night for this little girl, Mr.

Lew; the chance of a lifetime. I've been afraid for two days that his bureau drawer would stick or the hot water would give out and he'd leave for civilization."

They were silent for a moment; then he asked:

"You very much in love with him?"

"Of course I am. I mean, I don't know. You tell me. I've been in love with so many people; how can I answer that? Anyhow, I'll get away from this old barn."

"This house? You want to get away from here? Why, this is a lovely old house."

She was astonished now, and then suddenly explosive:

"This old tomb! That's the chief reason I'm marrying George Horton. Haven't I stood it for twenty years? Haven't I begged mother and father on my knees to move into town? This — shack — where everybody can hear what everybody else says three rooms off, and father won't allow a radio, and not even a phone till last summer. I'm afraid even to ask a girl down from school — probably she'd go crazy listening to the shutters on a stormy night."

"It's a darn nice old house," he said automatically.

"Nice and quaint," she agreed. "Glad you like it. People who don't have to live here generally do, but you ought to see us alone in it — if there's a family quarrel you have to stay with it for hours. It all comes down to father wanting to live fifty miles from anywhere, so we're condemned to rot. I'd rather live in a three-room apartment in town!" Shocked by her own vehemence, she broke off. "Anyhow," she insisted, "it may seem nice to you, but it's a nuisance to us."

A man pulled the vines apart and peered at them, claimed her and pulled her to her feet; when she was gone, Lew went over the railing with a handhold and walked into the garden; he walked far enough away so that the lights and music from the house were blurred into one entity like a stage effect, like an approaching port viewed from a deck at night.

“I only saw her four times,” he said to himself. “Four times isn’t much. Eeey-meeneey-miney-moe — what could I expect in four times? I shouldn’t feel anything at all.” But he was engulfed by fear. What had he just begun to know that now he might never know? What had happened in these moments in the garden this afternoon, what was the excitement that had blacked out in the instant of its birth? The scarcely emergent young image of Amanda — he did not want to carry it with him forever. Gradually he realized a truth behind his grief: He had come too late for her; unknown to him, she had been slipping away through the years. With the odds against him, he had managed to found himself on solid rock, and then, looking around for the girl, discovered that she had just gone. “Sorry, just gone out; just left; just gone.” Too late in every way — even for the house. Thinking over her tirade, Lew saw that he had come too late for the house; it was the house of a childhood from which the three girls were breaking away, the house of an older generation, sufficient unto them. To a younger generation it was pervaded with an aura of completion and fulfillment beyond their own power to add to. It was just old.

Nevertheless, he recalled the emptiness of many grander mansions built in more spectacular fashions — empty to him, at any rate, since he had first seen the Gunther place three months before. Something humanly valuable would vanish with the break-up of this family. The house itself, designed for reading long Victorian novels around an open fire of the evening, didn’t even belong to an architectural period worthy of restoration.

Lew circled an outer drive and stood quiet in the shadow of a rosebush as a pair of figures strolled down from the house; by their voices he recognized Jean and Allen Parks.

“Me, I’m going to New York,” Jean said, “whether they let me or not. . . . No, not now, you nut. I’m not in that mood.”

“Then what mood are you in?”

“Not in any mood. I’m only envious of Amanda because she’s hooked this M’sieur, and now she’ll go to Long Island and live in a house instead of a mouse trap. Oh, Jake, this business of being simple and swell — ”

They passed out of hearing. It was between dances, and Lew saw the colors of frocks and the quick white of shirt fronts in the window-panes as the guests flowed onto the porch. He looked up at the second floor as a light went on there — he had a conception of the second floor as walled with crowded photographs; there must be bags full of old materials, and trunks with costumes and dress-making forms, and old dolls' houses, and an overflow, everywhere along the vacant walls, of books for all generations — many childhoods side by side drifting into every corner.

Another couple came down the walk from the house, and feeling that inadvertently he had taken up too strategic a position, Lew moved away; but not before he had identified the pair as Amanda and her man from New York.

“What would you think if I told you I had another proposal tonight?”

“ . . . be surprised at all.”

“A very worthy young man. Saved my life. . . . Why weren't you there on that occasion, Bubbles? You'd have done it on a grand scale, I'm sure.”

Standing square in front of the house, Lew looked at it more searchingly. He felt a kinship with it — not precisely that, for the house's usefulness was almost over and his was just beginning; rather, the sense of superior unity that the thoughtful young feel for the old, sense of the grandparent. More than only a house. He would like to be that much used up himself before being thrown out on the ash heap at the end. And then, because he wanted to do some courteous service to it while he could, if only to dance with the garrulous little sister, he pulled a brash pocket comb through his hair and went inside.

II

The man with the smiling scar approached Lew once more.

“This is probably,” he announced, “the biggest party ever given in New York.”

“I even heard you the first time you told me,” agreed Lew cheerfully.

“But, on the other hand,” qualified the man, “I thought the same thing at a party two years ago, in 1927. Probably they’ll go on getting bigger and bigger. You play polo, don’t you?”

“Only in the back yard,” Lewis assured him. “I said I’d like to play. I’m a serious business man.”

“Somebody told me you were the polo star.” The man was somewhat disappointed. “I’m a writer myself. A humani — a humanitarian. I’ve been trying to help out a girl over there in that room where the champagne is. She’s a lady. And yet, by golly, she’s the only one in the room that can’t take care of herself.”

“Never try to take care of anybody,” Lew advised him. “They hate you for it.”

But although the apartment, or rather the string of apartments and penthouses pressed into service for the affair, represented the best resources of the New York sky line, it was only limited metropolitan space at that, and moving among the swirls of dancers, thinned with dawn, Lew found himself finally in the chamber that the man had spoken of. For a moment he did not recognize the girl who had assumed the role of entertaining the glassy-eyed citizenry, chosen by natural selection to personify dissolution; then, as she issued a blanket invitation to a squad of Gaiety beauties to come south and recuperate on her Maryland estates, he recognized Jean Gunther.

She was the dark Gunther — dark and shining and driven. Lew, living in New York now, had seen none of the family since Amanda’s marriage four years ago. Driving her home a quarter of an hour later, he extracted what news he could; and then left her in the dawn at the door of her apartment, mussed and awry, yet still proud, and tottering with absurd formality as she thanked him and said good night.

He called next afternoon and took her to tea in Central Park.

“I am,” she informed him, “the child of the century. Other people claim to be the child of the century, but I’m actually the child of the century. And I’m having the time of my life at it.”

Thinking back to another period — of young men on the tennis courts and hot buns in the afternoon, and of wistaria and ivy climbing along the ornate railings of a veranda — Lew became as moral as it was possible to be in that well-remembered year of 1929.

“What are you getting out of it? Why don’t you invest in some reliable man — just a sort of background?”

“Men are good to invest money for you,” she dodged neatly. “Last year one darling spun out my allowance so it lasted ten months instead of three.”

“But how about marrying some candidate?”

“I haven’t got any love,” she said. “Actually, I know four — five — I know six millionaires I could maybe marry. This little girl from Carroll County. It’s just too many. Now, if somebody that had everything came along — ”

She looked at Lew appraisingly. “You’ve improved, for example.”

“I should say I have,” admitted Lew, laughing. “I even go to first nights. But the most beautiful thing about me is I remember my old friends, and among them are the lovely Gunther girls of Carroll County.”

“You’re very nice,” she said. “Were you terribly in love with Amanda?”

“I thought so, anyhow.”

“I saw her last week. She’s super-Park Avenue and very busy having Park Avenue babies. She considers me rather disreputable and tells her friends about our magnificent plantation in the old South.”

“Do you ever go down to Maryland?”

“Do I though? I’m going Sunday night, and spend two months there saving enough money to come back on. When mother died” — she paused — “I suppose you knew mother died — I came into a little cash, and I’ve still got

it, but it has to be stretched, see?" — she pulled her napkin cornerwise — "by tactful investing. I think the next step is a quiet summer on the farm."

Lew took her to the theater the next night, oddly excited by the encounter. The wild flush of the times lay upon her; he was conscious of her physical pulse going at some abnormal rate, but most of the young women he knew were being hectic, save the ones caught up tight in domesticity.

He had no criticism to make — behind that lay the fact that he would not have dared to criticize her. Having climbed from a nether rung of the ladder, he had perforce based his standards on what he could see from where he was at the moment. Far be it from him to tell Jean Gunther how to order her life.

Getting off the train in Baltimore three weeks later, he stepped into the peculiar heat that usually preceded an electric storm. He passed up the regular taxis and hired a limousine for the long ride out to Carroll County, and as he drove through rich foliage, moribund in midsummer, between the white fences that lined the rolling road, many years fell away and he was again the young man, starved for a home, who had first seen the Gunther house four years ago. Since then he had occupied a twelve-room apartment in New York, rented a summer mansion on Long Island, but his spirit, warped by loneliness and grown gypsy with change, turned back persistently to this house.

Inevitably it was smaller than he had expected, a small, big house, roomy rather than spacious. There was a rather intangible neglect about it — the color of the house had never been anything but a brown-green relict of the sun; Lew had never known the stable to lean otherwise than as the Tower of Pisa, nor the garden to grow any other way than plebeian and wild.

Jean was on the porch — not, as she had prophesied, in the role of gingham queen or rural equestrienne, but very Rue-de-la-Paix against the dun cushions of the swinging settee. There was the stout, colored butler whom Lew remembered and who pretended, with racial guile, to remember Lew delightedly. He took the bag to Amanda's old room, and Lew stared around it a little before he went downstairs. Jean and Bess were waiting over a cocktail on the porch.

It struck him that Bess had made a leaping change out of childhood into something that was not quite youth. About her beauty there was a detachment, almost an impatience, as though she had not asked for the gift and considered it rather a burden; to a young man, the gravity of her face might have seemed formidable.

“How is your father?” Lew asked.

“He won’t be down tonight,” Bess answered. “He’s not well. He’s over seventy, you know. People tire him. When we have guests, he has dinner upstairs.”

“It would be better if he ate upstairs all the time,” Jean remarked, pouring the cocktails.

“No, it wouldn’t,” Bess contradicted her. “The doctors said it wouldn’t. There’s no question about that.”

Jean turned in a rush to Lew. “For over a year Bess has hardly left this house. We could — ”

“What junk!” her sister said impatiently. “I ride every morning.”

“ — we could get a nurse who would do just as well.”

Dinner was formal, with candles on the table and the two young women in evening dresses. Lew saw that much was missing — the feeling that the house was bursting with activity, with expanding life — all this had gone. It was difficult for the diminished clan to do much more than inhabit the house. There was not a moving up into vacated places; there was simply an anachronistic staying on between a vanishing past and an incalculable future.

Midway through dinner, Lew lifted his head at a pause in the conversation, but what he had confused with a mutter of thunder was a long groan from the floor above, followed by a measured speech, whose words were interrupted by the quick clatter of Bess’ chair.

“You know what I ordered. Just so long as I am the head of — ”

“It’s father.” Momentarily Jean looked at Lew as if she thought the situation was faintly humorous, but at his concerned face, she continued seriously, “You might as well know. It’s senile dementia. Not dangerous. Sometimes he’s absolutely himself. But it’s hard on Bess.”

Bess did not come down again; after dinner, Lew and Jean went into the garden, splattered with faint drops before the approaching rain. Through the vivid green twilight Lew followed her long dress, spotted with bright red roses — it was the first of that fashion he had ever seen; in the tense hush he had an illusion of intimacy with her, as though they shared the secrets of many years and, when she caught at his arm suddenly at a rumble of thunder, he drew her around slowly with his other arm and kissed her shaped, proud mouth.

“Well, at least you’ve kissed one Gunther girl,” Jean said lightly. “How was it? And don’t you think you’re taking advantage of us, being unprotected out here in the country?”

He looked at her to see if she were joking, and with a swift laugh she seized his arm again. It was raining in earnest, and they fled toward the house — to find Bess on her knees in the library, setting light to an open fire.

“Father’s all right,” she assured them. “I don’t like to give him the medicine till the last minute. He’s worrying about some man that lent him twenty dollars in 1892.” She lingered, conscious of being a third party, and yet impelled to play her mother’s role and impart an initial solidarity before she retired. The storm broke, shrieking in white at the windows, and Bess took the opportunity to fly to the windows upstairs, calling down after a moment:

“The telephone’s trying to ring. Do you think it’s safe to answer it?”

“Perfectly,” Jean called back, “or else they wouldn’t ring.” She came close to Lewis in the center of the room, away from the white, quivering windows.

“It’s strange having you here right now. I don’t mind saying I’m glad you’re here. But if you weren’t, I suppose we’d get along just as well.”

“Shall I help Bess close the windows?” Lew asked.

Simultaneously, Bess called downstairs:

“Nobody seemed to be on the phone, and I don’t like holding it.”

A ripping crash of thunder shook the house and Jean moved into Lew’s arm, breaking away as Bess came running down the stairs with a yelp of dismay.

“The lights are out up there,” she said. “I never used to mind storms when I was little. Father used to make us sit on the porch sometimes, remember?”

There was a dazzle of light around all the windows of the first floor, reflecting itself back and forth in mirrors, so that every room was pervaded with a white glare; there followed a sound as of a million matches struck at once, so loud and terrible that the thunder rolling down seemed secondary; then a splintering noise separated itself out, and Bess’ voice:

“That struck!”

Once again came the sickening lightning, and through a rolling pandemonium of sound they groped from window to window till Jean cried: “It’s William’s room! There’s a tree on it!”

In a moment, Lew had flung wide the kitchen door and saw, in the next glare, what had happened: The great tree, in falling, had divided the lean-to from the house proper.

“Is William there?” he demanded.

“Probably. He should be.”

Gathering up his courage, Lew dashed across the twenty feet of new marsh, and with a waffle iron smashed in the nearest window. Inundated with sheet rain and thunder, he yet realized that the storm had moved off from overhead, and his voice was strong as he called: “William! You all right?”

No answer.

“William!”

He paused and there came a quiet answer:

“Who dere?”

“You all right?”

“I wanna know who dere.”

“The tree fell on you. Are you hurt?”

There was a sudden peal of laughter from the shack as William emerged mentally from dark and atavistic suspicions of his own. Again and again the pealing laughter rang out.

“Hurt? Not me hurt. Nothin’ hurt me. I’m never better, as they say. Nothin’ hurt me.”

Irritated by his melting clothes, Lew said brusquely:

“Well, whether you know it or not, you’re penned up in there. You’ve got to try and get out this window. That tree’s too big to push off tonight.”

Half an hour later, in his room, Lew shed the wet pulp of his clothing by the light of a single candle. Lying naked on the bed, he regretted that he was in poor condition, unnecessarily fatigued with the exertion of pulling a fat man out a window. Then, over the dull rumble of the thunder he heard the phone again in the hall, and Bess’ voice, “I can’t hear a word. You’ll have to get a better connection,” and for thirty seconds he dozed, to wake with a jerk at the sound of his door opening.

“Who’s that?” he demanded, pulling the quilt up over himself.

The door opened slowly.

“Who’s that?”

There was a chuckle; a last pulse of lightning showed him three tense, blue-veined fingers, and then a man’s voice whispered: “I only wanted to know whether you were in for the night, dear. I worry — I worry.”

The door closed cautiously, and Lew realized that old Gunther was on some nocturnal round of his own. Aroused, he slipped into his sole change of clothes, listening to Bess for the third time at the phone.

“ — in the morning,” she said. “Can’t it wait? We’ve got to get a connection ourselves.”

Downstairs he found Jean surprisingly spritely before the fire. She made a sign to him, and he went and stood above her, indifferent suddenly to her invitation to kiss her. Trying to decide how he felt, he brushed his hand lightly along her shoulder.

“Your father’s wandering around. He came in my room. Don’t you think you ought to — ”

“Always does it,” Jean said. “Makes the nightly call to see if we’re in bed.”

Lew stared at her sharply; a suspicion that had been taking place in his subconscious assumed tangible form. A bland, beautiful expression stared back at him; but his ears lifted suddenly up the stairs to Bess still struggling with the phone.

“All right. I’ll try to take it that way. . . . P-ay-double ess-ee-dee — ‘p-a-s-s-e-d.’ All right; ay-double you-ay-wy. ‘Passed away?’” Her voice, as she put the phrase together, shook with sudden panic. “What did you say — ‘Amanda Gunther passed away?’”

Jean looked at Lew with funny eyes.

“Why does Bess try to take that message now? Why not — ”

“Shut up!” he ordered. “This is something serious.”

“I don’t see — ”

Alarmed by the silence that seeped down the stairs, Lew ran up and found Bess sitting beside the telephone table holding the receiver in her lap, just breathing and staring, breathing and staring. He took the receiver and got the message:

“Amanda passed away quietly, giving life to a little boy.”

Lew tried to raise Bess from the chair, but she sank back, full of dry sobbing.

“Don’t tell father tonight.”

How did it matter if this was added to that old store of confused memories? It mattered to Bess, though.

“Go away,” she whispered. “Go tell Jean.”

Some premonition had reached Jean, and she was at the foot of the stairs while he descended.

“What’s the matter?”

He guided her gently back into the library.

“Amanda is dead,” he said, still holding her.

She gathered up her forces and began to wail, but he put his hand over her mouth.

“You’ve been drinking!” he said. “You’ve got to pull yourself together. You can’t put anything more on your sister.”

Jean pulled herself together visibly — first her proud mouth and then her whole body — but what might have seemed heroic under other conditions seemed to Lew only reptilian, a fine animal effort — all he had begun to feel about her went out in a few ticks of the clock.

In two hours the house was quiet under the simple ministrations of a retired cook whom Bess had sent for; Jean was put to sleep with a sedative by a physician from Ellicott City. It was only when Lew was in bed at last that he thought really of Amanda, and broke suddenly, and only for a moment. She was gone out of the world, his second — no, his third love — killed in single combat. He thought rather of the dripping garden outside, and nature so suddenly innocent in the clearing night. If he had not been so tired he would have dressed and walked through the long-stemmed, clinging ferns, and looked once more impersonally at the house and its inhabitants — the broken old, the youth breaking and growing old with it, the other youth escaping into dissipation. Walking through broken dreams, he came in his imagination to where the falling tree had divided William’s bedroom from the house, and paused there in the dark shadow, trying to piece together what he thought about the Gunthers.

“It’s degenerate business,” he decided — “all this hanging on to the past. I’ve been wrong. Some of us are going ahead, and these people and the roof over them are just push-overs for time. I’ll be glad to leave it for good and get back to something fresh and new and clean in Wall Street tomorrow.”

Only once was he wakened in the night, when he heard the old man quavering querulously about the twenty dollars that he had borrowed in ‘92. He heard Bess’ voice soothing him, and then, just before he went to sleep, the voice of the old Negress blotting out both voices.

III

Lew’s business took him frequently to Baltimore, but with the years it seemed to change back into the Baltimore that he had known before he met the Gunthers. He thought of them often, but after the night of Amanda’s death he never went there. By 1933, the role that the family had played in his life seemed so remote — except for the unforgettable fact that they had formed his ideas about how life was lived — that he could drive along the Frederick Road to where it dips into Carroll County before a feeling of recognition crept over him. Impelled by a formless motive, he stopped his car.

It was deep summer; a rabbit crossed the road ahead of him and a squirrel did acrobatics on an arched branch. The Gunther house was up the next crossroad and five minutes away — in half an hour he could satisfy his curiosity about the family; yet he hesitated. With painful consequences, he had once tried to repeat the past, and now, in normal times, he would have driven on with a feeling of leaving the past well behind him; but he had come to realize recently that life was not always a progress, nor a search for new horizons, nor a going away. The Gunthers were part of him; he would not be able to bring to new friends the exact things that he had brought to the Gunthers. If the memory of them became extinct, then something in himself became extinct also.

The squirrel’s flight on the branch, the wind nudging at the leaves, the cock splitting distant air, the creep of sunlight transpiring through the immobility,

lulled him into an adolescent trance, and he sprawled back against the leather for a moment without problems. He loafed for ten minutes before the “k-dup, k-dup, k-dup” of a walking horse came around the next bend of the road. The horse bore a girl in Jodhpur breeches, and bending forward, Lew recognized Bess Gunther.

He scrambled from the car. The horse shied as Bess recognized Lew and pulled up. “Why, Mr. Lowrie! . . . Hey! Hoo-oo there, girl! . . . Where did you arrive from? Did you break down?”

It was a lovely face, and a sad face, but it seemed to Lew that some new quality made it younger — as if she had finally abandoned the cosmic sense of responsibility which had made her seem older than her age four years ago.

“I was thinking about you all,” he said. “Thinking of paying you a visit.” Detecting a doubtful shadow in her face, he jumped to a conclusion and laughed. “I don’t mean a visit; I mean a call. I’m solvent — sometimes you have to add that these days.”

She laughed too: “I was only thinking the house was full and where would we put you.”

“I’m bound for Baltimore anyhow. Why not get off your rocking horse and sit in my car a minute.”

She tied the mare to a tree and got in beside him.

He had not realized that flashing fairness could last so far into the twenties — only when she didn’t smile, he saw from three small thoughtful lines that she was always a grave girl — he had a quick recollection of Amanda on an August afternoon, and looking at Bess, he recognized all that he remembered of Amanda.

“How’s your father?”

“Father died last year. He was bedridden a year before he died.” Her voice was in the singsong of something often repeated. “It was just as well.”

“I’m sorry. How about Jean? Where is she?”

“Jean married a Chinaman — I mean she married a man who lives in China. I’ve never seen him.”

“Do you live alone, then?”

“No, there’s my aunt.” She hesitated. “Anyhow, I’m getting married next week.”

Inexplicably, he had the old sense of loss in his diaphragm.

“Congratulations! Who’s the unfortunate — ”

“From Philadelphia. The whole party went over to the races this afternoon. I wanted to have a last ride with Juniper.”

“Will you live in Philadelphia?”

“Not sure. We’re thinking of building another house on the place, tear down the old one. Of course, we might remodel it.”

“Would that be worth doing?”

“Why not?” she said hastily. “We could use some of it, the architects think.”

“You’re fond of it, aren’t you?”

Bess considered.

“I wouldn’t say it was just my idea of modernity. But I’m a sort of a home girl.” She accentuated the words ironically. “I never went over very big in Baltimore, you know — the family failure. I never had the sort of thing Amanda and Jean had.”

“Maybe you didn’t want it.”

“I thought I did when I was young.”

The mare neighed peremptorily and Bess backed out of the car.

“So that’s the story, Lew Lowrie, of the last Gunther girl. You always did have a sort of yen for us, didn’t you?”

“Didn’t I! If I could possibly stay in Baltimore, I’d insist on coming to your wedding.”

At the lost expression on her face, he wondered to whom she was handing herself, a very precious self. He knew more about people now, and he felt the steel beneath the softness in her, the girders showing through the gentle curves of cheek and chin. She was an exquisite person, and he hoped that her husband would be a good man.

When she had ridden off into a green lane, he drove tentatively toward Baltimore. This was the end of a human experience and it released old images that regrouped themselves about him — if he had married one of the sisters; supposing — The past, slipping away under the wheels of his car, crunched awake his acuteness.

“Perhaps I was always an intruder in that family. . . . But why on earth was that girl riding in bedroom slippers?”

At the crossroads store he stopped to get cigarettes. A young clerk searched the case with country slowness.

“Big wedding up at the Gunther place,” Lew remarked.

“Hah? Miss Bess getting married?”

“Next week. The wedding party’s there now.”

“Well, I’ll be dog! Wonder what they’re going to sleep on, since Mark H. Bourne took the furniture away?”

“What’s that? What?”

“Month ago Mark H. Bourne took all the furniture and everything else while Miss Bess was out riding — they mortgaged on it just before Gunther died. They say around here she ain’t got a stitch except them riding clothes. Mark H. Bourne was good and sore. His claim was they sold off all the best pieces of furniture without his knowing it. . . . Now, that’s ten cents I owe you.”

“What do she and her aunt live on?”

“Never heard about an aunt — I only been here a year. She works the truck garden herself; all she buys from us is sugar, salt and coffee.”

Anything was possible these times, yet Lew wondered what incredibly fantastic pride had inspired her to tell that lie.

He turned his car around and drove back to the Gunther place. It was a desperately forlorn house he came to, and a jungled garden; one side of the veranda had slipped from the brick pillars and sloped to the ground; a shingle job, begun and abandoned, rotted paintless on the roof, a broken pane gaped from the library window.

Lew went in without knocking. A voice challenged him from the dining room and he walked toward it, his feet loud on the rugless floor, through rooms empty of stick and book, empty of all save casual dust. Bess Gunther, wearing the cheapest of house dresses, rose from the packing box on which she sat, with fright in her eyes; a tin spoon rattled on the box she was using as a table.

“Have you been kidding me?” he demanded. “Are you actually living like this?”

“It’s you.” She smiled in relief; then, with visible effort, she spurred herself into amenities:

“Take a box, Mr. Lowrie. Have a canned-goods box — they’re superior; the grain is better. And welcome to the open spaces. Have a cigar, a glass of champagne, have some rabbit stew and meet my fiancé.”

“Stop that.”

“All right,” she agreed.

“Why didn’t you go and live with some relatives?”

“Haven’t got any relatives. Jean’s in China.”

“What are you doing? What do you expect to happen?”

“I was waiting for you, I guess.”

“What do you mean?”

“You always seemed to turn up. I thought if you turned up, I’d make a play for you. But when it came to the point, I thought I’d better lie. I seem to lack the S.A. my sisters had.”

Lew pulled her up from the box and held her with his fingers by her waist.

“Not to me.”

In the hour since Lew had met her on the road the vitality seemed to have gone out of her; she looked up at him very tired.

“So you liked the Gunthers,” she whispered. “You liked us all.”

Lew tried to think, but his heart beat so quick that he could only sit her back on the box and pace along the empty walls.

“We’ll get married,” he said. “I don’t know whether I love you — I don’t even know you — I know the notion of your being in want or trouble makes me physically sick.” Suddenly he went down on both knees in front of her so that she would not seem so unbearably small and helpless. “Miss Bess Gunther, so it was you I was meant to love all the while.”

“Don’t be so anxious about it,” she laughed. “I’m not used to being loved. I wouldn’t know what to do; I never got the trick of it.” She looked down at him, shy and fatigued. “So here we are. I told you years ago that I had the makings of Cinderella.”

He took her hand; she drew it back instinctively and then replaced it in his. “Beg your pardon. Not even used to being touched. But I’m not afraid of you, if you stay quiet and don’t move suddenly.”

It was the same old story of reserve Lew could not fathom, motives reaching back into a past he did not share. With the three girls, facts seemed to reveal themselves precipitately, pushing up through the gay surface; they were always unsuspected things, currents and predilections alien to a man who had been able to shoot in a straight line always.

“I was the conservative sister,” Bess said. “I wasn’t any less pleasure loving but with three girls, somebody has to play the boy, and gradually that got to be my part. . . . Yes, touch me like that. Touch my cheek. I want to be

touched; I want to be held. And I'm glad it's you; but you've got to go slow; you've got to be careful. I'm afraid I'm the kind of person that's forever. I'll live with you and die for you, but I never knew what halfway meant. . . . Yes, that's the wrist. Do you like it? I've had a lot of fun looking at myself in the last month, because there's one long mirror upstairs that was too big to take out."

Lew stood up. "All right, we'll start like that. I'll be so healthy that I'll make you all healthy again."

"Yes, like that," she agreed.

"Suppose we begin by setting fire to this house."

"Oh, no!" She took him seriously. "In the first place, it's insured. In the second place — "

"All right, we'll just get out. We'll get married in Baltimore, or Ellicott City if you'd rather."

"How about Juniper? I can't go off and leave her."

"We'll leave her with the young man at the store."

"The house isn't mine. It's all mortgaged away, but they let me live here — I guess it was remorse after they took even our old music, and our old scrapbooks. They didn't have a chance of getting a tenant, anyhow."

Minute by minute, Lew found out more about her, and liked what he found, but he saw that the love in her was all incrustated with the sacrificial years, and that he would have to be gardener to it for a while. The task seemed attractive.

"You lovely," he told her. "You lovely! We'll survive, you and I because you're so nice and I'm so convinced about it."

"And about Juniper — will she survive if we go away like this?"

"Juniper too."

She frowned and then smiled — and this time really smiled — and said: "Seems to me, you're falling in love."

“Speak for yourself. My opinion is that this is going to be the best thing ever happened.”

“I’m going to help. I insist on — ”

They went out together — Bess changed into her riding habit, but there wasn’t another article that she wanted to bring with her. Backing through the clogging weeds of the garden, Lew looked at the house over his shoulder. “Next week or so we’ll decide what to do about that.”

It was a bright sunset — the creep of rosy light that played across the blue fenders of the car and across their crazily happy faces moved across the house too — across the paralyzed door of the ice house, the rusting tin gutters, the loose-swinging shutter, the cracked cement of the front walk, the burned place of last year’s rubbish back of the tennis court. Whatever its further history, the whole human effort of collaboration was done now. The purpose of the house was achieved — finished and folded — it was an effort toward some commonweal, an effort difficult to estimate, so closely does it press against us still.

THE FIEND

Esquire (January 1935)

On June 3, 1895, on a country road near Stillwater, Minnesota, Mrs. Crenshaw Engels and her seven year old son, Mark, were waylaid and murdered by a fiend, under circumstances so atrocious that, fortunately, it is not necessary to set them down here.

Crenshaw Engels, the husband and father, was a photographer in Stillwater. He was a great reader and considered “a little unsafe,” for he had spoken his mind frankly about the railroad-agrarian struggles of the time — but no one denied that he was a devoted family man, and the catastrophe visited upon him hung over the little town for many weeks. There was a move to lynch the perpetrator of the horror, for Minnesota did not permit the capital punishment it deserved, but the instigators were foiled by the big stone penitentiary close at hand.

The cloud hung over Engel’s home so that folks went there only in moods of penitence, of fear or guilt, hoping that they would be visited in turn should their lives ever chance to trek under a black sky. The photography studio suffered also: the routine of being posed, the necessary silences and pauses in the process, permitted the clients too much time to regard the prematurely aged face of Crenshaw Engels, and high school students, newly married couples, mothers of new babies, were always glad to escape from the place into the open air. So Crenshaw’s business fell off and he went through a time of hardship — finally liquidating the lease, the apparatus and the good will, and wearing out the money obtained. He sold his house for a little more than its two mortgages, went to board and took a position clerking in Radmacher’s Department Store.

In the sight of his neighbors he had become a man ruined by adversity, a man *manqué*, a man emptied. But in the last opinion they were wrong — he was empty of all save one thing. His memory was long as a Jew’s, and though his heart was in the grave he was sane as when his wife and son had

started on their last walk that summer morning. At the first trial he lost control and got at the Fiend, seizing him by the necktie — and then had been dragged off with the Fiend's tie in such a knot that the man was nearly garotted.

At the second trial Crenshaw cried aloud once. Afterwards he went to all the members of the state legislature in the county and handed them a bill he had written himself for the introduction of capital punishment in the state — the bill to be retroactive on criminals condemned to life imprisonment. The bill fell through; it was on the day Crenshaw heard this that he got inside the penitentiary by a ruse and was only apprehended in time to be prevented from shooting the Fiend in his cell.

Crenshaw was given a suspended sentence and for some months it was assumed that the agony was fading gradually from his mind. In fact when he presented himself to the warden in another rôle a year after the crime, the official was sympathetic to his statement that he had had a change of heart and felt he could only emerge from the valley of shadow by forgiveness, that he wanted to help the Fiend, show him the True Path by means of good books and appeals to his buried better nature. So, after being carefully searched, Crenshaw was permitted to sit for half an hour in the corridor outside the Fiend's cell.

But had the warden suspected the truth he would not have permitted the visit — for, far from forgiving, Crenshaw's plan was to wreak upon the Fiend a mental revenge to replace the physical one of which he was subducted.

When he faced the Fiend, Crenshaw felt his scalp tingle. From behind the bars a roly-poly man, who somehow made his convict's uniform resemble a business suit, a man with thick brown-rimmed glasses and the trim air of an insurance salesman, looked at him uncertainly. Feeling faint Crenshaw sat down in the chair that had been brought for him.

"The air around you stinks!" he cried suddenly. "This whole corridor, this whole prison."

"I suppose it does," admitted the Fiend, "I noticed it too."

“You’ll have time to notice it,” Crenshaw muttered. “All your life you’ll pace up and down stinking in that little cell, with everything getting blacker and blacker. And after that there’ll be hell waiting for you. For all eternity you’ll be shut in a little space, but in hell it’ll be so small that you can’t stand up or stretch out.”

“Will it now?” asked the Fiend concerned.

“It will!” said Crenshaw. “You’ll be alone with your own vile thoughts in that little space, forever and ever and ever. You’ll itch with corruption so that you can never sleep, and you’ll always be thirsty, with water just out of reach.”

“Will I now?” repeated the Fiend, even more concerned. “I remember once —”

“All the time you’ll be full of horror,” Crenshaw interrupted. “You’ll be like a person just about to go crazy but can’t go crazy. All the time you’ll be thinking that it’s forever and ever.”

“That’s bad,” said the Fiend, shaking his head gloomily. “That’s real bad.”

“Now listen here to me,” went on Crenshaw. “I’ve brought you some books you’re going to read. It’s arranged that you get no books or papers except what I bring you.”

As a beginning Crenshaw had brought half a dozen books which his vagarious curiosity had collected over as many years. They comprised a German doctor’s thousand case histories of sexual abnormality — cases with no cures, no hopes, no prognoses, cases listed cold; a series of sermons by a New England Divine of the Great Revival which pictured the tortures of the damned in hell; a collection of horror stories; and a volume of erotic pieces from each of which the last two pages, containing the consummations, had been torn out; a volume of detective stories mutilated in the same manner. A tome of the Newgate calendar completed the batch. These Crenshaw handed through the bars — the Fiend took them and put them on his iron cot.

This was the first of Crenshaw's long series of fortnightly visits. Always he brought with him something somber and menacing to say, something dark and terrible to read — save that once when the Fiend had had nothing to read for a long time he brought him four inspiringly titled books — that proved to have nothing but blank paper inside. Another time, pretending to concede a point, he promised to bring newspapers — he brought ten copies of the yellowed journal that had reported the crime and the arrest. Sometimes he obtained medical books that showed in color the red and blue and green ravages of leprosy and skin disease, the mounds of shattered cells, the verminous tissue and brown corrupted blood.

And there was no sewer of the publishing world from which he did not obtain records of all that was gross and vile in man.

Crenshaw could not keep this up indefinitely both because of the expense and because of the exhaustibility of such books. When five years had passed he leaned toward another form of torture. He built up false hopes in the Fiend with protests of his own change of heart and manoeuvres for a pardon, and then dashed the hopes to pieces. Or else he pretended to have a pistol with him, or an inflammatory substance that would make the cell a raging Inferno and consume the Fiend in two minutes — once he threw a dummy bottle into the cell and listened in delight to the screams as the Fiend ran back and forth waiting for the explosion. At other times he would pretend grimly that the legislature had passed a new law which provided that the Fiend would be executed in a few hours.

A decade passed. Crenshaw was gray at forty — he was white at fifty when the alternating routine of his fortnightly visits to the graves of his loved ones and to the penitentiary had become the only part of his life — the long days at Radmacher's were only a weary dream. Sometimes he went and sat outside the Fiend's cell, with no word said during the half hour he was allowed to be there. The Fiend too had grown white in twenty years. He was very respectable-looking with his horn-rimmed glasses and his white hair. He seemed to have a great respect for Crenshaw and even when the latter, in a renewal of diminishing vitality, promised him one day that on his very next visit he was going to bring a revolver and end the matter, he nodded gravely as if in agreement, said, "I suppose so. Yes, I suppose you're perfectly right,"

and did not mention the matter to the guards. On the occasion of the next visit he was waiting with his hands on the bars of the cell looking at Crenshaw both hopefully and desperately. At certain tensions and strains death takes on, indeed, the quality of a great adventure as any soldier can testify.

Years passed. Crenshaw was promoted to floor manager at Radmacher's — there were new generations now that did not know of his tragedy and regarded him as an austere nonentity. He came into a little legacy and bought new stones for the graves of his wife and son. He knew he would soon be retired and while a third decade lapsed through the white winters, the short sweet smoky summers, it became more and more plain to him that the time had come to put an end to the Fiend; to avoid any mischance by which the other would survive him.

The moment he fixed upon came at the exact end of thirty years. Crenshaw had long owned the pistol with which it would be accomplished; he had fingered the shells lovingly and calculated the lodgement of each in the Fiend's body, so that death would be sure but lingering — he studied the tales of abdominal wounds in the war news and delighted in the agony that made victims pray to be killed.

After that, what happened to *him* did not matter.

When the day came he had no trouble in smuggling the pistol into the penitentiary. But to his surprise he found the Fiend scrunched up upon his iron cot, instead of waiting for him avidly by the bars.

"I'm sick," the Fiend said. "My stomach's been burning me up all morning. They gave me a physic but now it's worse and nobody comes."

Crenshaw fancied momentarily that this was a premonition in the man's bowels of a bullet that would shortly ride ragged through that spot.

"Come up to the bars," he said mildly.

"I can't move."

"Yes, you can."

“I’m doubled up. All doubled up.”

“Come doubled up then.”

With an effort the Fiend moved himself, only to fall on his side on the cement floor. He groaned and then lay quiet for a minute, after which, still bent in two, he began to drag himself a foot at a time toward the bars.

Suddenly Crenshaw set off at a run toward the end of the corridor.

“I want the prison doctor,” he demanded of the guard, “That man’s sick — sick, I tell you.”

“The doctor has — ”

“Get him — get him now!”

The guard hesitated, but Crenshaw had become a tolerated, even privileged person around the prison, and in a moment the guard took down his phone and called the infirmary.

All that afternoon Crenshaw waited in the bare area inside the gates, walking up and down with his hands behind his back. From time to time he went to the front entrance and demanded of the guard:

“Any news?”

“Nothing yet. They’ll call me when there’s anything.”

Late in the afternoon the Warden appeared at the door, looked about and spotted Crenshaw. The latter, all alert, hastened over.

“He’s dead,” the Warden said. “His appendix burst. They did everything they could.”

“Dead,” Crenshaw repeated.

“I’m sorry to bring you this news. I know how — ”

“It’s all right,” said Crenshaw, and licking his lips. “So he’s dead.”

The Warden lit a cigarette.

“While you’re here, Mr. Engels, I wonder if you can let me have that pass that was issued to you — I can turn it in to the office. That is — I suppose you won’t need it any more.”

Crenshaw took the blue card from his wallet and handed it over. The Warden shook hands with him.

“One thing more,” Crenshaw demanded as the Warden turned away. “Which is the — the window of the infirmary?”

“It’s on the interior court, you can’t see it from here.”

“Oh.”

When the Warden had gone Crenshaw still stood there a long time, the tears running out down his face. He could not collect his thoughts and he began by trying to remember what day it was; Saturday, the day, every other week, on which he came to see the Fiend.

He would not see the Fiend two weeks from now.

In a misery of solitude and despair he muttered aloud: “So he is dead. He has left me.” And then with a long sigh of mingled grief and fear, “So I have lost him — my only friend — now I am alone.”

He was still saying that to himself as he passed through the outer gate, and as his coat caught in the great swing of the outer door the guard opened up to release it, he heard a reiteration of the words: “I’m alone. At last — at last I am alone.”

Once more he called on the Fiend, after many weeks. “But he’s dead,” the Warden told him kindly.

“Oh, yes,” Crenshaw said. “I guess I must have forgotten.”

And he set off back home, his boots sinking deep into the white diamond surface of the flats.

THE NIGHT AT CHANCELLORSVILLE

Esquire (February 1935)

I tell you I didn't have any notion what I was getting into or I wouldn't of gone down there. They can have their army — it seems to me they were all a bunch of yella-bellies. But my friend Nell said to me: "Nora, Philly, is as dead as Baltimore and we've got to eat this summer." She just got a letter from a girl that said they were living fine down there in "Ole Virginia." The soldiers were getting big pay-offs and figuring maybe they'd stay there all summer, at least till the Johnny Rebs gave up. They got their pay regular too, and a good clean-looking girl could ask — well, I forget now, because, after what happened to us, I guess you can't expect me to remember anything.

I've always been used to decent treatment — somehow when I meet a man, no matter how fresh he is in the beginning, he comes to respect me in the end, and I've never had things done to me like some girls — getting left in a strange town or had my purse stolen.

Well, I started to tell you how I went down to the army in "Ole Virginia." Never again! Wait'll you hear.

I was used to traveling nice — once when I was a little girl my daddy took me on the cars to Baltimore — we lived in York, Pa. And we couldn't have been more comfortable; we had pillows and the men came through with baskets of oranges and apples. You know, singing out: "Want to buy some oranges or apples — or beer?"

You know what they sell — but I never took any beer because —

Oh I know, I'll go on — You only want to talk about the war, like all you men. But if this is your idea what a war is —

Well, they stuck us all in one car and a fresh fella took our tickets, and winked and said:

"Oh you're going down to Hooker's army."

The lights were terrible in the car, smoky and full of bugs, so everything looked sort of yella. And say, that car was so old it was falling to pieces.

There must of been forty gay girls in it, a lot of them from Baltimore and Philly. Only there were three or four that weren't gay — I mean they were more, oh, you know, rich people, and sat up front. Every once an awhile an officer would pop in from the next car and ask them if they wanted anything. I was in the seat behind with Nell and we heard him whisper: "You're in terrible company, but we'll be there in a few hours. And we'll go right to headquarters, and I guarantee you some solid comfort."

I never will forget that night. None of us had any food except some girls behind us had some sausages and bread, and they gave us what they had left. There was a spigot you turned but no water came out. After about two hours — stopping every two minutes it seemed to me — a couple of lieutenants, drunk as monkeys, came in from the next car and offered Nell and me some whiskey out of a bottle. Nell took some and I pretended to, and they set on the side of our seats. One of them started to make up to Nell, but just then the officer that had spoken to the women, pretty high up I guess, a major or a general, came back again and asked:

"You all right? Anything I can do?"

One of the ladies kind of whispered to him, and he turned to the one that was talking to Nell and made him go back in the other car. After that there was only one officer with us; he wasn't really so drunk, just feeling sick.

"This certainly is a happy looking gang," he said. "It's good you can hardly see them in this light. They look as if their best friend just died."

"What if they do," Nell answered back quick. "How would you look yourself if you come all the way from Philly and then got in a buggy like this?"

"I come all the way from The Seven Days, sister," he answered. "Maybe I'd be more pretty for you if I hadn't lost an eye at Games' Mill."

Then we noticed he *had* lost an eye. He kept it sort of closed so we hadn't remarked it before. Pretty soon he left and said he'd try and get us some water or coffee, that was what we wanted most.

The car kept rocking and it made us both feel funny. Some of the girls was sick and some was asleep on each other's shoulders.

"Hey, where *is* this army?" Nell said. "Down in Mexico?"

I was kind of half asleep myself by that time and didn't answer.

The next thing I knew I was woke up by a storm, the car was stopped again, and I said, "It's raining."

"Raining!" said Nell. "That's cannons — they're having a battle."

"Oh!" I got awake. "Well, after *this* ride I don't care who wins."

It seemed to get louder all the time, but out the windows you couldn't see anything on account of the mist.

In about half an hour another officer came in the car — he looked pretty messy as if he'd just crawled out of bed: his coat was still unbuttoned and he kept hitching up his trousers as if he didn't have any suspenders on.

"All you ladies outside," he said. "We need this car for wounded."

"Hey!"

"We paid for our tickets, didn't we?"

"We need all the cars for the wounded and the other cars are filled up."

"Hey! We didn't come down to fight in any battle!"

"It doesn't matter what you came down for — you're in a hell of a battle."

I was scared, I can tell you. I thought maybe the Rebs would capture us and send us down to one of those prisons you hear about, where they starve you to death unless you sing Dixie all the time and kiss niggers.

"Hurry up!"

But another officer had come in who looked more nice.

“Stay where you are, ladies,” he said. And then he said to the officer, “What do you want to do? leave them standing on the siding! If Sedgewick’s Corps is broken, like they say, the Rebs may come up in this direction!”

Some of the girls began crying out loud.

“These are northern women after all,” he said.

“These are — ”

“Shut up and go back to your command! I’m detailed to this transportation job — I’m taking these girls back to Washington with us.”

I thought they were going to hit each other, but they both walked off together. And we girls sat wondering what we were going to do.

What happened next I don’t remember exact. The cannons were sometimes very loud and then sometimes more far away, but there was firing of shots right near us — and a girl down the car had her window smashed like a hole in the center, sort of, all smashed you know, not like when you break a glass, more like ice in cold weather, just a hole and streaks around — you know. I heard a whole bunch of horses gallop by our windows, but I still couldn’t see anything.

That went on half an hour — galloping and more shots. We couldn’t tell how far away but they sounded like up by the engine.

Then it got quiet — and two men came into our car — we all knew right away they were Rebels, not officers, just plain Private ones, with muskets. One had on a old brown blouse sort of thing and one had on a blue thing — all spotted — I know I could never of let *that* man make love to me. It had spots — it was too short — anyway, it was out of style. Oh it was disgusting. I was surprised because I thought they always wore grey. They were disgusting looking and very dirty; one had a big pot of jam smeared all over his face and the other one had a big box of crackers.

“Hi ladies.”

“What you gals doin’ down here?”

“Kain’t you see, Steve, this is old Joe Hooker’s staff.”

“Reckin we ought to take em back to the General?”

They talked outlandish like that — I could hardly understand, they talked so funny.

One of the girls got historical she was so scared, and that made them kind of shy. They were just kids under those beards, and one of them tipped his hat or cap or whatever the old thing was.

“We’re not fixin’ to hurt you.”

At that moment there was a whole bunch more shooting down by the engine and the Rebs turned and ran.

We were glad, I can tell you.

Then, about fifteen minutes later, in came one of our officers. This was another new one.

“You better duck down!” he shouted to us. “They may fire on this train. We’re starting you off as soon as we unload two more ambulances.”

Half of us was on the floor already. The rich women sitting ahead of Nell and me had gone up into the car ahead where the wounded were — to see if they could do anything. Nell thought she’d look in too, but she came back holding her nose. She said it smelled awful in there.

It was lucky she didn’t go in, because two of the girls did from our car. People that is sick can never seem to get much consideration for other people who happen to be well. The nurses sent them right back — as if they was dirt under their feet.

After I don’t know how long the train began to move. A soldier come in and poured oil out of all our lights except one, and took it into the wounded car. So now we could hardly see at all.

If the trip down was slow the trip back was slower — The wounded began making so much noise, grunting and all, that we could hear it and couldn’t get a decent sleep.

We stopped everywhere.

When we got in Washington at last there was a lot of people in the station and they were all anxious about what had happened to the army, but I said You can search me. All I wanted was my little old room and my little old bed. I never been treated like that in my life.

One of the girls said she was going to write to President Lincoln about it.

And in the papers next day they never said anything about how our train got attacked, or about us girls at all! Can you beat it?

AFTERNOON OF AN AUTHOR

I

Esquire (August 1936)

When he woke up he felt better than he had for many weeks, a fact that became plain to him negatively — he did not feel ill. He leaned for a moment against the door frame between his bedroom and bath till he could be sure he was not dizzy. Not a bit, not even when he stooped for a slipper under the bed.

It was a bright April morning, he had no idea what time because his clock was long unwound but as he went back through the apartment to the kitchen he saw that his daughter had breakfasted and departed and that the mail was in, so it was after nine.

“I think I’ll go out today,” he said to the maid.

“Do you good — it’s a lovely day.” She was from New Orleans, with the features and coloring of an Arab.

“I want two eggs like yesterday and toast, orange juice and tea.”

He lingered for a moment in his daughter’s end of the apartment and read his mail. It was an annoying mail with nothing cheerful in it — mostly bills and advertisements with the diurnal Oklahoma school boy and his gaping autograph album. Sam Goldwyn might do a ballet picture with Spessiwitza and might not — it would all have to wait till Mr. Goldwyn got back from Europe when he might have half a dozen new ideas. Paramount wanted a release on a poem that had appeared in one of the author’s books, as they didn’t know whether it was an original or quoted. Maybe they were going to get a title from it. Anyhow he had no more equity in that property — he had sold the silent rights many years ago and the sound rights last year.

“Never any luck with movies,” he said to himself. “Stick to your last, boy.”

He looked out the window during breakfast at the students changing classes on the college campus across the way.

“Twenty years ago I was changing classes,” he said to the maid. She laughed her débutante’s laugh.

“I’ll need a check,” she said, “if you’re going out.”

“Oh, I’m not going out yet. I’ve got two or three hours’ work. I meant late this afternoon.”

“Going for a drive?”

“I wouldn’t drive that old junk — I’d sell it for fifty dollars. I’m going on the top of a bus.”

After breakfast he lay down for fifteen minutes. Then he went into the study and began to work.

The problem was a magazine story that had become so thin in the middle that it was about to blow away. The plot was like climbing endless stairs, he had no element of surprise in reserve, and the characters who started so bravely day-before-yesterday couldn’t have qualified for a newspaper serial.

“Yes, I certainly need to get out,” he thought. “I’d like to drive down the Shenandoah Valley, or go to Norfolk on the boat.”

But both of these ideas were impractical — they took time and energy and he had not much of either — what there was must be conserved for work. He went through the manuscript underlining good phrases in red crayon and after tucking these into a file slowly tore up the rest of the story and dropped it in the waste-basket. Then he walked the room and smoked, occasionally talking to himself.

“Wee-I, let’s see — ”

“Nau-ow, the next thing — would be — ”

“Now let’s see, now — ”

After awhile he sat down thinking:

“I’m just stale — I shouldn’t have touched a pencil for two days.”

He looked through the heading “Story Ideas” in his notebook until the maid came to tell him his secretary was on the phone — part time secretary since he had been ill.

“Not a thing,” he said. “I just tore up everything I’d written. It wasn’t worth a damn. I’m going out this afternoon.”

“Good for you. It’s a fine day.”

“Better come up tomorrow afternoon — there’s a lot of mail and bills.”

He shaved, and then as a precaution rested five minutes before he dressed. It was exciting to be going out — he hoped the elevator boys wouldn’t say they were glad to see him up and he decided to go down the back elevator where they did not know him. He put on his best suit with the coat and trousers that didn’t match. He had bought only two suits in six years but they were the very best suits — the coat alone of this one had cost a hundred and ten dollars. As he must have a destination — it wasn’t good to go places without a destination — he put a tube of shampoo ointment in his pocket for his barber to use, and also a small phial of luminol.

“The perfect neurotic,” he said, regarding himself in the mirror. “By-product of an idea, slag of a dream.”

II

He went into the kitchen and said good-bye to the maid as if he were going to Little America. Once in the war he had commandeered an engine on sheer bluff and had it driven from New York to Washington to keep from being A.W.O.L. Now he stood carefully on the street corner waiting for the light to change, while young people hurried past him with a fine disregard for traffic. On the bus corner under the trees it was green and cool and he thought of Stonewall Jackson’s last words: “Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.” Those Civil War leaders seemed to have realized very suddenly how tired they were — Lee shriveling into another man, Grant with his desperate memoir-writing at the end.

The bus was all he expected — only one other man on the roof and the green branches ticking against each window through whole blocks. They would probably have to trim those branches and it seemed a pity. There was so much to look at — he tried to define the color of one line of houses and could only think of an old opera cloak of his mother's that was full of tints and yet was of no tint — a mere reflector of light. Somewhere church bells were playing "*Venite Adoremus*" and he wondered why, because Christmas was eight months off. He didn't like bells but it had been very moving when they played "*Maryland, My Maryland*" at the governor's funeral.

On the college football field men were working with rollers and a title occurred to him: "Turf-keeper" or else "The Grass Grows," something about a man working on turf for years and bringing up his son to go to college and play football there. Then the son dying in youth and the man's going to work in the cemetery and putting turf over his son instead of under his feet. It would be the kind of piece that is often placed in anthologies, but not his sort of thing — it was sheer swollen antithesis, as formalized as a popular magazine story and easier to write. Many people, however, would consider it excellent because it was melancholy, had digging in it and was simple to understand.

The bus went past a pale Athenian railroad station brought to life by the blue shirted redcaps out in front. The street narrowed as the business section began and there were suddenly brightly dressed girls, all very beautiful — he thought he had never seen such beautiful girls. There were men too but they all looked rather silly, like himself in the mirror, and there were old undecorative women, and presently, too, there were plain and unpleasant faces among the girls; but in general they were lovely, dressed in real colors all the way from six to thirty, no plans or struggles in their faces, only a state of sweet suspension, provocative and serene. He loved life terribly for a minute, not wanting to give it up at all. He thought perhaps he had made a mistake in coming out so soon.

He got off the bus, holding carefully to all the railings and walked a block to the hotel barbershop. He passed a sporting goods store and looked in the window unmoved except by a first baseman's glove which was already dark in the pocket. Next to that was a haberdasher's and here he stood for quite

a while looking at the deep shade of shirts and the ones of checker and plaid. Ten years ago on the summer Riviera the author and some others had bought dark blue workmen's shirts, and probably that had started that style. The checkered shirts were nice looking, bright as uniforms and he wished he were twenty and going to a beach club all dolled up like a Turner sunset or Guido Reni's dawn.

The barbershop was large, shining and scented — it had been several months since the author had come downtown on such a mission and he found that his familiar barber was laid up with arthritis; however, he explained to another man how to use the ointment, refused a newspaper and sat, rather happy and sensually content at the strong fingers on his scalp, while a pleasant mingled memory of all the barbershops he had ever known flowed through his mind.

Once he had written a story about a barber. Back in 1929 the proprietor of his favorite shop in the city where he was then living had made a fortune of \$300,000 on tips from a local industrialist and was about to retire. The author had no stake in the market, in fact, was about to sail for Europe for a few years with such accumulation as he had, and that autumn hearing how the barber had lost all his fortune he was prompted to write a story, thoroughly disguised in every way yet hinging on the fact of a barber rising in the world and then tumbling; he heard, nevertheless, that the story had been identified in the city and caused some hard feelings.

The shampoo ended. When he came out into the hall an orchestra had started to play in the cocktail room across the way and he stood for a moment in the door listening. So long since he had danced, perhaps two evenings in five years, yet a review of his last book had mentioned him as being fond of night clubs; the same review had also spoken of him as being indefatigable. Something in the sound of the word in his mind broke him momentarily and feeling tears of weakness behind his eyes he turned away. It was like in the beginning fifteen years ago when they said he had "fatal facility," and he labored like a slave over every sentence so as not to be like that.

“I’m getting bitter again,” he said to himself. “That’s no good, no good — I’ve got to go home.”

The bus was a long time coming but he didn’t like taxis and he still hoped that something would occur to him on that upper-deck passing through the green leaves of the boulevard. When it came finally he had some trouble climbing the steps but it was worth it for the first thing he saw was a pair of high school kids, a boy and a girl, sitting without any self-consciousness on the high pedestal of the Lafayette statue, their attention fast upon each other. Their isolation moved him and he knew he would get something out of it professionally, if only in contrast to the growing seclusion of his life and the increasing necessity of picking over an already well-picked past. He needed reforestation and he was well aware of it, and he hoped the soil would stand one more growth. It had never been the very best soil for he had had an early weakness for showing off instead of listening and observing. Here was the apartment house — he glanced up at his own windows on the top floor before he went in.

“The residence of the successful writer,” he said to himself. “I wonder what marvelous books he’s tearing off up there. It must be great to have a gift like that — just sit down with pencil and paper. Work when you want — go where you please.”

His child wasn’t home yet but the maid came out of the kitchen and said: “Did you have a nice time?”

“Perfect,” he said. “I went roller skating and bowled and played around with Man Mountain Dean and finished up in a Turkish Bath. Any telegrams?”

“Not a thing.”

“Bring me a glass of milk, will you?”

He went through the dining room and turned into his study, struck blind for a moment with the glow of his two thousand books in the late sunshine. He was quite tired — he would lie down for ten minutes and then see if he could get started on an idea in the two hours before dinner.

“I DIDN’T GET OVER”

Esquire (October, 1936)

I was ‘sixteen in college and it was our twentieth reunion this year. We always called ourselves the “War Babies” — anyhow we were all in the damn thing and this time there was more talk about the war than at any previous reunion; perhaps because war’s in the air once more.

Three of us were being talkative on the subject in Pete’s back room the night after commencement, when a classmate came in and sat down with us. We knew he was a classmate because we remembered his face and name vaguely, and he marched with us in the alumni parade, but he’d left college as a junior and had not been back these twenty years.

“Hello there — ah — Hib,” I said after a moment’s hesitation. The others took the cue and we ordered a round of beer and went on with what we were talking about.

“I tell you it was kind of moving when we laid that wreath this afternoon.” He referred to a bronze plaque commemorating the ‘sixteeners who died in the war, “ — to read the names of Abe Danzer and Pop McGowan and those fellows and to think they’ve been dead for twenty years and we’ve only been getting old.”

“To be that young again I’d take a chance on another war,” I said, and to the new arrival, “Did you get over, Hib?”

“I was in the army but I didn’t get over.”

The war and the beer and the hours flowed along. Each of us shot off our mouths about something amusing, or unique, or terrible — all except Hib. Only when a pause came he said almost apologetically:

“I would have gotten over except that I was supposed to have slapped a little boy.”

We looked at him inquiringly.

“Of course I didn’t,” he added. “But there was a row about it.” His voice died away but we encouraged him — we had talked a lot and he seemed to rate a hearing.

“Nothing much to tell. The little boy, downtown with his father, said some officer with a blue M. P. band slapped him in the crowd and he picked me! A month afterwards they found he was always accusing soldiers of slapping, so they let me go. What made me think of it was Abe Danzer’s name on that plaque this afternoon. They put me in Leavenworth for a couple of weeks while they investigated me, and he was in the next cell to mine.”

“Abe Danzer!”

He had been sort of a class hero and we all exclaimed aloud in the same breath. “Why he was recommended for the D. S. C!”

“I know it.”

“What on earth was Abe Danzer doing in Leavenworth?”

Again Hibbing became apologetic.

“Oddly enough I was the man who arrested him. But he didn’t blame me because it was all in line of duty, and when I turned up in the next cell a few months later he even laughed about it.”

We were all interested now.

“What did you have to arrest him for?”

“Well, I’d been put on Military Police in Kansas City and almost the first call I got was to take a detail of men with fixed bayonets to the big hotel there — I forget the name — and go to a certain room. When I tapped on the door I never saw so many shoulder stars and shoulder leaves in my life; there were at least a brace apiece of generals and colonels. And in the center stood Abe Danzer and a girl — a tart — both of them drunk as monkeys. But it took me a minute’s blinking before I realized what else was the matter: the girl had on Abe’s uniform overcoat and cap and Abe had on her dress and hat. They’d gone down in the lobby like that and run straight into the divisional commander.”

We three looked at him, first incredulous, then shocked, finally believing. We started to laugh but couldn't quite laugh, only looked at Hibbing with silly half-smiles on our faces, imagining ourselves in Abe's position.

"Did he recognize you?" I asked finally.

"Vaguely."

"Then what happened?"

"It was short and sweet. We changed the clothes on them, put their heads in cold water, then I stood them between two files of bayonets and said, forward march."

"And marched old Abe off to prison!" we exclaimed. "It must have been a crazy feeling."

"It was. From the expression in that general's face I thought they'd probably shoot him. When they put me in Leavenworth a couple of months later I was relieved to find he was still alive."

"I can't understand it," Joe Boone said. "He never drank in college."

"That all goes back to his D. S. C.," said Hibbing.

"You know about that too?"

"Oh yes, we were in the same division — we were from the same state."

"I thought you didn't get overseas."

"I didn't. Neither did Abe. But things seemed to happen to him. Of course nothing like what you fellows must have seen — "

"How did he get recommended for the D. S. C.," I interrupted, " — and what did it have to do with his taking to drink?"

"Well, those drownings used to get on his nerves and he used to dream about it — "

"What drownings? For God's sake, man, you're driving us crazy. It's like that story about 'what killed the dog.'"

“A lot of people thought he had nothing to do with the drownings. They blamed the trench mortar.”

We groaned — but there was nothing to do but let him tell it his own way.

“Just what trench mortar?” I asked patiently.

“Rather I mean a Stokes mortar. Remember those old stove-pipes, set at forty-five degrees? You dropped a shell down the mouth.”

We remembered.

“Well, the day this happened Abe was in command of what they called the ‘fourth battalion,’ marching it out fifteen miles to the rifle range. It wasn’t really a battalion — it was the machine gun company, supply company, medical detachment and Headquarters Company. The H. Q. Company had the trench mortars and the one-pounder and the signal corps, band and mounted orderlies — a whole menagerie in itself. Abe commanded that company but on this day most of the medical and supply officers had to go ahead with the advance, so as ranking first lieutenant he commanded the other companies besides. I tell you he must have been proud that day — twenty-one and commanding a battalion; he rode a horse at the head of it and probably pretended to himself that he was Stonewall Jackson. Say, all this must bore you — it happened on the safe side of the ocean.”

“Go on.”

“Well, we were in Georgia then, and they have a lot of those little muddy rivers with big old rafts they pull across on a slow cable. You could carry about a hundred men if you packed them in. When Abe’s ‘battalion’ got to this river about noon he saw that the third battalion just ahead wasn’t even half over, and he figured it would be a full hour at the rate that boat was going to and fro. So he marched the men a little down the shore to get some shade and was just about to let them have chow when an officer came riding up all covered with dust and said he was Captain Brown and where was the officer commanding Headquarters Company.

“That’s me, sir,” said Abe.

“Well, I just got in to camp and I’m taking command,’ the officer said. And then, as if it was Abe’s fault, ‘I had to ride like hell to catch up with you. Where’s the company?’

“Right here, sir — and next is the supply, and next is the medical — I was just going to let them eat — ’

“At the look in his eye Abe shut up. The captain wasn’t going to let them eat yet and probably for no more reason than to show off his authority. He wasn’t going to let them rest either — he wanted to see what his company looked like (he’d never seen a Headquarters Company except on paper). He thought for a long time and then he decided that he’d have the trench mortar platoon throw some shells across the river for practice. He gave Abe the evil eye again when Abe told him he only had live shells along; he accepted the suggestion of sending over a couple of signal men to wigwag if any farmers were being bumped off. The signal men crossed on the barge and when they had wigwagged all clear, ran for cover themselves because a Stokes mortar wasn’t the most accurate thing in the world. Then the fun began.

“The shells worked on a time fuse and the river was too wide so the first one only made a nice little geyser under water. But the second one just hit the shore with a crash and a couple of horses began to stampede on the ferry boat in midstream only fifty yards down. Abe thought this might hold his majesty the captain but he only said they’d have to get used to shell fire — and ordered another shot. He was like a spoiled kid with an annoying toy.

“Then it happened, as it did once in a while with those mortars no matter what you did — the shell stuck in the gun. About a dozen people yelled, ‘Scatter!’ all at once and I scattered as far as anybody and lay down flat, and what did that damn fool Abe do but go up and tilt the barrel and spill out the shell. He’d saved the mortar but there were just five seconds between him and eternity and how he got away before the explosion is a mystery to me.”

At this point I interrupted Hibbing.

“I thought you said there were some people killed.”

“Oh yes — oh but that was later. The third battalion had crossed by now so Captain Brown formed the companies and we marched off to the ferry boat and began embarking. The second lieutenant in charge of the embarking spoke to the captain:

“This old tub’s kind of tired — been over-worked all day. Don’t try to pack them in too tight.’

“But the captain wouldn’t listen. He sent them over like sardines and each time Abe stood on the rail and shouted:

“Unbuckle your belts and sling your packs light on your shoulders — ’ (this without looking at the captain because he’d realized that the captain didn’t like orders except his own). But the embarking officer spoke up once more:

“That raft’s low in the water,’ he said. ‘I don’t like it. When you started shooting off that cannon the horses began jumping and the men ran around and unbalanced it.’

“Tell the captain,’ Abe said. ‘He knows everything.’

“The captain overheard this. ‘There’s just one more load,’ he said. ‘And I don’t want any more discussion about it.’

“It was a big load, even according to Captain Brown’s ideas. Abe got up on the side to make his announcement.

“They ought to know that by this time,’ Captain Brown snapped. ‘They’ve heard it often enough.’

“Not this bunch.’ Abe rattled it off anyhow and the men unloosened their belts, except a few at the far end who weren’t paying attention. Or maybe it was so jammed that they couldn’t hear.

“We began to sink when we were half way over, very slowly at first, just a little water around the shoes, but we officers didn’t say anything for fear of a panic. It had looked like a small river from the bank but here in the middle and at the rate we were going, it began to look like the widest river in the world.

“In two minutes the water was a yard high in the old soup plate and there wasn’t any use concealing things any longer. For once the captain was tongue-tied. Abe got up on the side again and said to stay calm, and not rock the boat and we’d get there, and made his speech one last time about slipping off the packs, and told the ones that could swim to jump off when it got to their hips.

“The men took it well but you could almost tell from their faces which ones could swim and which couldn’t.

“She went down with a big *whush!* just twenty yards from shore; her nose grounded in a mud bank five feet under water.

“I don’t remember much about the next fifteen minutes. I dove and swam out into the river a few yards for a view but it all looked like a mass of khaki and water with some sound over it that I remember as a sustained monotone but was composed, I suppose, of cussing, and a few yells of fright, and even a little kidding and laughter. I swam in and helped pull people to shore, but it was a slow business in our shoes . . .

“When there was nothing more in sight in the river (except one corner of the barge which had perversely decided to bob up) Captain Brown and Abe met. The captain was weak and shaking and his arrogance was gone.

“‘Oh God,’ he said. ‘What’ll I do?’

“Abe took control of things — he fell the men in and got squad reports to see if anyone was missing.

“There were three missing in the first squad alone and we didn’t wait for the rest — we called for twenty good swimmers to strip and start diving and as fast as they pulled in a body we started a medico working on it. We pulled out twenty-eight bodies and revived seven. And one of the divers didn’t come up — he was found floating down the river next day and they gave a medal and a pension to his widow.”

Hibbing paused and then added:

“But I know that’s small potatoes to you fellows in the big time.”

“Sounds exciting enough to me,” said Joe Boone. “I had a good time in France but I spent most of it guarding prisoners at Brest.”

“But how about finishing this?” I demanded. “Why did this drive Abe hell-raising?”

“That was the captain,” said Hibbing slowly. “A couple of officers tried to get Abe a citation or something for the trench mortar thing. The captain didn’t like that, and he began going around saying that when Abe jumped up on the side of the barge to give the unsling order, he’d hung on to the ferry cable and pulled it out of whack. The captain found a couple of people who agreed with him but there were others who thought it was overloading and the commotion the horses made at the shell bursts. But Abe was never very happy in the army after that.”

There was an emphatic interruption in the person of Pete himself who said in no uncertain words:

“Mr. Tomlinson and Mr. Boone. Your wives say they’re calling for the last time. They say this has been one night too often, and if you don’t get back to the Inn in ten minutes they driving to Philadelphia.”

Tommy and Joe Boone arose reluctantly.

“I’m afraid I’ve monopolized the evening,” said Hibbing. “And after what you fellows must have seen.”

When they had gone I lingered.

“So Abe wasn’t killed in France.”

“No — you’ll notice all that tablet says is ‘died in service.’”

“What did he die of?”

Hibbing hesitated.

“He was shot by a guard trying to escape from Leavenworth. They’d given him ten years.”

“God! And what a great guy he was in college.”

“I suppose he was to his friends. But he was a good deal of a snob wasn’t he?”

“Maybe to some people.”

“He didn’t seem to even recognize a lot of his classmates when he met them in the army.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I say. I told you something that wasn’t true tonight. That captain’s name wasn’t Brown.”

Again I asked him what he meant.

“The captain’s name was Hibbing,” he said. “I was that captain, and when I rode up to join my company he acted as if he’d never seen me before. It kind of threw me off — because I used to love this place. Well — good night.”

AN ALCOHOLIC CASE

I

Esquire (February 1937)

‘Let — go — that — Oh-h-h! Please, now, will you? Don’t start drinking again! Come on — give me the bottle. I told you I’d stay awake givin’ it to you. Come on. If you do like that a-way — then what are you going to be like when you go home. Come on — leave it with me — I’ll leave half in the bottle. Pul-lease. You know what Dr Carter says — I’ll stay awake and give it to you, or else fix some of it in the bottle — come on — like I told you, I’m too tired to be fightin’ you all night. . . . All right, drink your fool self to death.’

‘Would you like some beer?’ he asked.

‘No, I don’t want any beer. Oh, to think that I have to look at you drunk again. My God!’

‘Then I’ll drink the Coca Cola.’

The girl sat down panting on the bed.

‘Don’t you believe in anything?’ she demanded.

‘Nothing you believe in — please — it’ll spill.’

She had no business there, she thought, no business trying to help him. Again they struggled, but after this time he sat with his head in his hands awhile, before he turned around once more.

‘Once more you try to get it I’ll throw it down,’ she said quickly. ‘I will — on the tiles in the bathroom.’

‘Then I’ll step on the broken glass — or you’ll step on it.’

‘Then let go — oh you promised — ’

Suddenly she dropped it like a torpedo, sliding underneath her hand and slithering with a flash of red and black and the words: SIR GALAHAD, DISTILLED LOUISVILLE GIN. He took it by the neck and tossed it through the open door to the bathroom.

It was on the floor in pieces and everything was silent for a while and she read *Gone With the Wind* about things so lovely that had happened long ago. She began to worry that he would have to go into the bathroom and might cut his feet, and looked up from time to time to see if he would go in. She was very sleepy — the last time she looked up he was crying and he looked like an old Jewish man she had nursed once in California; he had had to go to the bathroom many times. On this case she was unhappy all the time but she thought:

‘I guess if I hadn’t liked him I wouldn’t have stayed on the case.’

With a sudden resurgence of conscience she got up and put a chair in front of the bathroom door. She had wanted to sleep because he had got her up early that morning to get a paper with the story of the Yale-Dartmouth game in it and she hadn’t been home all day. That afternoon a relative of his had come to see him and she had waited outside in the hall where there was a draught with no sweater to put over her uniform.

As well as she could she arranged him for sleeping, put a robe over his shoulders as he sat slumped over his writing table, and one on his knees. She sat down in the rocker but she was no longer sleepy; there was plenty to enter on the chart and treading lightly about she found a pencil and put it down:

Pulse 120

Respiration 25

Temp. 98 — 98.4 — 98.2

Remarks —

— She could make so many:

Tried to get bottle of gin. Threw it away and broke it.

She corrected it to read:

In the struggle it dropped and was broken. Patient was generally difficult.

She started to add as part of her report: *I never want to go on an alcoholic case again*, but that wasn't in the picture. She knew she could wake herself at seven and clean up everything before his niece awakened. It was all part of the game. But when she sat down in the chair she looked at his face, white and exhausted, and counted his breathing again, wondering why it had all happened. He had been so nice today, drawn her a whole strip of his cartoon just for fun and given it to her. She was going to have it framed and hang it in her room. She felt again his thin wrists wrestling against her wrist and remembered the awful things he had said, and she thought too of what the doctor had said to him yesterday:

'You're too good a man to do this to yourself.'

She was tired and didn't want to clean up the glass on the bathroom floor, because as soon as he breathed evenly she wanted to get him over to the bed. But she decided finally to clean up the glass first; on her knees, searching a last piece of it, she thought:

— This isn't what I ought to be doing. And this isn't what *he* ought to be doing.

Resentfully she stood up and regarded him. Through the thin delicate profile of his nose came a light snore, sighing, remote, inconsolable. The doctor had shaken his head in a certain way, and she knew that really it was a case that was beyond her. Besides, on her card at the agency was written, on the advice of her elders, 'No Alcoholics'.

She had done her whole duty, but all she could think of was that when she was struggling about the room with him with that gin bottle there had been a pause when he asked her if she had hurt her elbow against a door and that she had answered: 'You don't know how people talk about you, no matter how you think of yourself — ' when she knew he had a long time ceased to care about such things.

The glass was all collected — as she got out a broom to make sure, she realized that the glass, in its fragments, was less than a window through which they had seen each other for a moment. He did not know about her sister, and Bill Markoe whom she had almost married, and she did not know what had brought him to this pitch, when there was a picture on his bureau of his young wife and his two sons and him, all trim and handsome as he must have been five years ago. It was so utterly senseless — as she put a bandage on her finger where she had cut it while picking up the glass she made up her mind she would never take an alcoholic case again.

II

It was early the next evening. Some Halloween jokester had split the side windows of the bus and she shifted back to the Negro section in the rear for fear the glass might fall out. She had her patient's cheque but no way to cash it at this hour; there was a quarter and a penny in her purse.

Two nurses she knew were waiting in the hall of Mrs Hixson's Agency.

'What kind of case have you been on?'

'Alcoholic,' she said.

'Oh, yes — Gretta Hawks told me about it — you were on with that cartoonist who lives at the Forest Park Inn.'

'Yes, I was.'

'I hear he's pretty fresh.'

'He's never done anything to bother me,' she lied. 'You can't treat them as if they were committed —'

'Oh, don't get bothered — I just heard that around town — oh, you know — they want you to play around with them —'

'Oh, be quiet,' she said, surprised at her own rising resentment.

In a moment Mrs Hixson came out and, asking the other two to wait, signalled her into the office.

‘I don’t like to put young girls on such cases,’ she began. ‘I got your call from the hotel.’

‘Oh, it wasn’t bad, Mrs Hixson. He didn’t know what he was doing and he didn’t hurt me in any way. I was thinking much more of my reputation with you. He was really nice all day yesterday. He drew me — ’

‘I didn’t want to send you on that case.’ Mrs Hixson thumbed through the registration cards. ‘You take T.B. cases, don’t you? Yes, I see you do. Now here’s one — ’

The phone rang in a continuous chime. The nurse listened as Mrs Hixson’s voice said precisely:

‘I will do what I can — that is simply up to the doctor . . . That is beyond my jurisdiction . . . Oh, hello, Hattie, no, I can’t now. Look, have you got any nurse that’s good with alcoholics? There’s somebody up at the Forest Park Inn who needs somebody. Call back will you?’

She put down the receiver. ‘Suppose you wait outside. What sort of man is this, anyhow? Did he act indecently?’

‘He held my hand away,’ she said, ‘so I couldn’t give him an injection.’

‘Oh, an invalid he-man,’ Mrs Hixson grumbled. ‘They belong in sanatoria. I’ve got a case coming along in two minutes that you can get a little rest on. It’s an old woman — ’

The phone rang again. ‘Oh, hello, Hattie. . . . Well, how about that big Svensen girl? She ought to be able to take care of any alcoholic. . . . How about Josephine Markham? Doesn’t she live in your apartment house? . . . Get her to the phone.’ Then after a moment, ‘Joe, would you care to take the case of a well-known cartoonist, or artist, whatever they call themselves, at Forest Park Inn? . . . No, I don’t know, but Dr Carter is in charge and will be around about ten o’clock.’

There was a long pause; from time to time Mrs Hixson spoke:

‘I see . . . Of course, I understand your point of view. Yes, but this isn’t supposed to be dangerous — just a little difficult. I never like to send girls to

a hotel because I know what riff-raff you're liable to run into. . . . No, I'll find somebody. Even at this hour. Never mind and thanks. Tell Hattie I hope that the hat matches the *négligé*. . . .'

Mrs Hixson hung up the receiver and made notations on the pad before her. She was a very efficient woman. She had been a nurse and had gone through the worst of it, had been a proud, idealistic, overworked probationer, suffered the abuse of smart interneers and the insolence of her first patients, who thought that she was something to be taken into camp immediately for premature commitment to the service of old age. She swung around suddenly from the desk.

'What kind of cases do you want? I told you I have a nice old woman —'

The nurse's brown eyes were alight with a mixture of thoughts — the movie she had just seen about Pasteur and the book they had all read about Florence Nightingale when they were student nurses. And their pride, swinging across the streets in the cold weather at Philadelphia General, as proud of their new capes as *débutantes* in their furs going into balls at the hotels.

'I— I think I would like to try the case again,' she said amid a cacophony of telephone bells. 'I'd just as soon go back if you can't find anybody else.'

'But one minute you say you'll never go on an alcoholic case again and the next minute you say you want to go back to one.'

'I think I overestimated how difficult it was. Really, I think I could help him.'

'That's up to you. But if he tried to grab your wrists.'

'But he couldn't,' the nurse said. 'Look at my wrists: I played basketball at Waynesboro High for two years. I'm quite able to take care of him.'

Mrs Hixson looked at her for a long minute. 'Well, all right,' she said. 'But just remember that nothing they say when they're drunk is what they mean when they're sober — I've been all through that; arrange with one of the servants that you can call on him, because you never can tell — some alcoholics are pleasant and some of them are not, but all of them can be rotten.'

‘I’ll remember,’ the nurse said.

It was an oddly clear night when she went out, with slanting particles of thin sleet making white of a blue-black sky. The bus was the same that had taken her into town, but there seemed to be more windows broken now and the bus driver was irritated and talked about what terrible things he would do if he caught any kids. She knew he was just talking about the annoyance in general, just as she had been thinking about the annoyance of an alcoholic. When she came up to the suite and found him all helpless and distraught she would despise him and be sorry for him.

Getting off the bus, she went down the long steps to the hotel, feeling a little exalted by the chill in the air. She was going to take care of him because nobody else would, and because the best people of her profession had been interested in taking care of the cases that nobody else wanted.

She knocked at his study door, knowing just what she was going to say.

He answered it himself. He was in dinner clothes even to a derby hat — but minus his studs and tie.

‘Oh, hello,’ he said casually. ‘Glad you’re back. I woke up a while ago and decided I’d go out. Did you get a night nurse?’

‘I’m the night nurse too,’ she said. ‘I decided to stay on twenty-four-hour duty.’

He broke into a genial, indifferent smile.

‘I saw you were gone, but something told me you’d come back. Please find my studs. They ought to be either in a little tortoiseshell box or — ’

He shook himself a little more into his clothes, and hoisted the cuffs up inside his coat sleeves.

‘I thought you had quit me,’ he said casually.

‘I thought I had, too.’

‘If you look on that table,’ he said, ‘you’ll find a whole strip of cartoons that I drew you.’

‘Who are you going to see?’ she asked.

‘It’s the President’s secretary,’ he said. ‘I had an awful time trying to get ready. I was about to give up when you came in. Will you order me some sherry?’

‘One glass,’ she agreed wearily.

From the bathroom he called presently:

‘Oh, Nurse, Nurse, Light of my Life, where is another stud?’

‘I’ll put it in.’

In the bathroom she saw the pallor and the fever on his face and smelled the mixed peppermint and gin on his breath.

‘You’ll come up soon?’ she asked. ‘Dr Carter’s coming at ten.’

‘What nonsense! You’re coming down with me.’

‘Me?’ she exclaimed. ‘In a sweater and skirt? Imagine!’

‘Then I won’t go.’

‘All right then, go to bed. That’s where you belong anyhow. Can’t you see these people tomorrow?’

‘No, of course not!’

She went behind him and reaching over his shoulder tied his tie — his shirt was already thumbed out of press where he had put in the studs, and she suggested:

‘Won’t you put on another one, if you’ve got to meet some people you like?’

‘All right, but I want to do it myself.’

‘Why can’t you let me help you?’ she demanded in exasperation. ‘Why can’t you let me help you with your clothes? What’s a nurse for — what good am I doing?’

He sat down suddenly on the toilet seat.

‘All right — go on.’

‘Now don’t grab my wrist,’ she said, and then, ‘Excuse me.’

‘Don’t worry. It didn’t hurt. You’ll see in a minute.’

She had the coat, vest, and stiff shirt off him but before she could pull his undershirt over his head he dragged at his cigarette, delaying her.

‘Now watch this,’ he said. ‘One — two — three.’

She pulled up the undershirt; simultaneously he thrust the crimson-grey point of the cigarette like a dagger against his heart. It crushed out against a copper plate on his left rib about the size of a silver dollar, and he said ‘Ouch!’ as a stray spark fluttered down against his stomach.

Now was the time to be hard-boiled, she thought. She knew there were three medals from the war in his jewel box, but she had risked many things herself: tuberculosis among them and one time something worse, though she had not known it and had never quite forgiven the doctor for not telling her.

‘You’ve had a hard time with that, I guess,’ she said lightly as she sponged him. ‘Won’t it ever heal?’

‘Never. That’s a copper plate.’

‘Well, it’s no excuse for what you’re doing to yourself.’

He bent his great brown eyes on her, shrewd — aloof, confused. He signalled to her, in one second, his Will to Die, and for all her training and experience she knew she could never do anything constructive with him. He stood up, steadying himself on the wash-basin and fixing his eyes on some place just ahead.

‘Now, if I’m going to stay here you’re not going to get at that liquor,’ she said.

Suddenly she knew he wasn’t looking for that. He was looking at the corner where he had thrown the bottle the night before. She stared at his handsome face, weak and defiant — afraid to turn even half-way because

she knew that death was in that corner where he was looking. She knew death — she had heard it, smelt its unmistakable odour, but she had never seen it before it entered into anyone, and she knew this man saw it in the corner of his bathroom; that it was standing there looking at him while he spat from a feeble cough and rubbed the result into the braid of his trousers. It shone there crackling for a moment as evidence of the last gesture he ever made.

She tried to express it next day to Mrs Hixson:

‘It’s not like anything you can beat — no matter how hard you try. This one could have twisted my wrists until he strained them and that wouldn’t matter so much to me. It’s just that you can’t really help them and it’s so discouraging — it’s all for nothing.’

FINANCING FINNEGAN

I

Esquire (January 1938)

Finnegan and I have the same literary agent to sell our writings for us — but though I'd often been in Mr. Cannon's office just before and just after Finnegan's visits, I had never met him. Likewise we had the same publisher and often when I arrived there Finnegan had just departed. I gathered from a thoughtful sighing way in which they spoke of him —

“Ah — Finnegan — ”

“Oh yes, Finnegan was here.”

— that the distinguished author's visit had been not uneventful. Certain remarks implied that he had taken something with him when he went — manuscripts, I supposed, one of those great successful novels of his. He had taken “it” off for a final revision, a last draft, of which he was rumored to make ten in order to achieve that facile flow, that ready wit, which distinguished his work. I discovered only gradually that most of Finnegan's visits had to do with money.

“I'm sorry you're leaving,” Mr. Cannon would tell me, “Finnegan will be here tomorrow.” Then after a thoughtful pause, “I'll probably have to spend some time with him.”

I don't know what note in his voice reminded me of a talk with a nervous bank president when Dillinger was reported in the vicinity. His eyes looked out into the distance and he spoke as to himself:

“Of course he may be bringing a manuscript. He has a novel he's working on, you know. And a play too.”

He spoke as though he were talking about some interesting but remote events of the cinquecento; but his eyes became more hopeful as he added: “Or maybe a short story.”

“He’s very versatile, isn’t he?” I said.

“Oh yes,” Mr. Cannon perked up. “He can do anything — anything when he puts his mind to it. There’s never been such a talent.”

“I haven’t seen much of his work lately.”

“Oh, but he’s working hard. Some of the magazines have stories of his that they’re holding.”

“Holding for what?”

“Oh, for a more appropriate time — an upswing. They like to think they have something of Finnegans.”

His was indeed a name with ingots in it. His career had started brilliantly and if it had not kept up to its first exalted level, at least it started brilliantly all over again every few years. He was the perennial man of promise in American letters — what he could actually do with words was astounding, they glowed and coruscated — he wrote sentences, paragraphs, chapters that were masterpieces of fine weaving and spinning. It was only when I met some poor devil of a screen writer who had been trying to make a logical story out of one of his books that I realized he had his enemies.

“It’s all beautiful when you read it,” this man said disgustedly, “but when you write it down plain it’s like a week in the nut-house.”

From Mr. Cannon’s office I went over to my publishers on Fifth Avenue and there too I learned in no time that Finnegans was expected tomorrow.

Indeed he had thrown such a long shadow before him that the luncheon where I expected to discuss my own work was largely devoted to Finnegans. Again I had the feeling that my host, Mr. George Jagers, was talking not to me but to himself.

“Finnegans’s a great writer,” he said.

“Undoubtedly.”

“And he’s really quite all right, you know.”

As I hadn't questioned the fact I inquired whether there was any doubt about it.

"Oh no," he said hurriedly. "It's just that he's had such a run of hard luck lately —"

I shook my head sympathetically. "I know. That diving into a half-empty pool was a tough break."

"Oh, it wasn't half-empty. It was full of water. Full to the brim. You ought to hear Finnegan on the subject — he makes a side-splitting story of it. It seems he was in a run-down condition and just diving from the side of the pool, you know —" Mr. Jagers pointed his knife and fork at the table, "and he saw some young girls diving from the fifteen-foot board. He says he thought of his lost youth and went up to do the same and made a beautiful swan dive — but his shoulder broke while he was still in the air." He looked at me rather anxiously. "Haven't you heard of cases like that — a ball player throwing his arm out of joint?"

I couldn't think of any orthopedic parallels at the moment.

"And then," he continued dreamily, "Finnegan had to write on the ceiling."

"On the ceiling?"

"Practically. He didn't give up writing — he has plenty of guts, that fellow, though you may not believe it. He had some sort of arrangement built that was suspended from the ceiling and he lay on his back and wrote in the air."

I had to grant that it was a courageous arrangement.

"Did it affect his work?" I inquired. "Did you have to read his stories backward — like Chinese?"

"They were rather confused for a while," he admitted, "but he's all right now. I got several letters from him that sounded more like the old Finnegan — full of life and hope and plans for the future —"

The faraway look came into his face and I turned the discussion to affairs closer to my heart. Only when we were back in his office did the subject recur — and I blush as I write this because it includes confessing something I

seldom do — reading another man’s telegram. It happened because Mr. Jagers was intercepted in the hall and when I went into his office and sat down it was stretched out open before me:

WITH FIFTY I COULD AT LEAST PAY TYPIST AND GET HAIRCUT AND PENCILS
LIFE HAS BECOME IMPOSSIBLE AND I EXIST ON DREAM OF GOOD NEWS
DESPERATELY FINNEGAN

I couldn’t believe my eyes — fifty dollars, and I happened to know that Finnegan’s price for short stories was somewhere around three thousand. George Jagers found me still staring dazedly at the telegram. After he read it he stared at me with stricken eyes.

“I don’t see how I can conscientiously do it,” he said.

I started and glanced around to make sure I was in the prosperous publishing office in New York. Then I understood — I had misread the telegram. Finnegan was asking for fifty thousand as an advance — a demand that would have staggered any publisher no matter who the writer was.

“Only last week,” said Mr. Jagers disconsolately, “I sent him a hundred dollars. It puts my department in the red every season, so I don’t dare tell my partners any more. I take it out of my own pocket — give up a suit and a pair of shoes.”

“You mean Finnegan’s broke?”

“Broke!” He looked at me and laughed soundlessly — in fact I didn’t exactly like the way that he laughed. My brother had a nervous — but that is afield from this story. After a minute he pulled himself together. “You won’t say anything about this, will you? The truth is Finnegan’s been in a slump, he’s had blow after blow in the past few years, but now he’s snapping out of it and I know we’ll get back every cent we’ve — ” He tried to think of a word but “given him” slipped out. This time it was he who was eager to change the subject.

Don’t let me give the impression that Finnegan’s affairs absorbed me during a whole week in New York — it was inevitable, though, that being much in

the offices of my agent and my publisher, I happened in on a lot. For instance, two days later, using the telephone in Mr. Cannon's office, I was accidentally switched in on a conversation he was having with George Jagers. It was only partly eavesdropping, you see, because I could only hear one end of the conversation and that isn't as bad as hearing it all.

"But I got the impression he was in good health . . . he did say something about his heart a few months ago but I understood it got well . . . yes, and he talked about some operation he wanted to have — I think he said it was cancer Well, I felt like telling him I had a little operation up my sleeve too, that I'd have had by now if I could afford it. . . . No, I didn't say it. He seemed in such good spirits that it would have been a shame to bring him down. He's starting a story today, he read me some of it on the phone. . . .

" . . . I did give him twenty-five because he didn't have a cent in his pocket . . . oh, yes — I'm sure he'll be all right now. He sounds as if he means business."

I understood it all now. The two men had entered into a silent conspiracy to cheer each other up about Finnegan. Their investment in him, in his future, had reached a sum so considerable that Finnegan belonged to them. They could not bear to hear a word against him — even from themselves.

II

I spoke my mind to Mr. Cannon. "If this Finnegan is a four-flusher you can't go on indefinitely giving him money. If he's through he's through and there's nothing to be done about it. It's absurd that you should put off an operation when Finnegan's out somewhere diving into half-empty swimming pools."

"It was full," said Mr. Cannon patiently — "full to the brim."

"Well, full or empty the man sounds like a nuisance to me."

"Look here," said Cannon, "I've got a talk to Hollywood due on the wire. Meanwhile you might glance over that." He threw a manuscript into my lap. "Maybe it'll help you understand. He brought it in yesterday."

It was a short story. I began it in a mood of disgust but before I'd read five minutes I was completely immersed in it, utterly charmed, utterly convinced and wishing to God I could write like that. When Cannon finished his phone call I kept him waiting while I finished it and when I did there were tears in these hard old professional eyes. Any magazine in the country would have run it first in any issue.

But then nobody had ever denied that Finnegan could write.

III

Months passed before I went again to New York, and then, so far as the offices of my agent and my publisher were concerned, I descended upon a quieter, more stable world. There was at last time to talk about my own conscientious if uninspired literary pursuits, to visit Mr. Cannon in the country and to kill summer evenings with George Jagers where the vertical New York starlight falls like lingering lightning into restaurant gardens. Finnegan might have been at the North Pole — and as a matter of fact he was. He had quite a group with him, including three Bryn Mawr anthropologists, and it sounded as if he might collect a lot of material there. They were going to stay several months, and if the thing had somehow the ring of a promising little house party about it, that was probably due to my jealous, cynical disposition.

“We’re all just delighted,” said Cannon. “It’s a God-send for him. He was fed up and he needed just this — this — ”

“Ice and snow,” I supplied.

“Yes, ice and snow. The last thing he said was characteristic of him. Whatever he writes is going to be pure white — it’s going to have a blinding glare about it.”

“I can imagine it will. But tell me — who’s financing it? Last time I was here I gathered the man was insolvent.”

“Oh, he was really very decent about that. He owed me some money and I believe he owed George Jagers a little too — ” He “believed,” the old

hypocrite. He knew damn well — “so before he left he made most of his life insurance over to us. That’s in case he doesn’t come back — those trips are dangerous of course.”

“I should think so,” I said — “especially with three anthropologists.”

“So Jagers and I are absolutely covered in case anything happens — it’s as simple as that.”

“Did the life-insurance company finance the trip?”

He fidgeted perceptibly.

“Oh, no. In fact when they learned the reason for the assignments they were a little upset. George Jagers and I felt that when he had a specific plan like this with a specific book at the end of it, we were justified in backing him a little further.”

“I don’t see it,” I said flatly.

“You don’t?” The old harassed look came back into his eyes. “Well, I’ll admit we hesitated. In principle I know it’s wrong. I used to advance authors small sums from time to time, but lately I’ve made a rule against it — and kept it. It’s only been waived once in the last two years and that was for a woman who was having a bad struggle — Margaret Trahill, do you know her? She was an old girl of Finnegan’s, by the way.”

“Remember I don’t even know Finnegan.”

“That’s right. You must meet him when he comes back — if he does come back. You’d like him — he’s utterly charming.”

Again I departed from New York, to imaginative North Poles of my own, while the year rolled through summer and fall. When the first snap of November was in the air, I thought of the Finnegan expedition with a sort of shiver and any envy of the man departed. He was probably earning any loot, literary or anthropological, he might bring back. Then, when I hadn’t been back in New York three days, I read in the paper that he and some other members of his party had walked off into a snowstorm when the food supply gave out, and the Arctic had claimed another sacrifice.

I was sorry for him, but practical enough to be glad that Cannon and Jagers were well protected. Of course, with Finnegan scarcely cold — if such a simile is not too harrowing — they did not talk about it but I gathered that the insurance companies had waived *habeas corpus* or whatever it is in their lingo, and it seemed quite sure that they would collect.

His son, a fine looking young fellow, came into George Jagers' office while I was there and from him I could guess at Finnegan's charm — a shy frankness together with an impression of a very quiet brave battle going on inside of him that he couldn't quite bring himself to talk about — but that showed as heat lightning in his work.

"The boy writes well too," said George after he had gone. "He's brought in some remarkable poems. He's not ready to step into his father's shoes, but there's a definite promise."

"Can I see one of his things?"

"Certainly — here's one he left just as he went out."

George took a paper from his desk, opened it and cleared his throat. Then he squinted and bent over a little in his chair.

"Dear Mr. Jagers," he began, "*I didn't like to ask you this in person —*" Jagers stopped, his eyes reading ahead rapidly.

"How much does he want?" I inquired.

He sighed.

"He gave me the impression that this was some of his work," he said in a pained voice.

"But it is," I consoled him. "Of course he isn't quite ready to step into his father's shoes."

I was sorry afterwards to have said this, for after all Finnegan had paid his debts, and it was nice to be alive now that better times were back and books were no longer rated as unnecessary luxuries. Many authors I knew who had skimped along during the depression were now making long-deferred trips or paying off mortgages or turning out the more finished kind

of work that can only be done with a certain leisure and security. I had just got a thousand dollars advance for a venture in Hollywood and was going to fly out with all the verve of the old days when there was chicken feed in every pot. Going in to say good-by to Cannon and collect the money, it was nice to find he too was profiting — wanted me to go along and see a motor boat he was buying.

But some last-minute stuff came up to delay him and I grew impatient and decided to skip it. Getting no response to a knock on the door of his sanctum, I opened it anyhow.

The inner office seemed in some confusion. Mr. Cannon was on several telephones at once and dictating something about an insurance company to a stenographer. One secretary was getting hurriedly into her hat and coat as upon an errand and another was counting bills from her purse.

“It’ll be only a minute,” said Cannon, “it’s just a little office riot — you never saw us like this.”

“Is it Finnegan’s insurance?” I couldn’t help asking. “Isn’t it any good?”

“His insurance — oh, perfectly all right, perfectly. This is just a matter of trying to raise a few hundred in a hurry. The banks are closed and we’re all contributing.”

“I’ve got that money you just gave me,” I said. “I don’t need all of it to get to the coast.” I peeled off a couple of hundred. “Will this be enough?”

“That’ll be fine — it just saves us. Never mind, Miss Carlsen. Mrs. Mapes, you needn’t go now.”

“I think I’ll be running along,” I said.

“Just wait two minutes,” he urged. “I’ve only got to take care of this wire. It’s really splendid news. Bucks you up.”

It was a cablegram from Oslo, Norway — before I began to read I was full of a premonition.

AM MIRACULOUSLY SAFE HERE BUT DETAINED BY AUTHORITIES PLEASE WIRE PASSAGE MONEY FOR FOUR PEOPLE AND TWO HUNDRED EXTRA I AM BRINGING BACK PLENTY GREETINGS FROM THE DEAD.

FINNEGAN

“Yes, that’s splendid,” I agreed. “He’ll have a story to tell now.”

“Won’t he though,” said Cannon. “Miss Carlsen, will you wire the parents of those girls — and you’d better inform Mr. Jagers.”

As we walked along the street a few minutes later, I saw that Mr. Cannon, as if stunned by the wonder of this news, had fallen into a brown study, and I did not disturb him, for after all I did not know Finnegan and could not whole-heartedly share his joy. His mood of silence continued until we arrived at the door of the motor boat show. Just under the sign he stopped and stared upward, as if aware for the first time where we were going.

“Oh, my,” he said, stepping back. “There’s no use going in here now. I thought we were going to get a drink.”

We did. Mr. Cannon was still a little vague, a little under the spell of the vast surprise — he fumbled so long for the money to pay his round that I insisted it was on me.

I think he was in a daze during that whole time because, though he is a man of the most punctilious accuracy, the two hundred I handed him in his office has never shown to my credit in the statements he has sent me. I imagine, though, that some day I will surely get it because some day Finnegan will click again and I know that people will clamor to read what he writes. Recently I’ve taken it upon myself to investigate some of the stories about him and I’ve found that they’re mostly as false as the half-empty pool. That pool was full to the brim.

So far there’s only been a short story about the polar expedition, a love story. Perhaps it wasn’t as big a subject as he expected. But the movies are interested in him — if they can get a good long look at him first and I have every reason to think that he will come through. He’d better.

DESIGN IN PLASTER

Esquire (November, 1939)

“How long does the doctor think now?” Mary asked. With his good arm Martin threw back the top of the sheet, disclosing that the plaster armor had been cut away in front in the form of a square, so that his abdomen and the lower part of his diaphragm bulged a little from the aperture. His dislocated arm was still high over his head in an involuntary salute.

“This was a great advance,” he told her. “But it took the heat wave to make Ottinger put in this window. I can’t say much for the view but — have you seen the wire collection?”

“Yes, I’ve seen it,” his wife answered, trying to look amused.

It was laid out on the bureau like a set of surgeons’ tools — wires bent to every length and shape so that the nurse could reach any point inside the plaster cast when perspiration made the itching unbearable.

Martin was ashamed at repeating himself.

“I apologize,” he said. “After two months you get medical psychology. All this stuff is fascinating to me. In fact — ” he added, and with only faint irony, “ — it is in a way of becoming my life.”

Mary came over and sat beside the bed raising him, cast and all, into her slender arms. He was chief electrical engineer at the studio and his thirty-foot fall wasn’t costing a penny in doctor’s bills. But that — and the fact that the catastrophe had swung them together after a four months’ separation, was its only bright spot.

“I feel so close,” she whispered. “Even through this plaster.”

“Do you think that’s a nice way to talk?”

“Yes.”

“So do I.”

Presently she stood up and rearranged her bright hair in the mirror. He had seen her do it half a thousand times but suddenly there was a quality of remoteness about it that made him sad.

“What are you doing tonight?” he asked.

Mary turned, almost with surprise.

“It seems strange to have you ask me.”

“Why? You almost always tell me. You’re my contact with the world of glamour.”

“But you like to keep bargains. That was our arrangement when we began to live apart.”

“You’re being very technical.”

“No — but that was the arrangement. As a matter of fact I’m not doing anything. Bieman asked me to go to a preview, but he bores me. And that French crowd called up.”

“Which member of it?”

She came closer and looked at him.

“Why, I believe you’re jealous,” she said. “The wife of course. Or *hedid*, to be exact, but he was calling for his wife — she’d be there. I’ve never seen you like this before.”

Martin was wise enough to wink as if it meant nothing and let it die away, but Mary said an unfortunate last word.

“I thought you liked me to go with them.”

“That’s it,” Martin tried to go slow, “ — with ‘them,’ but now it’s ‘he.’”

“They’re all leaving Monday,” she said almost impatiently. “I’ll probably never see him again.”

Silence for a minute. Since his accident there were not an unlimited number of things to talk about, except when there was love between them. Or even pity — he was accepting even pity in the past fortnight. Especially their

uncertain plans about the future were in need of being preceded by a mood of love.

“I’m going to get up for a minute,” he said suddenly. “No, don’t help me — don’t call the nurse. I’ve got it figured out.”

The cast extended half way to his knee on one side but with a snake-like motion he managed to get to the side of the bed — then rise with a gigantic heave. He tied on a dressing gown, still without assistance, and went to the window. Young people were splashing and calling in the outdoor pool of the hotel.

“I’ll go along,” said Mary. “Can I bring you anything tomorrow? Or tonight if you feel lonely?”

“Not tonight. You know I’m always cross at night — and I don’t like you making that long drive twice a day. Go along — be happy.”

“Shall I ring for the nurse?”

“I’ll ring presently.”

He didn’t though — he just stood. He knew that Mary was wearing out, that this resurgence of her love was wearing out. His accident was a very temporary dam of a stream that had begun to overflow months before.

When the pains began at six with their customary regularity the nurse gave him something with codein in it, shook him a cocktail and ordered dinner, one of those dinners it was a struggle to digest since he had been sealed up in his individual bomb-shelter. Then she was off duty four hours and he was alone. Alone with Mary and the Frenchman.

He didn’t know the Frenchman except by name but Mary had said once:

“Joris is rather like you — only naturally not formed — rather immature.”

Since she said that, the company of Mary and Joris had grown increasingly unattractive in the long hours between seven and eleven. He had talked with them, driven around with them, gone to pictures and parties with them — sometimes with the half comforting ghost of Joris’ wife along. He had been near as they made love and even that was endurable as long as he

could seem to hear and see them. It was when they became hushed and secret that his stomach winced inside the plaster cast. That was when he had pictures of the Frenchman going toward Mary and Mary waiting. Because he was not sure just how Joris felt about her or about the whole situation.

“I told him I loved you,” Mary said — and he believed her, “I told him that I could never love anyone but you.”

Still he could not be sure how Mary felt as she waited in her apartment for Joris. He could not tell if, when she said good night at her door, she turned away relieved, or whether she walked around her living room a little and later, reading her book, dropped it in her lap and looked up at the ceiling. Or whether her phone rang once more for one more good night.

Martin hadn't worried about any of these things in the first two months of their separation when he had been on his feet and well.

At half-past eight he took up the phone and called her; the line was busy and still busy at a quarter of nine. At nine it was out of order; at nine-fifteen it didn't answer and at a little before nine-thirty it was busy again. Martin got up, slowly drew on his trousers and with the help of a bellboy put on a shirt and coat.

“Don't you want me to come, Mr. Harris?” asked the bellboy.

“No thanks. Tell the taxi I'll be right down.”

When the boy had gone he tripped on the slightly raised floor of the bathroom, swung about on one arm and cut his head against the wash bowl. It was not so much, but he did a clumsy repair job with the adhesive and, feeling ridiculous at his image in the mirror, sat down and called Mary's number a last time — for no answer. Then he went out, not because he wanted to go to Mary's but because he had to go somewhere toward the flame, and he didn't know any other place to go.

At ten-thirty Mary, in her nightgown, was at the phone.

“Thanks for calling. But, Joris, if you want to know the truth I have a splitting headache. I'm turning in.”

“Mary, listen,” Joris insisted. “It happens Marianne has a headache too and has turned in. This is the last night I’ll have a chance to see you alone. Besides, you told me you’d never had a headache.”

Mary laughed.

“That’s true — but I *am* tired.”

“I would promise to stay one-half hour — word of honor. I am only just around the corner.”

“No,” she said and a faint touch of annoyance gave firmness to the word. “Tomorrow I’ll have either lunch or dinner if you like, but now I’m going to bed.”

She stopped. She had heard a sound, a weight crunching against the outer door of her apartment. Then three odd, short bell rings.

“There’s someone — call me in the morning,” she said. Hurriedly hanging up the phone she got into a dressing gown.

By the door of her apartment she asked cautiously.

“Who’s there?”

No answer — only a heavier sound — a human slipping to the floor.

“Who is it?”

She drew back and away from a frightening moan. There was a little shutter high in the door, like the peephole of a speakeasy, and feeling sure from the sound that whoever it was, wounded or drunk, was on the floor Mary reached up and peeped out. She could see only a hand covered with freshly ripening blood, and shut the trap hurriedly. After a shaken moment, she peered once more.

This time she recognized something — afterwards she could not have said what — a way the arm lay, a corner of the plaster cast — but it was enough to make her open the door quickly and duck down to Martin’s side.

“Get doctor,” he whispered. “Fell on the steps and broke.”

His eyes closed as she ran for the phone.

Doctor and ambulance came at the same time. What Martin had done was simple enough, a little triumph of misfortune. On the first flight of stairs that he had gone up for eight weeks, he had stumbled, tried to save himself with the arm that was no good for anything, then spun down catching and ripping on the stair rail. After that a five minute drag up to her door.

Mary wanted to exclaim, “Why? Why?” but there was no one to hear. He came awake as the stretcher was put under him to carry him to the hospital, repair the new breakage with a new cast, start it over again. Seeing Mary he called quickly. “Don’t you come. I don’t like anyone around when — when — Promise on your word of honor not to come?”

The orthopedist said he would phone her in an hour. And five minutes later it was with the confused thought that he was already calling that Mary answered the phone.

“I can’t talk, Joris,” she said. “There was an awful accident — ”

“Can I help?”

“It’s gone now. It was my husband — ”

Suddenly Mary knew she wanted to do anything but wait alone for word from the hospital.

“Come over then,” she said. “You can take me up there if I’m needed.”

She sat in place by the phone until he came — jumped to her feet with an exclamation at his ring.

“Why? Why?” she sobbed at last. “I offered to go see him at his hotel.”

“Not drunk?”

“No, no — he almost never takes a drink. Will you wait right outside my door while I dress and get ready?”

The news came half an hour later that Martin’s shoulder was set again, that he was sleeping under the ethylene gas and would sleep till morning. Joris Deglen was very gentle, swinging her feet up on the sofa, putting a pillow at

her back and answering her incessant “Why?” with a different response every time — Martin had been delirious; he was lonely; then at a certain moment telling the truth he had long guessed at: Martin was jealous.

“That was it,” Mary said bitterly. “We were to be free — only I wasn’t free. Only free to sneak about behind his back.”

She was free now though, free as air. And later, when he said he wouldn’t go just yet, but would sit in the living room reading until she quieted down, Mary went into her room with her head clear as morning. After she undressed for the second time that night she stayed for a few minutes before the mirror arranging her hair and keeping her mind free of all thoughts about Martin except that he was sleeping and at the moment felt no pain.

Then she opened her bedroom door and called down the corridor into the living room:

“Do you want to come and tell me good night?”

THE LOST DECADE

Esquire (December 1939)

All sorts of people came into the offices of the news-weekly and Orrison Brown had all sorts of relations with them. Outside of office hours he was “one of the editors” — during work time he was simply a curly-haired man who a year before had edited the Dartmouth *Jack-O-Lantern* and was now only too glad to take the undesirable assignments around the office, from straightening out illegible copy to playing call boy without the title.

He had seen this visitor go into the editor’s office — a pale, tall man of forty with blond statuesque hair and a manner that was neither shy nor timid, nor otherworldly like a monk, but something of all three. The name on his card, Louis Trimble, evoked some vague memory, but having nothing to start on, Orrison did not puzzle over it — until a buzzer sounded on his desk, and previous experience warned him that Mr. Trimble was to be his first course at lunch.

“Mr. Trimble — Mr. Brown,” said the Source of all luncheon money.

“Orrison — Mr. Trimble’s been away a long time. Or he *feels* it’s a long time — almost twelve years. Some people would consider themselves lucky to’ve missed the last decade.”

“That’s so,” said Orrison.

“I can’t lunch today,” continued his chief. “Take him to Voisin or 21 or anywhere he’d like. Mr. Trimble feels there’re lots of things he hasn’t seen.”

Trimble demurred politely.

“Oh, I can get around.”

“I know it, old boy. Nobody knew this place like you did once — and if Brown tries to explain the horseless carriage just send him back here to me. And you’ll be back yourself by four, won’t you?”

Orrison got his hat.

“You’ve been away ten years?” he asked while they went down in the elevator.

“They’d begun the Empire State Building,” said Trimble. “What does that add up to?”

“About 1928. But as the chief said, you’ve been lucky to miss a lot.” As a feeler he added, “Probably had more interesting things to look at.”

“Can’t say I have.”

They reached the street and the way Trimble’s face tightened at the roar of traffic made Orrison take one more guess.

“You’ve been out of civilization?”

“In a sense.” The words were spoken in such a measured way that Orrison concluded this man wouldn’t talk unless he wanted to — and simultaneously wondered if he could have possibly spent the thirties in a prison or an insane asylum.

“This is the famous 21,” he said. “Do you think you’d rather eat somewhere else?”

Trimble paused, looking carefully at the brownstone house.

“I can remember when the name 21 got to be famous,” he said, “about the same year as Moriarity’s.” Then he continued almost apologetically, “I thought we might walk up Fifth Avenue about five minutes and eat wherever we happened to be. Some place with young people to look at.”

Orrison gave him a quick glance and once again thought of bars and gray walls and bars; he wondered if his duties included introducing Mr. Trimble to complaisant girls. But Mr. Trimble didn’t look as if that was in his mind — the dominant expression was of absolute and deep-seated curiosity and Orrison attempted to connect the name with Admiral Byrd’s hideout at the South Pole or flyers lost in Brazilian jungles. He was, or he had been, quite a fellow — that was obvious. But the only definite clue to his environment — and to Orrison the clue that led nowhere — was his countryman’s obedience to the traffic lights and his predilection for walking on the side next to the shops

and not the street. Once he stopped and gazed into a haberdasher's window.

"Crêpe ties," he said. "I haven't seen one since I left college."

"Where'd you go?"

"Massachusetts Tech."

"Great place."

"I'm going to take a look at it next week. Let's eat somewhere along here —
" They were in the upper Fifties " — you choose."

There was a good restaurant with a little awning just around the corner.

"What do you want to see most?" Orrison asked, as they sat down.

Trimble considered.

"Well — the back of people's heads," he suggested. "Their necks — how their heads are joined to their bodies. I'd like to hear what those two little girls are saying to their father. Not exactly what they're saying but whether the words float or submerge, how their mouths shut when they've finished speaking. Just a matter of rhythm — Cole Porter came back to the States in 1928 because he felt that there were new rhythms around."

Orrison was sure he had his clue now, and with nice delicacy did not pursue it by a millimeter — even suppressing a sudden desire to say there was a fine concert in Carnegie Hall tonight.

"The weight of spoons," said Trimble, "so light. A little bowl with a stick attached. The cast in that waiter's eye. I knew him once but he wouldn't remember me."

But as they left the restaurant the same waiter looked at Trimble rather puzzled as if he almost knew him. When they were outside Orrison laughed:

"After ten years people will forget."

"Oh, I had dinner there last May — " He broke off in an abrupt manner.

It was all kind of nutsy, Orrison decided — and changed himself suddenly into a guide.

“From here you get a good candid focus on Rockefeller Center,” he pointed out with spirit “ — and the Chrysler Building and the Armistead Building, the daddy of all the new ones.”

“The Armistead Building,” Trimble rubber-necked obediently. “Yes — I designed it.”

Orrison shook his head cheerfully — he was used to going out with all kinds of people. But that stuff about having been in the restaurant last May . . .

He paused by the brass entablature in the cornerstone of the building. “Erected 1928,” it said. Trimble nodded. “But I was taken drunk that year — every-which-way drunk. So I never saw it before now.”

“Oh.” Orrison hesitated. “Like to go in now?”

“I’ve been in it — lots of times. But I’ve never seen it. And now it isn’t what I want to see. I wouldn’t ever be able to see it now. I simply want to see how people walk and what their clothes and shoes and hats are made of. And their eyes and hands. Would you mind shaking hands with me?”

“Not at all, sir.”

“Thanks. Thanks. That’s very kind. I suppose it looks strange — but people will think we’re saying good-by. I’m going to walk up the avenue for awhile, so we *will* say good-by. Tell your office I’ll be in at four.”

Orrison looked after him when he started out, half expecting him to turn into a bar. But there was nothing about him that suggested or ever had suggested drink.

“Jesus,” he said to himself. “Drunk for ten years.”

He felt suddenly of the texture of his own coat and then he reached out and pressed his thumb against the granite of the building by his side.

THREE HOURS BETWEEN PLANES

Esquire (July 1941)

It was a wild chance but Donald was in the mood, healthy and bored, with a sense of tiresome duty done. He was now rewarding himself. Maybe.

When the plane landed he stepped out into a mid-western summer night and headed for the isolated pueblo airport, conventionalized as an old red 'railway depot'. He did not know whether she was alive, or living in this town, or what was her present name. With mounting excitement he looked through the phone book for her father who might be dead too, somewhere in these twenty years.

No. Judge Harmon Holmes — Hillside 3194.

A woman's amused voice answered his inquiry for Miss Nancy Holmes.

'Nancy is Mrs Walter Gifford now. Who is this?'

But Donald hung up without answering. He had found out what he wanted to know and had only three hours. He did not remember any Walter Gifford and there was another suspended moment while he scanned the phone book. She might have married out of town.

No. Walter Gifford — Hillside 1191. Blood flowed back into his fingertips.

'Hello?'

'Hello. Is Mrs Gifford there — this is an old friend of hers.'

'This is Mrs Gifford.'

He remembered, or thought he remembered, the funny magic in the voice.

'This is Donald Plant. I haven't seen you since I was twelve years old.'

'Oh-h-h!' The note was utterly surprised, very polite, but he could distinguish in it neither joy nor certain recognition.

‘ — Donald!’ added the voice. This time there was something more in it than struggling memory.

‘ . . . when did you come back to town?’ Then cordially, ‘Where are you?’

‘I’m out at the airport — for just a few hours.’

‘Well, come up and see me.’

‘Sure you’re not just going to bed?’

‘Heavens, no!’ she exclaimed. ‘I was sitting here — having a highball by myself. Just tell your taxi man . . .’

On his way Donald analysed the conversation. His words ‘at the airport’ established that he had retained his position in the upper bourgeoisie. Nancy’s aloneness might indicate that she had matured into an unattractive woman without friends. Her husband might be either away or in bed. And — because she was always ten years old in his dreams — the highball shocked him. But he adjusted himself with a smile — she was very close to thirty.

At the end of a curved drive he saw a dark-haired little beauty standing against the lighted door, a glass in her hand. Startled by her final materialization, Donald got out of the cab, saying:

‘Mrs Gifford?’

She turned on the porch light and stared at him, wide-eyed and tentative. A smile broke through the puzzled expression.

‘Donald — it is you — we all change so. Oh, this is remarkable!’

As they walked inside, their voices jingled the words ‘all these years’, and Donald felt a sinking in his stomach. This derived in part from a vision of their last meeting — when she rode past him on a bicycle, cutting him dead — and in part from fear lest they have nothing to say. It was like a college reunion — but there the failure to find the past was disguised by the hurried boisterous occasion. Aghast, he realized that this might be a long and empty hour. He plunged in desperately.

‘You always were a lovely person. But I’m a little shocked to find you as beautiful as you are.’

It worked. The immediate recognition of their changed state, the bold compliment, made them interesting strangers instead of fumbling childhood friends.

‘Have a highball?’ she asked. ‘No? Please don’t think I’ve become a secret drinker, but this was a blue night. I expected my husband but he wired he’d be two days longer. He’s very nice, Donald, and very attractive. Rather your type and colouring.’ She hesitated, ‘— and I think he’s interested in someone in New York — and I don’t know.’

‘After seeing you it sounds impossible,’ he assured her. ‘I was married for six years, and there was a time I tortured myself that way. Then one day I just put jealousy out of my life forever. After my wife died I was very glad of that. It left a very rich memory — nothing marred or spoiled or hard to think over.’

She looked at him attentively, then sympathetically as he spoke.

‘I’m very sorry,’ she said. And after a proper moment, ‘You’ve changed a lot. Turn your head. I remember father saying, “That boy has a brain.”’

‘You probably argued against it.’

‘I was impressed. Up to then I thought everybody had a brain. That’s why it sticks in my mind.’

‘What else sticks in your mind?’ he asked smiling.

Suddenly Nancy got up and walked quickly a little away.

‘Ah, now,’ she reproached him. ‘That isn’t fair! I suppose I was a naughty girl.’

‘You were not,’ he said stoutly. ‘And I *will* have a drink now.’

As she poured it, her face still turned from him, he continued:

‘Do you think you were the only little girl who was ever kissed?’

‘Do you like the subject?’ she demanded. Her momentary irritation melted and she said: ‘What the hell! We *did* have fun. Like in the song.’

‘On the sleigh ride.’

‘Yes — and somebody’s picnic — Trudy James’s. And at Frontenac that — those summers.’

It was the sleigh ride he remembered most and kissing her cool cheeks in the straw in one corner while she laughed up at the cold white stars. The couple next to them had their backs turned and he kissed her little neck and her ears and never her lips.

‘And the Macks’ party where they played post office and I couldn’t go because I had the mumps,’ he said.

‘I don’t remember that.’

‘Oh, you were there. And you were kissed and I was crazy with jealousy like I never have been since.’

‘Funny I don’t remember. Maybe I wanted to forget.’

‘But why?’ he asked in amusement. ‘We were two perfectly innocent kids. Nancy, whenever I talked to my wife about the past, I told her you were the girl I loved almost as much as I loved her. But I think I really loved you just as much. When we moved out of town I carried you like a cannon ball in my insides.’

‘Were you *that* much — stirred up?’

‘My God, yes! I—’ He suddenly realized that they were standing just two feet from each other, that he was talking as if he loved her in the present, that she was looking up at him with her lips half-parted and a clouded look in her eyes.

‘Go on,’ she said, ‘I’m ashamed to say — I like it. I didn’t know you were so upset *then*. I thought it was *me* who was upset.’

‘You!’ he exclaimed. ‘Don’t you remember throwing me over at the drugstore.’ He laughed. ‘You stuck out your tongue at me.’

'I don't remember at all. It seemed to me you did the throwing over.' Her hand fell lightly, almost consolingly on his arm. 'I've got a photograph book upstairs I haven't looked at for years. I'll dig it out.'

Donald sat for five minutes with two thoughts — first the hopeless impossibility of reconciling what different people remembered about the same event — and secondly that in a frightening way Nancy moved him as a woman as she had moved him as a child. Half an hour had developed an emotion that he had not known since the death of his wife — that he had never hoped to know again.

Side by side on a couch they opened the book between them. Nancy looked at him, smiling and very happy.

'Oh, this is *such* fun,' she said. 'Such fun that you're so nice, that you remember me so — beautifully. Let me tell you — I wish I'd known it then! After you'd gone I hated you.'

'What a pity,' he said gently.

'But not now,' she reassured him, and then impulsively, 'Kiss and make up —'

'... that isn't being a good wife,' she said after a minute. 'I really don't think I've kissed two men since I was married.'

He was excited — but most of all confused. Had he kissed Nancy? or a memory? or this lovely trembly stranger who looked away from him quickly and turned a page of the book?

'Wait!' he said. 'I don't think I could see a picture for a few seconds.'

'We won't do it again. I don't feel so very calm myself.'

Donald said one of those trivial things that cover so much ground.

'Wouldn't it be awful if we fell in love again?'

'Stop it!' She laughed, but very breathlessly. 'It's all over. It was a moment. A moment I'll have to forget.'

'Don't tell your husband.'

‘Why not? Usually I tell him everything.’

‘It’ll hurt him. Don’t ever tell a man such things.’

‘All right I won’t.’

‘Kiss me once more,’ he said inconsistently, but Nancy had turned a page and was pointing eagerly at a picture.

‘Here’s you,’ she cried. ‘Right away!’

He looked. It was a little boy in shorts standing on a pier with a sailboat in the background.

‘I remember —’ she laughed triumphantly, ‘— the very day it was taken. Kitty took it and I stole it from her.’

For a moment Donald failed to recognize himself in the photo — then, bending closer — he failed utterly to recognize himself.

‘That’s not me,’ he said.

‘Oh yes. It was at Frontenac — the summer we — we used to go to the cave.’

‘What cave? I was only three days in Frontenac.’ Again he strained his eyes at the slightly yellowed picture. ‘And that isn’t me. That’s Donald Bowers. We did look rather alike.’

Now she was staring at him — leaning back, seeming to lift away from him.

‘But you’re Donald Bowers!’ she exclaimed; her voice rose a little. ‘No, you’re not. You’re Donald *Plant*.’

‘I told you on the phone.’

She was on her feet — her face faintly horrified.

‘Plant! Bowers! I must be crazy. Or it was that drink? I was mixed up a little when I first saw you. Look here! What have I told you?’

He tried for a monkish calm as he turned a page of the book.

‘Nothing at all,’ he said. Pictures that did not include him formed and reformed before his eyes — Frontenac — a cave — Donald Bowers — ‘You threw me over!’

Nancy spoke from the other side of the room.

‘You’ll never tell this story,’ she said. ‘Stories have a way of getting around.’

‘There isn’t any story,’ he hesitated. But he thought: So she was a bad little girl.

And now suddenly he was filled with wild raging jealousy of little Donald Bowers — he who had banished jealousy from his life forever. In the five steps he took across the room he crushed out twenty years and the existence of Walter Gifford with his stride.

‘Kiss me again, Nancy,’ he said, sinking to one knee beside her chair, putting his hand upon her shoulder. But Nancy strained away.

‘You said you had to catch a plane.’

‘It’s nothing. I can miss it. It’s of no importance.’

‘Please go,’ she said in a cool voice. ‘And please try to imagine how I feel.’

‘But you act as if you don’t remember me,’ he cried, ‘ — as if you don’t remember Donald *Plant!*’

‘I do. I remember you too . . . But it was all so long ago.’ Her voice grew hard again. ‘The taxi number is Crestwood 8484.’

On his way to the airport Donald shook his head from side to side. He was completely himself now but he could not digest the experience. Only as the plane roared up into the dark sky and its passengers became a different entity from the corporate world below did he draw a parallel from the fact of its flight. For five blinding minutes he had lived like a madman in two worlds at once. He had been a boy of twelve and a man of thirty-two, indissolubly and helplessly commingled.

Donald had lost a good deal, too, in those hours between the planes — but since the second half of life is a long process of getting rid of things, that part of the experience probably didn't matter.

NEWS OF PARIS — FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

Furioso (Winter, 1947)

“We shouldn’t both be coming from the same direction,” Ruth said. “A lot of people know we’re at the same hotel.”

Henry Haven Dell smiled and then they both laughed. It was a bright morning in April and they had just turned off the Champs Elysées toward the English Church.

“I’ll walk on the other side of the street,” he said, “and then we’ll meet at the door.”

“No, we oughtn’t even to sit together. I’m a countess — laugh it off but anything I do will be in that damn ‘Boulevardier.’”

They stopped momentarily.

“But I hate to leave you,” he said. “You look so lovely.”

“I hate to leave you too,” she whispered. “I never knew how nice you were. But good-bye.”

Half way across the street, he stopped to a great screech of auto horns playing Debussy.

“We’re lunching,” he called back.

She nodded, but continued to walk looking straight ahead on her sidewalk. Henry Haven Dell continued his crossing and then walked quickly, from time to time throwing a happy glance at the figure across the way.

— I wonder if they have telephones in churches, he thought. After the ceremony he would see.

He stood in a rear row, catching Ruth’s eye from time to time, teasing her. It was a very fashionable wedding. As the bride and groom came down the aisle the bride caught his arm and took him with them down the street.

“Isn’t it fun,” the bride said. “And just think, Henry, I almost married you.”

Her husband laughed.

— at what, Henry thought. I could have had her if she’d really been the one.

Aloud he said:

“I have to telephone before the reception.”

“The hotel’s full of phones. Come and stand beside me. I want you to be the first to know.”

He got to the phone only after an hour.

“The *Paris* is delayed,” said the Compagnie Transatlantique. “We can’t give you an exact hour. Not before four.”

“Oh, no, Monsieur — not possibly.”

Good. In the lobby he joined a party of wedding guests and repaired to the Ritz on the man’s part of the bar. You couldn’t be with women incessantly.

“How long will you be in Paris, Henry?”

“That’s not a fair question. I can always tell you how long I’ll be in New York or London.”

He had two cocktails — each at a different table. A little before one when the confusion and din were at their height he went out into the Rue Cambon. There was not a taxi to be had — the doormen were chasing them all the way up to the Rue de Rivoli. One sailed into port with a doorman on the running board but a lovely little brunette in pale green was already waiting.

“Oh, look,” begged Henry. “You’re not by any chance going near the Bois?”

He was getting into the cab as he spoke. His morning coat was a sort of introduction. She nodded.

“I’m lunching there.”

“I’m Henry Dell,” he said, lifting his hat.

“Oh, it’s you — at last,” she said eagerly. “I’m Bessie Wing — born Leighton. I know all your cousins.”

“Isn’t this nice,” he exclaimed and she agreed.

“I’m breaking my engagement at luncheon,” she said. “And I’ll name you.”

“Really breaking your engagement?”

“At the Café Dauphine — from one to two.”

“I’ll be there — from time to time I’ll look at you.”

“What I want to know is — does he take me home afterward. I’m not Emily Posted.”

On impulse he said:

“No, I do. You may be faint or something. I’ll keep an eye on you.”

She shook her head.

“No — it wouldn’t be reverend this afternoon,” she said. “But I’ll be here weeks.”

“This afternoon,” he said. “You see, there’s a boat coming in.”

After a moment’s reluctance she answered:

“I do *almost* know you. Leave it this way. If you see me talk shaking a spoon back and forth I’ll meet you in front in five minutes.”

Ruth was waiting at table. Henry talked lazily to her for ten minutes, watching her face and the spring light upon the table. Then with a casual glance he located Bessie Wing across the room, deep in conversation with a man of twenty-six, his own age.

“We’ll have this afternoon — and then good-bye,” said Ruth.

“Not even this afternoon,” he answered solemnly, “I’m meeting the boat in an hour.”

“I’m sorry, Henry. Hasn’t it been fun?”

“Lots of fun. So much fun.” He felt sincerely sad.

“It’s just as well,” said Ruth with a little effort, “I have fittings that I’ve postponed. Remember me when you go to the Opera or out to St.-Germain.”

“I’ll do my best to forget you.”

A little later he saw the spoon waving.

“Let me go first,” he said. “I somehow couldn’t bear to sit here and see you walk off.”

“All right, I’ll sit here and think.”

Bessie was waiting under a pear tree in front — they crammed hastily into a taxi like escaping children.

“Was it bad?” he asked. “I watched you. There were tears in his eyes.”

She nodded.

“It was pretty bad.”

“Why did you break it?”

“Because my first marriage was a flop. There were so many men around that when I married I didn’t know who I loved any more. So there didn’t seem to be any point if you know what I mean. Why should it have been Hershell Wing?”

“How about this other man?”

“It would have been the same way only now it would be my fault because I know.”

They sat in the cool American drawing room of her apartment and had coffee.

“For anyone so beautiful — ” he said, “there must be many times like those. When there isn’t a man — there’s just men.”

“There was a man once,” she said, “when I was sixteen. He looked like you. He didn’t love me.”

Henry went and sat beside her on the fauteuil.

“That happens too,” said Henry. “Perhaps the safest way is ‘Ships that pass in the night.’”

She held back a little.

“I don’t want to be old-fashioned but we don’t know each other.”

“Sure we do — remember — we met this morning.”

She laughed.

“Sedative for a broken engagement!”

“The specific one,” he said.

It was quiet in the room. The peacocks in the draperies stirred in the April wind.

Later they stood on her balcony arm in arm and looked over a sea of green leaves to the Arc de Triomphe.

“Where is the phone?” he asked suddenly. “Never mind — I know.”

He went inside, picked up the phone beside her bed.

“Compagnie Générale? . . . How about the boat train from the *Paris*?”

“Oh, she has not docked in Havre yet, monsieur. Call in several hours. The delay has been at Southampton.”

Returning to the balcony Henry said:

“All right — let’s do go to the Exposition.”

“I have to, you see,” she said. “This woman, Mary Tolliver I told you about — she’s the only person I can go to with what I did at luncheon. She’ll understand.”

“Would she understand about us too?”

“She’ll never know. She’s been an ideal of mine since I was sixteen.”

She was not much older than Bessie, Henry thought as they met her in the Crillon lobby — she was a golden brown woman, very trim and what the French call “soignée” — which means washed and something more. She had an American painter and an Austrian sculptor with her and Henry gathered that they were both a little in love with her, or else exploiting her for money — money evident in the Renault town car that took them to the exhibition of decorative arts that ringed the Seine.

They walked along through the show, passed the chromium rails, the shining economy of steel that was to change the furniture of an era. Henry, once art editor of the Harvard Lampoon, was not without a seeing eye but he let the painter and sculptor talk. When they sat down for an apéritif afterwards, Bessie sat very close to him — Mary Tolliver smiled and saw. She looked appraisingly at Henry.

“Have you two known each other long?” she asked.

“Years,” said Henry. “She is a sister to me. And now I must leave you all — after a charming afternoon.”

Bessie looked at him reproachfully, started to rise with him — controlled herself. “I told you there was a boat,” he said gently.

“Ship,” she answered.

As he walked away he saw the painter move to the chair he had vacated by her side.

The *Paris* was still delayed at Southampton and Henry considered what to do. When you have been doing nothing in a pleasant way a long time it is difficult to fill in stray hours. More difficult than for one who works. In the country he might have exercised — here there were only faces over tables. And there must continue to be faces over tables.

— I am become a contemptible drone, he thought. I must give at least a thought to duty.

He taxied over to the left bank — to the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs — to call on a child he had endowed just after the war. A beautiful little orphan who begged in front of the Café du Dôme, Henry had sent her for three years to convent. He saw her once or twice each summer — not now for almost a year.

“Hélène is out,” said a new concierge whom Henry did not know. “How should I guess where she is? At the Café des Lilas? At Lipps?”

He was faintly shocked — then faintly reassured when he found her at Lipps, the beer place which was, at least, a step more respectable than the Dôme or the Rotonde. She left the two Americans with whom she was sitting and embraced him shyly.

“What are you preparing to do, Hélène?” he demanded kindly. “What profession do the nuns teach you?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I shall marry,” she said. “A rich American if I can. That young man I just left for example — he is on the staff of the New York Herald Tribune.”

“Reporters are not rich,” he reproved her, “and that one doesn’t look very promising.”

“Oh, he is drunk now,” said Hélène, “but at times he is all one would desire.”

Henry had been a romantic four years ago — right after the war. He had in no sense brought up this girl to marry or for anything else. Yet the thought was in his mind then, What if she could continue to be a great beauty. And now as he looked at her he felt a surge of jealousy toward the reporter.
