The Happy End

Joseph Hergesheimer

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THE HAPPY END

DEDICATION

These stories have but one purpose—to give pleasure; and they have been made into a book at the requests of those I have fortunately pleased. It is, therefore, to such friends of my writing that they are addressed and dedicated. However, this is not an effort to avoid my responsibility: but to whom? Not to critics, not middlemen, nor the Academies of which I am so reprehensibly ignorant; not, certainly, to my neighbor. They brought me, in times of varying difficulty, food; and for that excellent reason I am forced to conclude that, then as now, I am responsible to my grocer.

LONELY VALLEYS

The maid, smartly capped in starched ruffled muslin and black, who admitted them to the somber luxury of the rectory, hesitated in unconcealed sulky disfavor.

“Doctor Goodlowe has hardly started dinner,” she asserted.

“Just ask him to come out for a little,” the man repeated.

He was past middle age, awkward in harsh ill−fitting and formal clothes and with a gaunt high−boned countenance and clear blue eyes.

His companion, a wistfully pale girl under an absurd and expensive hat, laid her hand in an embroidered white silk glove on his arm and said in a low tone: “We won't bother him, Calvin. There are plenty of ministers in Washington; or we could come back later.”

“There are, and we could,” he agreed; “but we won't. I'm not going to wait a minute more for you, Lucy. Not now that you are willing. Why, I have been waiting half my life already.”

I

A gaunt young man with clear blue eyes sat on the bank of a mountain road and gazed at the newly−built house opposite. It was the only dwelling visible. Behind, the range rose in a dark wall against the evening sky; on either hand the small green valley was lost in a blue haze of serried peaks. The house was not imposing; in reality small, but a story and a half, it had a length of three rooms with a kitchen forming an angle, invisible from where Calvin Stammark sat; an outside chimney at each end, and a narrow covered portico over the front door.

An expiring clatter of hoofs marked the departure of the neighbor who had helped Calvin set the last flanged course. It seemed incredible that it was finished, ready—when the furniture and bright rag carpet had been placed—for Hannah. “The truck patch will go in there on the right,” he told himself; “and gradually I'll get the slope cleared out, corn and buckwheat planted.”

He twisted about, facing the valley. It was deep in grass, watered with streams like twisting shining ribbons, and held a sleek slow−grazing herd of cattle.

The care of the latter, a part of Senator Alderwith's wide possessions, was to form Calvin's main occupation—for the present anyhow. Calvin Stammark had larger plans for his future with Hannah. Some day he would own the Alderwith pastures at his back and be grazing his own steers.

His thoughts returned to Hannah, and he rose and proceeded to where a saddled horse was tied beside the road. He ought to go back to Greenstream and fix up before seeing her; but with their home all built, his impatience to be with her was greater than his sense of propriety, and he put his horse at a sharp canter to the left.

Calvin continued down the valley until the road turned toward the range and an opening which he followed into a steeper and narrower rift beyond. Here there were no clearings in the rocky underbrush until he reached Richmond Braley's land. A long upturning sweep ended at the house, directly against the base of the mountain; and without decreasing his gait he passed over the faintly traced way, by the triangular sheep washing and shearing pen, to the stabling shed.

Hannah's mother was bending fretfully over the kitchen stove, and Richmond, her father, was drawing off sodden leather boots. He was a man tall and bowed, stiff but still powerful, with a face masked in an unkempt tangle of beard.

“H'y, Calvin,” he cried; “you're just here for spoon licking! Lucy was looking for company.” Mrs. Braley's comment was below her breath, but it was plainly no corroboration of her husband's assurance. “You'll find Hannah in the front of the house,” Richmond added. Hannah was sitting on the stone steps at the side entrance to the parlor. As usual she had a bright bow in the hair streaming over her back, and her feet were graceful in slippers with thin black stockings. She kissed him willingly and studied him with wide−opened hazel−brown eyes. There wasn't another girl in Greenstream, in Virginia, with Hannah's fetching appearance, he decided with a glow of adoration. She had a—a sort of beauty entirely her own; it was not exactly prettiness, but a quality far more disturbing, something a man could never forget.

“She's done,” he told her abruptly.

“What?” Hannah gazed up at him with a dim sweetness in the gathering dusk.

“What!” he mocked her. “You ought to be ashamed to ask. Why, the house —our home. We could move in by a week if we were called to. We can get married any time.”

She now looked away from him, her face still and dreaming.

“You don't seem overly anxious,” Calvin declared.

“It's just the idea,” she replied. “I never thought of it like this before—right on a person.” She sighed. “Of course it will be nice, Calvin.”

He sat below her with an arm across her slim knees. “I'm going to dig right into the truck patch; there's a parcel of poles cut for the beans. It won't be much the first year; but wait and we'll show people how to live.” He repeated his vision in connection with the present Alderwith holdings.

“I wonder will we ever be rich like the senator?”

“Certainly,” he answered with calm conviction. “A man couldn't be shiftless with you to do for, Hannah. He'd be obliged to have everything the best.”

“It'll take a long while though,” she continued.

“We will have to put in some hard licks,” he admitted. “But we are young; we've got a life to do it in.”

“A man has, but I don't know about girls. It seems like they get old faster; and then things—silk dresses don't do them any good. How would ma look in fashionable clothes!”

“You won't have to wait that long,” he assured her. “Your father has never hurt himself about the place, there's no money in sheep; and as for Hosmer—you know well as me that he is nothing outside of the bank and his own comfort. Store clothes is Hosmer all through.”

“I wish you were a little like him there,” Hannah returned.

He admitted that this evening he was more untidy than need be. “I just couldn't wait to see you,” he declared; “with our place and—and all so safe and happy.”

II

The Braley table, spread after the Greenstream custom in the kitchen, was surrounded by Richmond and Calvin—Hosmer had stayed late at the bank—Hannah and Susan, the eldest of the children, prematurely aged and wasted by a perpetual cough, while Lucy Braley moved carelessly between the stove and the table. At rare intervals she was assisted by Hannah, who bore the heavy dishes in a silent but perceptible air of protest.

Calvin Stammark liked this; it was a part of her superiority to the other girls of the locality. He made up his mind that she should never lose her present gentility. Whenever he could afford it Hannah must have help in the house. No greater elegance was imaginable. Senator Alderwith, at his dwelling with its broad porch, had two servants—two servants and a bathtub with hot water running right out of a tap. And he Calvin Stammark, would have the same, before Hannah and he were too old to enjoy it.

He had eleven hundred dollars now, after buying the land about his house. When the right time came he would invest it in more property— grazing, a few herd of cattle and maybe in timber. Calvin had innumerable schemes for their betterment and success. To all this the sheer fact of Hannah was like the haunting refrain of a song. She was never really out of his planning. He might be sitting on his rooftree squaring the shingling; bargaining with Eli Goss, the stone−cutter; renewing the rock salt for Alderwith's steers; but running through every occupation was the memory of Hannah's pale distracting face, the scarlet thread of the lips she was continually biting, her slender solid body.

He had heard that her mother was like that when she was young; but looking at Mrs. Braley's spent being, hearing her thin complaining voice, it seemed impossible. People who had known her in her youth asserted that it was so. Phebe too, they said, was the same—Phebe who had left Greenstream nine years ago, when she was seventeen, to become an actress in the great cities beyond the mountains. This might or might not be a fact. Calvin always doubted that any one else could have Hannah's charm.

However, he had never seen Phebe; he had moved from a distant part of the county to the principal Greenstream settlement after she had gone. But the legend of Phebe's beauty and talent was a part of the Braley household. Mrs. Braley told it as a distinguished trait that Phebe would never set her hand in hot dishwater. Calvin noted that Hannah was often blamed for domestic negligence, but this and far more advanced conduct in Phebe was surrounded by a halo of superiority.

After supper, in view of the fact of their courtship, Calvin and Hannah were permitted to sit undisturbed in the formality of the parlor. The rest of the family congregated with complete normality in the kitchen. The parlor was an uncomfortable chamber with uncomfortable elaborate chairs in orange plush upholstery, a narrow sofa, an organ of highly varnished lightwood ornamented with scrolled fretwork, and a cannon stove with polished brass spires.

Calvin sat on the sofa with an arm about Hannah's waist, while she twisted round her finger the ring he had given her, a ring of warranted gold clasping a large red stone. Her throat was circled by a silver chain supporting a mounted polished Scotch pebble, his gift as well. Their position was conventional; Calvin's arm was cramped from its unusual position, he had to brace his feet to keep firm on the slippery plush, but he was dazed with delight. His heart throbs were evident in his wrists and throat, while a tenderness of pity actually wet his eyes. At times he spoke in a hushed voice, phrases meaningless in word but charged with inarticulate emotion; Hannah replied more coherently; but for the most they were silent. She accepted the situation with evident calm as an inevitable part of life. Drawn against him she rested her head lightly on his shoulder, her gaze speculative and undisturbed.

Once he exclaimed: “I don't believe you love me! I don't believe you're interested in the things for the kitchen or the bedroom suite I saw in a catalogue at Priest's store!”

“Don't be silly!” she murmured. “Why shouldn't I be when it's my own, when it's all I'm going to have.”

He cried bravely. “It's only the beginning! Wait till you see our cattle herded over the mountain to the railroad; wait till you see a spur come up the Sugarloaf and haul away our hardwood. Just you wait——”

There was the clip−clip of a horse outside, and the creaking of wheels.

“I believe that's Hosmer.” Hannah rose. “It's funny, too, because he said he'd have to stay at the hotel to−night,

there was so much settling up at the bank."

It was, however, Hosmer Braley. He paused at the parlor door, a man in the vicinity of thirty, fat in body and carefully clad, with a white starched collar and figured satin tie.

"I didn't want to drive out," he said, at once bland and aggrieved; "but it couldn't be helped. Here's a piece of news for all of you— Phebe is coming home to visit She wrote me to say so, and I only got the letter this evening. Whatever do you suppose took her?"

Hannah at once flushed with excitement—like, Calvin Stammark thought, the parlor lamp with the pink shade, turned up suddenly. An instant vague depression settled over him; Hannah, only the minute before in his arms, seemed to draw away from him, remote and unconcerned by anything but Phebe's extraordinary return. Hosmer made it clear that the event promised nothing but annoyance for him.

"She's coming by to−morrow's stage," he went on, untouched by the sensation his information had wrought in the kitchen; "and it's certain I can't meet her. The bank's sending me into West Virginia about some securities."

Richmond Braley, it developed further, was bound to a day's work on the public roads. They turned to Calvin.

"Take my buggy," Hosmer offered; "I'll have to go from Durban by rail."

There was no reason why he shouldn't meet Phebe Braley, Calvin realized. He lingered, gazing with silent longing at Hannah, but it was evident that she had no intention of returning to the parlor.

III

Waiting in Hosmer's buggy for the arrival of the Greenstream stage and Phebe Braley, Calvin was conscious of the persistence of the depression that had invaded him at the announcement of her visit. He resented, too, the new element thrust into the Braley household, disrupting the familiar course of his love. Hannah had been unreasonably distracted by the actuality of Phebe's return—the Phebe who had gone away from the mountains and become an actress.

The buggy was drawn to one side of the principal Greenstream road, at the post−office. Before him the way crossed the valley and lifted abruptly to the slope of the eastern range. At his back the village— the brick Methodist church and the white painted Presbyterian church, the courthouse with its dignified columns, the stores at the corners of the single crossroads, and varied dwellings—was settling into the elusive May twilight. The highest peaks in the east were capped with dissolving rose by the lowering sun, and the sky was a dusty blue.

Calvin Stammark heard the approaching stage before he saw it; then the long rigid surrey with its spare horses rapidly rolled up over the open road to the post−office. He got down and moved diffidently forward, seeing and recognizing Phebe immediately. This was made possible by her resemblance to Hannah; and yet, Calvin added, no two women could be more utterly different.

Phebe Braley had a full figure—she was almost stout—a body of the frankest emphasized curves in a long purple coat with a collar of soiled white fur. A straw hat with the brim caught by a short purple−dyed ostrich feather was pinned to a dead−looking crinkled mass of greenish−gold hair, and her face—the memorable features of Hannah—was loaded with pink powder.

Calvin said: “You must be Phebe Braley. Well, I'm Calvin Stammark. Your father or Hosmer couldn't meet the stage and so they had to let me get you. Where's your bag?”

She adopted at once an air of comfortable familiarity. “I don't remember your name,” she said, settling beside him in the buggy.

He told her that he had come to this vicinity after she had gone and that he was about to marry her sister.

“The hell you say!” she replied with cheerful surprise. “Who'd thought Hannah was old enough to have a fellow!”

They were out of the village now and she produced a paper pack of cigarettes from a leather hand bag with a florid gilt top. Flooding her being with smoke she gazed with a shudder at the mountain wall on either hand, the unbroken greenery sweeping to the sky.

“It's worse than I remembered,” she confided, resting against him. “A person with any life to them would go dippy here. Say, it's fierce! And yet, inside of me, I'm kind of glad to see it. I used to dream about the mountains, and this is like riding in the dream. I'm glad you came for me and let me down easy into things. I suppose they live in the kitchen home and pa'd lose a currycomb in his beard. Does Hosmer still beller if he gets the chicken neck?

“Do you sit in the holy parlor for your courting, and ain't that plush sofa a God−forsaken perch for two little love birds? It's funny how I remember this and that. I reckon ma's temper don't improve with age. They kid me something dreadful about saying 'reckon,' in the talent. But it's all good and a dam' sight better than 'I guess.' That's all they get off me.”

Calvin Stammark's vague uneasiness changed to an acute dislike, even a fear of Phebe. Her freedom of discourse and person, the powdered hard fare close to his, the reek of scent—all rasped the delicacy of his love for Hannah. The sisters were utterly different, and yet he would have realized instantly their relationship. Phebe, too, had the disturbing quality that made Hannah so appealing. In the former it was coarsened, almost lost; almost but not quite.

“I'll bet,” she continued, “that I'm the only female prodigal on the bills. Not that I've been feeding on husks. Not me. Milwaukee lager and raw beef sandwiches. I have a passion for them after the show. We do two a day and I want solid refreshment. I wonder if you ever saw me. Of course you didn't, but you might have. Ned Higmann's Parisian Dainties. Rose Rayner's what I go by. That's French, but spelled different, and means brightness. And I'm bright, Casper.

“My, what are you so glum about—the dump you live in or matrimony? There was a gentleman in an orchestra in Harrisburg wanted to marry me —he played the oboe—but I declined. Too Bohemian.... This is where we turn,” she cried instinctively, and they swung into the valley where the Braleys had their clearing.

Phebe crushed the cigarette in her fingers. Suddenly she was nervous.

“It's natural I have changed a lot,” she said. “If you hear me saying anything rough pinch me.”

Richmond Braley was standing beside his house in the muddy clothes in which he had labored on the roads, and Mrs. Braley and Hannah came eagerly forward. Behind them sounded Susan's racking cough. Sentimental tears rolled dustily over Phebe's cheeks as she kissed and embraced her mother and sisters.

“H'y,” Richmond Braley awkwardly saluted her; and “H'y,” she answered in the local manner.

“Well,” he commented, “you hain't forgotten that anyway.”

Calvin was asked to stay for the supper that had been delayed for Phebe's return, but when he declined uncertainly he wasn't pressed. Putting up Hosmer's rig and saddling his own horse he rode slowly and dejectedly on.

Instead of going directly back to Greenstream he followed the way that led to his new house. The evening was silvery with a full brilliant moon, and the fresh paint and bright woodwork were striking against the dark elevated background of trees. The truck patch would be dug on the right, the clearing widen rod by rod. From Alderwith's meadows came the soft blowing of a steer's nostrils, while the persistent piping of the frogs in the hollows fluctuated in his depressed consciousness.

Calvin had drawn rein and sat on his horse in the road. He was trying to picture Hannah standing in the door waiting for him, to hear her calling him from work; but always Phebe intervened with her travesty of Hannah's clear loveliness.

IV

Again at the Braleys' he found the family—in the kitchen—listening with absorbed interest to Phebe's stories of life and the stage. Richmond Braley sat with an undisguised wonderment and frequent exclamations; there was a faint flush in Mrs. Braley's dun cheeks; Susan tried without success to strangle her coughing. Only Hosmer was unmoved; at times he nodded in recognition of the realities of Phebe's narratives; his attitude was one of complacent understanding.

Calvin, at last succeeding in catching Hannah's attention, made a suggestive gesture toward the front of the house, but she ignored his desire. She, more than any of the others, was intent upon Phebe. And he realized that Phebe paid her a special attention.

“My,” she exclaimed, “the healthy life has put you in the front row. Ned Higmann would rave about your shape and airs. It's too bad to bury them here in the mountains. I reckon you love me for that”—she turned cheerfully to Calvin—“but it's the truth. If you could do anything at all, Hannah, you'd lead a chorus and go in the olio. And you would draw at the stage door better than you would on the front. Young and fresh as a daisy spells champagne and diamond garters. I don't believe they'd let you stay in burlesque but sign you for comic opera.”

The blood beat angrily in Calvin Stammark's head. Whatever did Phebe mean by talking like that to Hannah just when she was to marry him! He cursed silently at Richmond Braley's fatuous face, at Mrs. Braley's endorsement of all that her eldest daughter related, at Hosmer's assumption of worldly experience. But Hannah's manner filled him with apprehension.

“It's according to how you feel,” Phebe continued; “some like to get up of a black winter morning and fight the kitchen fire. I don't. Some women are happy handing plates to their husband while he puts down a square feed. Not in mine.”

“The loneliness is what I hate,” Hannah added.

“It's hell,” the other agreed. “Excuse me, ma.”

Hannah went on: “And you get old without ever seeing things. There is all that you tell about going on—those crowds and the jewels and dresses, the parties and elegant times; but there is never a whisper of it in Greenstream; nothing but the frogs that I could fairly scream at —and maybe a church social.” As she talked Hannah avoided Celvin Stammark's gaze.

“Me and you'll have a conversation,” Phebe promised her recklessly.

Choking with rage Calvin rose. “I might as well move along,” he asserted.

“Don't get heated,” Phebe advised him. “I wouldn't break up your happy home, only I want Hannah to have an idea of what's what. I don't doubt you'll get her for a wife.”

“There's nothing but slaving for a woman round here,” Mrs. Braley put in. “I'm right glad Phebe had so much spirit.”

Richmond Braley evidently thought it was time for certain reservations. “You mustn't come down so hard on Calvin and me,” he said practically. “We're both likely young fellows.”

“I'll be here evening after to−morrow,” Calvin told Hannah in a low voice.

She nodded without interest. They must be married at once, he decided, his wise horse following unerringly the rocky road, stepping through splashing dark fords. If there was a repetition of the past visit he would have something to say. Hannah was his, she was promised to him. He felt the coolness of her cheeks, her bright mouth against his. A tyranny of misery and desire flooded him at the sudden danger—it was as much as that—threatening his happiness and life.

It was a danger founded on his entire ignorance of what he must combat. He couldn't visualize it, but it never occurred to him that Hannah would actually go away—leave him and Greenstream. No, it was a quality in Hannah herself, a thing that had always lurked below the surface, beyond his knowledge until now. Yet he realized that it formed a part of her appeal, a part of her distinction over the other girls of the county.

Maybe it was because he was never in his heart absolutely certain of her—even when she was closest to him she seemed to slip away beyond his power to follow. His love, he acknowledged for the first time, had never been easy or contented or happy. It had been obscure, like the night about him now; it resembled a fire that he held in

his bare hands. Hannah's particularity, too, was allied to this strange newly−awakened peril. In a manner it was that which had carried Phebe out of the mountains. Now the resemblance between them was far stronger than their difference.

There was more than a touch of all this in the girls' mother, in her bitterness and discontent. He felt that he hated the elder as much as he did Phebe. If the latter were a man——

He dressed with the greatest care for his next evening with Hannah. Hosmer wore no stiffer nor whiter collar, and Calvin's necktie was a pure gay silk. He arrived just as the moon detached itself from the fringe of mountain peaks and the frogs started insistently. His heart was heavy but his manner calm, determined, as he entered the Braley kitchen. No one was there but Susan; soon however, Phebe entered in an amazing slovenly wrapper with a lace edge turned back from her ample throat; and Hannah followed.

Phebe made a mocking reference to the sofa in the parlor, and Hannah's expression was distasteful; but she slowly followed Calvin into the conventional chamber.

He made no attempt to embrace her, but said instead: “I came to fix the day for our wedding.”

“Phebe wants me to go with her for a little first,” she replied indirectly. “She says I can come back whenever I like.”

“Your Phebe has no say in it.” He spoke harshly. “We're honestly promised to each other and don't need outside advice or interference.”

“Don't you go to call Phebe 'outside,'“ she retorted. “She's my sister. Perhaps it's a good thing she came when she did, and saved me from being buried. Perhaps I'm not aiming to be married right off.”

V

Hannah was standing, a hand on the table that held the pink−shaded lamp, and the light showed her petulant and antagonistic. A flare of anger threatened to shut all else from Calvin's thoughts; but suddenly he was conscious of the necessity for care—care and patience. He forced back his justified sense of wrong.

“I wasn't referring direct to Phebe,” he told her. “I meant that between us nobody else matters, no one in the world is of any importance to me but you. It's all I think about. When I was building the house, our house, I hammered you into it with every nail. It is sort of made out of you,” he foundered; “like—like I am.”

He could see her relenting in the loss of the rigidity of her pose. Hannah's head drooped and her fingers tapped faintly on the table. He moved closer, urging his advantage.

“We're all but married, Hannah; our carpet is being wove and that suite of furniture ordered through Priest. You've been upset by this talk of theaters and such. You'd get tired of them and that fly−by−night life in a month.”

“Phebe hasn't.”

“What suits one doesn't suit all,” he said concisely.

“It would suit more girls than you know for,” she informed him. “Take it round here, there's nothing to do but get married, and all the change is from one kitchen to another. You don't even have a way to match up fellows. Soon as you're out of short skirts one of them visits with you and the rest stay away like you had the smallpox. Our courting lasted a week and you were here four times.”

“We haven't much time, Hannah,” he reminded her. “It was right hard for me to see you that often. There was a smart of things you were doing, too.”

“The more fool!” she exclaimed.

Again his resentment promised to leap beyond control. He clenched his hands and stared with contracted eyes at the floor.

“Well,” he articulated finally, “we're promised anyhow; that can't be denied. I have your word.”

“Yes,” she admitted, “but chance that I went with Phebe doesn't mean I'd never come back.”

“It would mean that you'd never come back,” he paraphrased her.

“Maybe I would know better,” she answered quickly. “I'm sorry, Calvin. I didn't go to be so sharp. Only I don't know what's right,” she went on unhappily.

“It isn't what's right,” he corrected her, “but what you want. I wish Phebe had stayed away a little longer.”

“There you go again at Phebe!” she protested.

He replied grimly; “Not half what I feel.”

In a dangerously calm voice she inquired, “What's the rest then?”

“She's a trouble−maker,” he asserted in a shaking tone over which he seemed to have no command; “she came back to Greenstream and for no reason but her own slinked into our happiness. Your whole family—even Hosmer, pretending to be so wise—are blind as bats. You can't even see that Phebe's hair is as dyed as her stories. She says she is on the stage, but it's a pretty stage! I've been to Stanwick and seen those Parisian Dainties and burlesque shows. They're nothing but a lot of half−naked women cavorting and singing fast songs. And the show only begins—with most of them—when the curtain drops. If I even try to think of you in that I get sick.”

“Go on,” Hannah stammered, scarcely above her breath.

“It's bad,” Calvin Stammark went on. “The women are bad; and a bad woman is something awful. I know about that too. I've been to the city as well as Phebe. Oh, Hannah,” he cried, “can't you see, can't you!” With a violent effort he regained the greater part of his composure. “But it won't touch you,” he added; “we're going to be married right away.”

“We are?” Hannah echoed him thinly, in bitter mockery. “I wouldn't have you now if you were the last man on earth with the way you talked about Phebe! I don't see how you can stand there and look at me. If I told pa or Hosmer they would shoot you. You might as well know this as well—I'm going back with her; it'll be some gayer than these lonely old valleys or your house stuck away all by itself with nothing to see but Senator Alderwith's steers.”

There flashed into Calvin Stammark's mind the memory of how he had planned to possess just such cattle for Hannah and himself; he saw in the elusive lamplight the house he had built for Hannah. His feeling, that a second before had been so acute, was numb. This, he thought, was strange; a voice within echoed that he was going to lose her, to lose Hannah; but he had no faculty capable of understanding such a calamity.

“Why, Hannah,” he said impotently—“Hannah—” His vision blurred so that he couldn't see her clearly; it was as if, indistinct before him, she were already fading from his life. “I never went to hurt you,” he continued in a curious detachment from his suffering. “You were everything I had.”

Calvin grew awkward, confused in his mind and gestures. At the same time Hannah's desirability increased immeasurably. Never in Greenstream or any place else had he seen another like her; and he was about to lose her, lose Hannah.

Automatically he repeated, “If Phebe were a man——”

He was powerless not only against exterior circumstance but to combat what lay with Hannah. Phebe would never set her hands in hot dishwater. He recalled their mother, fretful and impatient. He shook his head as if to free his mind from so many vain thoughts. She stood, hard and unrelenting.

He tried to mutter a phrase about being here if she should return, but it perished in the conviction of its uselessness. Calvin saw her with green−yellow hair, a cigarette in painted lips; he heard the blurred applause of men at the spectacle of Hannah on the stage, dressed like the women he had seen there. Then pride stiffened him into a semblance of her own remoteness.

“It's in you,” he said; “and it will have to come out. I'm what I am too, and that doesn't make it any easier. Kind of a fool about you. Another girl won't do. I'll say good night.”

He turned and abruptly quitted the room and all his hope.

VI

When the furniture Calvin had ordered through the catalogue at Priest's store arrived by mountain wagon he placed it in the room beside the kitchen that was to have been Hannah's and his. Hannah had gone three weeks before with Phebe. This done he sat for a long while on the portico of his house, facing the rich bottom pasturage and high verdant range beyond. It was late afternoon and the rift was filling with a golden haze from a sun veiled in watery late−spring vapors. An old apple tree by the road was flushed with pink blossoms and a mocking bird was whistling with piercing sweetness.

Soon it would be evening and the frogs would begin again, the frogs and whippoorwills. The valley, just as Hannah had said, was lonely. He stirred and later found himself some supper—in the kitchen where everything was new.

On the following morning he left the Greenstream settlement; it was Friday, and Monday he returned with Ettie, his sister. She was remarkably like him—tall and angular, with a gaunt face and steady blue eyes. Older than Calvin, she had settled into a complete acquiescence with whatever life brought; no more for her than the keeping of her brother's house. Calvin, noting the efficient manner in which she ordered their material affairs, wondered at the fact that she had not been married. Men were unaccountable, but none more than himself, with his unquenchable longing for Hannah.

This retreated to the back of his being. He never spoke of her. Indeed he tried to put her from his thoughts, and with a measure of success. But it never occurred to him to consider any other girl; that possibility was closed. Those he saw—and they were uniformly kind, even inviting—were dull after Hannah.

Instead he devoted himself to the equivalent, in his undertakings, of Ettie's quiet capability. The following year a small number of the steers grazing beyond the road were his; in two years more Senator Alderwith died, and there was a division of his estate, in which Calvin assumed large liabilities, paying them as he had contracted. The timber in Sugarloaf Valley drew speculators—he sold options and bought a place in the logging development.

It seemed to him that he grew older, in appearance anyhow, with exceptional rapidity; his face grew leaner and his beard, which he continued to shave, was soiled with gray hair.

He avoided the Braleys and their clearing; and when circumstance drew him into conversation with Richmond or Hosmer he studiously spoke of indifferent things. He heard nothing of Hannah. Yet he learned in the various channels of communication common to remote localities that Richmond Braley was doing badly. Hosmer went to bank in one of the newly prosperous towns of West Virginia and apparently left all family obligations behind; Susan died of lung fever; and then, at the post−office, Calvin was told that Richmond himself was dangerously sick.

He left the mail with Ettie at his door and rode on, turning for the first time in nine years into the narrow valley of the Braleys' home. The place had been neglected until it was hardly distinguishable from the surrounding tangled wild. Such sheep as he saw were in wretched condition, wild and massed with filth and burrs.

Mrs. Braley was filling a large glass flask with hot water for her husband; and to Calvin's surprise a child with a quantity of straight pale−brown hair and wide−opened hazel−brown eyes was seated in the kitchen watching her.

“How is Richmond?” he asked, his gaze straying involuntarily to the girl.

“Kingdom Come's how he is,” Lucy Braley replied. “Yes, and the poorhouse will end us unless Hosmer has a spark of good feeling. I sent him a postal card to come a long while back, but he hasn't so much as answered. Here, Lucy”—she turned to the child—“run up with this.”

“Lucy?” Calvin Stammark asked when they were alone.

“Been here two weeks,” Mrs. Braley told him. “What will become of her's beyond me. She is Hannah's daughter, and Hannah is dead.”

There was a sharp constriction of Calvin's heart. Hannah's daughter, and Hannah was dead!

“As far as I know,” the other continued in a strained metallic voice, “the child's got no father you could fix. Her mother wrote the name was Lucy Vibard, and she'd called her after me. But when I asked her she didn't seem to know anything about it.

“Hannah was alone and dog poor when she died, that's certain. Like everything else I can lay mind on she came to a bad end—Lord reckons where Phebe is. I always thought you were weak fingered to let Hannah go—with that house built and all. I suppose maybe you weren't, though; well out of a slack bargain.”

Calvin Stammark scarcely heard her; his being was possessed by the pitiable image of Hannah dying alone and dog poor. He had always pictured her—except in the fleet vision of debasement—as young and graceful and disturbing. Without further speech he left the kitchen and crossed the house to the shut parlor. It was screened against the day, dim and musty and damp. The orange plush of the chairs and the narrow uncomfortable sofa, carefully dusted, was as bright as it had been when he had last seen it—was it ten years ago?

Here she had stood, her fingers tapping on the table, when he had made the unfortunate remark about Phebe; the lamplight had illuminated her right cheek. Here she had proclaimed her impatience with Greenstream, with its loneliness, her hunger for life. Here he had lost her. A sudden need to see Hannah's daughter invaded him and he returned to the kitchen.

The child was present, silent; she had Hannah's eyes, Hannah's hair. Seated by Richmond Braley's bed he realized instantly that the old man was dying; and mentally he composed the urgent message to be sent to Hosmer. But that failed to settle the problem of Lucy's safety— Hannah's Lucy, who might have been his too. The solution of that difficulty slowly took form in his thoughts. There was no need to discuss it with Ettie—his duty, yes, and his desire was clear.

He took her home directly after Richmond's funeral, an erratic wind blowing her soft loose hair against his face as he drove.

VII

There had been additions to Calvin Stammark's house—the half story raised, and the length increased by a room. This was now furnished as the parlor and had an entrance from the porch extended across the face of the dwelling; the middle lower room was his; the chamber designed for his married life was a seldom used dining room; while Ettie and Lucy were above. A number of sheds for stabling and implements, chicken coops and pig pen had accumulated at the back; the corn and buckwheat climbed the mountain; and the truck patch was wide and luxuriant.

A narrow strip, bright, in season, with the petunias and cinnamon pinks which Ettie tended, separated the dwelling from the public road; and the flowers more than anything else attracted Hannah's daughter. Calvin talked with her infrequently, but a great deal of his silent attention was directed at the child.

Already Lucy had a quality of appeal to which he watched Ettie respond. The latter took a special pride in making Lucy as pretty as possible; in the afternoon she would dress her in sheer white with a ribbon in her hair. She spared Lucy many of the details of housework in which the latter could have easily assisted her; and when Calvin protested she replied that she was so accustomed to doing that it was easier for her to go ahead.

Calvin's feelings were mixed. At first he had told himself that Lucy would be, in a way, his daughter; he would bring her up as his own; and in the end what he had would be hers, just as it should have been Hannah's. However, his attitude was never any that might be recognized as that of parenthood. He never grew completely accustomed to her presence, she was always a subject of interest and speculation. He continued to get pleasure from her slender graceful being and the little airs of delicacy she assumed.

He was conscious, certainly, that Lucy was growing older—yet not so fast as he—but he had a shock of surprise when she informed him that she was fifteen. Calvin pinched her cheek, and, sitting on the porch, heard her within issuing a peremptory direction to Ettie. The elder made no reply and, he knew, did as Lucy wished. This disturbed him. There wasn't a finer woman living than Ettie Stammark, and he didn't purpose to have Lucy impudent to her. Lucy, he decided, was getting a little beyond them. She was quick at her lessons, the Greenstream teacher said. Lucy would have considerable property when he died; he'd like her to have all the advantages possible; and—very suddenly— Calvin decided to send her away to school, to Stanwick, the small city to and from which the Greenstream stage drove.

She returned from her first term at Christmas, full of her experiences with teachers and friends, to which Ettie and he listened with absorbed attention. Now she seemed farther from him than before; and he saw that a likeness to Hannah was increasing; not in appearance—though that was not dissimilar—but in the quality that had established Hannah's difference from other girls, the quality for which he had never found a name. The assumptions of Lucy's childhood had become strongly marked preferences for the flowers of existence, the ease of the portico rather than the homely labor of the back of the house.

Neither his sister nor he resented this or felt that Lucy was evading her just duties; rather they enjoyed its difference from their own practical beings and affairs. They could afford to have her in fresh laundered frills and they secretly enjoyed the manner in which she instructed them in social conventions.

At her home−coming for the summer she brought to an end the meals in the kitchen; but when she left once more for Stanwick and school Ettie and Calvin without remark drifted back to the comfortable convenience of the table near the cooking stove.

This period of Lucy's experience at an end she arrived in Greenstream on a hot still June evening. Neither Calvin nor his sister had been able to go to Stanwick for the school commencement, and Calvin had been too late to meet the stage. After the refreshing cold water in the bright tin basin by the kitchen door he went to his room for a presentable necktie and handkerchief—Lucy was very severe about the latter—and then walked into the dining room.

The lamp was not yet lit, the light was elusive, tender, and his heart contracted violently at the youthful yet mature back toward him. She turned slowly, a hand resting on the table, and Calvin Stammark's senses swam. An inner confusion invaded him, pierced by a sharp unutterable longing.

“Hannah,” he whispered.

She smiled and advanced; but, his heart pounding, Calvin retreated. He must say something reasonable, tell her that they were glad to have her back—mustn't leave them again. She kissed him, and, his eyes shut, the touch of her lips re−created about him the parlor of the Braleys,—the stiffly arranged furniture with its gay plush, the varnished fretwork of the organ, the pink glow of the lamp.

She was Hannah! The resemblance was so perfect—her cheek's turn, her voice, sweet with a trace of petulance, her fingers—that it was sustained in a flooding illumination through the commonplace revealing act of supper. It was as if the eighteen years since Hannah, his Hannah, was a reality were but momentary, the passage of the valley. His love for her was unchanged—no, here at least, was a difference; it was greater, keener; exactly as if during the progress of their intimacy he had been obliged to go away from her for a while.

She accompanied Ettie to the kitchen and Calvin sat on the porch in a gathering darkness throbbing with frogs and perfumed with drifting locust blooms. Constellation by constellation the stars glimmered into being. Hannah, Lucy! They mingled and in his fiber were forever one. He gave himself up to the beauty of his passion, purified and intense from long patience and wanting, amazed at the miracle that had brought back everything infinitely desirable.

He forgot his age, and, preparing for the night, saw with a sense of personal outrage his seamed countenance reflected in the mirror of the bureau. Yet in reality he wasn't old—forty−something—still, not fifty. He was as hard and nearly as springy as a hickory sapling. There was a saying in which he found vast comfort—the prime, the very prime of life.

VIII

His enormous difficulty would be to bring Lucy to the understanding of his new—but it was the old—attitude toward her. If she had never become completely familiar to him association had made him a solid recognized part of her existence; if not exactly a father, an uncle at the very least. Calvin realized that she would be profoundly shocked by any abrupt revelation of his feeling. Yet he was for the time in no hurry to bring about the desired change in their relationship. His life had been so long empty that it was enough to dwell on the great happiness of his repossession.

This, he knew, could not continue, but at present, today, it was almost enough. Before he was aware, the summer had gone, the mountains were sheeted in gold; and he was still dreaming, putting off the actuality before them.

The logging in Sugarloaf Valley had grown to an operation of importance, and a great deal of his time was spent watching the spur of railroad creep forward and the clearing of new sections; sawmills and camps were in course of erection; and what had been a still green cleft in the mountains was filled with human activity. He had secured an advantageous position for a young man from the part of the county inhabited by the Stammark family, Wilmer Deakon, and consulted with him frequently in connection with his interests.

Wilmer was to the last degree dependable; a large grave individual who took a serious interest in the welfare of his fellows and supported established customs and institutions. He sang in a resounding barytone with the Methodist Church choir; his dignified bearing gave weight to the school board; and he accumulated a steadily growing capital at the Greenstream bank. An admirable individual, Calvin thought, and extended to him the wide hospitality of his house.

Lucy apparently had little to say to Wilmer Deakon; indeed, when he was not present, to their great amusement she imitated his deliberate balanced speech. She said that he was too solemn—an opinion with which Calvin privately agreed—and made an irreverent play on his name and the place he should occupy in the church. It seemed that she found a special pleasure in annoying him; and on an occasion when Calvin had determined to reprove her for this he was surprised by Winner's request to speak to him outside.

Wilmer Deakon said abruptly: “Lucy and I are promised to each other.”

Calvin stood gazing at him in a lowering complete surprise, at a loss for words, when the other continued with an intimation of his peculiar qualifications for matrimony, the incontrovertible fact that he could and would take care of Lucy. He stopped at the appropriate moment and waited confidently for Calvin Stammark's approval.

The latter, out of a gathering immeasurable rage, almost shouted: “You get to hell off my place!”

Wilmer Deakon was astounded but otherwise unshaken. “That's no way to answer a decent man and a proper question,” he replied. “Lucy and I want to be married. There's nothing wrong with that. But you look as if I had offered to disgrace her. Why, Mr. Stammark, you can't keep her forever. I reckon it'll be hard on you to have her go, but you must make up your mind to it some day. She's willing, and you know all about me. Then Lucy won't be far away from you all. I've cleared the brush up and right now the bottom of our house is laid in Sugarloaf.”

Calvin's anger sank before a sense of helplessness at this latter fact. Wilmer was building a house for her just as he had built one for Hannah. He remembered his delight and pride as it had approached completion; he remembered the evening, nearly twenty years ago, when he had sat on the bank across the road and seen it finished. Then he had ridden, without waiting to fix up, to the Braleys'; Hannah had scolded him as they sat in the parlor.

“I must talk to Lucy,” he said in a different weary tone. Bareheaded he walked over into the pasture, now his. The cattle moved vaguely in the gloom, with softly blowing nostrils, and the streams were like smooth dark ribbons. When he returned to his house the lights were out, Wilmer Deakon was gone and Lucy was in bed.

He again examined his countenance in the mirror, but now he was surprised that it was not haggard with age. It seemed that twenty more years had been added to him since supper. He wondered whether there had ever been another man who had lost his love twice and saw that he had been a blind fool for not speaking in the June dusk when Lucy had come back from school.

Lucy, it developed, had spoken to Ettie, and there was a general discussion of her affair at breakfast.

Calvin carried away from it a persistent feeling of dissatisfaction, but for this he could find no tangible reason. Of course, he silently argued, the girl could not be expected to show her love for Wilmer publicly; it was enough that he had been assured of its strength; the fact of her agreement to marry him was final.

He went about his daily activities with a heavy absent−mindedness, with a dragging spirit. A man was coming from Washington to see him in the interest of a new practically permanent fencing, and he met him at the post−office, listened to a loud cheerful greeting with marked inattention.

The salesman was named Martin Eckles, and he was fashionably dressed in a suit of shepherd's check bound with braid, and had a flashing ring—a broad gold band set with a mystic symbol in rubies and diamonds. After his supper at the hotel he walked, following Calvin's direction, the short distance to the latter's house, where Calvin and Ettie Stammark and Lucy were seated on the porch.

Martin Eckles, it developed, was a fluent and persuasive talker, a man of the broadest worldly experiences and wit. He was younger than Calvin, but older than Wilmer Deakon, and a little fat. He had a small mustache cut above his lip, and closely shaved ruddy cheeks with a tinge of purple about his ears. Drawing out his monologue entertainingly he gazed repeatedly at Lucy. Calvin lost the sense of most that the other said; he was immersed in the past that had been made the present and then denied to him—it was all before him in the presence of Lucy, of Hannah come back with the unforgetable and magic danger of her appeal.

IX

In the extension of his commercial activity Martin Eckles kept his room at the Greenstream hotel and employed a horse and buggy for his excursions throughout the county. It had become his habit to sit through the evenings with the Stammarks where his flood of conversation never lessened. Lucy scarcely added a phrase to the sum of talk. She rocked in her chair with a slight endless motion, her dreaming gaze fixed on the dim valley.

Wilmer Deakon, on the occasion of his first encounter with Eckles at the Stammarks', acknowledged the other's phrase and stood waiting for Lucy to proceed with him to the parlor. But Lucy was apparently unaware of this; she sat calm and remote in her crisp white skirts, while Wilmer fidgeted at the door.

Soon, however, she said: “For goodness' sake, Wilmer, whatever's the matter with you? Can't you find a chair that suits you? You make a person nervous.”

At the same time she rose ungraciously and followed him into the house.

Wilmer came out, Calvin thought, in an astonishingly short time. Courting was nothing like it had been in his day. The young man muttered an unintelligible sentence that, from its connection, might be interpreted as a good night, and strode back to the barn and his horse.

Martin Eckles smiled: “The love birds must have been a little ruffled.”

And Calvin, with a strong impression of having heard such a thing before, was vaguely uneasy. Eckles sat for a long space; Lucy didn't appear, and at last the visitor rose reluctantly. But Lucy had not gone to bed; she came out on the porch and dropped with a flounce into a chair beside Calvin.

“Wilmer's pestering me to get married right away,” she told him; “before ever the house is built. He seems to think I ought to be just crazy to take him and go to that lonely Sugarloaf place.”

“It's what you promised for,” Calvin reminded her; “nothing's turned up you didn't know about.”

“If I did!” she exclaimed irritably. “What else is a girl to do, I'd like to ask? It's just going from one stove to another, here. Only it'll be worse in my case—you and Aunt Ettie have been lovely to me. I hate to cook!” she cried. “And it makes me sick to put my hands in greasy dishwater! I suppose that's wicked but I can't help it. When I told Wilmer that to−night he acted like I'd denied communion. I can't help it if the whippoorwills make me shiver, can I? Or if I want to see a person go by once in a while. I—I don't want to be bad—or to hurt you or Wilmer. Oh, I'll settle down, there's nothing else to do; I'll marry him and get old before my time, like the others.”

Calvin Stammark leaned forward, his hands on his knees, and stared at her in shocked amazement—Hannah in every accent and feeling. The old sense of danger and helplessness flooded him. He thought of Phebe with her dyed hair and cigarette−stained lips, her stories of the stage and life; he thought of Hannah dying alone and dog poor. Now Lucy——

“Do you remember anything about your mother,” he asked, “and before you came here?”

“Only that we were dreadfully unhappy,” she replied. “There was a boarding house with actresses washing their stockings in the rooms and a landlady they were all afraid of. There was beer in the wash−stand pitcher. But that wouldn't happen to me,” she asserted; “I'd be different. I might be an actress, but in dramas where my hair would be down and everybody love me.”

“You're going to marry Wilmer Deakon and be a proper happy wife!” he declared, bringing his fist down on a hard palm. “Get this other nonsense out of your head!”

Suddenly he was trembling at the old catastrophe reopened by Lucy. His love for her, and his dread, choked him. She added nothing more, but sat rigid and pale and rebellious. Before long she went in, but Calvin stayed facing the darkness, the menace of the lonely valley. Except for the lumbermen it would be worse in the Sugarloaf cutting.

Damn the frogs!

Martin Eckles appeared in the buggy the following evening and offered to carry Lucy for a short drive to a near−by farm; with an air of indifference she accepted. Wilmer didn't call, and Calvin sat in silent perplexity with Ettie. The buggy returned later than they had allowed, and Lucy went up to bed without stopping on the porch.

The next morning Ettie, with something in her hand, came out to Calvin at the stable shed.

“I found this in Lucy's room,” she said simply.

It was Martin Eckles' gold ring, set with the insignia in rubies, suspended in a loop of ribbon.

A cold angry certitude formed in his being. What a criminal fool he had been! What a blind booby! His only remark, however, brought a puzzled expression to Ettie's troubled countenance. Calvin Stammark exclaimed, “Phebe Braley.” He was silent for a little, his frowning gaze fixed beyond any visible object, then he added: “Put that back where you found it and forget everything.”

Ettie laid a hand on his sleeve. “Now, Calvin,” she begged, her voice low and strained, “promise me——”

“Forget everything!” he repeated harshly.

His face was dark, forbidding, the lines deeply bitten about a somber mouth, his eyes were like blue ice. He walked into Greenstream, where he saw the proprietor of the small single hotel; then, back in his room, he unwrapped from oiled leather a heavy blued revolver; and soon after he saddled his horse and was clattering in a sharp trot in the opposite direction from the village.

It was dark when, having returned, he dismounted and swung the saddle from the horse to its tree. Familiar details kept him a long while, his hands were steady but slow, automatic in movement. He went in through the kitchen past Ettie to his room, and after a little he re−wrapped the revolver and laid it back in its accustomed place. Supper, in spite of Lucy's sharp comment, was set by the stove, and Ettie was solicitous of his every possible need. He ate methodically what was offered, and afterward filled and lit his pipe. It soon went out. Once, on the porch, he leaned toward Lucy and awkwardly touched her shoulder.

X

Wilmer came. He was late, and Lucy said wearily, “I've got a headache to−night. Do you mind if we stay out here in the cool?”

He didn't, and his confident familiar planning took the place of Martin Eckles' more exciting narratives.

The next day, past noon, the proprietor of the Greenstream hotel left an excited group of men to stop Calvin as he drove in from Sugarloaf Valley.

He cried: “Eckles has been shot and killed. First they found the horse and buggy by the road, and then Martin Eckles. He had fallen out. One bullet did it.”

“That's too bad,” Calvin replied evenly. “Lawlessness ought to be put down.” He had known Solon Entreken all his life. The level gaze of two men encountered and held.

Then: “I'll never say anything against that,” the other pronounced. “It's mighty strange who could have shot Eckles and got clear away. That's what he did, in spite of hell and the sheriff.”

Turning, after inevitable exclamations, toward home, Calvin found Lucy sitting moodily on the porch.

“I've got a right ugly piece of news,” he told her, masking the painful interest with which he followed her expression. “Martin Eckles was killed yesterday; shot out of the buggy.”

She grew pale, her breast rose in a sudden gasp and her hands were clenched.

“Oh!” she whispered, horrified.

But there was nothing in her manner beyond the natural detestation of such brutality; nothing, he saw, hidden.

“He wanted me to go away with him,” she swept on; “and get married in Stanwick. Martin wanted me to see the world. He said I ought to, and not stay here all my life.”

The misery that settled over her, the hopelessness dulling her youth filled him with a passionate resentment at the fate that made her what she was and seemingly condemned her to eternal denial. His love for her—Lucy, Hannah, Hannah, Lucy—was intolerably keen. He went to her, bending with a riven hand on the arm of her chair.

“Do you want Wilmer?” he demanded. “Do you love him truly? Is he enough?”

“I don't know.” Slow tears wet her cheeks. “I can't say. I ought to; he's good and faithful, and with some of me that's enough. But there's another part; I can't explain it except to say it's a kind of excitement for the life Mr. Eckles told us about, all those lights and restaurants and theaters. Sometimes I think I'll die, I want it so much; then it comes over me how ungrateful I am to you and Aunt Ettie, and I hate myself for the way I treat Wilmer.” “Do you love him?” he insisted.

“Perhaps not like you mean.”

All that had been so long obscured in his mind and heart slowly cleared to understanding—Lucy Braley, Richmond's wife; Phebe; Hannah; and again Lucy, Lucy Vibard had this common hunger for life, for brightness; they were as helpless in its grasp as he had been to hold Hannah. Phebe's return, Martin Eckles—were only incidents in a great inner need. In itself it wasn't wicked; circumstance had made it seem wrong; Phebe's greenish hair, the mark of so much spoiled, Hannah's unhappy death—were the result of aspirations; they fretted and bruised, even killed themselves, like gay young animals, innocent animals, in a dark lonely enclosure.

They were really finer than the satisfied women who faded to ugliness in the solitary homes of the Greenstream mountains; not better, for example, than Ettie—it might be that they weren't so good, not so high in heaven; but they were finer in the manner of blooded horses rebelling against the plow traces. They were more elegant, slimmer, with a greater fire. That too was the secret of their memorable power over him; he wanted a companion different from a kitchen drudge; when he returned home at evening, he wanted a wife cool and sweet in crisp white with a yellow ribbon about her waist, and store slippers. He loved Lucy's superiority—it was above ordinary things. “Like a star,” Calvin Stammark told himself.

He, with everything else that had combated their desire, depriving them of the very necessities for his adoration, had been to blame.

“Lucy,” he said, bending over her and speaking rapidly, “let's you and me go and learn all this life together. Let's run away from Greenstream and Wilmer Deakon and even Ettie, what we ought to hold by, and see every theater in the country. I've got enough money——”

The radiance of the gesture by which she interrupted his speech filled him with pounding joy.

“Oh, shall we!” she cried; and then hugged him wildly, her warm young arms about his neck.

“Of course we will,” he reassured her; “and right away, to−morrow. You and me.”

He felt her lips against his, and then more cautiously she took up the immediate planning of their purpose. It would be ridiculously easy; they would drive to Stanwick in the buggy.

“The hotels and all,” she continued with shining eyes; “and nobody will think it's queer. I'll be your daughter, like always.”

Calvin turned abruptly from her and faced the valley saturated with slumberous sunlight. Lucy hesitated for a moment and then fled lightly into the house. After a little he heard her singing on the upper floor. People wouldn't think it was queer because she would be his daughter, “like always.”

Yet he wasn't old beyond hope, past love—as strong and nearly as springy as a hickory sapling. He had waited half his life for this. Calvin slowly smiled in bitterness and self−contempt; a pretty figure for a young girl to admire, he thought, losing the sense of mere physical fitness. Anyhow Lucy was supremely happy and safe, and he had accomplished it. He was glad that he had been so industrious and successful. Lucy could have almost anything she wanted—pretty clothes and rings with real jewels, necklaces hung with better than Scotch pebbles.

Perhaps when she had seen the world—its bigness and noise and confusion—after her longing was answered, she would turn back to him. Already he was oppressed by a feeling of strangeness, of loss at leaving the high valleys of home.

THE EGYPTIAN CHARIOT

Lemuel Doret walked slowly home from the prayer meeting with his being vibrating to the triumphant beat of the last hymn. It was a good hymn, filled with promised joy for every one who conquered sin. The long twilight of early summer showed the surrounding fields still bright green, but the more distant hills were vague, the sky was remote and faintly blue, and shadows thickened under the heavy maples that covered the single street of Nantbrook. The small frame dwellings of the village were higher than the precarious sidewalk; flights of steps mounted to the narrow porches; and though Lemuel Doret realized that his neighbors were sitting outside he did not look up, and no voices called down arresting his deliberate progress.

An instant bitterness, tightening his thin metallic lips and narrowing a cold fixed gaze, destroyed the harmony of the assured salvation. Lemuel Doret silently cursed the pinched stupidity of the country clods. The slow helpless fools! If instead of muttering in groups one of the men would face him with the local hypocrisy he'd sink a heel in his jaw. The bitterness expanded into a hatred like the gleam on a knife blade; his hands, spare and hard, grew rigid with the desire to choke a thick throat.

Then the rage sank before a swift self−horror, an overwhelming conviction of his relapse into unutterable sin. He stopped and in a spiritual agony, forgetful of his surroundings, half lifted quivering arms to the dim sky: “O Christ, lean down from the throne and hold me steady.”

He stood for a moment while a monotonous chatter on a porch above dropped to a curious stillness. It seemed to him that his whisper was heard and immediately answered; anyhow peace slowly enveloped him once more, the melody of hope was again uppermost in his mind. He went forward, procuring a cigarette from a mended ragged pocket.

His house, reached by a short steep path and sagging steps, was dark; at first he saw no one, then the creak of a rocking−chair in the open doorway indicated Bella, his wife.

“Give me a cigarette,” she demanded, her penetrating voice dissatisfied.

“You know I don't want you to smoke anywhere you can be seen,” he answered. “Since we've come here to live we have to mind the customs. The women'll never take to you smoking cigarettes.”

“Ah, hell, what do I care! We came here, but it ain't living. It makes me sick, and you make me sick I Can't you sing and pray in the city as well as among these hicks?”

“I'm afraid of it,” he said, brief and somber. “And I don't want Flavilla brought up with any of the gang we knew. Where is she?”

“I sent her to bed. She fussed round till she got me nervous.”

“Did she feel good?”

“If she didn't a smack would have cured her.”

He passed Bella, rocking sharply, into the dank interior.

On the right was the bare room where he had his dilapidated barber's chair and shelf with a few mugs, brushes and other scant necessities. There had been no customers to−day nor yesterday; still, it was the middle of the week and what trade there was generally concentrated on Saturday. Beyond he went upstairs to Flavilla's bed. She was awake, twisting about in a fragmentary nightgown, dark against the disordered sheet.

“It's dreadful hot,” she complained shortly; “my head's hot too. The window won't go up.”

Lemuel Doret crossed the narrow bare floor and dragged the sash open; then he moved his daughter while he smoothed the bed and freshened a harsh pillow. She whimpered.

“You're too big to cry without any reason,” he informed her, leaving to fetch a glass of water from the tap in the kitchen.

Usually she responded to his intimations of her increasing age and wisdom, but to−night she was listless. She turned away from him, her arms flung above her head and wispy hair veiling her damp cheek.

“Keep still, can't you?” and he gathered her hair into a clumsy plait.

The darkness about him seeped within, into his hope and courage and resolution; all that he had determined to do seemed impossibly removed. The whole world resembled Nantbrook—a place of universal condemnation, forgiving nothing. He felt a certainty that even the few dollars he had honestly earned would now be stopped.

The air grew clearer and deeper in color, and stars brightened. Lemuel Doret wondered about God. There was no doubt of His power and glory or of the final triumph of heaven established and earth, sin, destroyed. His mind was secure in these truths; his comprehension of the paths of wickedness was equally plain; it was the ways of the righteous that bewildered him—the conduct of the righteous and, in the face of his supreme recognition, the extreme difficulty of providing life for Flavilla—and Bella.

He consciously added his wife's name. Somehow his daughter was the sole objective measure of his determination to build up, however late, a home here and in eternity.

It was not unreasonable, in view of the past, to suppose that he had no chance of succeeding. Yet religion was explicit upon that particular; it was founded on the very hopes of sinners, on redemption. But he could do nothing without an opportunity to make the small living they required; if the men of Nantbrook, of the world, wouldn't come to him to be barbered, and if he had no money to go anywhere else to begin again, he was helpless. Everything was conspiring to thrust him back into the city, of which he had confessed his fear, back——

He rose and stood above the child's thin exposed body—suddenly frozen into a deathlike sleep—chilled with a vision, a premonition, the insidious possibility of surrender. He saw, too, that it was a solitary struggle; even his devotion to Flavilla, shut in the single space of his own heart, helped to isolate him in what resembled a surrounding blackness rent with blinding flashes of lightning.

The morning sun showed him spare, with a curious appearance of being both wasted and grimly strong; he moved with an alert, a watchful ease, catlike and silent; and his face was pallid with gray shadows. He stood in trousers and undershirt, suspenders hanging down, before the small dim mirror in the room where he had the barber chair, pasting his hair down with an odorous brilliantine. This was his intention, but he saw with sharp discomfort that bristling strands defied his every effort. The hot edge of anger cut at him, but, singing, he dissipated it:

"Why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows fall?
Why should my heart be lonely,
And long for heaven——"

He broke off at the thought of Flavilla, still in bed, her head, if anything, hotter than last night. Lemuel Doret wished again that he had not allowed Bella to call their child by that unsanctified name. Before the birth they had seen a vaudeville, and Bella, fascinated by a golden−and−white creature playing a white accordion that bore her name in ornamental letters, had insisted on calling her daughter, too, Flavilla. In spite of the hymn, dejection fastened on him as he remembered this and a great deal more about his wife.

If she could only be brought to see the light their marriage and life might still be crowned with triumph. But Bella, pointing out the resulting poverty of his own conviction and struggle, said freely that she had no confidence in promises; she demanded fulfillment now. She regarded him as more than a little affected in the brain. Yet there had been no deep change in him—from the very first he had felt a growing uneasiness at the spectacle of the world and the flesh. The throb of the Salvation Army drum at the end of an alley, the echo of the fervent exhortations and holy songs, had always filled him with a surging emotion like homesickness.

Two impulses, he recognized, held a relentless warfare within him; he pictured them as Christ and Satan; but the first would overthrow all else. "Glory!" he cried mechanically aloud. He put down the hairbrush and inspected the razors on their shelf. The bright morning light flashed along the rubbed fine blades; they were beautiful, flawless, without a trace of defilement. He felt the satin smoothness of the steel with an actual thrill of pleasure; his eyes narrowed until they were like the glittering points of knives; he held the razor firmly and easily, with a sinewy poised wrist.

Finally, his suspenders in position over a collarless striped shirt, he moved out to the bare sharp descent before his house and poured water onto the roots of a struggling lilac bush. Its leaves were now coated with dust; but the week before it had borne an actual cluster of scented blossom; and he was still in the wonder of the lavender fragrance on the meager starved stem.

The beat of hoofs approached, and he turned, seeing Doctor Frazee in his yellow cart.

"Oh, doctor!" he called instinctively.

The other stopped, a man with a lean face, heavy curved nose and penetrating gaze behind large spectacles. He was in reality a veterinary, but Lemuel Doret, out of a profound caution, had discovered him to be above the

narrow scope of local prejudice.

“I wish you'd look at Flavilla,” Doret continued.

The doctor hesitated, and then turned shortly in at the sidewalk. “It will hurt no one if I do that.” Above Flavilla's flushed face, a tentative finger on her wrist, Frazee's expression grew serious. “I'll tell you this,” he asserted; “she's sick. You had better call Markley to−day. And until he comes don't give her any solids. You can see she's in a fever.”

“Can't you tend her? I'd put more on you than any fresh young hospital stiff.”

“Certainly not,” he responded.

When the latter had gone Lemuel Doret found his wife in the kitchen. She wore a pale−blue wrapper with a soiled scrap of coarse lace at her full throat, her hair was gathered into a disorderly knot, and already there was a dab of paint on either cheek. She had been pretty when he married her, pretty and full of an engaging sparkle, a ready wit; but the charm had gone, the wit had hardened into a habit of sarcasm. They had been married twelve years, and in itself, everything considered, that was remarkable and held a great deal in her favor. She had been faithful. It was only lately, in Nantbrook, that her dissatisfaction had materialized in vague restless hints.

“Frazee says Flavilla is sick,” he told her. “He thinks we ought to get Markley.”

She made a gesture of skepticism. “All those doctors send you to each other,” she proclaimed. “Like as not he'll get half for doing it.”

“She don't look right.”

Bella's voice and attitude grew exasperated. “Of course you know all about children; you've been where you could study on them. And of course I have no sense; a woman's not the person to say when her child is sick or well. Have a doctor if you can pay one, and buy a lot of medicine too. There's some calomel upstairs, but that's no good. I'd like to know where you have all the money! God knows I need a little, to put inside me and out.”

“It's right scarce,” he admitted, resolutely ignoring her tone. “Perhaps Flavilla will be better later in the day; I'll wait.”

He spoke without conviction, denying the impulse to have her cared for at once, in an effort to content and still Bella. However, he failed in both of these aims. Her voice swept into a shrill complaint and abuse of Nantbrook—a place, she asserted, of one dead street, without even a passing trolley car to watch. She had no intention of being buried here for the rest of her life. Turning to a cigarette and yesterday's paper she drooped into a sulky shape of fat and slovenly blue wrapper beside the neglected dishes of their insufficient breakfast.

He went through the empty house to the front again, where at least the sun was warm and bright. The air held a faint dry fragrance that came from the haymaking of the deep country in which Nantbrook lay. Lemuel Doret could see the hotel at a crossing on the left, a small gray block of stone with a flat portico, a heavy gilt beer sign and whitewashed sheds beyond. The barkeeper stood at a door, a huge girth circled by a soiled apron; nearer a bundle of brooms and glittering stacked paint cans marked the local store. It was, he was forced to admit, far from gay; but he found a great contentment in the sunny peace, in the limitless space of the unenclosed sky; the air, the fields, the birds in the trees were free.

As he stood frowning in thought he saw the figure of a strange man walking over the road; Lemuel knew that he was strange by the formality of the clothes. He wore a hard straw hat, collar and diamond−pinned tie, and a suit with a waistcoat. At first Doret's interest was perfunctory, but as the other drew nearer his inspection changed to a painful absorption. Suddenly his attitude grew tense; he had the appearance of a man gazing at an enthralling but dangerous spectacle, such—for example—as a wall that might topple over, crushing anything human within its sweep.

The object of this scrutiny had a pale countenance with a carefully clipped mustache, baggy eyes and a blue−shaved heavy jaw. An indefinable suggestion of haste sat on a progress not unduly hurried. But as he caught sight of Lemuel Doret he walked more and more slowly, returning his fixed attention. When the two men were opposite each other, only a few feet apart, he almost stopped. For a moment their sharpened visions met, parried, and then the stranger moved on. He made a few steps, hesitated, then directly returned.

“Come inside,” he said in a slightly hoarse voice.

“It suits me here,” Doret replied.

The other regarded him steadily. “I've made no mistake,” he asserted. “I could almost say how long you were up for, and a few other little things too. I don't know what you're doing in this dump, but here we both are.”

He waited for nothing more, ascending quickly to the hall. The two made their way into the improvised barber shop.

“You've got me wrong,” Doret still insisted.

“Who is it, Lem?” Bella demanded at the door.

As she spoke an expression of geniality overspread her face, daubed with paint and discontent.

“Why, I'll tell you—I'm June Bowman.”

“That don't mean anything to us,” Lemuel continued. “The best thing you can do is keep right on going.”

“Not that Fourth Ward stew?” Bella asked eagerly.

He nodded.

“Lem's kind of died on his feet,” she explained in a palpable excuse of her husband's ignorance; “he don't read the papers nor nothing. But of course I've heard of you, Mr. Bowman. We're glad to see you.”

“Keep right along,” Lemuel Doret repeated. His face was dark and his mouth hardly more than a pinched line.

“Now, who are you?” Bowman inquired.

“I'll tell you,” Bella put in, “since his manners have gone with everything else. This is Snow Doret. If you know the live men that name will be familiar to you.”

“I seem to remember it,” he admitted.

“If Snow went in the city it's Lemuel here,” Doret told him. His anger seethed like a kettle beginning to boil.

“Well, if Snow ever went I guess I'm in right. The truth is I got to lay off for a little, and this seems first−rate. I can explain it in a couple of words: Things went bad——”

“Wasn't it the election?” Bella asked politely.

“In a way,” he answered with a bow. “You're all right. A certain party, you see, was making some funny cracks—a reform dope; and he got in other certain parties' light, see? Word was sent round, and when a friend and me come on him some talk was passed and this public nuisance got something. It was all regular and paid for——”

“I read about it,” Bella interrupted. “He died in the ambulance.”

“Then I was slipped the news that they were going to elect me the pretty boy, and I had to make a break. Only temporary, till things are fixed. Thus you see me scattered with hayseed. I was walking through for a lift to Lancaster, where there are some good fellows; but when I saw Snow here taking the air I knew there was one nearer.”

“Lemuel; and I'm no good fellow.”

“That's the truth,” his wife added thinly. “Here is the only one in this house.” She touched her abundant self.

“Then I can put up?”

“No,” Lemuel Doret told him. “This is a house of God's.”

Bella laughed in a rising hysterical key.

“Listen to him,” she gasped; “listen to Snow Doret. It's no wonder you might have forgotten him,” she proclaimed; “he's been in the pen for ten and a half years with a bunch off for good conduct. But fifteen years ago—say! He went in for knifing a drug store keeper who held out on a 'coke' deal. If this here's a house of God's I'd like to know what he called the one he had then. I couldn't tell you half of what went on, not half, with fixing drinks and frame−ups and skirts. Why, he run a hop joint with the Chinese and took a noseful of snow at every other breath. That was after his gambling room broke up—it got too raw even for the police. It was brandy with him, too, and there ain't a gutter in his district he didn't lay in. The drug store man wasn't the first he cut neither.”

She stopped from sheer lack of breath.

Curiously all that filled Lemuel Doret's mind was the thought of the glory of God. Everything Bella said was true; but in the might of the Savior it was less than nothing. He had descended into the pit and brought him, Snow, up, filling his ears with the sweet hymns of redemption, the promise of Paradise for the thieves and murderers who acknowledged His splendor and fought His fight. This marvelous charity, the cleansing hope for his blackened soul, swept over him in a warm rush of humble praise and unutterable gratitude. Nothing of the Lord's was lost: “His eye is on the sparrow.”

“Certainly, lay off your coat,” Bella was urging; “it's fierce hot. Lem can rush a can of beer from the hotel. Even he wouldn't go to turn out one of the crowd in a hard fix. I'm awful glad you saw him.”

With June Bowman in his house, engaged in verbal agreements with Bella and spreading comfortably on a

chair, Lemuel was powerless. AH his instinct pressed him to send the other on, to refuse—in the commonest self−preservation—shelter. But both the laws of his old life and the commands of the new were against this act of simple precaution. Bowman eyed him with a shrewd appraisement.

"A clever fellow," he said, nodding; "admire you for coming out here for a while. Well, how about the suds?"

He produced a thick roll of yellow−backed currency and detached a small bill. "I'll finance this campaign."

Lemuel Doret was confused by the rapidity with which the discredited past was re−created by Bowman's mere presence. He was at the point of refusing to fetch the beer when he saw that there was no explanation possible; they would regard him as merely crabbed, and Bella would indulge her habit of shrill abuse. It wasn't the drink itself that disturbed him but the old position of "rushing the can"—a symbol of so much that he had left forever. Forever; he repeated the word with a silent bitter force. The feel of the kettle in his hand, the thin odor of the beer and slopping foam, seemed to him evidences of acute degeneration; he was oppressed by a mounting dejection. God seemed very far away.

His wife was talking while Bowman listened with an air of sympathetic wisdom.

"It wasn't so bad then," she said; "I was kind of glad to get away, and Lem was certain everything would open right out. But he's awful hard to do with; he wouldn't take a dollar from parties who had every right to stake him good, and borrowed five from no more than a stranger to buy that secondhand barber chair. What he needed was chloroform to separate these farmers from their dimes and whiskers." Bowman laughed loudly, and a corresponding color invaded Bella. "Of course no one knew Lem had done time, then. They wouldn't have either, but for the Law and Order. Oh, dear me, no, your child ain't none of your own; they lend it to you like and then sneak up whenever the idea takes them, to see if it's getting a Turkish bath. I guess the people on the street wondered who was our swell automobile friend till they found out."

"I suppose," Bowman put in, "they all came round and offered you the helping hand, wanted to see you happy and successful."

She laughed. "Them?" she demanded. "Them? The man that owns this house said that if he'd known, Lem would never had it; they don't want convicts in this town. This is a moral burg. That's more than the women said to me though—the starved buzzards; if they've spoke a word to me since I never heard it." Her voice rose in sharp mimicry: "You, Katie, come right up on the porch, child! Don't you know—! See, I'm going by."

"I could have warned you of all that," June Bowman asserted; "for the reason they're narrow, don't know anything about living or affairs; hypocritical too; long on churchgoing——"

Doret regarded him solemnly. How blind he was, a mound of corruptible flesh! He put the beer down and turned abruptly away, going up to Flavilla. She seemed better; her face was white but most of the fever had gone. He listened to her harsh breathing with the conviction that she had caught a cold; and immediately after he was back from the store with a bottle of cherry pectoral. She liked the sweet taste of the thick bright−pink sirup and was soon quiet. Lemuel sniffed the mouth of the bottle suspiciously. It was doped, he finally decided, but not enough to hurt her; tasting it, a momentary desire for stinging liquor ran like fire through his nerves. He laughed at it, crushing and throwing aside the longing with a sense of contempt and triumph.

He could hear occasionally Bowman's smooth periods and his wife's eager enjoyment of the discourse. His sense of worldly loneliness deepened; Flavilla seemed far away. All life was inexplicable—yes, and profitless, ending in weariness and death. The hunger for perfection, for God, that had been a constant part of his existence, the longing for peace and security, were almost unbearable. He had had a long struggle; the devil was deeply rooted in him. He could laugh at the broken tyranny of drugs and drink, but the passion for fine steel cutting edges was different, and twisted into every fiber. The rage that even yet threatened to flood him, sweeping away his painfully erected integrity, was different too. These things had made him a murderer.

"... not the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

He had a sudden muddled vision of another world, a world where sturdy men gave him their hands and in reality fulfilled June Bowman's mocking words. There the houses, the streets of his youth would have been impossible. Ah, he was thinking of another kind of heaven; it was a hop dream.

There was a stir below and he heard the clatter of plates. Dinner was in preparation. "Lem!" his wife called. "Mr. Bowman wants you to go to the butcher's."

"Call me June," he put in; adding: "Sure, Lem; the butcher's; we want a tenderloin, cut thick. You can't get any pep on greens; we ain't cattle."

Doret felt that he would have been infinitely happier with his own thin fare. In a manner he got comfort from a pinch of hunger; somehow the physical deprivation gave him a sense of purification. The other man, purple with the meat and beer, shook out a cigarette from a paper pack.

“Always smoke caporal halves,” he proclaimed.

The blue vapor from the three burning cigarettes rose and mingled. Bella was quiet, reflective; Bowman sat with half−shut speculative eyes; Lemuel Doret was again lost in visions.

“How long are you taking the milk cure?” Bowman asked.

Lemuel made no reply, but his wife smiled bitterly.

“I had an idea,” the other continued; “but it's a little soon to spring anything. And I don't know but you might prefer it here.”

“Try me,” Bella proclaimed; “that's all I want!”

Doret still said nothing of his determination to conquer life in Nantbrook. A swift impulse seized him to take June Bowman by the collar and fling him into the street.

“Just try me!” Bella repeated.

He would be helpless in his, Doret's, hands. It was hard enough to be upright without an insinuating crook in the place. There was a heavy movement of feet in the front of the house, and he went out to meet a customer.

Sliding the sensitive razor blade over a young tanned cheek he pondered moodily on the undesirable fact of June Bowman.

Returning from this exercise of his trade he saw Bella descending the stair with a plate.

“With all your going on over Flavilla,” she told him, “it never came to you that she'd like a piece of steak.”

“But Doctor Frazee told us nothing solid. I took her up two eggs in the morning.”

“Yes, and you'd had two dollars to pay as well if I hadn't showed you different. Flavilla's probably as well as any of us. I wish you would fix yourself a little, Lem. I'm tired of having you about the house in your suspenders.”

He viewed her silently. Bella had on a dress he had never seen before, thin red−spotted yellow silk drawn tightly over a pronounced figure, a red girdle, and high−heeled patent−leather slippers.

“If you're going to look like this,” he admitted, “I'll have to get a move on.”

When they were first in Nantbrook she had worn a denim apron, and that, too, with all the other differences had seemed to express their new life; but now in yellow silk she was back in the old. Lemuel Doret studied his wife with secret doubt; more than the dress had changed. She seemed younger; rather she was adopting a younger manner. In the presence of June Bowman it intensified.

“That idea I spoke about,” the latter advanced: “I've been sizing you up, the both of you, and you look good. Well, I've got hold of a concession on the Atlantic Boardwalk and the necessary cash is in sight.” He turned to Lemuel. “How would you like to run a bowling game? It's on the square and would give you a lead into something bigger. You're wise; why, you might turn into a shore magnate, with Bella here dressed up in stones.”

Doret shook his head. “Treasure on earth,” he thought; “moth and rust.” But it would be hopeless to attempt any explanation. “No,” he said; “we'll play it out here.”

“We will?” Bella echoed him. “Indeed! We will?” Now the emphasis was sharply on the first word. “What's going to keep me?”

“You're my wife,” he replied simply; “we have a child.”

“Times have changed, Snow,” Bowman interrupted. “You ought to read the papers. This is ladies' day. The old harem stuff don't go no longer. They are emancipated.”

“Lemuel,” Doret insisted, a narrowed hard gaze on the other man; “Lemuel Doret.”

“He thinks nobody'll remember,” his wife explained. “Lem's redeemed.”

“Your name's what you say,” Bowman agreed, “but remember this—you can't throw any scare into me. I'm no Fauntleroy, neither. Behave.”

The anger seethed again beneath Lemuel's restraint. It began to be particular, personal, focused on Bowman; and joined to it was a petty dislike for the details of the man's appearance, the jaunty bearing and conspicuous necktie, the gloss of youth over the unmistakable signs of degeneration, the fatty pouches of his eyes and loose throat.

“I wouldn't bother with scaring you,” he told him. “Why should I? You've got no kick. I took you in, didn't I? And all I said was my name. Snow Doret's dead; he died in prison; and this Lemuel's all different——”

"I've heard about that too," Bowman returned; "but somehow I don't take stock in these miracles."

"If you ever see me looking like I might be Snow, go quiet," Lemuel advised. "That's all."

With clenched hands he abruptly departed. The cords of his neck were swollen and rigid; there was a haze before his eyes. He went up to the refuge of his daughter's room. She was lying still, breathing thickly, with a finger print of scarlet on each cheek.

She was so thin, so wasted, the bed and room so stripped of every comfort, that he dropped forward on his knees, his arms outflung across her body in an inarticulate prayer for faith, for strength and patience.

It was not much he wanted—only food for one child and help for a woman, and a grip on the devil tearing at him in the form of hatred.

He got only a temporary relief, for when he went down Bella and June Bowman were whispering together; he passed the door with his silent tread and saw their heads close. Bella was actually pretty.

An astonishing possibility occurred to him—perhaps Bella would go away with Bowman. An unbidden deep relief at such a prospect invaded him; how happy he could be with Flavilla. They would get a smaller house, which Flavilla would soon learn to keep for him; they would go to church and prayer meeting together, her soprano voice and his bass joined in the praise of the Lord, of the Almighty who raised the dead and his Son, who took the thief to glory.

This speculation was overcome by a troubled mind; both his innate pride in his wife as an institution of his honor, the feeling that he would uphold it at any cost, and his Christianity interrupted the vision of release. He must not let her stumble, and he would see that June Bowman didn't interfere in his home. More beer made its appearance, and the other man grew louder, boastful. He exhibited the roll of money—that was nothing, four times that much could be had from the same source. He was a spender, too, and treated all his friends liberally. Lemuel was to see if there was any wine in the damned jumping−off place; and when would they all go to Atlantic?

"Never," Doret repeated.

Bowman laughed skeptically.

The rage stirred and increased, blinding Lemuel Doret's heart, stinging his eyes. Bella, watching him, became quieter, and she gave June—she called him June—a warning pressure of her fingers. Her husband saw it with indifference; everything small was lost in the hot tide enveloping him. His hands twitched, but there was no other outward sign of his tumult. He smoked his cigarettes with extreme deliberation.

It was evening again, and they were sitting on the narrow porch. The west was a serene lake of fading light against which the trees made dark blots of foliage. Nantbrook seemed unreal, a place of thin shadow, the future unsubstantial as well; only the past was actual in Lemuel Doret's mind—the gray cold prison, the city at night, locked rooms filled with smoke and lurid lights, avaricious voices in the mechanical sentences of gambling, agonized tones begging for a shot, just a shot, of an addicted drug, a girl crying.

He tried to sing a measure of praise beneath his breath but the tune and words evaded him. He glanced furtively at Bowman's complacent bulk, the flushed face turned fatuously to Bella. Under the other's left arm his coat was drawn smoothly on a cushion of fat.

Later Lemuel stopped at Flavilla's bed, and though she was composed he was vaguely alarmed at what seemed to him an unreal rigidity. She was not asleep, but sunk in a stupor with a glimmer of vision and an elusive pulse. He should not have listened to Bella but had a doctor as Frazee had advised. It appeared now that—with all Flavilla held for him—he had been strangely neglectful. At the same time he was conscious of the steady increase of his hatred for Bowman. This was natural, he told himself; Bowman in a way was the past—all that he, Doret, had put out of his life. At least he had believed that accomplished, yet here it was back again, alive and threatening; drinking beer in his rooms, whispering to his wife, putting the thought of Flavilla from his head.

In the morning even Bella admitted that Flavilla might be sick and a doctor necessary. He took one look at his daughter's burning face, heard the shrill labor of her breathing, and hurried downstairs with a set face. He was standing with Bella in the hall when June Bowman descended.

"Flavilla ain't right," she told him.

The latter promptly exhibited the wad of money. "Whatever you need," he said.

"Put it away," Lemuel replied shortly. "I don't want any of that for Flavilla."

Bowman studied him. Doret made no effort to mask his bitterness, and the other whistled faintly. Bella

laughed, turning from her husband.

"He's cracked," she declared; "you'll get no decency off him. A body would think I had been in jail and him looking out for her all those ten years and more. I can say thank you, though; we'll need your help, and glad."

"Put it away," Lemuel Doret repeated. He was more than ever catlike, alert, bent slightly forward with tense fingers.

Bowman was unperturbed. "I told you about this flash stuff," he observed. "Nobody's forcing money on you. Get the bend out of you and give me a shave. That'll start you on the pills."

Lemuel Doret mechanically followed him into the rude barber shop; he was fascinated by the idea of laying the razor across Bowman's throat. The latter extended himself in the chair and Doret slowly, thoroughly, covered his lower face with lather, through which the blade drew with a clean smooth rip. A fever burned in the standing man's brain, he fought constantly against a stiffening of his employed fingers—a swift turn, a cutting twist. Subconsciously he called noiselessly upon the God that had sustained him and, divided between apprehension and the increasing lust to kill, his lips held the form in which they had pronounced that impressive name. He had the sensation of battling against a terrific wind, a remorseless force beating him to submission. His body ached from the violence of the struggle to keep his hand steadily, evenly, busied, following in a delicate sweep the cords of June Bowman's neck, the jugulars.

The other looked up at him and grinned confidently. "Little children," he said, "love one another."

Lemuel stopped, the razor suspended in air; there was a din in his ears, his vision blurred, his grip tightened on the bone handle. A sweat started out on his brow and he found himself dabbing June Bowman's face with a wet cold towel.

"Witch hazel?" he asked mechanically.

Suddenly he was so tired that his legs seemed incapable of support. He wiped the razor blade and put it away with a lax nerveless hand. He realized that he had been again at the point of murder. He had been saved by the narrowest margin in the world. For a moment the fact that he had been saved absorbed him, and then the imminent danger of his position, his weakness, filled him with the sense of failure, a heavy feeling of hopelessness. His prayers and singing, his plans for redemption, for a godly life, had threatened to end at the first assault of evil.

He temporarily overcame his dejection at the memory of Flavilla. Doctor Markley lived in a larger town than Nantbrook, a dozen miles beyond the fields and green hills, and he must get him by telephone. Then there was the problem of payment. The doctor, he knew, would expect his fee, two dollars, immediately from such an applicant as himself; and he had less than a dollar. He explained something of this over the wire, adding that if Markley would see Flavilla at the end of the day the money would be forthcoming. That, the crisp, disembodied tone replied, was impossible; he must call in the middle of the morning, but no difficulty would be made about his bill; Doret could send the amount to him promptly.

He hurried back to the house with this information, and found Bella seated in the kitchen, the inevitable cigarette throwing up its ribbon of smoke from her fingers, and June Bowman at her shoulder. Lemuel ignored the latter.

"The doctor'll be here at about eleven," he announced. "Mind you listen to all he says and get Flavilla into a clean nightgown and sheets."

"What's the matter with your tending to her?" Bella demanded.

"I won't be here; not till night. I'm going to put up hay with one of the farmers. I hear they're in a hurry and offering good money."

Bella's expression was strange. She laughed in a forced way.

"We got to hand it to you," Bowman admitted genially; "you're there. I guess I'd starve before ever it would come to me to fork hay."

Lemuel's wife added nothing; her lips twisted into a fixed smile at once defiant and almost tremulous. Well, he was late now; he couldn't linger to inquire into Bella's moods. Yet at the door he hesitated again to impress on her the importance of attending the doctor's every word.

It seemed to him an hour later that he was burning up in a dry intolerable haze of sun and hay. He awkwardly balanced heavy ragged forkfuls, heaving them onto the mounting stack of the wagon in a paste of sweat and dust. His eyes were filmed and his throat dry. He struggled on in the soft unaccustomed tyranny of the grass, the glare

of sun, with his mind set on the close of day. He thought of cool shadows, of city streets wet at night, and a swift plunge into a river where it swept about the thrust of a wharf. He wondered what Doctor Markley would say about Flavilla; probably the child wasn't seriously sick.

The day drew apparently into a tormenting eternity; the physical effort he welcomed; it seemed to exhaust that devil in him which had so nearly betrayed and ruined him forever in the morning; but the shifting slippery hay, the fiery dust, the incandescent blaze created an inferno in the midst of which his mind whirled with monotonous giddy images and half−meaningless phrases spoken and re−spoken. Yet the sun was not, as he had begun to suppose, still in the sky; it sank toward the horizon, the violet shadows slipped out from the western hills, and Lemuel finished his toil in a swimming gold mist. It was two miles to Nantbrook, and disregarding his aching muscles he hurried over the gray undulating road. The people of the village were gathered on their commanding porches, the barkeeper at the hotel bulked in his doorway. The lower part of Lemuel's own house was closed; no one appeared as he mounted the insecure steps.

“Bella!” he cried in an overwhelming anxiety before he reached the hall.

There was no reply. He paused inside and called again. His voice echoed about the bare walls; he heard a dripping from the kitchen sink; nothing more.

“I'd better go up,” he said aloud with a curious tightening of his throat. He progressed evenly up the stairs; suddenly a great weight seemed to bow his shoulders; the illusion was so vivid that he actually staggered; he was incapable of breaking from his measured progress. He turned directly into Flavilla's room. She was there—he saw her at once. But Bella hadn't put a fresh nightgown on her, and the sheets were disordered and unchanged.

Lemuel took a step forward; then he stopped. “The fever's gone,” he vainly told the dread freezing about his heart at a stilled white face.

“Yes,” he repeated with numb lips; “it's gone.”

He approached the bed and standing over it and the meager body he cursed softly and wonderingly. The light was failing and it veiled the sharp lines of the dead child's countenance. For a moment his gaze strayed about the room and he felt a swift sorrow at its ugliness. He had wanted pretty things, pictures and a bright carpet and ribbons, for Flavilla. Then he was conscious of a tearing rage, but now he was unmindful of it, impervious to its assault in the fixed necessity of the present.

Later——

He was sitting again on his porch, after the momentary morbid stir of curiosity and small funeral, when the unrestrained sweep of his own emotion overcame him. His appearance had not changed; it was impossible for his expression to become bleaker; but there was a tremendous change within. Yet it was not strange; rather he had the sensation of returning to an old familiar condition. There he was at ease; he moved swiftly, surely forward in the realization of what lay ahead.

Bella and June Bowman had left the house almost directly after him, and Markley, finding it empty, with no response to his repeated knocking, had turned away, being as usual both impatient and hurried. Yes, Bella had gone and left Flavilla without even a glass of water. But Bella didn't matter. He couldn't understand this—except where he saw at last that she never had mattered; yet it was so. June Bowman was different.

There was no rush about the latter—to−morrow, next week would do equally. There was no doubt either. Lemuel Doret gave a passing thought, like a half−contemptuous gesture of final dismissal, to so much that had lately occupied him. The shadow of a smile disfigured his metallic lips.

The following noon he shut the door of his house with a sharp impact and made his way over the single street of Nantbrook toward the city. His fear of it had vanished; and when he reached the steel−bound towering masonry, the pouring crowds, he moved directly to a theater from which an audience composed entirely of men was passing out by the posters of a hectic burlesque.

“Clegett?” he asked at the grille of the box office.

A small man with a tilted black derby came from the darkened auditorium.

“Where have you been?” he demanded as he caught sight of Lemuel Doret. “I asked two or three but you might have been dead for all of them.”

“That's just about what I have,” Doret answered. “Mr. Clegett, I'd like a little money.”

“How little?”

“A hundred would be plenty.”

The other without hesitation produced a fold of currency, from which he transferred an amount to Lemuel Doret. It went into his pocket without a glance. He hesitated a moment, then added: “This will be all.”

Clegett nodded. “It might, and it might not,” he asserted; “but you can't jam me. You're welcome to that, anyhow. It was coming to you. I wondered when you'd be round.”

It was not far from the theater to a glittering hardware store, a place that specialized in sporting goods. There were cases of fishing reels, brilliant tied flies and varnished, gayly wrapped cane rods, gaffs and coiled wire leaders, and an impressive assortment of modern pistols, rifles and shotguns.

“Something small and neat,” Doret told the man in charge of the weapons.

He examined a compact automatic pistol, a blunted shape no larger than his palm. It was a beautiful mechanism, and as with his silken razors, merely to hold it, to test the smooth action, gave him a sense of pleasure.

Later, seated in a quiet cafe, an adjunct of the saloon below, he could not resist the temptation of taking the pistol in its rubber holster from his pocket, merely to finger the delicate trigger. There was no hurry. He knew his world thoroughly: it was a small land in which the inhabitants had constant knowledge of each other. A question in the right place would bring all the information he needed. Lemuel was absolutely composed, actually he was a little sleepy; longing and inner strife, dreams, were at an end; only an old familiar state, a thoroughly comprehensible purpose remained.

A girl—she could have been no more than fourteen—was hurriedly slipping a paper of white crystalline powder into a glass of sarsaparilla. She smiled at him as she saw his indifferent interrogation.

“It's better rolled with a pencil first,” he said, and then returned to the contemplation of his own affair.

The result of this was that, soon after, he was seated in the smoking car of an electric train that, hurtling across a sedgy green expanse of salt meadow, deposited him in a colorful thronging city built on sand and the rim of the sea. It was best to avoid if possible even a casual inquiry, and Bowman had spoken of Atlantic City. The afternoon was hot and bright, the beach was still dotted with groups of bathers; and Lemuel Doret found an inconspicuous place in a row of swing chairs protected by an awning ... where he waited for evening. Below him a young woman lay contentedly with her head in a youth's lap; a child in a red scrap of bathing suit dug sturdily with an ineffectual tin spade.

The day declined, the water darkened and the groups vanished from the beach. An attendant was stacking the swing chairs, and Lemuel Doret left his place. The boardwalk, elevated above him, was filled with a gay multitude, subdued by the early twilight and the brightening lemon−yellow radiance of the strung globes. Drifting, with only his gaze alert, in the scented mob, he stopped at an unremarkable lunch room for coffee, and afterward turned down a side avenue to where some automobiles waited at the curb. A driver moved from his seat as Lemuel approached, but after a closer inspection the former's interest died.

Doret lighted a cigarette. “How are they hitting you?” he asked negligently.

“Bad; but the season ain't opened up right yet. It'll have to soon, though, if they want me; gas has gone to where it's like shoving champagne into your car.”

“The cafes doing anything?”

“None except the Torquay; but the cabaret they got takes all the profits. That's on the front. Then there's the World, back of the town. It's colored, but white go. Quite a place—I saw a sailor come out last night hashed with a knife.”

He found the Torquay, a place of brilliant illumination and color, packed with tables about a dancing floor, and small insistent orchestra. He sat against the wall by the entrance, apparently sunk in apathy, but his vision searched the crowd like the cutting bar of light thrown on the intermittent singers. He renewed his order. Toward midnight a fresh influx of people swept in; his search was unsatisfied.

The cigarette girl, pinkly pretty with an exaggerated figure, carrying a wooden tray with her wares, stopped at his gesture.

“Why don't you hang that about your neck with something?” he inquired.

“And get round shouldered!” she demanded. Her manner became confidential. “I do get fierce tired,” she admitted; “nine till two−thirty.”

He asked for a particular brand of cigarette.

“We haven't got them.” She studied him with a memorizing frown. “They are hardly ever asked for; and

now—yes, there was a man, last night, I think——”

“He must have made an impression.”

“Another move and I'd slapped him if I lost my job. They got to be some fresh when they disturb me, too.”

“Alone, then?”

“That's right. Wanted me to meet him, and showed me a roll of money. Me!” her contempt sharpened.

“He was young?”

“Young nothing, with gray in his shoebrush mustache.”

By such small things, Lemuel Doret reflected, the freshness that had fixed June Bowman in the girl's memory, men were marked and followed.

“I told him,” she volunteered further, “he didn't belong on the boardwalk but in the rough joints past the avenue.”

Paying for his drink Doret left the Torquay; and following the slight pressure of two suggestions and a faint possibility he found himself in a sodden dark district where a red−glass electric sign proclaimed the entrance to the World. An automobile stopped and a chattering group of young colored girls in sheer white with vivid ribbons, accompanied by sultry silent negroes, preceded him into the cafe. He was met by a brassy racket and a curiously musty heavy air.

The room was long and narrow, and on one wall a narrow long platform was built above the floor for the cabaret. There was a ledge about the other walls the width of one table, and below that the space was crowded by a singular assembly. There were women faintly bisque in shade, with beautiful regular features, and absolute blacks with flattened noses and glistening eyes in burning red and green muslins. Among them were white girls with untidy bright−gold hair, veiled gaze and sullen painted lips; white men sat scattered through the darker throng, men like Lemuel Doret, quiet and watchful, others laughing carelessly, belligerent, and still more sunk in a stupor of drink.

Perhaps ten performers occupied the stage, and at one end was the hysterical scraping on strings, the muffled hammered drums, that furnished the rhythm for a slow intense waltz.

Yet in no detail was the place so marked as by an indefinable oppressive atmosphere. The strong musk and edged perfumes, the races, distinct and subtly antagonistic or mingled and spoiled, the rasping instruments, combined in an unnatural irritating pressure; they produced an actual sensation of cold and staleness like that from the air of a vault.

Doret ordered beer in a bottle, and watched the negro waitress snap off the cap. He had never seen a cafe such as this before, and he was engaged, slightly; its character he expressed comprehensively in the word “bad.”

A wonderfully agile dancer caught the attention of the room. The musicians added their voices to the jangle, and the minor half−inarticulate wail, the dull regular thudding of the bass drum were savage. The song fluctuated and died; the dancer dropped exhausted into her chair.

Then Lemuel saw June Bowman. He was only a short distance away, and— without Bella—seated alone but talking to the occupants of the next table. Lemuel Doret was composed. In his pocket he removed the automatic pistol from its rubber case. Still there was no hurry—Bowman was half turned from him, absolutely at his command. The other twisted about, his glance swept the room, and he recognized Doret. He half rose from his chair, made a gesture of acknowledgment that died before Lemuel's stony face, and sank back into his place. Lemuel saw Bowman's hand slip under his coat, but it came out immediately; the fingers drummed on the table.

The careless fool—he was unarmed.

There was no hurry; he could make one, two steps at Bowman's slightest movement.... Lemuel thought of Flavilla deserted, dying alone with a parched mouth, of all that had gone to wreck in the evil that had overtaken him—the past that could not, it appeared, be killed. Yet where Bowman was the past, it was nearly over. He'd finish the beer before him, that would leave some in the bottle, and then end it. With the glass poised in his hand he heard an absurd unexpected sound. Looking up he saw that it came from the platform, from a black woman in pale−blue silk, a short ruffled skirt and silver−paper ornaments in her tightly crinkled hair. She was singing, barely audibly:

“Oh, children ... lost in Egypt
See that chariot....
... good tidings!”

Even from his table across the room he realized that she was sunk in an abstraction; her eyes were shut and her body rocking in beat to the line.

“Good tidings,” she sang.

A negro close beside Doret looked up suddenly, and his voice joined in a humming undertone, “See that chariot, oh, good tidings ... that Egyptian chariot.”

A vague emotion stirred within Lemuel Doret, the singing annoyed him, troubled him with memories of perishing things. Another joined, and the spiritual swelled slightly, haltingly above the clatter of glasses and laughter. The woman who had begun it was swept to her feet; she stood with her tinsel gayety of apparel making her tragic ebony face infinitely grotesque and tormented while her tone rose in a clear emotional soprano:

“Children of Israel, unhappy slaves,
Good tidings, good tidings,
For that chariot's coming,
God's chariot's coming, ... coming,
..... chariot out of Egypt.”

The magic of her feeling swept like a flame over the room; shrill mirth, mocking calls, curses were bound in a louder and louder volume of hope and praise. The negroes were on their feet, swaying in the hysterical contagion of melody, the unutterable longing of their alien isolation.

“God's chariot's coming.” The song filled the roof, hung with bright strips of paper, it boomed through the windows and doors. Sobbing cries cut through it, profound invocations, beautiful shadowy voices chimed above the weight of sound.

It beat like a hammer on Lemuel Doret's brain and heart. Suddenly he couldn't breathe, and he rose with a gasp, facing the miracle that had overtaken the place he called bad. God's chariot—was there! He heard God's very tone directed at him. Borne upward on the flood of exaltation he seemed to leave the earth far, far away. Something hard, frozen, in him burst, and tears ran over his face; he was torn by fear and terrible joy. His Lord....

He fell forward on his knees, an arm overturning the bottle of beer; and, his sleeve dabbled in it, he pressed his head against the cold edge of the table, praying wordlessly for faith, incoherently ravished by the marvel of salvation, the knowledge of God here, everywhere.

The harmony wavered and sank, and out of the shuddering silence that followed Lemuel Doret turned again from the city.

THE FLOWER OF SPAIN

I

From the window of the drawing−room Lavinia Sanviano could see, on the left, the Statue of Garibaldi, where the Corso Regina Maria cut into the Lungarno; on the right, and farther along, the gray−green foliage of the Cascine. Before her the Arno flowed away, sluggish and without a wrinkle or reflection on its turbid surface, into Tuscany. It was past the middle of afternoon, and a steady procession of carriages and mounted officers in pale blue tunics moved below toward the shade of the Cascine.

Lavinia could not see this gay progress very well, for the window—it had only a narrow ledge guarded by an iron grille—was practically filled by her sister, Gheta, and Anna Mantegazza. Occasionally she leaned forward, pressed upon Gheta's shoulder, for a hasty unsatisfactory glimpse.

“You are crushing my sleeves!” Gheta finally and sharply complained. “Do go somewhere else. Anna and I want to talk without your young ears eternally about. When do you return to the convent?”

Lavinia drew back. However, she didn't leave. She was accustomed to her sister's complaining, and—unless the other went to their father—she ignored her hints. Lavinia's curiosity in worldly scenes and topics was almost as full as her imagination thereof. She was sixteen, and would have to endure another year of obscurity before her marriage could be thought of, or she take any part in the social life where Gheta moved with such marked success.

But, Lavinia realized with a sigh, she couldn't expect to be pursued like Gheta, who was very beautiful. Gheta was so exceptional that she had been introduced to the Florentine polite world without the customary preliminary of marriage. She could, almost every one agreed, marry very nearly whomever and whenever she willed. Even now, after the number of years she had been going about with practically all her friends wedded, no one seriously criticized the Sanvianos for not insisting on a match with one of the several eligibles who had unquestionably presented themselves.

Gheta was slender and round; her complexion had the flawless pallid bloom of a gardenia; her eyes and hair were dark, and her lips an enticing scarlet thread. Perhaps her chin was a trifle lacking in definition, her voice a little devoid of warmth; but those were minor defects in a person so precisely radiant. Her dress was always noticeably lovely; at present she wore pink tulle over lustrous gray, with a high silver girdle, a narrow black velvet band and diamond clasp about her delicate full throat.

Anna Mantegazza was more elaborately gowned, in white embroidery, with a little French hat; but Anna Mantegazza was an American with millions, and elaboration was a commonplace with her. Lavinia wore only a simple white slip, confined about her flexible waist with a yellow ribbon; and she was painfully conscious of the contrast she presented to the two women seated in the front of the window.

The fact was that a whole fifth of the Sanvianos' income was spent on Gheta's clothes; and this left only the most meager provision for Lavinia. But this, the latter felt, was just—still in the convent, she required comparatively little personal adornment; while the other's beauty demanded a worthy emphasis. Later Lavinia would have tulle and silver lace. She wished, however, that Gheta would get married; for Lavinia knew that even if she came home she would be held back until the older sister was settled. It was her opinion that Gheta was very silly to show such indifference to Cesare Orsi.... Suddenly she longed to have men—not fat and good−natured like the Neapolitan banker, but austere and romantic—in love with her. She clasped her hands to her fine young breast and a delicate color stained her cheeks. She stood very straight and her breathing quickened through parted lips.

She was disturbed by the echo of a voice from the cool depths of the house, and turned at approaching footfalls. The room was so high and large that its stiff gilt and brocade furnishing appeared insignificant. Three long windows faced the Lungarno, but two were screened with green slatted blinds and heavily draped, and the light within was silvery and illusive. A small man in correct English clothes, with a pointed bald head and a heavy nose, entered impulsively.

“It's Bembo,” Lavinia announced flatly.

“Of course it's Bembo,” he echoed vivaciously. “Who's more faithful to the Casa Sanviano——”

“At tea time,” Lavinia interrupted.

“Lavinia,” her sister said sharply, “don't be impertinent. There are so many strangers driving,” she continued, to the man; “do stand and tell us who they are. You know every second person in Europe.”

He pressed eagerly forward, and Anna Mantegazza turned and patted his hand.

“I wish you were so attentive to Pier and myself,” she remarked, both light and serious. “I'd like to buy you—you're indispensable in Florence.”

“Contessa!” he protested. “Delighted! At once.”

“Bembo,” Gheta demanded, “duty—who's that in the little carriage with the bells bowed over the horses?”

He leaned out over the grille, his beady alert gaze sweeping the way below.

“Litolff,” he pronounced without a moment's hesitation—“a Russian swell. The girl with him is——” He stopped with a side glance at Lavinia, a slight shrug.

“Positively, Lavinia,” Gheta insisted again, more crossly, “you're a nuisance! When do you go back to school?”

“In a week,” Lavinia answered serenely.

With Bembo added to the others, she could see almost nothing of the scene below. Across the river the declining sun cast a rosy light on the great glossy hedges and clipped foliage of the Boboli Gardens; far to the left the paved height of the Piazzale Michelangelo rose above the somber sweep of roofs and bridges; an aged bell rang harshly and mingled with the inconsequential clatter on the Lungarno. An overwhelming sense of the mystery of being stabbed, sharp as a knife, at her heart; a choking longing possessed her to experience all—all the wonders of life, but principally love.

“Look, Bembo!” Anna Mantegazza suddenly exclaimed. “No; there— approaching! Who's that singular person in the hired carriage?”

Her interest was so roused that Lavinia, once more forgetful of Gheta's sleeves, leaned over her sister's shoulder, and immediately distinguished the object of their curiosity.

An open cab was moving slowly, almost directly under the window, with a single patron—a slender man, sitting rigidly erect, in a short, black shell jacket, open upon white linen, a long black tie, and a soft narrow scarlet sash. He wore a wide−brimmed stiff felt hat slanted over a thin countenance burned by the sun as dark as green bronze; his face was as immobile as metal, too; it bore, as if permanently molded, an expression of excessive contemptuous pride.

Bembo's voice rose in a babble of excited information.

“'Singular?' Why, that's one of the most interesting men alive. It's Abrego y Mochales, the greatest bullfighter in existence, the Flower of Spain. I've seen him in the ring and at San Sebastian with the King; and I can assure you that one was hardly more important than the other. He's idolized by every one in Spain and South America; women of all classes fall over each other with declarations and gifts.”

As if he had heard the pronouncement of his name the man in the cab turned sharply and looked up. Gheta was leaning out, and his gaze fastened upon her with a sudden and extraordinary intensity. Lavinia saw that her sister, without dissembling her interest, sat forward, statuesque and lovely. It seemed to the former that the cab was an intolerable time passing; she wished to draw Gheta back, to cover her indiscretion from Anna Mantegazza's prying sight. She sighed with inexplicable relief when she saw that the man had driven beyond them and that he did not turn.

A bull−fighter! A blurred picture formed in Lavinia's mind from the various details she had read and heard of the cruelty of the Spanish national sport—torn horses, stiff on blood−soaked sand; a frenzied and savage populace; and charging bulls, drenched with red froth. She shuddered.

“What a brute!” she spoke aloud unintentionally.

Gheta glanced at her out of a cool superiority, but Anna Mantegazza nodded vigorously.

“He would be a horrid person!” she affirmed.

“How silly!” Gheta responded. “It's an art, like the opera; he's an artist in courage. Personally I find it rather fascinating. Most men are so—so mild.”

Lavinia knew that the other was thinking of Cesare Orsi, and she agreed with her sister that Orsi was far too mild. Without the Orsi fortune— he had much more even than Anna Mantegazza—Cesare would simply get nowhere. The Spaniard—Lavinia could not recall his name, although it hung elusively among her thoughts—was different; women of all classes, Bembo had said, pursued him with favors. He could be cruel, she decided, and shivered a little vicariously. She half heard Bembo's rapid high−pitched excitement over trifles.

“You are going to the Guarinis' sale to−morrow afternoon? But, of course, every one is. Well, if I come across

Abrego y Mochales before then, and I'm almost certain to, and he'll come, I'll bring him. He's as proud as the devil—duchesses, you see—so no airs with him. The Flower of Spain. A king of sport sits high at the table—" He went on, apparently interminable; but Lavinia turned away to where tea was being laid in a far angle.

Others approached over the tiled hall and the Marchese Sanviano entered with Cesare Orsi. The window was deserted, and the women trailed gracefully toward the bubbling minor note of the alcohol lamp. Both Sanviano and Orsi were big men—the former, like Bembo, wore English clothes; but Orsi's ungainly body had been tightly garbed by a Southern military tailor, making him—Lavinia thought—appear absolutely ridiculous. His collar was both too tight and too high, although perspiration promised relief from the latter.

A general and unremarkable conversation mingled with the faint rattle of passing cups and low directions to a servant. Lavinia was seated next to Cesare Orsi, but she was entirely oblivious of his heavy kindly face and almost anxiously benevolent gaze. He spoke to her, and because she had comprehended nothing of his speech she smiled at him with an absent and illuminating charm. He smiled back, happy in her apparent pleasure; and his good−nature was so insistent that she was impelled to reward it with a remark.

She thought, she said, that Gheta was particularly lovely this afternoon. He agreed eagerly; and Lavinia wondered whether she had been clumsy. She simply couldn't imagine marrying Cesare Orsi, but she knew that such a match for Gheta was freely discussed, and she hoped that her sister would not make difficulties. She wouldn't have dresses so fussy as Gheta's—in figure, anyhow, she was perhaps her sister's superior—fine materials, simply cut, with a ruffle at the throat and hem, a satin wrap pointed at the back, with a soft tassel....

Orsi was talking to Gheta, and she was answering him with a brevity that had cast a shade of annoyance over the Marchese Sanviano's large features. Lavinia agreed with her father that Gheta was a fool. She must be thirty, the younger suddenly realized. Bembo was growing hysterical from the tea and his own shrill anecdotes. He resembled a grotesque performing bird with a large beak. Lavinia's mind returned to the silent dark man who had passed in a cab. She wished, now, that she had been sitting at the front of the window—the object of his unsparing intense gaze. She realized that he was extremely handsome, and contrasted his erect slim carriage with Orsi's thick slouched shoulders. The latter interrupted her look, misinterpreted it, and said something about candy from Giacosa's.

Lavinia thanked him and rose; the discussion about the tea table became unbearably stupid, no better than the flat chatter of the nuns at school.

Her room was small and barely furnished, with a thin rug over the stone floor, and opened upon the court about which the house was built. The Sanvianos occupied the second floor. Below, the *piano nobile* was rented by the proprietor of a great wine industry. It was evident that he was going out to dinner, for his dark blue brougham was waiting at the inner entrance. The horse, a fine sleek animal, was stamping impatiently, with ringing shoes, on the paved court. A flowering magnolia tree against one corner filled the thickening dusk with a heavy palpitating sweetness.

Lavinia stayed for a long while at the ledge of her window. Her hair, which she wore braided in a smooth heavy rope, slid out and hung free. The brougham left, with a clatter of hoofs and a final clang of the great iron−bound door on the street; above, white stars grew visible in a blue dust. She dressed slowly, changing from one plain gown to another hardly less simple. Before the mirror, in an unsatisfactory lamplight, she studied her appearance in comparison with Gheta's.

She lacked the latter's lustrous pallor, the petal−like richness of Gheta's skin. Lavinia's cheeks bore a perceptible flush, which she detested and tried vainly to mask with powder. Her eyes, a clear bluish gray, inherited from the Lombard strain in her mother, were not so much fancied as her sister's brown; but at least they were more uncommon and contrasted nicely with her straight dark bang. Her shoulders and arms she surveyed with frank healthy approbation. Now her hair annoyed her, swinging childishly about her waist, and she secured it in an instinctively effective coil on the top of her head. She decided to leave it there for dinner. Her mother was away for the night; and she knew that Gheta's sarcasm would only stir their father to a teasing mirth.

Later, Gheta departed for a ball, together with the Marchese Sanviano— to be dropped at his club—and Lavinia was left alone. The scene in the court was repeated, but with less flourish than earlier in the evening. Gheta would be nominally in the charge of Anna Mantegazza; but Lavinia knew how laxly the American would hold her responsibility. She wished, moving disconsolately under high painted ceilings through the semi− gloom of still formal chambers, that she was a recognized beauty—free, like Gheta.

The drawing−room, from which they had watched the afternoon procession, was in complete darkness, save for the luminous rectangle of the window they had occupied. Its drapery was still disarranged. Lavinia crossed the room and stood at the grille. The lights strung along the river, curving away like uniform pale bubbles, cast a thin illumination over the Lungarno, through which a solitary vehicle moved. Lavinia idly watched it approach, but her interest increased as it halted directly opposite where she stood. A man got quickly out—a lithe figure with a broad−brimmed hat slanted across his eyes. It was, she realized with an involuntary quickening of her blood, Abrego y Mochales. A second man followed, tendered him a curiously shaped object, and stood by the waiting cab while the bull−fighter walked deliberately forward. He stopped under the window and shifted the thing in his hands.

A rich chord of strings vibrated through the night, another followed, and then a brief pattern of sound was woven from the serious notes of a guitar. Lavinia shrank back within the room—it was, incredibly, a serenade on the stolid Lungarno. It was for Gheta! The romance of the south of Spain had come to life under their window. A voice joined the instrument, melodious and melancholy, singing an air with little variation, but with an insistent burden of desire. The voice and the guitar mingled and fluctuated, drifting up from the pavement exotic and moving. Lavinia could comprehend but little of the Spanish:

"I followed through the acacias,
But it was only the wind.
.... looked for you beyond the limes——"

The thrill at her heart deepened until tears wet her cheeks. It was for Gheta, but it overwhelmed Lavinia with a formless and aching emotion; it was for Gheta, but her response was instant and uncontrollable. It seemed to Lavinia that the sheer beauty of life, which had moved her so sharply, had been magnified unbearably; she had never dreamed of the possibilities of such ecstasy or such delectable grief.

The song ended abruptly, with a sharp jarring note. The man by the carriage moved deferentially forward and took the guitar. She could see the minute pulsating sparks of cigarettes; heard a direction to the driver. Abrego y Mochales and the other got into the cab and it turned and shambled away. Lavinia Sanviano moved forward mechanically, gazing after the dark vanishing shape on the road. She was shaken, almost appalled, by the feeling that stirred her. A momentary terror of living swept over her; the thrills persisted; her hands were icy cold. She had been safely a child until now, when she had lost that small security, and gained—what?

She studied herself, clad in her coarse nightgown with narrow lace, in her inadequate mirror. The color had left her cheeks and her eyes shone darkly from shadows. "Lavinia Sanviano!" she spoke aloud, with the extraordinary sensation of addressing, in her reflection, a stranger. She could never, never wear her hair down again, she thought with an odd pang.

II

Gheta invariably took breakfast in her room. It was a larger chamber by far than Lavinia's, toward the Via Garibaldi. A thick white bearskin was spread by the canopied bed, an elaborate dressing table stood between long windows drawn with ruffled pink silk, while the ceiling bore a scaling ottocento frescoing of garlanded cupids. She was sitting in bed, the chocolate pot on a painted table at her side, when Lavinia entered.

A maid was putting soft paper in the sleeves of Gheta's ball dress, and Lavinia, finding an unexpected reluctance to proceed with what she had come to say, watched the servant's deft care.

"Mochales was here last night," Lavinia finally remarked abruptly— "that is he stood on the street and serenaded you."

Gheta put her cup down with a clatter.

"How charming!" she exclaimed. "And I missed it for an insufferable affair. He stood under the window—"

"With a guitar," Lavinia proceeded evenly. "It was very beautiful."

"Heavens! Bembo's going to fetch him to the Guarinis' sale, and I forgot and promised Anna Mantegazza to drive out to Arcetri! But Anna won't miss this. It was really a very pretty compliment."

She spoke with a trivial satisfaction that jarred painfully on Lavinia's memory of the past night. Gheta calmly accepted the serenade as another tribute to her beauty; Lavinia could imagine what Anna Mantegazza and her sister would say, and they both seemed commonplace— even a little vulgar—to her acutely sensitive being. She suddenly lost her desire to resemble Gheta; her sister diminished in her estimation. The elder, Lavinia realized with an unsparing detachment, was enveloped in a petty vanity acquired in an atmosphere of continuous flattery; it had chilled her heart.

The Guarinis, who had been overtaken by misfortune, and whose household goods were, being disposed of at public sale, occupied a large gloomy floor on the Via Cavour. The rooms were crowded by their friends and the merely curious; the carpets were protected by a temporary covering; and all the furnishings, the chairs and piano, pictures, glass and bijoux, bore gummed and numbered labels.

The sale was progressing in one of the larger salons, but the crowd circulated in a slow solid undulation through every room. Gheta and Anna Mantegazza had sought the familiar comfortable corner of an entresol, and were seated. Lavinia was standing tensely, with a laboring breast, when Bembo suddenly appeared with the man whom he had called the Flower of Spain.

"The Contessa Mantegazza," Bembo said suavely, "Signorina Sanviano, this is Abrego y Mochales."

The bull−fighter bowed with magnificent flexibility. A hot resentment possessed Lavinia at Bembo's apparent ignoring of her; but he had not seen her at first and hastened to repair his omission. Lavinia inclined her head stiffly. An increasing confusion enveloped her, but she forced herself to gaze directly into Mochales' still black eyes. His face, she saw, was gaunt, the ridges of his skull apparent under the bronzed skin. His hair, worn in a queue, was pinned in a flat disk on his head, and small gold loops had been riveted in his ears; but these peculiarities of garb were lost in the man's intense virility, his patent brute force. His fine perfumed linen, the touch of scarlet at his waist, his extremely high−heeled patent−leather boots under soft uncreased trousers, served only to emphasize his resolute metal—they resembled an embroidered and tasseled scabbard that held a keen, thin and dangerous blade.

Anna Mantegazza extended her hand in the American fashion, and Gheta smiled from—Lavinia saw—her best facial angle. The Spaniard regarded Gheta Sanviano so fixedly that after a moment she turned, in a species of constraint, to Anna. The latter spoke with her customary facility and the man responded gravely.

They stood a little aside from Lavinia; she only partly heard their remarks, but she saw that Abrego y Mochales' attention never strayed from her sister. Vicariously it made her giddy. The man absolutely summed up all that Lavinia had dreamed of a romantic and masterful personage. She felt convinced that he had destroyed her life's happiness—no other man could ever appeal to her now; none other could satisfy the tumult he had aroused in her. This, she told herself, desperately miserable, was love.

Gheta spoke of her, for the three turned to regard her. She met their scrutiny with a doubtful half smile, which vanished as Anna Mantegazza made a light comment upon her hair being so newly up. Lavinia detested the latter

with a sudden and absurd intensity. She saw Anna, with a veiled glance at Gheta, make an apology and leave to join an eddy of familiars that had formed in the human stream sweeping by. Mochales stood very close to her sister, speaking seriously, while Gheta nervously fingered the short veil hanging from her gay straw hat.

A familiar kindly voice sounded suddenly in Lavinia's ears, and Cesare Orsi joined her. He was about to move forward toward Gheta; but, before he could attract her attention, she disappeared in the crowd with the Spaniard.

“Who was it?” he inquired. “He resembles a juggler.”

Lavinia elaborately masked her hot resentment at this fresh stupidity. She must not, she felt, allow Orsi to discover her feeling for Abrego y Mochales; that was a secret she must keep forever from the profane world. She would die, perhaps at a terribly advanced age, with it locked in her heart. But if Gheta married him she would go into a convent.

“A bull−fighter, I believe,” she said carelessly.

“In other words, a brute,” Orsi continued. “Such men are not fit for the society of—of your sister. One would think his mere presence would make her ill.... Yet she seemed quite pleased.”

“Strange!” Lavinia spoke with innocent eyes.

It was like turning a knife in her wound to agree apparently with Cesare Orsi—rather, she wanted to laugh at him coldly and leave him standing alone; but she must cultivate her defenses. There was, too, a sort of negative pleasure in misleading the banker, a sort of torment not unlike that enjoyed by the early martyrs.

Cesare Orsi regarded her with new interest and approbation.

“You're a sensible girl,” he proclaimed; “and extremely pretty in the bargain.” He added this in an accent of profound surprise, as if she had suddenly grown presentable under his eyes. “In some ways,” he went on, gathering conviction, “you are as handsome as Gheta.”

“Thank you, Signor Orsi,” Lavinia responded with every indication of a modesty, which, in fact, was the indifference of a supreme contempt.

“I have been blind,” he asseverated, vivaciously gesticulating with his thick hands.

Lavinia studied him with a remote young brutality, from his fluffy disarranged hair, adhering to his wet brow, to his extravagantly pointed shoes. The ridiculous coral charm hanging from his heavy watch chain, a violent green handkerchief, an insufferable cameo pin—all contributed pleasurably to the lowering of her opinion of him.

“I must find Gheta,” she pronounced, suddenly aware of her isolation with Cesare Orsi in the crowd, and of curious glances. Orsi immediately took her arm, but she eluded him. “Go first, please; we can get through sooner that way.”

They progressed from room to room, thoroughly exploring the dense throng about the auctioneer, but without finding either Gheta, Anna Mantegazza or the bull−fighter.

“I can't think how she could have forgotten me!” Lavinia declared with increasing annoyance. “It's clear that they have all gone.”

“Don't agitate yourself,” Cesare Orsi begged. “Sanviano will be absolutely contented to have you in my care. I am delighted. You shall go home directly in my carriage.” He conducted her, with a show of form that in any one else or at another time she would have enjoyed hugely, to the street, where he handed her into an immaculately glossy and corded victoria, drawn by a big stamping bay, and stood with his hat off until she had rolled away.

It was comfortable in the luxuriously upholstered seat and, in spite of herself, Lavinia sank back with a contented sigh. There was in its case a gilt hand mirror, into which she peered, and a ledge that pulled out, with a crystal box for cigarettes and a spirit lighter. The Sanvianos had only a landaulet, no longer in its first condition; and Lavinia wondered why Gheta, who adored ease, had been so long in securing for herself such comforts as Orsi's victoria.

They swept smoothly on rubber tires into the Lungarno and rapidly approached her home. The carriage stopped before the familiar white facade, built of marble in the pseudo−severity of the early nineteenth century, and the porter swung open the great iron gate to the courtyard. Lavinia mounted the square white shaft of the stairs to the Sanvianos' floor with a deepening sense of injury. She would make it plain to Gheta that she was no longer a child to be casually overlooked.

A small room, used in connection with the dining room for coffee and smoking, gave directly on the hall; there she saw her father sitting, with his hat still on, his face stamped with an almost comical dismay, and holding an unlighted cigar.

“Gheta left me at the Guarinis',” Lavinia halted impetuously. “If it hadn't been for Signor Orsi I shouldn't be here yet; I was completely ignored.”

“Heavens!” her father exclaimed, waving her away. “Another feminine catastrophe! Go to your sister and mother. My head is in a whirl.”

Her mother, then, had returned. She went forward and was suddenly startled by hearing Gheta's voice rise in a wail of despairing misery. She hurried forward to her sister's room. Gheta, fully dressed, was prostrate, face down, upon her bed, shaken by a strangled sobbing that at intervals rose to a thin hysterical scream. The Marchesa Sanviano, still in her traveling suit and close−fitting black hat, sat by her elder daughter's side, trying vainly to calm the tumult. In the background the maid, her face streaming with sympathetic tears, was hovering distractedly with a jar of volatile salts.

“Mamma,” Lavinia demanded, torn by extravagant fears, “what has happened?”

The marchesa momentarily turned a concerned countenance.

“Your sister,” she said seriously, “has found some wrinkles on her forehead.”

Lavinia with difficulty restrained a sharp giggle. Gheta's grief and their mother's anxiety at first seemed so foolishly disproportionate to their cause. Then a realization of what such an occurrence meant to Gheta dawned upon her. To an acknowledged beauty like Gheta Sanviano the marks of Time were an absolute tragedy; they threatened her on every plane of her being.

“But when—” Lavinia began.

“They—Anna Mantegazza and she—went to the dressing room at the Guarinis', where, it seems, Anna discovered them—sympathetically, of course.”

Gheta's sobbing slowly subsided under the marchesa's urgent plea that unrestrained emotion would only deepen her trouble. She did not appear at dinner; and afterward the marchese, his wife and Lavinia sat wrapped in a gloomy silence. The marchesa was still handsome, in spite of increasing weight. The gray gaze inherited by Lavinia had escaped the parent; her eyes were soft and dense, like brown velvet. She was a woman of decision and now she brought her hands smartly together.

“We have waited too long with Gheta; we should not have counted so confidently on her beauty; time flies so treacherously. She must marry as soon as possible.”

“Thank God, there's Cesare Orsi!” her husband responded.

Lavinia was gazing inward at the secretly enshrined image of the Flower of Spain.

III

Gheta Sanviano often passed a night at the Mantegazzas' villa on the Height of Castena, a long mile from the city.

Lavinia, too, knew the dwelling well, for Sanviano and Pier Mantegazza had been intimate from their similar beginnings, and she had played there as a child. However, she had never been regularly asked with Gheta; and when that occurred—Gheta indifferently delivered Anna Mantegazza's message—and her mother acquiesced, Lavinia had a renewed sense of her growing importance.

She went out early, in the heat of midday, a time that fitted best with the involved schedule of the Sanvianos' single equipage—Anna would take her sister directly from a luncheon at the Ginoris'. Lavinia looked with mingled anticipation and relief at the approaching graceful facade added scarcely a hundred and fifty years before to the otherwise somber abode of the Mantegazzas, first established in the twelfth century.

The villa stood on an eminence, circled by austere pines, and terraced with innumerable vegetable gardens and frugally planted olives. The road mounted abruptly, turned under a frowning wall incongruously topped with delicately painted urns, and doubled across the massive iron−bound door that closed the arched entrance. Within, an immensely high timbered hall was pleasantly cool and dark after the white blaze without. It was bare of furnishing except for a number of rude oak settles against the naked stone walls. It had been a place of fear to Lavinia when a child; and even now she left it with a sense of relief for the modernized interior beyond.

Pier Mantegazza was standing before a high inclined table, which bore a number of blackened and shapeless medallions. He was a famous numismatic—a tall stooping man, slightly lame, and enveloped in a premature gray ill health that resembled clinging cobwebs. He bent and brushed Lavinia's forehead with his crisp mustache, and then returned to the delicate manipulation of a magnifying glass and a small blue bottle of acid. She left him for a deep chair and a surprising French romance by Remy de Gourmont. At a long philosophical dialogue the book drooped, and she thought of Anna Mantegazza and her husband.

She wondered whether they were happy. But she decided, measuring that condition solely by her own requirement, that such a state was impossible for them. It had certainly been a marriage for money and position; prior to the ceremony the Casa Mantegazza had been closed for years, and Pier Mantegazza occupied a small establishment near the Military Hospital, on the Via San Gallo. Anna Cane had arrived in Rome, without family or credentials, and unknown to the American Embassy other than by amazing deposits at the best banks. But she did have, in addition to this, a pungent charm and undeniable force and good taste. It was said that the moment she had seen Mantegazza's villa she had decided to possess it, even at the price of its sere withdrawn holder.

She had gone at once into the best Florentine and Roman society. That was ten years before, but Lavinia realized that she had never successfully assimilated the Italian social formula. She mixed the most diverse elements of their world willfully and found enjoyment in bringing about amusing situations. She seemed devoid of the foundations of proper caution; in fact, she mocked at them openly. And if she had not been a model Catholic, and herself above the slightest moral question, even Mantegazza could not have carried her among his own circles. As it was, people flocked to her elaborate parties, torn between the hope of being amazed and the fear that they should furnish the hub of the occasion.

Gheta and her hostess arrived later. The former, it appeared to Lavinia, looked disconcerted; and it was evident that she had been remonstrating with Anna Mantegazza. The other laughed provokingly.

“Nonsense!” she declared. “It was too good to miss; besides, you're an old campaigner.”

A stair of flagging, turning sharply round a stone pillar, led incongruously from the light French furnishings to the chamber where Lavinia was to sleep. A Renaissance bed, made of thick quilting directly upon the floor, was covered with gilt ecclesiastical embroidery; and a movable tub stood in a stone corner. The narrow deep windows overlooked Florence, a somber expanse of roofing; and, coming rapidly toward the villa, Lavinia could see a tall dogcart, with a groom and two passengers. They were men; and, as they drew nearer, Lavinia—with a sudden pounding of her heart—realized the cause of the slight friction between the two women. The cart bore Cesare Orsi, and Mochales the bull−fighter, the Flower of Spain. It was a part of Anna Mantegazza's humor that the men, so essentially antagonistic, should arrive together clinging precariously on the high insecure trap.

Tea was served at five on the terrace, and Lavinia dressed with minute care. Gheta, she knew, had brought a new lavender lawn with little gold velvet buttons and lace; while she had nothing but the familiar coarse white mull. But she had fresh ribbons and she gazed with satisfaction at her firm, faintly rosy countenance. She would have no wrinkles for years to come. However, she thought, with a return to her sense of tragic gloom, such considerations were of little moment, as Abrego y Mochales would scarcely be aware of her existence; he would never know.... Perhaps, years after—

She purposely delayed her appearance on the terrace until the others had assembled, and then quietly took possession of a chair. Cesare Orsi greeted her with effusive warmth, the Spaniard bowed ceremoniously. A wide prospect of countryside flowed away in innumerable hills and valleys, clothed in the silvery smoke of olives and in green−black pines; below, a bank of cherry trees were in bloom. The air was sweet and still and full of a warm radiance.

Lavinia luxuriated in her unhappiness. Mochales, she decided, must be the handsomest man in existence. His unchanging gravity fascinated her —the man's face, his voice, his dignified gestures, were all steeped in a splendid melancholy.

“I am a peasant,” he said, apparently addressing them all, but with his eyes upon Gheta, “from Estremadura, in the mountains. The life there was very hard, and that was fortunate for me; the food was scarce, and that was good too. If I ate like the grandees a bull would end me in the hot sun of the first *fiesta*; I'd double up like a pancake. I must work all the time—run for miles and play *pelota*.”

Lavinia was possessed by a new contempt for her kind, which she centered upon Orsi, clumsy and stupidly smiling. It was clear that he couldn't run a mile; in fact, he admitted that he detested all exercise. How absurd he looked in his tight plaited jacket! It appeared that he was always perspiring; a crime, she felt sure—with entire disregard of its fatal consequences—that Mochales never committed.

“A friend of ours—it was Bembo—said that he saw you at San Sebastian with your King,” Anna Mantegazza put in.

“Why not? But Alphonso is a fine boy; he understands the business of royalty. Every year I dedicate a magnificent bull to the King on his name day.”

“Will you dedicate one to me?” Gheta asked carelessly.

“The best in Andalusia,” he responded with fire.

Cesare Orsi made a slight sharp exclamation, and Lavinia's heart beat painfully. The former turned to her with sudden determination.

“Were you comfortable in my carriage,” he demanded, “and fetched home at a smart pace?” Lavinia thanked him.

“You are always so quiet,” he complained. “I'm certain there's a great deal in that wise young head worth hearing.”

“Lavinia is still in the schoolroom,” Gheta explained brutally. “Yesterday she put up her hair, to−day Anna Mantegazza invites her, and we have an effect.”

Anna Mantegazza turned to the younger with a new veiled scrutiny. Her gaze rested for an instant on Orsi and then moved contemplatively to Gheta and Abrego y Mochales. It was evident that her thoughts were very busy; a faint sparkle appeared in her eyes, a fresh vivacity animated her manner. Suddenly she included Lavinia in her remarks; she put queries to the girl patently intended to draw her out. Gheta grew uneasy and then cross.

“I'm sick of sitting here,” she declared; “let's walk about. It's cooler, and Pier Mantegazza's place is always worth investigation.” She rose and waited for Cesare Orsi, then led the small procession from under the striped tea kiosk down the terrace. The way grew steep and she rested a hand on Orsi's arm. Anna, Lavinia and the Flower of Spain followed together, until the first moved forward to join the leaders. Lavinia's gaze was obscured by a sort of warm mist; she clasped her hands to keep them from trembling. In a narrow flagged turn Mochales brushed her shoulder. He scarcely moved his eyes from Gheta's back. Once he gazed somberly at the girl beside him and she responded with a pale questioning smile. “I have had a great misfortune,” he told her.

“Oh, I'm terribly, terribly sorry!”

“I've lost a blessed coin that interceded for me since the first day I went in the bull ring. I'd give a thousand wax candles for its return. Now—when I need everything,” he continued as if to himself. “Your sister is beautiful,” he added abruptly. “Everybody thinks so,” Lavinia replied in a voice she endeavored to make

enthusiastic. “She has had tens of admirers here and at Rome and Lucca.” There she knew she should stop; but she continued: “Cesare Orsi is very persistent and tremendously rich.”

Mochales made a short unintelligible remark in Spanish. He twisted a cigarette with lightning−like rapidity and only one hand. Together they looked at Orsi's broad ungainly back, and the bull−fighter's lips tightened, exposing a glimmer of his immaculate teeth. They passed a neat whitewashed cottage, where an old couple stood bowing abjectly, and came on a series of long pale−brown buildings and walls.

“The stables and barn,” Lavinia explained.

Anna Mantegazza turned. “You may see something of interest here,” she called to Mochales.

A series of steps, made by projecting stones, rose to the top of an eight−foot wall, up which Anna unexpectedly led the way. The wall was broad, afforded a comfortable footing, and enclosed a straw−littered yard. A number of doors led into a barn, and into one some men were urging refractory cattle. In a corner a small compact bull, with the rapierlike horns of the mountain breeds, was secured by a nose ring and a short chain; and to the latter the men turned when the other animals had been confined. Two threatened the animal with long poles, while a third unfastened the chain from the wall; and then all endeavored to drive him within. Abrego y Mochales stood easily above, watching these clumsy efforts.

Suddenly the bull stopped, plunged his front hoofs into the soft mold of the stable yard and swept his head from side to side with a broken hoarse bellow. The men prodded him with urgent cries; but the bull suddenly whirled, snapping the poles, and there was an immediate scattering.

The sight of the retreating forms apparently enraged the animal, for he charged with astonishing speed and barely missed horning the last man to fall over the barricade of a half door. Mochales smiled; he called familiarly to the bull. Then he stooped and vaulted lightly down into the yard. Lavinia gave a short exclamation; she was cold with fear. Orsi looked on without any emotion visible on his heavy face. Anna Mantegazza leaned forward, tense with interest. “*Bravo!*“ she called.

Gheta Sanviano smiled.

The bull did not see Mochales at first, then the man cried tauntingly. The bull turned and stood with a lowered slowly−moving head, an uneasy tail. The Spaniard found a small milking stool and, carrying it to the middle of the yard, sat and comfortably rolled another cigarette. He was searching for a match when the bull moved forward a pace; he had found and was striking it when the bull increased his pace; he was guarding the flame about the cigarette's end when the animal broke into a charging run.

The Flower of Spain inhaled a deep breath of smoke, which he expelled in deliberate globes.

“Oh, don't! Oh——” Lavinia exclaimed, an arm before her eyes.

Mochales shifted easily from his seat and apparently in the same instant the bull crushed the stool to splinters.

“*Bravo! Bravo!*” Anna Mantegazza called again, and the man bowed until his extended hat rested on the ground.

He straightened slowly; the bull whirled about and flung himself forward. Abrego y Mochales now had one of the discarded poles; and, waiting until the horns had almost encircled him, he vaulted lightly and beautifully over the running animal's shoulder. He waited again, avoiding the infuriated charge by a scant step; and, when the bull stopped he had Mochales' hat placed squarely upon his horns. Lavinia watched now in fascinated terror; she could not remove her gaze from the slim figure in the short black jacket and narrow crimson sash. At the moment when her tension relaxed, Mochales, with a short running step, vaulted cleanly to the top of the wall. His cigarette was still burning. She wanted desperately to add her praise to Anna Mantegazza's enthusiastic plaudits, Gheta's subtle smile; but only the utmost banalities occurred to her.

They descended the stone steps and slowly mounted toward the house. Cesare Orsi resolutely dropped back beside Lavinia.

“You are really superb!” he told her in his highly colored Neapolitan manner. “Most women—Anna Mantegazza for example—are like children before such a show as that back there. Your sister, too, was pleased; it appealed to her vanity, as the fellow intended it should. But you only disliked it.... I could see that in your attitude. It was the circus—that's all.”

Lavinia gazed at him out of an unfathomable contempt. She thought: What a fool he is! It wasn't Abrego y Mochales' courage that appealed to her most, although that had afforded her an exquisite thrill, but his powerful grace, his absolute physical perfection. Orsi was heated again and his tie had slipped up over the back of his

collar.

She recalled the first talk she had had with him about Mochales and the manner in which she had masked her true feeling for the latter.

How easy Orsi had been to mislead! Now she was seized by the desire to show him the actual state of her mind; she wanted, in bitter sentences, to tell him how infinitely superior the Spaniard was to such fat easy grubs as himself. She longed to make clear to him exactly what it was that women admired in men—romance and daring and splendid strength. It might suit Gheta, who had wrinkles, to encourage such men as Cesare Orsi; their wealth might appeal to cold and material minds, but they could never hope to inspire passion; no one would ever cherish for them a hopeless lifelong love.

"Do you know," Orsi declared with firm conviction, "you are even handsomer than your sister!"

"Fool! fool! fool!" But she could not, of course, say a word of what was in her thoughts. She met his admiring gaze with a blank face, conscious of how utterly her exterior belied and hid the actual Lavinia Sanviano. She felt wearily old, sophisticated. In her room, dressing for the evening, she made up her mind that she must have a black dinner gown—later she would wear no other shade.

IV

Anna Mantegazza knocked and entered just as Lavinia had finished with her hair and was slipping into the familiar white dress. There had been, within the last few hours, a perceptible change in the former's attitude toward her. Lavinia realized that Anna Mantegazza regarded her with a new interest, a greater and more personal friendliness.

“My dear Lavinia!” she exclaimed, critically overlooking the other's preparations. “You look very appealing—like a snowdrop; exactly. I should say the toilet for Sunday at the convent; but no longer appropriate outside. Really, I must speak to the marchesa—parents are so slow to see the differences in their own family. Gheta has been a little overemphasized.

“I wonder,” she continued with glowing vivacity, “if you would allow me—I assure you it would give me the greatest pleasure in the world.... Your figure is a thousand times better than mine; but, thank heaven, I'm still slender.... A little evening dress from Vienna! It should really do you very well. Will you accept it from me? I'd like to give you something, Lavinia; and it has never been out of its box.”

She turned and was out of the room before Lavinia could reply. There was no reason why she shouldn't take a present from Anna—Pier Mantegazza and her father had been lifelong friends, and his wife was an intimate of the Sanvianos. It would not, probably, be black. It wasn't. Anna returned, followed by her maid, who bore carefully over her arm a shimmering mass of glowing pink.

“Now!” Anna Mantegazza cried. “Your hair is very pretty, very original —but hardly for a dress by Verlat. Sara!”

The maid moved quietly forward and directed an appraising gaze at Lavinia. She was a flat−hipped Englishwoman, with a cleft chin and enigmatic greenish eyes. “I see exactly, madame,” she assured Anna; and with her deft dry hands she took down Lavinia's laboriously arranged hair.

She drew it back from the brow apparently as simply as before, twisted it into a low knot slightly eccentric in shape, and recut a bang. Lavinia's eyes seemed bluer, her delicate flush more elusive; the shape of her face appeared changed, it was more pointed and had a new willful charm.

“The stockings,” Anna commanded.

Dressed, Lavinia Sanviano stood curiously before the long mirror; she saw a fresh Lavinia that was yet the old; and she was absorbing her first great lesson in the magic of clothes. Verlat, a celebrated dressmaker, was typical of the Viennese spirit—the gown Lavinia wore resembled, in all its implications, an orchid. There was a whisper here of satin, a pale note of green, a promise of chiffon. Her crisp round shoulders were bare; her finely molded arms were clouded, as it were, with a pink mist; the skirt was full, incredibly airy; yet every movement was draped by a suave flowing and swaying.

Lavinia recognized that she had been immensely enriched in effect; it was not a question of mere beauty—beauty here gave way to a more subtle and potent consideration. It was a potency which she instinctively shrank from probing. For a moment she experienced, curiously enough, a gust of passionate resentment, followed by a quickly passing melancholy, a faint regret.

Anna Mantegazza and the maid radiated with satisfaction at the result of their efforts. The former murmured a phrase that bore Gheta's name, but Lavinia caught nothing else. The maid said:

“Without a doubt, madame.”

Lavinia lingered in her room, strangely reluctant to go down and see her sister. She was embarrassed by her unusual appearance and dreaded the prominence of the inevitable exclamations. At last she was obliged to proceed. The rest stood by the entrance of the dining room. Anna Mantegazza was laughing at a puzzled expression on the good−natured countenance of Cesare Orsi; Gheta was slowly waving a fan of gilded feathers; Abrego y Mochales was standing rigid and somberly handsome; and, as usual, Pier Mantegazza was late.

Gheta Sanviano turned and saw Lavinia approaching, and the elder's face, always pale, grew suddenly chalky; it was drawn, and the wrinkles, carefully treated with paste, became visible about her eyes. Her hands shook a little as she took a step forward.

“What does this mean, Lavinia?” she demanded. “Why did I know nothing about that dress?”

“I knew nothing myself until a little bit ago,” Lavinia explained apologetically, filled with a formless pity for Gheta. “Isn't it pretty? Anna Mantegazza gave it to me.”

She could see, over Gheta's shoulder, Cesare Orsi staring at her in idiotic surprise.

“Don't you like it, Gheta?” Anna asked.

Gheta Sanviano didn't answer, but closed her eyes for a moment in an effort to control the anger that shone in them. The silence deepened to constraint, and then she laughed lightly.

“Quite a woman of fashion!” she observed of Lavinia. “Fancy! It's a pity that she must go back to the convent so soon.”

Her eyes while she was speaking were directed toward Anna Mantegazza and the resentment changed to hatred. The other shrugged her shoulders indifferently and moved toward the dining room, catching Lavinia's arm in her own.

Mantegazza entered at the soup and was seated on Gheta's right; Cesare Orsi was on Anna's left; and Lavinia sat between the two men, with Mochales opposite. Whatever change had taken place in her looks made absolutely no impression upon the latter; it was clear that he saw no one besides Gheta Sanviano.

In the candlelight his face more than ever resembled bronze; his hair was dead−black; above the white linen his head was like a superb effigy of an earlier and different race from the others. It was almost savage in its still austerity. Cesare Orsi, too, said little, which was extraordinary for him. If Lavinia had made small mark on Mochales, at least she had overpowered the other to a ludicrous degree. It seemed that he had never before half observed her; he even muttered to himself and smiled uncertainly when she chanced to gaze at him.

But what the others lacked conversationally Anna Mantegazza more than supplied; she was at her best, and that was very sparkling, touched with malice and understanding, and absolute independence. She insisted on including Lavinia in every issue. At first Lavinia was only confused by the attention pressed on her; she retreated, growing more inarticulate at every sally. Then she became easier; spurred partly by Gheta's direct unpleasantness and partly by the consciousness of her becoming appearance, she retorted with spirit; engaged Pier Mantegazza in a duet of verbal confetti. She gazed challengingly at Abrego y Mochales, but got no other answer than a grave perfunctory inclination.

She thought of an alternative to the black gowns and unrelieved melancholy—she might become the gayest member of the gay Roman world, be known throughout Italy for her reckless exploits, her affairs and Vienna gowns, all the while hiding her passion for the Flower of Spain. It would be a vain search for forgetfulness, with an early death in an atmosphere of roses and champagne. Gheta was gazing at her so crossly that she took a sip of Mantegazza's brandy; it burned her throat cruelly, but she concealed the choking with a smile of high bravado.

After dinner they progressed to a drawing−room that filled an entire end of the villa; it lay three steps below the hall, the imposing walls and floor covered with tapestries and richly dark rugs. Lavinia more than ever resembled an orchid, here in a gloom of towering trees curiously suggested by the draperies and space. She went forward with Anna Mantegazza to an amber blur of lamplight, the others following irregularly.

Cesare Orsi sat at Lavinia's side, quickly finishing one long black cigar and lighting another; Pier Mantegazza and Mochales smoked cigarettes. Anna was smoking, but Gheta had refused. Lavinia's feeling for her sister had changed from pity to total indifference. The elder had been an overbearing and thoughtless superior; and now, when Lavinia felt in some subtle inexplicable manner that Gheta was losing rank, her store of sympathy was small. Lavinia hoped that she would marry Orsi immediately and leave the field free for herself. She wondered whether her father would buy her a dress by Verlat.

“Honestly,” Orsi murmured, “more beautiful than your—”

She stopped him with an impatient gesture, wondering what Mochales was saying to Gheta. A possibility suddenly filled her with dread—it was evident that the Spaniard was growing hourly more absorbed in Gheta, and the latter might——Lavinia could not support the possibility of Abrego y Mochales married to her sister. But, she reassured herself, there was little danger of that—Gheta would never make a sacrifice for emotion; she would be sure of the comfortable material thing, and now more than ever.

Anna Mantegazza moved to a piano, which, in the obscurity, she began to play. The notes rose deliberate and melodious. Gheta Sanviano told Orsi:

“That's Iris. Do you remember, we heard it at the Pergola in the winter?”

“Do go over to her,” Lavinia whispered.

He rose heavily and went to Gheta's side, and Lavinia waited expectantly for Mochales to change too. The Spaniard shifted, but it was toward the piano, where he stood with the rosy reflection of his cigarette on a moody countenance. It was Pier Mantegazza who sat beside her, with a quizzical expression on his long gray visage. He said something to her in Latin, which she only partly understood, but which alluded to the changing of water into wine.

"I am a subject of jest," he continued in Italian, "because I prefer water."

She smiled with polite vacuity, wondering what he meant.

"You always satisfied me, Lavinia, with your dark smooth plait and white simplicity; you were cool and refreshing. Now they have made you only disturbing. I suppose it was inevitable, and with you the change will be temporary."

"I'll never let my hair down again," she retorted. "I've settled that with Gheta. Mother didn't care, really."

She was annoyed by the implied criticism, his entire lack of response to her new being. He had grown blind staring at his stupid old coins.

A step sounded behind her; she turned hopefully, but it was only Cesare Orsi.

"The others have gone outside," he told her, and she noticed that the piano had stopped.

Mantegazza rose and bowed in mock serious formality, at which Lavinia shrugged an impatient shoulder and walked with Orsi across the room and out upon the terrace.

Florence had sunk into a dark chasm of night, except for the curving double row of lights that marked the Lungarno and the indifferent illumination of a few principal squares. The stars seemed big and near in deep blue space. Orsi was standing very close to her, and she moved away; but he followed.

"Lavinia," he muttered, and suddenly his arm was about her waist.

She leaned back, pushing with both hands against his chest; but he swept her irresistibly up to him and kissed her clumsily. A cold rage possessed her. She stopped struggling; yet there was no need to continue—he released her immediately and opened a stammering apology.

"I am a madman," he admitted abjectly—"a little animal that ought to be shot. I don't know what came over me; my head was in a carnival. You must forgive or I shall be a maniac, I——"

She turned and walked swiftly into the house and mounted to her room. All the pleasure she had had in the evening, the Viennese gown, evaporated, left her possessed by an utter loathing of self. Now, in the mirror, she seemed hateful, the clouded chiffon and airy clinging satin unspeakable. Looking back out of the dim glass was a stranger who had betrayed and cheapened her. Her pure serenity revolted against the currents of life sweeping down upon her, threatening to inundate her.

She unhooked the Verlat gown with trembling fingers and—once more in simple white—dropped into a deep chair, where she cried with short painful inspirations, her face pressed against her arm. Her emotion subsided, changed to a formless dread, and again to a black sense of helplessness. Suddenly she rose and mechanically shook loose her hair— footsteps were approaching. Her sister entered, pale and vindictive.

"You are to be congratulated," she proceeded thinly; "you made a success with everybody—that is, with all but Mochales. It was for him, wasn't it? You were very clever, but you failed ridiculously."

Lavinia made no reply.

"I hope Mochales excuses you because of your greenness."

"Youth isn't any longer your crime," Lavinia retorted at last.

"That dress—it would suit Anna Mantegazza; but you looked only indecent."

"Perhaps you're right, Gheta," Lavinia said unexpectedly. "I'm going to bed now, please."

Her balance, restored by sleep, was once more normal when she returned to the Lungarno. It was again late afternoon, the daily procession was returning from the Cascine, and Gheta was at the window, looking coldly down. The Marchesa Sanviano was knitting at prodigious speed a shapeless gray garment. They all turned when a servant entered:

Signer Orsi wished to see the marchese.

This unusual formality on the part of Cesare Orsi could have but one purpose, and Lavinia and their mother gazed significantly at the elder sister.

"The marchese is dressing," his wife directed.

She drew a long breath of relief and nodded over her needles. Gheta raised her chin; her lips bore the

half−contemptuous expression that lately had become habitual; her eyes were half closed.

Lavinia sat with her hands loose in her lap. She was wondering whether or not, should she make a vigorous protest, they would send her back to the convent. The Verlat gown was carefully hung in her closet. Last night she had been idiotic.

The Marchese Sanviano appeared hurriedly and alone; his tie was crooked and his expression very much disturbed. His wife looked up, startled.

“What!” she demanded directly. “Didn't he——”

“Yes,” Sanviano replied, “he did! He wants to marry Lavinia.”

Lavinia half rose, with a horrified protest; Gheta seemed suddenly turned to stone; the knitting fell unheeded from the marchesa's lap. Sanviano spread out his hands helplessly.

“Well,” he demanded, “what could I do?... A man with Orsi's blameless character and the Orsi banks!”

V

The house to which Cesare Orsi took Lavinia was built over the rim of a small steep island in the Bay of Naples, opposite Castellamare. It faced the city, rising in an amphitheater of bright stucco and almond blossoms, across an expanse of glassy and incredibly blue water. It was evening, the color of sky and bay was darkening, intensified by a vaporous rosy column where the ascending smoke of Vesuvius held the last upflung glow of the vanished sun. Lavinia could see from her window the pale distant quiver of the electric lights springing up along the Villa Nazionale.

The dwelling itself drew a long irregular facade of white marble on its abrupt verdant screen—a series of connected pavilions, galleries, pergolas, belvedere, flowering walls and airy chambers. There were tesselated remains from the time of the great pleasure−saturated Roman emperors, a later distinctly Moorish influence, quattrocento−painted eaves, an eighteenth−century sodded court, and a smoking room with the startling colored glass of the nineteenth.

The windows of Lavinia's room had no sashes; they were composed of a double marble arch, supported in the center by a slender twisted marble column, with Venetian blinds. She stood in the opening, gazing fixedly over the water turning into night. She could hear, from the room beyond, her husband's heavy deliberate footfalls; and the sound filled her with a formless resentment. She wished to be justifiably annoyed by them, or him; but there was absolutely no cause. Cesare Orsi's character and disposition were alike beyond reproach—transparent and heroically optimistic. Since their marriage she had been insolent, she had been both captious and continuously indifferent, without unsettling the determined eager good−nature with which he met her moods.

During the week he went by launch into Naples in the interests of his banking, and did not return for luncheon; and she had long uninterrupted hours for the enjoyment of her pleasant domain. Altogether, his demands upon her were reasonable to the point of self−effacement. He laughed a great deal; this annoyed her youthful gravity and she remonstrated sharply more than once, but he only leaned back and laughed harder. Then she would either grow coldly disdainful or leave the room, followed by the echo of his merriment. There was something impervious, like armor, in his excellent humor. Apparently she could not get through it to wound him as she would have liked; and she secretly wondered.

He was prodigal in his generosity—the stores of the Via Roma were prepared to empty themselves at her desire. Cesare Orsi's wife was a figure of importance in Naples. She had been made welcome by the Neapolitan society—lawn fetes had been given in villas under the burnished leaves of magnolias on the height of Vomero. The Cavaliere Nelli, Orsi's cousin and a retired colonel of Bersaglieri, entertained lavishly at dinner on the terrace of Bertolini's; she went out to old houses looking through aged and riven pines at the sea.

She would have enjoyed all this hugely if she had not been married to Orsi; but the continual reiteration of the fact that she was Orsi's wife filled her with an accumulating resentment. The implication that she had been exceedingly fortunate became more than she could bear. The consequence was that, as soon as it could be managed, she ceased going about.

She was now at the window, immersed in a melancholy sense of total isolation; the water stirring along the masonry below, a call from a shadowy fishing boat dropping down the bay, filled her with longing for the cheerful existence of the Lungarno. She had had a letter from Gheta that morning, the first from her sister since she had left Florence, brief but without any actual expression of ill will. After all was said, she had brought Gheta a great disappointment; if she had been in the elder's place probably she would have behaved no better.... It occurred to her to ask Gheta to Naples. At least then she would have some one with whom to recall the pleasant trifles of past years. She would have liked to ask Anna Mantegazza, too; but this she knew was impossible—Gheta had not forgiven Anna for her part on the night that had resulted in Orsi's proposal for Lavinia.

She wondered, more obscurely, whether Abrego y Mochales was still in Florence. He loomed at the back of her thoughts, inscrutably dark and romantic. It piqued her that he had not made the slightest response to her palpable admiration. But he had been tremendously stirred by Gheta, who was never touched by such emotions.

A desire to see Mochales grew insidiously out of her speculations; a desire to talk about him, hear his name.

Lavinia deliberately shut her eyes to the fact that this last became her principal reason for wishing to see Gheta.

She told Cesare, with a diffidence which she was unable to overcome, that she had written asking her sister for a visit. Seemingly he didn't hear her. They were at breakfast, on the wine−red tiling of a pergola by the water, and he had shaken his fist, with a rueful curse, in the direction of Naples. Before him lay an open letter with an engraved page heading.

“I said,” Lavinia repeated impatiently, “that Gheta will probably be here the last of the week.”

“The sacred camels!” Orsi exclaimed; then: “Oh, Gheta—good!” But he fell immediately into an angry reverie. “If I dared—” he muttered.

“What has stirred you up so?”

“It's difficult to explain to any one not born in Naples. Here, you see, all is not in order, like Florence; we have had a stormy time between brigands and secret factions and foreign rulers; and certain societies sprang up, necessary once, but now—when one still exists—a source of bribery and nuisance. This letter, for example, congratulates me on the possession of a charming bride; it expresses the devotion of a hidden organization, but points out that in order to guarantee your safety in a city where the guards are admittedly insufficient it will be necessary for me to forward two thousand lire at once.”

“You will, of course, ignore it.”

“I will certainly send the money at once.”

“What a cowardly attitude!” Lavinia declared contemptuously. “You allow yourself to be blackmailed like a common criminal.”

Orsi laughed, his equilibrium quickly restored.

“I warned you that a stranger could not understand,” he reminded her. “If the money weren't sent, in ten days or two weeks perhaps, there would be a little accident on the Chiaja—your carriage would be run into; you would be upset, confused, angry. There would be profuse apologies, investigation, perhaps arrests; but nothing would come of it. If the money was still held back something a little more serious would occur. Nothing really dangerous, you understand; but finally the two thousand lire would be gladly paid over and the accidents would mysteriously cease.”

“An outrage!” Lavinia asserted, and Orsi nodded.

“If you had an enemy,” he continued, “you could have her gown ruined in the foyer of the San Carlos; if it were a man he would be caught at his club with an uncomfortable ace in his cuff. At least so I'm assured. I haven't had any reason to look the society up yet.” He laughed prodigiously. “Even murders are ascribed to it. Careful, Cesare, or a new valet will cut your throat some fine morning and your widow walk away with a more graceful man!”

“Your jokes are so stupid.” Lavinia shrugged her shoulders.

He laid the letter on the table's edge and a wandering air bore it slanting to the floor, but he promptly recovered it.

“That must go in the safe,” he ended; “it is well to have a slight grasp on those gentlemen.”

He rose; and a few minutes later Lavinia saw his trim brown launch, with its awning and steersman in gleaming white, rushing through the bay toward Naples.

VI

The basin from which the launch plied lay inside a seawall inclosing a small placid rectangle with a walk all about and iron benches. Steps at the back, guarded by two great Pompeian sandstone urns, and pressed by a luxuriant growth, led up to the villa. Gheta looked curiously about as she stepped from the launch and went forward with her brother−in− law. Lavinia followed, with Gheta's maid and a porter in the rear.

Lavinia realized that her sister looked badly; in the unsparing blaze of midday the wrinkles about her eyes were apparent, and they had multiplied. Although it was past the first of June, Gheta was wearing a linen suit of last year; and—as her maid unpacked—Lavinia saw the familiar pink tulle and the lavender gown with the gold velvet buttons.

“Your dressmaker is very late,” she observed thoughtlessly.

A slow flush spread over the other's countenance; she did not reply immediately and Lavinia would have given a great deal to unsay her period.

“It isn't that,” Gheta finally explained; “the family find that I am too expensive. You see, I haven't justified their hopes and they have been cutting down.”

Her voice was thin, metallic; her features had sharpened like folded paper creased between the fingers.

“It's very good form here,” she went on, dancing about her room. It was hardly more than a marble gallery, the peristyle choked with flowering bushes, camellias and althea and hibiscus, barely furnished, and filled with drifting perfumes and the savor of the sea. “What a shame that these things must be got at a price!”

Lavinia glanced at her sharply; until the present moment that would have expressed her own attitude, but said by Gheta it seemed a little crude. It was, anyhow, painfully obvious, and she had no intention of showing Gheta the true state of her being.

“Isn't that so of everything—worth having?” she asked, adding the latter purely as a counter.

The elder drew up her fine shoulders.

“That's very courageous of you,” she admitted—“especially since everybody knew your opinion of Orsi. Heaven knows you made no effort to disguise your feeling to others.”

Lavinia smiled calmly; Cesare was really very thoughtful, and she said so. Gheta replied at a sudden tangent:

“Mochales has been a great nuisance.”

Lavinia was gazing through an opening in the leaves at the sparkling blue plane of the bay. She made no movement, aware of her sister's unsparing curiosity turned upon her, and only said:

“Really?”

“Spaniards are so tempestuous,” Gheta continued; “he's been whispering a hundred mad schemes in my ear. He gave up an important engagement in Madrid rather than leave Florence. I have been almost stirred by him, he is so slender and handsome.

“Simply every woman—except perhaps me—is in love with him.”

“There's no danger of your loving any one besides yourself.”

“I saw him the day before I left; told him where I was going. Then I had to beg him not to take the same train. He said he was going to Naples, anyhow, to sail from there for Spain. He will be at the Grand Hotel and I gave him permission to see me here once.”

Lavinia revolved slowly.

“Why not? He turned my head round at least twice.” She moved toward the door. “Ring whenever you like,” she said; “there are servants for everything.”

In her room she wondered, with burning cheeks, when Abrego y Mochales would come. Her sentimental interest in him had waned a trifle during the past busy weeks; but, in spite of that, he was the great romantic attachment of her life. If he had returned her love no whispered scheme would have been too mad. What would he think of her now? But she knew instinctively that there would be no change in Mochales' attitude. He was in love with Gheta; blind to the rest of the world.

She sat lost in a day−dream—how different her life would have been, married to the bull−fighter! She would have become a part of the fierce Spanish crowds at the ring, traveled to South America, seen the people heap

roses, jewels, upon her idol....

Cesare Orsi stood in the doorway, smiling with oppressive good−nature.

“Lavinia,” he told her, “I've done something, and now I'm in the devil of a doubt.” He advanced, holding a small package, and sat on the edge of a chair, mopping his brow. “You see,” he began diffidently, “that is, as you must know, at first—you were at the convent—I thought something of proposing for your sister. Thank God,” he added vigorously, “I waited! Well, I didn't; although, to be completely honest, I knew that it came to be expected. I could see the surprise in your father's face. It occurred to me afterward that if I had brought Gheta any embarrassment I'd like to do something in a small way, a sort of acknowledgment. And to−day I saw this,” he held out the package; “it was pretty and I bought it for her at once. But now, when the moment arrives, I hesitate to give it to her. Gheta has grown so—so formal that I'm afraid of her,” he laughed.

Lavinia unwrapped the paper covering from a green morocco box and, releasing the catch, saw a shimmering string of delicately pink pearls.

“Cesare!” she exclaimed. “How gorgeous!” She lifted the necklace, letting it slide cool and fine through her fingers. “It's too good of you. This has cost hundreds and hundreds. I'll keep it myself.”

He laughed, shaking all over; then fell serious.

“Everything I have—all, all—is yours,” he assured her. Lavinia turned away with an uncomfortable feeling of falseness. “What do you predict— will Gheta take it, understand, or will she play the frozen princess?”

“If I know Gheta, she'll take it,” Lavinia promptly replied.

Orsi presented Gheta Sanviano with the necklace at dinner. She took it slowly from its box and glanced at the diamond clasp.

“Thank you, Cesare, immensely! What a shame that pink pearls so closely resemble coral! No one gives you credit for them.”

A feeling of shame for her sister's ungraciousness possessed Lavinia and mounted to angry resentment. She had no particular desire to champion Cesare, but the simplicity and kindness of his thought demanded more than a superficial admission. At the same time she had no intention of permitting Gheta any display of superiority here.

“You need only say they were from Cesare,” she observed coldly; “with him, it is always pearls.”

Such a tide of pleasure swept over her husband's countenance that Lavinia bit her lip in annoyance. She had intended only to rebuke Gheta and had not calculated the effect of her speech upon Cesare. She was scrupulously careful not to mislead the latter with regard to her feeling for him. She went to a rather needless extreme to demonstrate that she conducted herself from a sense of duty and propriety alone.

Her married life, she assured herself, already resembled the Mantegazzas', whose indifferent courtesy she had marked and wondered at. Perhaps in time, like them, she would grow accustomed to it; but now it took all her determination to maintain the smallest daily amenities. It was not that her actual condition was unbearable, but only that it was so tragically removed from what she had imagined; she had dreamed of romance, it had been embodied for her eager gaze—and she had married Cesare Orsi!

Gheta returned the necklace to its box and the dinner progressed in silence. The coffee was on when the elder sister said:

“I had a card from the Grand Hotel a while ago; Abrego y Mochales is there.”

“And there,” Orsi put in promptly, “I hope he'll stay, or sail for Spain. I don't want the clown about here.”

Gheta turned.

“But you will regret that,” she addressed Lavinia; “you always found him so fascinating.”

Lavinia's husband cleared his throat sharply; he was clearly impatiently annoyed.

“What foolishness!” he cried. “From the first, Lavinia has been scarcely conscious of his existence.”

Lavinia avoided her sister's mocking gaze, disturbed and angry.

“Certainly Signore Mochales must be asked here,” she declared.

“I suppose it can't be avoided,” Orsi muttered.

It was arranged that the Spaniard should dine with them on the following evening and Lavinia spent the intervening time in exploring her emotions. She recognized now that Gheta hated both Cesare and herself, and that she would miss no opportunity to force an awkward or even dangerously unpleasant situation upon them. Gheta had sharpened in being as well as in countenance to such a degree that Lavinia lost what natural affection for her sister she had retained.

This, in a way, allied her with Cesare. She was now able at least to survey him in a detached manner, with an impersonal comprehension of his good qualities and aesthetic shortcomings; and in pointing out to Gheta the lavish beauty of her—Lavinia's—surroundings, she engendered in herself a slight proprietary pride. She met Abrego y Mochales at the basin with a direct bright smile, standing firmly upon her wall.

Against the blue water shadowed by the promise of dusk he was a somber and splendid figure. Her heart undeniably beat faster and she was vexed when he turned immediately to Gheta. His greeting was intensely serious, his gaze so hungry that Lavinia looked away. It was vulgar, she told herself. Cesare met them above and greeted Mochales with a superficial heartiness. It was difficult for Cesare Orsi to conceal his opinions and feelings. The other man's gravity was superb.

At dinner conversation languished. Gheta, in a very low dress, had a bright red scarf about her shoulders, and was painted. This was so unusual that it had almost the effect of a disguise; her eyes were staring and brilliant, her fingers constantly fidgeting and creasing her napkin. Afterward she walked with Mochales to the corner of the belvedere, where they had all been sitting, and from there drifted the low continuous murmur of her voice, briefly punctuated by a deep masculine note of interrogation. Below, the water was invisible in the wrap of night. Naples shone like a pale gold net drawn about the sweep of its hills. A glow like a thumb print hung over Vesuvius; the hidden column of smoke smudged the stars.

Lavinia grew restless and descended to her room, where she procured a fan. Returning, she was partly startled by a pale still figure in the gloom of a passage. She saw that it was Gheta, and spoke; but the other moved away without reply and quickly vanished. Above, Lavinia halted at the strange spectacle—clearly drawn against the luminous depths of space—of Mochales and her husband rigidly facing each other.

“I must admit,” Orsi said in an exasperated voice, “that I don't understand.”

Lavinia saw that he was holding something in a half−extended hand. Moving closer, she identified the object as the necklace he had given Gheta.

“What is it that you don't understand, Cesare?” she asked.

“Some infernal joke or foolishness!”

“It is no joke, signore,” Mochales responded; “and it is better,— perhaps, for your wife to leave us.”

Orsi turned to Lavinia.

“He gives me back this necklace of Gheta's,” he explained; “he says that he has every right. It appears that Gheta is going to marry him, and he already objects to presents from her brother−in−law.”

“But what stuff!” Lavinia pronounced.

A swift surprise overtook her at Cesare's announcement—Gheta and Mochales to marry! She was certain that the arrangement had not existed that morning. A fleet inchoate sorrow numbed her heart and fled.

“Orsi has been only truthful enough to suit his own purpose,” Mochales stated, “Signora, please——” He indicated the descent from the belvedere.

She moved closer to him, smiling appealingly.

“What is it all about?” she queried.

“Forgive me; it is impossible to answer.”

“Cesare?” She addressed her husband.

“Why, this—this donkey hints that there was something improper in my present. It seems that I have been annoying Gheta by my attentions, flattering her with pearls.”

“Did Gheta tell you that?” Lavinia demanded. A growing resentment took possession of her. “Because if she did, she lied!”

“Ah!” Mochales whispered sharply.

“They're both mad,” Orsi told her, “and should be dipped in the bay.”

Never had Abrego y Mochales appeared handsomer; never more like fine bronze. That latter fact struck her forcibly. His face was no more mutable than a mask of metal. Its stark rigidity sent a cold tremor to her heart.

“And,” she went on impetuously, “since Gheta said that, I'll tell you really about this necklace: Cesare gave it to her because he was sorry for her; because he thought that perhaps he had misled her. He spoke of it to me first.”

“No, signora,” the Spaniard responded deliberately; “it is not your sister who lies.”

Cesare Orsi exclaimed angrily. He took a hasty step; but Lavinia, quicker, moved between the two men.

“This is impossible,” she declared, “and must stop immediately! It is childish!”

There was now a metallic ring in Mochales' voice that disturbed her even more than his words. The bull−fighter, completely immobile, seemed a little inhuman; he was without a visible stir of emotion, but Orsi looked more puzzled and angry every moment.

“This,” he ejaculated, “in my own house—infamous!”

“Signor Mochales,” Lavinia reiterated, “what I have told you is absolutely so.”

“Your sister, signora, has said something different.... She did not want to tell me, but I persisted—I saw that something was wrong—and forced it from her.”

“Enough!” Orsi commanded. “One can see plainly that you have been duped; some things may be overlooked.... You have talked enough.”

Mochales moved easily forward.

“You pudding!” he said in a low even voice. “Do you talk to me—Abrego y Mochales?”

A dark tide of passion, visible even in the night, flooded Orsi's countenance.

“Leave!” he insisted, “Or I'll have you flung into the bay.”

A deep silence followed, in which Lavinia could hear the stir of the water against the walls below. A sharp fear entered her heart, a new dread of the Spaniard. He was completely outside the circle of impulses which she understood and to which she reacted. He was not a part of her world; he coldly menaced the foundations of all right and security. Her worship of romance died miserably. In a way, she thought, she was responsible for the present horrible situation; it was the result of the feeling she had had for Mochales. Lavinia was certain that if Gheta had not known of it the Spaniard would have been quickly dropped by the elder. She was suddenly conscious of the perfume he always bore; that, curiously, lent him a strange additional oppression.

“Mochales,” he said in a species of strained wonderment, “threatened ... thrown into the bay! Mochales—the Flower of Spain! And by a helpless mound of fat, a tub of entrails——”

“Cesare!” Lavinia cried in an energy of desperation. “Come! Don't listen to him.”

Orsi released her grasp.

“I believe you are at the Grand Hotel?” he addressed the other man.

“Until I hear from you.”

“To−morrow——”

All the heat had apparently evaporated from their words; they spoke with a perfunctory politeness. Cesare Orsi said:

“I will order the launch.”

In a few minutes the palpitations of the steam died in the direction of Naples.

VII

Lavinia followed her husband to their rooms, where he sat smoking one of his long black cigars. He was pale; his brow was wet and his collar wilted. She stood beside him and he patted her arm.

“Everything is in order,” he assured her.

A species of blundering tenderness for him possessed her; an unexpected throb of her being startled and robbed her of words. He mistook her continued silence.

“All I have is yours,” he explained; “it is your right. I can see now that—that my money was all I had to offer you. The only thing of value I possess. I should have realized that a girl, charming like yourself, couldn't care for a mound of fat.” Her tenderness rose till it choked in her throat, blurred what she had to say.

“Cesare,” she told him, “Gheta was right; at one time I was in love with Mochales.” He turned with a startled exclamation; but she silenced him. “He was, it seemed, all that a girl might admire—dark and mysterious and handsome. He was romantic. I demanded nothing else then; now something has happened that I don't altogether understand, but it has changed everything for me. Cesare, your money never made any difference in my feeling for you—it didn't before and it doesn't to−night—” She hesitated and blushed painfully, awkwardly.

The cigar fell from his hand and he rose, eagerly facing her.

“Lavinia,” he asked, “is it possible—do you mean that you care the least about me?”

“It must be that, Cesare, because I am so terribly afraid.”

Later he admitted ruefully:

“But no man should resemble, as I do, a great oyster. I shall pay very dearly for my laziness.”

“You are not going to fight Mochales!” she protested. “It would be insanity.”

“Insanity,” he agreed promptly. “Yet I can't permit myself to be the target for vile tongues.”

Lavinia abruptly left him and hurried to her sister's room. The door was locked; she knocked, but got no response.

“Gheta,” she called, low and urgently, “open at once! Your plans have gone dreadfully wrong. Gheta!” she said more sharply into the answering silence. “Cesare has had a terrific argument with Mochales, and worse may follow. Open!” There was still no answer, and suddenly she beat upon the door with her fists. “Liar!” she cried thinly through the wood. “Liar! You bitter old stick! I'll make you eat that necklace, pearl for pearl, sorrow for sorrow!”

A feeling of impotence overwhelmed her at the implacable stillness that succeeded her hysterical outburst. She stood with a pounding heart, and clasped straining fingers.

Abrego y Mochales could kill Cesare without the slightest shadow of a question. There was, she recognized, something essentially feminine in the saturnine bullfighter; his pride had been severely assaulted; and therefore he would be—in his own, less subtle manner—as dangerous as Gheta. Cesare's self−esteem, too, had been wounded in its most vulnerable place—he had been insulted before her. But, even if the latter refused to proceed, Mochales, she knew, would force an acute conclusion. There was nothing to be got from her sister and she slowly returned to her chamber, from which she could hear Orsi's heavy footfalls.

She mechanically removed the square emerald that hung from a platinum thread about her neck, took off her rings, and proceeded to the small iron safe where valuables were kept. As she swung open the door a sheet of paper slipped forward from an upper compartment. It bore a printed address ... in the Strada San Lucia. She saw that it was the blackmailing letter Cesare had received from the Neapolitan secret society, demanding two thousand lire. She recalled what he had said at the time—if she had an enemy her gown could be spoiled in the foyer of the opera; a man ruined at his club.... Even murders were ascribed to it.

She held the letter, gazing fixedly at the address, mentally repeating again and again the significance of its contents. She thought of showing it to Cesare, suggesting——But she realized that, bound by a conventional honor, he would absolutely refuse to listen to her.

Almost subconsciously she folded the sheet and hid it in her dress. Kneeling before the safe she procured a long red envelope. It contained the sum of money her father had given her at the wedding. It was her dot—a comparatively small amount, he had said at the time with an apologetic smile; but it was absolutely,

unquestionably her own. This, when she locked the safe, remained outside.

When she had hidden the letter and envelope in her dressing table Cesare stood in the doorway. He was still pale, but composed, and held himself with simple dignity.

“Some men,” he said, “are not so happy, even for an hour.”

A sudden passionate necessity to save him swept over her.

In the morning Orsi remained at the villa, but he sent the launch in early with an urgent summons for the Cavaliere Nelli. Later, when he asked for Lavinia, he was told that she had gone to Naples; and when the boat returned, Nelli—a military figure, with hair and mustache like yellowish white silk—assisted her to the wall. She was closely veiled against the sparkling flood of light and bay, and hurried directly to her room.

There she knelt on a praying chair before a small alcoved altar with tall wax tapers, and remained a long while. She was disturbed by a sudden ringing report below; it was Cesare practising with a dueling pistol. Lavinia remembered, from laughing comments in Florence, that her husband was an atrocious shot. The sound was repeated at irregular intervals through an unbearably long morning.

Gheta, she learned, had refused the morning chocolate and, with her maid, had collected and packed all her effects. Lavinia had no desire to see her. The situation now was past Gheta's mending.

After luncheon Lavinia remained in her room, Nelli departed for Naples and Cesare joined her. It was evident that he was greatly disturbed; but he spoke to her evenly. He was possessed by an impotent rage at his unwieldy body and clumsy hand. This alternated with an evident wonderment at the position in which he found himself and a great tenderness for Lavinia.

At dusk they were in Lavinia's room waiting for a message from Naples. Lavinia was leaning across the marble ledge of her window, gazing over the dim blue sweep of water to the distant flowering lights. She heard sudden footsteps and, half turning, saw her husband tearing open an envelope.

“Lavinia!” he cried. “There has been an accident in the elevator of the Grand Hotel, and Mochales—is dead!” She hung upon the ledge now for support. “The attendant, a new man, started the car too soon and caught Mochales——” She sank down upon her knees in an attitude of prayer, and Cesare Orsi stood reverently bowed.

“The will of God!” he muttered.

A long slow shiver passed over Lavinia, and he bent and lifted her in his arms.

TOL'ABLE DAVID

I

He was the younger of two brothers, in his sixteenth year; and he had his father's eyes—a tender and idyllic blue. There, however, the obvious resemblance ended. The elder's azure gaze was set in a face scarred and riven by hardship, debauch and disease; he had been—before he had inevitably returned to the mountains where he was born—a brakeman in the lowest stratum of the corruption of small cities on big railroads; and his thin stooped body, his gaunt head and uncertain hands, all bore the stamp of ruinous years. But in the midst of this his eyes, like David's, retained their singularly tranquil color of sweetness and innocence.

David was the youngest, the freshest thing imaginable; he was overtall and gawky, his cheeks were as delicately rosy as apple blossoms, and his smile was an epitome of ingenuous interest and frank wonder. It was as if some quality of especial fineness, lingering unspotted in Hunter Kinemon, had found complete expression in his son David. A great deal of this certainly was due to his mother, a thick solid woman, who retained more than a trace of girlish beauty when she stood back, flushed from the heat of cooking, or, her bright eyes snapping, tramped with heavy pails from the milking shed on a winter morning.

Both the Kinemon boys were engaging. Allen, almost twenty−one, was, of course, the more conspicuous; he was called the strongest youth in Greenstream County. He had his mother's brown eyes; a deep bony box of a chest; rippling shoulders; and a broad peaceful countenance. He drove the Crabapple stage, between Crabapple, the village just over the back mountain, and Beaulings, in West Virginia. It was twenty−six miles from point to point, a way that crossed a towering range, hung above a far veil of unbroken spruce, forded swift glittering streams, and followed a road that passed rare isolated dwellings, dominating rocky and precarious patches and hills of cultivation. One night Allen slept in Beaulings; the next he was home, rising at four o'clock in order to take his stage out of Crabapple at seven sharp.

It was a splendid job, and brought them thirty−five dollars a month; not in mere trade at the store, but actual money. This, together with Hunter Kinemon's position, tending the rich bottom farm of State Senator Gait, gave them a position of ease and comfort in Greenstream. They were a very highly esteemed family.

Gait's farm was in grazing; it extended in deep green pastures and sparkling water between two high mountainous walls drawn across east and west. In the morning the rising sun cast long delicate shadows on one side; at evening the shadow troops lengthened across the emerald valley from the other. The farmhouse occupied a fenced clearing on the eastern rise, with a gray huddle of barn and sheds below, a garden patch of innumerable bean poles, and an incessant stir of snowy chickens. Beyond, the cattle moved in sleek chestnut−brown and orange herds; and farther out flocks of sheep shifted like gray−white clouds on a green−blue sky.

It was, Mrs. Kinemon occasionally complained, powerful lonely, with the store two miles up the road, Crabapple over a heft of a rise, and no personable neighbors; and she kept a loaded rifle in an angle of the kitchen when the men were all out in a distant pasturage. But David liked it extremely well; he liked riding an old horse after the steers, the all−night sap boilings in spring groves, the rough path across a rib of the mountain to school.

Nevertheless, he was glad when studying was over for the year. It finished early in May, on account of upland planting, and left David with a great many weeks filled only with work that seem to him unadulterated play. Even that didn't last all the time; there were hours when he could fish for trout, plentiful in cool rocky pools; or shoot gray squirrels in the towering maples. Then, of evenings, he could listen to Allen's thrilling tales of the road, of the gambling and fighting among the lumbermen in Beaulings, or of strange people that had taken passage in the Crabapple stage—drummers, for the most part, with impressive diamond rings and the doggonedest lies imaginable. But they couldn't fool Allen, however believing he might seem.... The Kinemons were listening to such a recital by their eldest son now.

They were gathered in a room of very general purpose. It had a rough board floor and crumbling plaster walls, and held a large scarred cherry bed with high posts and a gayly quilted cover; a long couch, covered with yellow untanned sheepskins; a primitive telephone; some painted wooden chairs; a wardrobe, lurching insecurely forward; and an empty iron stove with a pipe let into an original open hearth with a wide rugged stone. Beyond, a door opened into the kitchen, and back of the bed a raw unguarded flight of steps led up to the peaked space where Allen and David slept.

Hunter Kinemon was extended on the couch, his home−knitted socks comfortably free of shoes, smoking a sandstone pipe with a reed stem. Mrs. Kinemon was seated in a rocking−chair with a stained and torn red plush cushion, that moved with a thin complaint on a fixed base. Allen was over against the stove, his corduroy trousers thrust into greased laced boots, and a black cotton shirt open on a chest and throat like pink marble. And David supported his lanky length, in a careless and dust−colored garb, with a capacious hand on the oak beam of the mantel.

It was May, school had stopped, and a door was open on a warm still dusk. Allen's tale had come to an end; he was pinching the ear of a diminutive dog—like a fat white sausage with wire−thin legs and a rat tail—that never left him. The smoke from the elder Kinemon's pipe rose in a tranquil cloud. Mrs. Kinemon rocked vigorously, with a prolonged wail of the chair springs. “I got to put some tallow to that chair,” Kinemon proclaimed.

“The house on Elbow Barren's took,” Allen told him suddenly—“the one just off the road. I saw smoke in the chimney this evening.”

A revival of interest, a speculation, followed this announcement.

“Any women'll get to the church,” Mr. Kinemon asserted. “I wonder? Did a person say who were they?”

“I asked; but they're strange to Crabapple. I heard this though: there weren't any women to them—just men—father and sons like. I drew up right slow going by; but nobody passed out a word. It's a middling bad farm place—rocks and berry bushes. I wouldn't reckon much would be content there.”

David walked out through the open doorway and stood on the small covered portico, that with a bench on each side, hung to the face of the dwelling. The stars were brightening in the sky above the confining mountain walls; there was a tremendous shrilling of frogs; the faint clamor of a sheep bell. He was absolutely, irresponsibly happy. He wished the time would hurry when he'd be big and strong like Allen, and get out into the absorbing stir of the world.

II

He was dimly roused by Allen's departure in the beginning brightness of the following morning. The road over which the stage ran drew by the rim of the farm; and later David saw the rigid three−seated surrey, the leather mail bags strapped in the rear, trotted by under the swinging whip of his brother. He heard the faint sharp bark of Rocket, Allen's dog, braced at his side.

David spent the day with his father, repairing the fencing of the middle field, swinging a mall and digging post holes; and at evening his arms ached. But he assured himself he was not tired; any brother of Allen's couldn't give in before such insignificant effort. When Hunter Kinemon turned back toward house and supper David made a wide circle, ostensibly to see whether there was rock salt enough out for the cattle, but in reality to express his superabundant youth, staying qualities and unquenchable vivid interest in every foot of the valley.

He saw the meanest kind of old fox, and marked what he thought might be its hole; his flashing gaze caught the obscure distant retreat of ground hogs; he threw a contemptuous clod at the woolly−brained sheep; and with a bent willow shoot neatly looped a trout out upon the grassy bank. As a consequence of all this he was late for supper, and sat at the table with his mother, who never took her place until the men—yes, and boys of her family—had satisfied their appetites. The dark came on and she lighted a lamp swinging under a tin reflector from the ceiling. The kitchen was an addition, and had a sloping shed roof, board sides, a polished stove, and a long table with a red cloth.

His father, David learned, attacking a plateful of brown chicken swimming with greens and gravy, was having another bad spell. He had the familiar sharp pain through his back and his arms hurt him.

“He can't be drove to a doctor,” the woman told David, speaking, in her concern, as if to an equal in age and comprehension.

David had grown accustomed to the elder's periods of suffering; they came, twisted his father's face into deep lines, departed, and things were exactly as before—or very nearly the same. The boy saw that Hunter Kinemon couldn't support labor that only two or three years before he would have finished without conscious effort. David resolutely ignored this; he felt that it must be a cause of shame, unhappiness, to his father; and he never mentioned it to Allen. Kinemon lay very still on the couch; his pipe, beside him on the floor, had spilled its live core, burning into a length of rag carpet. His face, hung with shadows like the marks of a sooty finger, was glistening with fine sweat. Not a whisper of complaint passed his dry lips. When his wife approached he attempted to smooth out his corrugated countenance. His eyes, as tenderly blue as flowers, gazed at her with a faint masking of humor.

“This is worse'n usual,” she said sharply. “And I ain't going to have you fill yourself with any more of that patent trash. You don't spare me by not letting on. I can tell as soon as you're miserable. David can fetch the doctor from Crabapple to−night if you don't look better.”

“But I am,” he assured her. “It's just a comeback of an old ache. There was a power of heavy work to that fence.”

“You'll have to get more to help you,” she continued. “That Galt'll let you kill yourself and not turn a hand. He can afford a dozen. I don't mind housing and cooking for them. David's only tol'able for lifting, too, while he's growing.”

“Why,” David protested, “it ain't just nothing what I do. I could do twice as much. I don't believe Allen could helt more'n me when he was sixteen. It ain't just nothing at all.”

He was disturbed by this assault upon his manhood; if his muscles were still a little stringy it was surprising what he could accomplish with them. He would show her to−morrow.

“And,” he added impetuously, “I can shoot better than Allen right now. You ask him if I can't. You ask him what I did with that cranky twenty− two last Sunday up on the mountain.”

His clear gaze sought her, his lean face quivered with anxiety to impress, convince her of his virility, skill. His jaw was as sharp as the blade of a hatchet. She studied him with a new surprised concern.

“David!” she exclaimed. “For a minute you had the look of a man. A real steady look, like your father. Don't you grow up too fast, David,” she directed him, in an irrepressible maternal solicitude. “I want a boy— something

young—round a while yet.”

Hunter Kinemon sat erect and reached for his pipe. The visible strain of his countenance had been largely relaxed. When his wife had left the room for a moment he admitted to David:

“That was a hard one. I thought she had me that time.”

The elder's voice was light, steady. The boy gazed at him with intense admiration. He felt instinctively that nothing mortal could shake the other's courage. And, on top of his mother's complimentary surprise, his father had confided in him, made an admission that, David realized, must be kept from fretting women. He couldn't have revealed more to Allen himself.

He pictured the latter swinging magnificently into Beaulings, cracking the whip over the horses' ears, putting on the grinding brake before the post−office. No one, even in that town of reckless drinking, ever tried to down Allen; he was as ready as he was strong. He had charge of Government mail and of passengers; he carried a burnished revolver in a holster under the seat at his hand. Allen would kill anybody who interfered with him. So would he—David—if a man edged up on him or on his family; if any one hurt even a dog of his, his own dog, he'd shoot him.

An inextinguishable hot pride, a deep sullen intolerance, rose in him at the thought of an assault on his personal liberty, his rights, or on his connections and belongings. A deeper red burned in his fresh young cheeks; his smiling lips were steady; his candid blue eyes, ineffably gentle, gazed widely against the candlelit gloom where he was making his simple preparations for bed. The last feeling of which he was conscious was a wave of sharp admiration, of love, for everything and everybody that constituted his home.

III

Allen, on his return the following evening, immediately opened an excited account of the new family, with no women, on the place by Elbow Barren.

“I heard they were from down hellwards on the Clinch,” he repeated; “and then that they'd come from Kentucky. Anyway, they're bad. Ed Arbogast just stepped on their place for a pleasant howdy, and some one on the stoop hollered for him to move. Ed, he saw the shine on a rifle barrel, and went right along up to the store. Then they hired Simmons— the one that ain't good in his head—to cut out bush; and Simmons trailed home after a while with the side of his face all tore, where he'd been hit with a piece of board. Simmons' brother went and asked them what was it about; and one of the Hatburns—that's their name— said he'd busted the loony just because!”

“What did Simmons answer back?” Hunter Kinemon demanded, his coffee cup suspended.

“Nothing much; he'd law them, or something like that. The Simmonses are right spindling; they don't belong in Greenstream either.” David commented: “I wouldn't have et a thing till I'd got them!” In the ruddy reflection of the lamp his pink−and−blue charm, his shy lips, resembled a pastoral divinity of boyhood. Allen laughed.

“That family, the Hatburns——” He paused. “Why, they'd just mow you down with the field daisies.”

David flushed with annoyance. He saw his mother studying him with the attentive concern she had first shown the day before yesterday.

“You have no call to mix in with them,” Kinemon told his elder son. “Drive stage and mind your business. I'd even step aside a little from folks like that.”

A sense of surprised disappointment invaded David at his father's statement. It seemed to him out of keeping with the elder's courage and determination. It, too, appeared almost spindling. Perhaps he had said it because his wife, a mere woman, was there. He was certain that Allen would not agree with such mildness. The latter, lounging back from the table, narrowed his eyes; his fingers played with the ears of his dog, Rocket. Allen gave his father a cigar and lit one himself, a present from a passenger on the stage. David could see a third in Allen's shirt pocket, and he longed passionately for the day when he would be old enough to have a cigar offered him. He longed for the time when he, like Allen, would be swinging a whip over the horses of a stage, rambling down a steep mountain, or walking up at the team's head to take off some weight.

Where the stage line stopped in Beaulings the railroad began. Allen, he knew, intended in the fall to give up the stage for the infinitely wider world of freight cars; and David wondered whether Priest, the storekeeper in Crabapple who had charge of the awarding of the position, could be brought to see that he was as able a driver, almost, as Allen.

It was probable Priest would call him too young for the charge of the Government mail. But he wasn't; Allen had to admit that he, David, was the straighter shot. He wouldn't step aside for any Hatburn alive. And, he decided, he would smoke nothing but cigars. He considered whether he might light his small clay pipe, concealed under the stoop, before the family; but reluctantly concluded that that day had not yet arrived.

Allen passed driving the next morning as usual, leaving a gray wreath of dust to settle back into the tranquil yellow sunshine; the sun moved from the east barrier to the west; a cool purple dusk filled the valley, and the shrilling of the frogs rose to meet the night. The following day was almost identical—the shadows swept out, shortened under the groves of trees and drew out again over the sheep on the western slope. Before Allen reached home he had to feed and bed his horses, and walk back the two miles over the mountain from Crabapple; and a full hour before the time for his brother's arrival, David was surprised to see the stage itself making its way over the precarious turf road that led up to the Kinemons' dwelling. He was standing by the portico, and immediately his mother moved out to his side, as if subconsciously disturbed by the unusual occurrence. David saw, while the stage was still diminutive against the rolling pasture, that Allen was not driving; and there was an odd confusion of figures in a rear seat. Mrs. Kinemon said at once, in a shrill strange voice:

“Something has happened to Allen!” She pressed her hands against her laboring breast; David ran forward and met the surrey as it came through the fence opening by the stable shed. Ed Arbogast was driving; and a stranger—a drummer evidently—in a white−and−black check suit, was holding Allen, crumpled in a dreadful

bloody faint.

“Where's Hunter?” Arbogast asked the boy.

“There he comes now,” David replied, his heart pounding wildly and dread constricting his throat.

Hunter Kinemon and his wife reached the stage at the same moment. Both were plaster−white; but the woman was shaking with frightened concern, while her husband was deliberate and still.

“Help me carry him in to our bed,” he addressed Ed Arbogast.

They lifted Allen out and bore him toward the house, his limp fingers, David saw, trailing through the grass. At first the latter involuntarily turned away; but, objurgating such cowardice, he forced himself to gaze at Allen. He recognized at once that his brother had not been shot; his hip was too smeared and muddy for that. It was, he decided, an accident, as Arbogast and the drummer lead Hunter Kinemon aside. David Kinemon walked resolutely up to the little group. His father gestured for him to go away, but he ignored the elder's command. He must know what had happened to Allen. The stranger in the checked suit was speaking excitedly, waving trembling hands—a sharp contrast to the grim immobility of the Greenstream men:

“He'd been talking about that family, driving out of Beaulings and saying how they had done this and that; and when we came to where they lived he pointed out the house. A couple of dark−favored men were working in a patch by the road, and he waved his whip at them, in a way of speaking; but they never made a sign. The horses were going slow then; and, for some reason or other, his little dog jumped to the road and ran in on the patch. Sirs, one of those men spit, stepped up to the dog, and kicked it into Kingdom Come.”

David's hands clenched; and he drew in a sharp sobbing breath.

“This Allen,” the other continued, “pulled in the team and drawed a gun from under the seat before I could move a hand. You can hear me—I wouldn't have kicked any dog of his for all the gold there is! He got down from the stage and started forward, and his face was black; then he stopped, undecided. He stood studying, with the two men watching him, one leaning careless on a grub hoe. Then, by heaven, he turned and rested the gun on the seat, and walked up to where laid the last of his dog. He picked it up, and says he:

“'Hatburn, I got Government mail on that stage to get in under contract, and there's a passenger too—paid to Crabapple; but when I get them two things done I'm coming back to kill you two dead to hear the last trumpet.'

“The one on the hoe laughed; but the other picked up a stone like my two fists and let Allen have it in the back. It surprised him like; he stumbled forward, and the other stepped out and laid the hoe over his head. It missed him mostly, but enough landed to knock Allen over. He rolled into the ditch, like, by the road; and then Hatburn jumped down on him, deliberate, with lumbermen's irons in his shoes.”

David was conscious of an icy flood pouring through him; a revulsion of grief and fury that blinded him. Tears welled over his fresh cheeks in an audible crying. But he was silenced by the aspect of his father. Hunter Kinemon's tender blue eyes had changed apparently into bits of polished steel; his mouth was pinched until it was only a line among the other lines and seaming of his worn face.

“I'd thank you to drive the stage into Crabapple, Ed,” he said; “and if you see the doctor coming over the mountain—he's been rung up for—ask him, please sir, will he hurry.” He turned and walked abruptly away, followed by David.

Allen lay under the gay quilt in the Kinemons' big bed. His stained clothes drooped from a chair where Mrs. Kinemon had flung them. Allen's face was like white paper; suddenly it had grown as thin and sharp as an old man's. Only a slight quiver of his eyelids showed that he was not dead.

Hunter Kinemon sat on the couch, obviously waiting for the doctor. He, too, looked queer, David thought. He wished his father would break the dreadful silence gathering over them; but the only sound was the stirring of the woman in the kitchen, boiling a pot of water. Allen moved and cried out in a knifelike agony, and a flicker of suffering passed over his father's face.

An intolerable hour dragged out before the doctor arrived; and then David was driven from the room. He sat outside on the portico, listening to the passage of feet about Allen in a high shuddering protest. David's hands and feet were still cold, but he was conscious of an increasing stillness within, an attitude not unlike his father's. He held out an arm and saw that it was as steady as a beam of the stoop roof. He was without definite plan or knowledge of what must occur; but he told himself that any decision of Hunter Kinemon's must not exclude him.

There were four Hatburns; but two Kinemons were better; and he meant his father and himself, for he knew instinctively that Allen was badly hurt. Soon there would be no Hatburns at all. And then the law could do as it

pleased. It seemed to David a long way from the valley, from Allen broken in bed, to the next term of court—September—in Crabapple. The Kinemons could protect, revenge, their own.

The doctor passed out, and David entered where his mother was bent above her elder son. Hunter Kinemon, with a blackened rag, was wiping the lock of an old but efficient repeating rifle. His motions were unhurried, careful. Mrs. Kinemon gazed at him with blanching lips, but she interposed no word. There was another rifle, David knew, in the long cupboard by the hearth; and he was moving to secure it when his father's voice halted him in the middle of the floor. “You David,” he said, “I want you to stop along here with your mother. It ain't fit for her to be left alone with Allen, and there's a mess of little things for doing. I want those cows milked dry, and catch in those little Dominicker chickens before that old gander eats them up.”

David was about to protest, to sob out a passionate refusal, when a glimpse of his father's expression silenced him. He realized that the slightest argument would be worse than futile. There wasn't a particle of familiar feeling in the elder's voice; suddenly David was afraid of him. Hunter Kinemon slipped a number of heavily greased cartridges into the rifle's magazine. Then he rose and said:

“Well, Mattie?”

His wife laid her hand on his shoulder.

“Hunter,” she told him, “you've been a mighty sweet and good husband.” He drew his hand slowly and lovingly across her cheek.

“I'm sorry about this, Mattie,” he replied; “I've been powerful happy along with you and all of us. David, be a likely boy.” He walked out of the room, across the grass to the stable shed.

“He's going to drive to Elbow Barren,” David muttered; “and he hadn't ought to have left me to tend the cows and chickens. That's for a woman to do. I ought to be right along with him facing down those Hatburns. I can shoot, and my hand is steady as his.”

He stood in the doorway, waiting for the reappearance of his father with the roan horse to hitch to their old buggy. It didn't occur to David to wonder at the fact that the other was going alone to confront four men. The Kinemons had a mort of friends who would have gladly accompanied, assisted Hunter; but this, the boy told himself, was their own affair—their own pride.

From within came the sound of his mother, crying softly, and of Allen murmuring in his pain. David was appalled by the swift change that had fallen over them—the breaking up of his entire world, the shifting of every hope and plan. He was appalled and confused; the thoughtless unquestioning security of his boyhood had been utterly destroyed. He looked about dazed at the surrounding scene, callous in its total carelessness of Allen's injury, his haggard father with the rifle. The valley was serenely beautiful; doves were calling from the eaves of the barn; a hen clucked excitedly. The western sky was a single expanse of primrose on which the mountains were jagged and blue.

He had never known the elder to be so long getting the bridle on the roan; the buggy was drawn up outside. An uneasy tension increased within him—a pressing necessity to see his father leading out their horse. He didn't come, and finally David was forced to walk over to the shed.

The roan had been untied, and turned as the boy entered; but David, at first, failed to find Hunter Kinemon; then he almost stepped on his hand. His father lay across a corner of the earthen floor, with the bridle tangled in stiff fingers, and his blue eyes staring blankly up.

David stifled an exclamation of dread, and forced himself to bend forward and touch the gray face. Only then he realized that he was looking at death. The pain in his father's back had got him at last! The rifle had been carefully placed against the wall; and, without realizing the significance of his act, David picked it up and laid the cold barrel against his rigid young body.

IV

On the evening after Hunter Kinemon's burial in the rocky steep graveyard above Crabapple, David and his mother sat, one on the couch, the other in her creaking rocking−chair, lost in heavy silence. Allen moved in a perpetual uneasy pain on the bed, his face drawn and fretful, and shadowed by a soft young beard. The wardrobe doors stood open, revealing a stripped interior; wooden chairs were tied back to back; and two trunks—one of mottled paper, the other of ancient leather—stood by the side of a willow basket filled with a miscellany of housekeeping objects.

What were left of the Kinemons were moving into a small house on the edge of Crabapple; Senator Galt had already secured another tenant for the care of his bottom acres and fat herds. The night swept into the room, fragrant and blue, powdered with stars; the sheep bells sounded in a faintly distant clashing; a whippoorwill beat its throat out against the piny dark.

An overpowering melancholy surged through David; though his youth responded to the dramatic, the tragic change that had enveloped them, at the same time he was reluctant to leave the farm, the valley with its trout and ground hogs, its fox holes and sap boilings. These feelings mingled in the back of his consciousness; his active thoughts were all directed toward the time when, with the rifle, the obligation that he had picked up practically from his dead father's hand, he would walk up to the Hatburn place and take full payment for Allen's injury and their paternal loss.

He felt uneasily that he should have gone before this—at once; but there had been a multitude of small duties connected with the funeral, intimate things that could not be turned over to the kindest neighbors; and the ceremony itself, it seemed to him, should be attended by dignity and repose.

Now, however, it was over; and only his great duty remained, filling the entire threshold of his existence. He had no plan; only a necessity to perform. It was possible that he would fail—there were four Hatburns; and that chance depressed him. If he were killed there was no one else, for Allen could never take another step. That had been disclosed by the most casual examination of his injury. Only himself, David, remained to uphold the pride of the Kinemons.

He gazed covertly at his mother; she must not, certainly, be warned of his course; she was a woman, to be spared the responsibility borne by men. A feeling of her being under his protection, even advice, had grown within him since he had discovered the death in the stable shed. This had not changed his aspect of blossoming youth, the intense blue candor of his gaze; he sat with his knees bent boyishly, his immature hands locked behind his head.

An open wagon, piled with blankets, carried Allen to Crabapple, and Mrs. Kinemon and David followed in the buggy, a great bundle, folded in the bright quilt, roped behind. They soon crossed the range and dropped into a broader valley. Crabapple lay on a road leading from mountain wall to wall, the houses quickly thinning out into meadow at each end.

A cross−roads was occupied by three stores and the courthouse, a square red−brick edifice with a classic white portico and high lantern; and it was out from that, where the highway had degenerated into a sod−cut trail, that the future home of the Kinemons lay. It was a small somber frame dwelling, immediately on the road, with a rain−washed patch rising abruptly at the back. A dilapidated shed on the left provided a meager shelter for the roan; and there was an aged and twisted apple tree over the broken pump.

“You'll have to get at that shed, David,” his mother told him; “the first rain would drown anything inside.”

She was settling Allen on the couch with the ragged sheepskin. So he would; but there was something else to attend to first. He would walk over to Elbow Barren, to−morrow. He involuntarily laid his hand on the barrel of the rifle, temporarily leaned against a table, when his mother spoke sharply from an inner doorway.

“You David,” she said; “come right out into the kitchen.”

There he stood before her, with his gaze stubbornly fixed on the bare floor, his mouth tight shut.

“David,” she continued, her voice now lowered, fluctuating with anxiety, “you weren't reckoning on paying off them Hatburns? You never?” She halted, gazing at him intently. “Why, they'd shoot you up in no time! You are nothing but a—”

“You can call me a boy if you've a mind to,” he interrupted; “and maybe the Hatburns'll kill me—and maybe they won't. But there's no one can hurt Allen like that and go plumb, sniggering free; not while I can move and hold a gun.”

“I saw a look to you that was right manlike a week or two back,” she replied; “and I said to myself: 'There's David growing up overnight.' I favored it, too, though I didn't want to lose you that way so soon. And only last night I said again: 'Thank God, David's a man in his heart, for all his pretty cheeks!' I thought I could build on you, with me getting old and Allen never taking a mortal step. Priest would give you a place, and glad, in the store—the Kinemons are mighty good people. I had it all fixed up like that, how we'd live here and pay regular.

“Oh, I didn't say nothing to your father when he started out—he was too old to change; but I hoped you would be different. I hoped you would forget your own feeling, and see Allen there on his back, and me ... getting along. You're all we got, David. It's no use, I reckon; you'll go like Allen and Hunter, full up with your own pride and never ——” She broke off, gazing bitterly at her hands folded in her calico lap.

A new trouble filled David's heart. Through the open doorway he could see Allen, twisting on the couch; his mother was older, more worn, than he had realized. She had failed a great deal in the past few days. She was suddenly stripped of her aspect of authority, force; suddenly she appeared negative, dependent. A sharp pity for her arose through his other contending emotions.

“I don't know how you figure you will be helping Allen by stepping off to be shot instead of putting food in his mouth,” she spoke again. “He's got nobody at all but you, David.”

That was so; and yet—

“How can I let those skunks set their hell on us?” he demanded passionately. “Why, all Greenstream will think I'm afraid, that I let the Hatburns bust Allen and kill my father. I couldn't stand up in Priest's store; I couldn't bear to look at anybody. Don't you understand how men are about those things?”

She nodded.

“I can see, right enough—with Hunter in the graveyard and Allen with both hips broke. What I can't see is what we'll do next winter; how we'll keep Allen warm and fed. I suppose we can go to the County Home.”

But that, David knew, was as disgraceful as the other—his own mother, Allen, objects of public charity! His face was clouded, his hands clenched. It was only a chance that he would be killed; there were four Hatburns though. His heart, he thought, would burst with misery; every instinct fought for the expression, the upholding of the family prestige, honor. A hatred for the Hatburns was like a strangling hand at his throat.

“I got to!” he said; but his voice was wavering; the dull conviction seized him that his mother was right.

All the mountains would think of him as a coward—that Kinemon who wouldn't stand up to the men who had destroyed Allen and his father!

A sob heaved in his chest; rebellious tears streamed over his thin cheeks. He was crying like a baby. He threw an arm up across his eyes and stumbled from the room.

V

However, he had no intention of clerking back of a counter, of getting down rolls of muslin, papers of buttons, for women, if it could be avoided. Priest's store was a long wooden structure with a painted facade and a high platform before it where the mountain wagons unloaded their various merchandise teamed from the railroad, fifty miles distant. The owner had a small glass−enclosed office on the left as you entered the store; and there David found him. He turned, gazing over his glasses, as the other entered.

“How's Allen?” he asked pleasantly. “I heard he was bad; but we certainly look to have him back driving stage.”

“I came to see you about that,” David replied. “Allen can't never drive again; but, Mr. Priest, sir, I can. Will you give me a try?”

The elder ignored the question in the concern he exhibited for Allen's injury.

“It is a cursed outrage!” he declared. “Those Hatburns will be got up, or my name's not Priest! We'd have them now, but the jail wouldn't keep them overnight, and court three months off.”

David preserved a stony silence—the only attitude possible, he had decided, in the face of his patent dereliction.

“Will you try me on the Beaulings stage?” he repeated. “I've been round horses all my life; and I can hold a gun straighter than Allen.”

Priest shook his head negatively.

“You are too light—too young,” he explained; “you have to be above a certain age for the responsibility of the mail. There are some rough customers to handle. If you only had five years more now—We are having a hard time finding a suitable man. A damned shame about Allen! Splendid man!”

“Can't you give it to me for a week,” David persisted, “and see how I do?”

They would have awarded him the position immediately, he felt, if he had properly attended to the Hatburns. He wanted desperately to explain his failure to Priest, but a dogged pride prevented. The storekeeper was tapping on an open ledger with a pen, gazing doubtfully at David.

“You couldn't be worse than the drunken object we have now,” he admitted. “You couldn't hold the job permanent yet, but I might let you drive extra—a day or so—till we find a man. I'd like to do what I could for Mrs. Kinemon. Your father was a good man, a good customer.... Come and see me again—say, day after to−morrow.”

This half promise partly rehabilitated his fallen pride. There was no sign in the men he passed that they held him in contempt for neglecting to kill the Hatburns; and his mother wisely avoided the subject. She wondered a little at Priest's considering him, even temporarily, for the stage; but confined her wonder to a species of compliment. David sat beside Allen, while the latter, between silent spaces of suffering, advised him of the individual characters and attributes of the horses that might come under his guiding reins.

It seemed incredible that he should actually be seated in the driver's place on the stage, swinging the heavy whip out over a team trotting briskly into the early morning; but there he was. There were no passengers, and the stage rode roughly over a small bridge of loose boards beyond the village. He pulled the horses into a walk on the mountain beyond, and was soon skirting the Gait farm, with its broad fields, where he had lived as a mere boy.

David slipped his hand under the leather seat and felt the smooth handle of the revolver. Then, on an even reach, he wrapped the reins about the whipstock and publicly filled and lighted his clay pipe. The smoke drifted back in a fragrant cloud; the stage moved forward steadily and easily; folded in momentary forgetfulness, lifted by a feeling of mature responsibility, he was almost happy. But he swung down the mountain beyond his familiar valley, crossed a smaller ridge, and turned into a stony sweep rising on the left.

It was Elbow Barren. In an instant a tide of bitterness, of passionate regret, swept over him. He saw the Hatburns' house, a rectangular bleak structure crowning a gray prominence, with the tender green of young pole beans on one hand and a disorderly barn on the other, and a blue plume of smoke rising from an unsteady stone chimney against an end of the dwelling. No one was visible.

Hot tears filled his eyes as the stage rolled along past the moldy ditch into which Allen had fallen. The mangy

curs! His grip tightened on the reins and the team broke into a clattering trot, speedily leaving the Barren behind. But the day had been robbed of its sparkle, his position of its pleasurable pride. He saw again his father's body on the earthen floor of the stable, the bridle in his stiff fingers; Allen carried into the house. And he, David Kinemon, had had to step back, like a coward or a woman, and let the Hatburns triumph.

The stage drew up before the Beaulings post−office in the middle of the afternoon. David delivered the mail bags, and then led the team back to a stable on the grassy verge of the houses clustered at the end of tracks laid precariously over a green plain to a boxlike station. Beaulings had a short row of unpainted two−story structures, the single street cut into deep muddy scars; stores with small dusty windows; eating houses elevated on piles; an insignificant mission chapel with a tar−papered roof; and a number of obviously masked depots for the illicit sale of liquor.

A hotel, neatly painted white and green, stood detached from the main activity. There, washing his face in a tin basin on a back porch, David had his fried supper, sat for a while outside in the gathering dusk, gazing at the crude−oil flares, the passing dark figures beyond, the still obscured immensity of mountain and forest. And then he went up to a pine sealed room, like the heated interior of a packing box, where he partly undressed for bed.

VI

The next mid−morning, descending the sharp grade toward Elbow Barren, there was no lessening of David's bitterness against the Hatburns. The flavor of tobacco died in his mouth, he grew unconscious of the lurching heavy stage, the responsibility of the mail, all committed to his care. A man was standing by the ditch on the reach of scrubby grass that fell to the road; and David pulled his team into the slowest walk possible. It was his first actual sight of a Hatburn. He saw a man middling tall, with narrow high shoulders, and a clay−yellow countenance, extraordinarily pinched through the temples, with minute restless black eyes. The latter were the only mobile feature of his slouching indolent pose, his sullen regard. He might have been a scarecrow, David thought, but for that glittering gaze.

The latter leaned forward, the stage barely moving, and looked unwaveringly at the Hatburn beyond. He wondered whether the man knew him—David Kinemon? But of course he did; all the small details of mountain living circulated with the utmost rapidity from clearing to clearing. He was now directly opposite the other; he could take out the revolver and kill that Hatburn, where he stood, with one precise shot. His hand instinctively reached under the seat. Then he remembered Allen, forever dependent on the couch; his mother, who had lately seemed so old. The stage was passing the motionless figure. David drew a deep painful breath, and swung out his whip with a vicious sweep.

His pride, however, returned when he drove into Crabapple, down the familiar street, past the familiar men and women turning to watch him, with a new automatic measure of attention, in his elevated position. He walked back to his dwelling with a slight swagger of hips and shoulders, and, with something of a flourish, laid down the two dollars he had been paid for the trip to Beaulings.

“I'm to drive again to−morrow,” he stated to his mother and Allen; “after that Priest has a regular man. I suppose, then, I'll have to go into the store.”

The last seemed doubly difficult now, since he had driven stage. As he disposed of supper, eating half a pie with his cracklings and greens, his mother moved from the stove to the table, refilled his plate, waved the paper streamers of the fly brush above his head, exactly as she had for his father. Already, he assured himself, he had become a man.

The journey to Beaulings the following day was an unremarkable replica of the one before. He saw no Hatburns; the sun wheeled from east to west at apparently the same speed as the stage; and Beaulings held its inevitable surge of turbulent lumbermen, the oil flares made their lurid note on the vast unbroken starry canopy of night.

The morning of his return was heavy with a wet low vapor. The mail bags, as he strapped them to the rear rack, were slippery; the dawn was a slow monotonous widening of dull light. There were no passengers for Crabapple, and David, with his coat collar turned up about his throat, urged the horses to a faster gait through the watery cold.

The brake set up a shrill grinding, and then the stage passed Elbow Barren in a smart rattle and bumping.

After that David slowed down to light his pipe. The horses willingly lingered, almost stopping; and, the memory of the slippery bags at the back of his head, David dismounted, walked to the rear of the stage.

A chilling dread swept through him as he saw, realized, that one of the Government sacks was missing. The straps were loose about the remaining two; in a minute or more they would have gone. Panic seized him, utter misery, at the thought of what Priest, Crabapple, would say. He would be disgraced, contemptuously dismissed—a failure in the trust laid on him.

He collected his faculties by a violent effort; the bags, he was sure, had been safe coming down the last mountain; he had walked part of the way, and he was certain that he would have noticed anything wrong. The road was powerful bad through the Barren....

He got up into the stage, backed the team abruptly on its haunches, and slowly retraced his way to the foot of the descent. There was no mail lying on the empty road. David turned again, his heart pounding against his ribs, tears of mortification, of apprehension, blurring his vision. The bag must have fallen here in Elbow Barren. Subconsciously he stopped the stage. On the right the dwelling of the Hatburns showed vaguely through the mist.

No one else could have been on the road. A troubled expression settled on his glowing countenance, a pondering doubt; then his mouth drew into a determined line.

"I'll have to go right up and ask," he said aloud.

He jumped down to the road, led the horses to a convenient sapling, where he hitched them. Then he drew his belt tighter about his slender waist and took a step forward. A swift frown scarred his brow, and he turned and transferred the revolver to a pocket in his trousers.

The approach to the house was rough with stones and muddy clumps of grass. A track, he saw, circled the dwelling to the back; but he walked steadily and directly up to the shallow portico between windows with hanging, partly slatted shutters. The house had been painted dark brown a long while before; the paint had weathered and blistered into a depressing harmony with the broken and mossy shingles of the roof, the rust−eaten and sagging gutters festooning the ragged eaves.

David proceeded up the steps, hesitated, and then, his mouth firm and hand steady, knocked. He waited for an apparently interminable space, and then knocked again, more sharply. Now he heard voices within. He waited rigidly for steps to approach, the door to open; but in vain. They had heard, but chose to ignore his summons; and a swift cold anger mounted in him. He could follow the path round to the back; but, he told himself, he—David Kinemon—wouldn't walk to the Hatburns' kitchen door. They should meet him at the front. He beat again on the scarred wood, waited; and then, in an irrepressible flare of temper, kicked the door open.

He was conscious of a slight gasping surprise at the dark moldy−smelling hall open before him. A narrow bare stairway mounted above, with a passage at one side, and on each hand entrances were shut on farther interiors. The scraping of a chair, talking came from the left; the door, he saw, was not latched. He pushed it open and entered. There was a movement in the room still beyond, and he walked evenly into what evidently was a kitchen.

The first thing he saw was the mail bag, lying intact on a table. Then he was meeting the concerted stare of four men. One of two, so similar that he could not have distinguished between them, he had seen before, at the edge of the road. Another was very much older, taller, more sallow. The fourth was strangely fat, with a great red hanging mouth. The latter laughed uproariously, a jangling mirthless sound followed by a mumble of words without connective sense. David moved toward the mail bag:

"I'm driving stage and lost those letters. I'll take them right along."

The oldest Hatburn, with a pail in his hand, was standing by an opening, obviously at the point of departure on a small errand. He looked toward the two similar men, nearer David.

"Boy," he demanded, "did you kick in my front door?"

"I'm the Government's agent," David replied. "I've got to have the mail. I'm David Kinemon too; and I wouldn't step round to your back door, Hatburn—not if there was a boiling of you!"

"You'll learn you this," one of the others broke in: "it will be the sweetest breath you ever draw'd when you get out that back door!"

The elder moved on to the pounded earth beyond. Here, in their presence, David felt the loathing for the Hatburns a snake inspires— dusty brown rattlers and silent cottonmouths. His hatred obliterated every other feeling but a dim consciousness of the necessity to recover the mail bag. He was filled with an overpowering longing to revenge Allen; to mark them with the payment of his father, dead in the stable shed.

His objective senses were abnormally clear, cold: he saw every detail of the Hatburns' garb—the soiled shirts with buttoned pockets on their left breasts; the stained baggy breeches in heavy boots—such boots as had stamped Allen into nothingness; dull yellow faces and beady eyes; the long black hair about their dark ears.

The idiot thrust his fingers into his loose mouth, his shirt open on a hairy pendulous chest. The Hatburn who had not yet spoken showed a row of tobacco−brown broken teeth.

"He mightn't get a heave on that breath," he asserted.

The latter lounged over against a set of open shelves where, David saw, lay a heavy rusted revolver. Hatburn picked up the weapon and turned it slowly in his thin grasp.

"I'm carrying the mail," David repeated, his hand on the bag. "You've got no call on this or on me."

He added the last with tremendous effort. It seemed unspeakable that he should be there, the Hatburns before him, and merely depart.

"What do you think of putting the stage under a soft little strawberry like that?" the other inquired.

For answer there was a stunning report, a stinging odor of saltpeter; and David felt a sharp burning on his

shoulder, followed by a slow warmish wet, spreading.

“I didn't go to do just that there!” the Hatburn who had fired explained. “I wanted to clip his ear, but he twitched like.”

David picked up the mail bag and took a step backward in the direction he had come. The other moved between him and the door.

“If you get out,” he said, “it'll be through the hog−wash.”

David placed the bag on the floor, stirred by a sudden realization—he had charge of the stage, official responsibility for the mail. He was no longer a private individual; what his mother had commanded, entreated, had no force here and now. The Hatburns were unlawfully detaining him.

As this swept over him, a smile lighted his fresh young cheeks, his frank mouth, his eyes like innocent flowers. Hatburn shot again; this time the bullet flicked at David's old felt hat. With his smile lingering he smoothly leveled the revolver from his pocket and shot the mocking figure in the exact center of the pocket patched on his left breast.

David wheeled instantly, before the other Hatburn running for him, and stopped him with a bullet as remorselessly placed as the first. The two men on the floor stiffened grotesquely and the idiot crouched in a corner, whimpering.

David passed his hand across his brow; then he bent and grasped the mail bag. He was still pausing when the remaining Hatburn strode into the kitchen. The latter whispered a sharp oath. David shifted the bag; but the elder had him before he could bring the revolver up. A battering blow fell, knocked the pistol clattering over the floor, and David instinctively clutched the other's wrist.

The blows multiplied, beating David into a daze, through which a single realization persisted—he must not lose his grip upon the arm that was swinging him about the room, knocking over chairs, crashing against the table, even drawing him across the hot iron of the stove. He must hold on!

He saw the face above him dimly through the deepening mist; it seemed demoniacal, inhuman, reaching up to the ceiling—a yellow giant bent on his destruction....

His mother, years ago, lives away, had read to them—to his father and Allen and himself—about a giant, a giant and David; and in the end——

He lost all sense of the entity of the man striving to break him against the wooden angles of the room; he had been caught, was twisting, in a great storm; a storm with thunder and cruel flashes of lightning; a storm hammering and hammering at him.... Must not lose his hold on—on life! He must stay fast against everything! It wasn't his hand gripping the destructive force towering above him, but a strange quality within him, at once within him and aside, burning in his heart and directing him from without.

The storm subsided; out of it emerged the livid face of Hatburn; and then, quite easily, he pitched David back across the floor. He lay there a moment and then stirred, partly rose, beside the mail bag. His pistol was lying before him; he picked it up.

The other was deliberately moving the dull barrel of a revolver up over his body. A sharp sense of victory possessed David, and he whispered his brother's name. Hatburn fired—uselessly. The other's battered lips smiled.

Goliath, that was the giant's name. He shot easily, securely—once.

Outside, the mail bag seemed weighted with lead. He swayed and staggered over the rough declivity to the road. It required a superhuman effort to heave the pack into the stage. The strap with which he had hitched the horses had turned into iron. At last it was untied. He clambered up to the enormous height of the driver's seat, unwrapped the reins from the whipstock, and the team started forward.

He swung to the lurching of the stage like an inverted pendulum; darkness continually thickened before his vision; waves of sickness swept up to his head. He must keep the horses on the road, forward the Government mail!

A grim struggle began between his beaten flesh, a terrible weariness, and that spirit which seemed to be at once a part of him and a voice. He wiped the blood from his young brow; from his eyes miraculously blue like an ineffable May sky.

“Just a tol'able David,” he muttered weakly—“only just tol'able!”

BREAD

I

The train rolling rapidly over the broad salt meadows thunderously entered the long shed of the terminal at the sea. August Turnbull rose from his seat in the Pullman smoking compartment and took down the coat hanging beside him. It was gray flannel; in a waistcoat his shirt sleeves were a visible heavy mauve silk, and there was a complication of gold chains about his lower pockets. Above the coat a finely woven Panama hat with a narrow brim had rested, and with that now on his head he moved arrogantly toward the door.

He was a large man, past the zenith of life, but still vigorous in features and action. His face was full, and, wet from the heat, he mopped it with a heavy linen handkerchief. August Turnbull's gaze was steady and light blue; his nose was so heavy that it appeared to droop a little from sheer weight, almost resting on the mustache brushed out in a horizontal line across prominent lips; while his neck swelled in a glowing congestion above a wilting collar.

He nodded to several men in the narrow corridor of the car; men like himself in luxurious summer clothes, but for the most part fatter; then in the shed, looking about in vain for Bernard, his son−in−law, he proceeded to the street, where his automobile was waiting. It was a glittering landaulet, folded back and open. Thrusting a wadded evening paper into a crevice he sank in an upholstered corner while his chauffeur skillfully worked out through a small confusion of similar motor activity. Before him a carved glass vase set in a bracket held smilax and yellow rosebuds, and he saw on the floor a fallen gold powder box.

Picking it up his face was suffused by a darker tide; this was the result of stooping and the angry realization that in spite of his prohibition Louise had been using the landaulet again. She must be made to understand that he, her father, had an absolute authority over his family and property. Marriage to Bernard Foster did not relieve her from obedience to the head of the house. Bernard had a car as well as himself; yet August Turnbull knew that his son−in−law—at heart a stingy man—encouraged her to burn the parental gasoline in place of his own. Turned against the public Bernard's special quality was admirable; he was indeed more successful, richer, than August had been at the other's age; but Louise and her husband would have to recognize his precedence.

They were moving faster now on a broad paved avenue bound with steel tracks. A central business section was left for a more unpretentious region—small open fruit and fish stands, dingy lodging places, drab corner saloons, with, at the intervals of the cross streets, fleet glimpses of an elevated boardwalk and the luminous space of the sea. Though the day was ending there was no thinning of the vaporous heat, and a sodden humanity, shapeless in bathing suits, was still reluctantly moving away from the beach.

Groups of women with their hair in trailing wet wisps and short uneven skirts dripping on the pavements, gaunt children in scant haphazard garb surged across the broad avenue or with shrill admonishments stood in isolated helpless patches amid the swift and shining procession of automobiles.

August Turnbull was disturbed by the sudden arrest of his progress, and gazing out saw the insignificant cause of delay. He had again removed his hat and a frown drew a visible heavy line between his eyes.

“More police are needed for these crossings,” he complained to the chauffeur; “there is the same trouble every evening. The city shouldn't encourage such rabbles; they give the place a black eye.”

All the immediate section, he silently continued, ought to be torn down and rebuilt in solid expensive structures. It made him hot and uncomfortable just to pass through the shabby quarter. The people in it were there for the excellent reason that they lacked the ambition, the force to demand better things. They got what they deserved.

August Turnbull made an impatient movement of contempt; the world, success, was for the strong men, the men who knew what they wanted and drove for it in a straight line. There was a great deal of foolishness in the air at present—the war was largely responsible; though, on the other hand, the war would cure a lot of nonsense. But America in particular was rotten with sentimentality; it was that mainly which had involved them here in a purely European affair. Getting into it had been bad business.

Nowhere was the nation's failing more evident than in the attitude toward women. It had always been maudlin; and now, long content to use their advantages in small ways, women would become a serious menace to the country generally. He had admitted their economic value—they filled every possible place in the large

establishment of the Turnbull Bakery; rather, they performed all the light manual labor. There they were more satisfactory than men, more easily controlled—yes, and cheaper. But in Congress, voting, women in communities reporting on factory conditions were a dangerous nuisance.

He had left the poorer part, and the suavity of the succeeding streets rapidly increased to a soothing luxury. Wide cottages occupied velvet− green lawns, and the women he saw were of the sort he approved—closely skirted creatures with smooth shoulders in transparent crepe de Chine. They invited a contemplative eye, the thing for which they were created—a pleasure for men; that and maternity.

The automobile turned toward the sea and stopped at his house midway in the block. It was a square dwelling painted white with a roof of tapestry slate, and broad awning−covered veranda on the sea. A sprinkler was flashing on the lawn, dripping over the concrete pavement and filling the air with a damp coolness. No one was visible and, leaving his hat and coat on a chair in an airy hall furnished in black wicker and flowery chintz hangings on buff walls, he descended to the basement dressing rooms.

In his bathing suit he presented a figure of vigorous glowing well−being. Only the silvering hair at his temples, the fatty bulge across the back of his neck, and a considerable stomach indicated his multiplying years. He left by a lower door, and immediately after was on the sand. The tide was out, the lowering sun obscured in a haze, and the sea undulated with a sullen gleam. Two men were swimming, and farther at the left a woman stood in the water with arms raised to her head. It was cold, but August Turnbull marched out without hesitation and threw himself forward with an uncompromising solid splash.

He swam adequately, but he had not progressed a dozen feet before he was conscious of a strong current sweeping him up the beach, and he regained his feet with an angry flourish. The other men came nearer, and he recognized Bernard Foster, his son−in−law, and Frederick Rathe, whose cottage was directly across the street from the Turnbulls'.

Like August they were big men, with light hair and eyes. They were very strong and abrupt in their movements, they spoke in short harsh periods, and fingered mustaches waxed and rolled into severe points.

“A gully has cut in above,” Bernard explained, indicating a point not far beyond them; “it's over your head. Watch where you swim.” They were moving away.

“Are you coming over to dinner?” August Turnbull called to Bernard.

“Can't,” the latter shouted; “Victorine is sick again. Too many chocolate sundaes.”

Left alone, August dived and floated until he was thoroughly cooled; then he turned toward the beach. The woman, whose existence he had forgotten, was leaving at the same time. She approached at an angle, and he was admiring her slim figure when he realized that it was Miss Beggs, his wife's companion. He had never seen her in a bathing suit before. August Turnbull delayed until she was at his side.

“Good evening.” Her voice was low, and she scarcely lifted her gaze from the sand.

He wondered why—she had been in his house for a month—he had failed completely to notice her previously. He decided that it had been because she was so pale and quiet. Ordinarily he didn't like white cheeks; and then she had been deceptive; he had subconsciously thought of her as thin.

She stopped and took off her rubber cap, performing that act slowly, while her body, in wet satin, turned like a faultless statue of glistening black marble.

“Do you enjoy bathing in the ocean?” he asked.

A momentary veiled glance accompanied her reply. “Yes,” she said; “though I can't swim. I like to be beaten by the waves. I like to fight against them.”

She hesitated, then fell definitely back; and he was forced to walk on alone.

His wife's companion! With the frown once more scoring the line between his eyes he satirically contrasted Miss Beggs, a servant really, and Emmy.

II

His room occupied the front corner on the sea, Emmy's was beyond; the door between was partly open and he could hear her moving about, but with a cigarette and his hair−brushes he made no acknowledgment of her presence.

The sun was now no more than a diffused gray glow, the sea like unstirred molten silver. The sound of the muffled gong that announced dinner floated up the stairs.

Below, the damask was lit both by rose silk−shaded candles and by the radiance of a suspended alabaster bowl. August Turnbull sat at the head of a table laden with silver and crystal and flowers. There were individual pepper mills—he detested adulterated or stale spices— carved goblets for water, cocktail glasses with enameled roosters, ruby goblets like blown flowers and little gilt−speckled liqueur glasses; there were knives with steel blades, knives all of silver, and gold fruit knives; there were slim oyster forks, entree forks of solid design, and forks of filigree; a bank of spoons by a plate that would be presently removed, unused, for other filled plates.

Opposite him Emmy's place was still empty, but his son, Morice, in the olive drab and bar of a first lieutenant, together with his wife, was already present. August was annoyed by any delay: one of the marks of a properly controlled household, a house admirably conscious of the importance of order—and obedience—was an utter promptness at the table. Then, silent and unsubstantial as a shadow, Emmy Turnbull slipped into her seat.

August gazed at her with the secret resentment more and more inspired by her sickness. At first he had been merely dogmatic—she must recover under the superlative advice and attention he was able to summon for her. Then his impatience had swung about toward all doctors—they were a pack of incompetent fools, medicine was nothing more than an organized swindle. They had tried baths, cures, innumerable infallible treatments—to no purpose. Finally he had given up all effort, all hope; he had given her up. And since then it had been difficult to mask his resentment.

The butler, a white jacket taking the place of the conventional somber black, poured four cocktails from a silver mixer and placed four dishes of shaved ice, lemon rosettes and minute pinkish clams before August Turnbull, Morice and his wife, and Miss Beggs, occupying in solitude a side of the table. Then he set at Mrs. Turnbull's hand a glass of milk thinned with limewater and an elaborate platter holding three small pieces of zwieback.

She could eat practically nothing.

It was the particular character of her state that specially upset August Turnbull. He was continually affronted by the spectacle of Emmy seated before him sipping her diluted milk, breaking her dry bread, in the midst of the rich plenty he provided. Damn it, he admitted, it got on his nerves!

The sting of the cocktail whipped up his eagerness for the iced tender clams. His narrowed gaze rested on Emmy; she was actually seven years older than he, but from her appearance she might be a hundred, a million. There was nothing but her painfully slow movements to distinguish her from a mummy.

The plates were again removed and soup brought on, a clear steaming amber−green turtle, and with it crisp wheat rolls. Morice's wife gave a sigh of satisfaction at the latter.

“My,” she said, “they're elegant! I'm sick and tired of war bread.”

She was a pinkish young woman with regular features and abundant coppery hair. Marriage had brought her into the Turnbull family from the chorus of a famous New York roof beauty show. August had been at first displeased, then a certain complacency had possessed him—Morice, who was practically thirty years old, had no source of income other than that volunteered by his father, and it pleased the latter to keep them depending uncertainly on what he was willing to do. It insured just the attitude from Rosalie he most enjoyed, approved, in a youthful and not unhandsome woman. He liked her soft scented weight hanging on his arm and the perfumed kiss with which she greeted him in the morning.

Nevertheless, at times there was a gleam in her eyes and an expression at odds with the perfection of her submission; on several occasions Morice had approached him armed with a determination that he, August, knew had been injected from without, undoubtedly by Rosalie. Whatever it had been he quickly disposed of it, but there was a possibility that she might some day undertake a rebellion; and there was added zest in the thought of how

he would totally subdue her.

"It's a wonder something isn't said to you," she continued. "They're awfully strict about wheat now."

"That," August Turnbull instructed her heavily, "is a subject we needn't pursue."

The truth was that he would permit no interference with what so closely touched his comfort. He was not a horse to eat bran. His bakery—under inspection—conformed rigidly with the Government requirements; but he had no intention of spoiling his own dinners. Any necessary conservation could be effected at the expense of the riffraff through which he had driven coming from the station. Black bread was no new experience to them.

He saw that Miss Beggs' small white teeth were crushing salted cashew nuts. Noticing her in detail for the first time he realized that she enormously appreciated good food. Why in thunder, since she ate so heartily, didn't she get fat and rosy! She was one of the thin kind— yet not thin, he corrected himself. Graceful. Why, she must weigh a hundred and twenty−five pounds; and she wasn't tall.

The butler filled his ruby goblet from a narrow bottle of Rhine wine. It was exactly right, not sweet but full; and the man held for his choice a great platter of beef, beautifully carved into thick crimson slices; the bloodlike gravy had collected in its depression and he poured it over his meat.

"A piece of this," he told Emmy discontentedly, "would set you right up; put something in your veins besides limewater."

She became painfully upset at once and fumbled in her lap, with her face averted, as the attention of the table was momentarily directed at her. There was an uncontrollable tremor of her loose colorless mouth.

What a wife for him, August Turnbull! The stimulants and rich flavors and roast filled him with a humming vitality; he could feel his heart beat—as strong, he thought, as a bell. In a way Emmy had deceived him —she probably had always been fragile, but was careful to conceal it from him at their marriage. It was unjust to him. He wished that she would take her farcical meals in her room, and not sit here—a skeleton at the feast. Positively it made him nervous to see her—spoiled his pleasure.

It had become worse lately; he had difficulty in putting her from his mind; he imagined Emmy in conjunction with the bakery, of her slowly starving and the thousands of loaves he produced in a day. There was something unnatural in such a situation; it was like a mockery at him.

A vision of her came to him at the most inopportune moments, lingering until it drove him into a hot rage and a pounding set up at the back of his neck.

The meat was brought back, and he had more of a sweet boiled huckleberry pudding. A salad followed, with a heavy Russian dressing. August Turnbull's breathing grew thicker, he was conscious of a familiar oppression. He assaulted it with fresh wine.

"I saw Bernard on the beach" he related; "Victorine is sick once more. Chocolate sundaes, Bernard said. She is always stuffing herself at soda−water counters or with candy. They oughtn't to allow it; the child should be made to eat at the table. When she is here she touches nothing but the dessert. When I was ten I ate everything or not at all. But there is no longer any discipline, not only with children but everywhere."

"There is a little freedom, though," Rosalie suggested.

His manner clearly showed displeasure, almost contempt, and he turned to Miss Beggs. "What do you think?" he demanded. "I understand you have been a school−teacher."

"Oh, you are quite right," she responded; "at least about children, and it is clear from them that most parents are idiotically lax." A blaze of discontent, loathing, surprisingly invaded her pallid face.

"A rod of iron," August recommended.

The contrast between his wife and Miss Beggs recurred, intensified—one an absolute wreck and the other as solidly slender as a birch tree. Fate had played a disgusting trick on him. In the prime of his life he was tied to a hopeless invalid. It put an unfair tension on him. Women were charming, gracious—or else they were nothing. If Emmy's money had been an assistance at first he had speedily justified its absorption in the business. She owed him, her husband, everything possible. He suddenly pictured mountains of bread, bread towering up into the clouds, fragrant and appetizing; and Emmy, a thing of bones, gazing wistfully at it. August Turnbull, with a feeling like panic, brushed the picture from his mind.

The dessert was apparently a bomb of frozen coffee, but the center revealed a delicious creamy substance flaked with pistache. The cold sweet was exactly what he craved, and he ate it rapidly in a curious mounting excitement. With the coffee he fingered the diminutive glass of golden brandy and a long dark roll of oily

tobacco. He lighted this carefully and flooded his head with the coiling bluish smoke. Rosalie was smoking a cigarette—a habit in women which he noisily denounced. She extinguished it in an ash tray, but his anger lingered, an unreasoning exasperation that constricted his throat. Sharply aware of the sultriness of the evening he went hastily out to the veranda.

Morice following him with the evening paper volunteered, “I see German submarines are operating on the Atlantic coast.”

His father asserted: “This country is due for a lesson. It was anxious enough to get into trouble, and now we'll find how it likes some severe instruction. All the news here is bluff—the national asset. What I hope is that business won't be entirely ruined later.”

“The Germans will get the lesson,” Rosalie unexpectedly declared at his shoulder.

“You don't know what you're talking about,” he replied decidedly. “The German system is a marvel, one of the wonders of civilization.”

She turned away, lightly singing a line from one of her late numbers: “I've a Yankee boy bound for Berlin.”

Morice stirred uneasily. “They got a Danish tanker somewhere off Nantucket,” he continued impotently.

August Turnbull refused to be drawn into further speech; he inhaled his cigar with a replete bodily contentment. The oppression of dinner was subsiding. His private opinion of the war was that it would end without a military decision—he regarded the German system as unsmashable—and then, with France deleted and England swamped in internal politics, he saw an alliance of common sense between Germany and the United States. The present hysteria, the sentimentality he condemned, could not continue to stand before the pressure of mercantile necessity. After all, the entire country was not made up of fools.

Morice and his wife wandered off to the boardwalk, and he, August, must have fallen asleep, for he suddenly sat up with a sensation of strangeness and dizzy vision.

He rose and shook it off. It was still light, and he could see Bernard at his automobile, parked before the latter's cottage.

The younger man caught sight of August at the same moment and called: “We are going to a cafe with the Rathes; will you come?”

He was still slightly confused, his head full, and the ride, the gayety of the crowd, he thought, would do him good.

“Be over for you,” the other added; and later he was crowded into a rear seat between Louise, his daughter, and Caroline Rathe.

Louise was wearing the necklace of platinum and diamonds Bernard Foster had given her last Christmas. It was, August admitted to himself, a splendid present, and must have cost eighteen or twenty thousand dollars. The Government had made platinum almost prohibitive. In things of this kind—the adornment of his wife, of, really, himself, the extension of his pride—Bernard was extremely generous. It was in the small affairs such as gasoline that he was prudent.

Both Caroline Rathe and Louise were handsome women handsomely dressed; he was seated in a nest of soft tulle and ruffled embroidery, of pliant swaying bodies. Their satin−shod feet had high sharp insteps in films of black lace and their fingers glittered with prismatic stones. Bernard was in front with the chauffeur, and Frederick Rathe occupied a small seat at the knees of the three others. He had not made his money, as had August and Bernard, but inherited it with a huge brewery. Frederick was younger than the other men too; but his manner was, if anything, curter. He said things about the present war that made even August Turnbull uneasy.

He was an unusual youth, not devoted to sports and convivial pleasures —as any one might infer, viewing his heavy frame and wealth—but something of a reader. He quoted fragments from philosophical books about the will−to−power and the *Uebermensch* that stuck like burrs in August Turnbull's memory, furnishing him with labels, backing, for many of his personally evolved convictions and experience.

They were soon descending the steps to the anteroom of the cafe, where the men left their hats and sticks. As they entered the brilliantly lighted space beyond a captain hurried forward. “Good evening, gentlemen,” he said servilely; “Mr. Turnbull——”

He ushered them to a table by the rope of an open floor for dancing and removed a reserved card. There he stood attentively with a waiter at his shoulder.

“What will you have?” Frederick Rathe asked generally. “For me nothing but beer. Not the filthy American

stuff.” He turned to the servants. “If you still have some of the other. You understand?”

“No beer for me!” Louise exclaimed.

“Champagne,” the captain suggested.

She agreed, but Caroline had a fancy for something else. August Turnbull preferred a Scotch whisky and soda. The cafe was crowded; everywhere drinking multiplied in an illuminated haze of cigarettes. A slight girl in an airy slip and bare legs was executing a furious dance with a powdered youth on the open space. The girl whirled about her partner's head, a rigid shape in a flutter of white.

They stood limply answering the rattle of applause that followed. A woman in an extravagantly low−cut gown took their place, singing. There was no possibility of mistaking her allusions; August smiled broadly, but Louise and Caroline Rathe watched her with an unmoved sharp curiosity. In the same manner they studied other women in the cafe; more than once August Turnbull hastily averted his gaze at the discovery that his daughter and he were intent upon the same individual.

“The U−boats are at it again,” Bernard commented in a lowered voice.

“And, though it is war,” Frederick added, “every one here is squealing like a mouse. 'Ye are not great enough to know of hatred and envy,'“ he quoted. “'It is the good war which halloweth every cause.'“

“I wish you wouldn't say those things here,” his wife murmured.

“'Thou goest to women?'“ he lectured her with mock solemnity. “'Do not forget thy whip!'“

The whisky ran in a burning tide through August Turnbull's senses. His surroundings became a little blurred, out of focus; his voice sounded unfamiliar, as though it came from somewhere behind him. Fresh buckets of wine were brought, fresh, polished glasses. His appetite revived, and he ordered caviar. Beyond, a girl in a snake−like dress was breaking a scarlet boiled lobster with a nut cracker; her cigarette smoked on the table edge. Waiters passed bearing trays of steaming food, pitchers of foaming beer, colorless drinks with bobbing sliced limes, purplish sloe gin and sirupy cordials. Bernard's face was dark and there was a splash of champagne on his dinner shirt. Louise was uncertainly humming a fragment of popular song. The table was littered with empty plates and glasses. Perversely it made August think of Emmy, his wife, and acute dread touched him at the mockery of her wasting despair.

III

The following morning, Thursday, August Turnbull was forced to go into the city. He drove to the Turnbull Bakery in a taxi and dispatched his responsibilities in time for luncheon uptown and an early afternoon train to the shore. The bakery was a consequential rectangle of brick, with the office across the front and a court resounding with the shattering din of ponderous delivery trucks. All the vehicles, August saw, bore a new temporary label advertising still another war bread; there was, too, a subsidiary patriotic declaration: “Win the War With Wheat.”

He was, as always, fascinated by the mammoth trays of bread, the enormous flood of sustenance produced as the result of his energy and ability. Each loaf was shut in a sanitary paper envelope; the popular superstition, sanitation, had contributed as much as anything to his marked success. He liked to picture himself as a great force, a granary on which the city depended for life; it pleased him to think of thousands of people, men, women and children, waiting for his loaves or perhaps suffering through the inability to buy them.

August left a direction for a barrel of superlative flower to be sent to his cottage, and then with a curious feeling of expectancy he departed. He was unable to grasp the cause of his sudden impatience to be again at the sea. On the train, in the Pullman smoking compartment, his coat swinging on a hook beside him, the vague haste centered surprisingly about the person of Miss Beggs. At first he was annoyed by the reality and persistence of her image; then he slipped into an unquestioning consideration of her.

Never had he seen a more healthy being, and that alone, he told himself, was sufficient to account for his interest. He liked marked physical well−being; particularly, he added, in women. A sick wife, for example, was the most futile thing imaginable; a wife should exist for the comfort and pleasure of her husband. What little Miss Beggs—her name, he now remembered from the checks made out for her, was Meta Beggs—had said was as vigorous as herself. He realized that she had a strong, even rebellious personality. That, in her, however, should not be encouraged—an engaging submission was the becoming attitude for her sex.

He proceeded immediately into the ocean, puffing strenuously and gazing about. No women could be seen. They never had any regularity of habit, he complained silently. After dinner—a surfeit of tenderloin Bordelaise—he walked up the short incline to the boardwalk, where on one of the benches overlooking the sparkling water he saw a slight familiar figure. It was Miss Beggs. Her eyes dwelt on him momentarily and then returned to the horizon.

“You are a great deal alone,” he commented on the far end of the bench.

“It's because I choose to be,” she answered sharply.

An expression of displeasure was audible in his reply, “You should have no trouble.”

“I ought to explain,” she continued, her slim hands clasped on shapely knees; “I mean that I can't get what I want”

“So you prefer nothing?”

She nodded.

“That's different,” August Turnbull declared. “Anybody could see you're particular. Still, it's strange you haven't met—well, one that suited you.”

“What good would it do me—a school−teacher, and now a companion!”

“You might be admired for those very things.”

“Yes, by old ladies, male and female. Not men. There's just one attraction for them.”

“Well——”

She turned now and faced him with a suppressed bitter energy. “Clothes,” she said.

“That's nonsense!” he replied emphatically. “Dress is only incidental.”

“When did you first notice me?” she demanded. “In bathing. That bathing suit cost more than any two of my dresses. It is absolutely right.” August was confused by the keenness of her perception. It wasn't proper for a woman to understand such facts. He was at a loss for a reply. “Seven men spoke to me in it on one afternoon. It is no good for you to try to reassure me with platitudes; I know better. I ought to, at least.”

August Turnbull was startled by the fire of resentment smoldering under her still pale exterior. Why, she was like a charged battery. If he touched her, he thought, sparks would fly. She was utterly different from Emmy, as

different as a live flame from ashes.

It was evident that having at last spoken she intended to unburden herself of long−accumulated passionate words.

“All my life I've had to listen to and smile sweetly at ridiculous hypocrisies. I have had to teach them and live them too. But now I'm so sick of them I can't keep it up a month longer. I could kill some one, easily. In a world where salvation for a woman is in a pair of slippers I have to be damned. If I could have kept my hair smartly done up and worn sheer batiste do you suppose for a minute I'd be a companion to Mrs. Turnbull? I could be going out to the cafes in a landaulet.”

“And looking a lot better than most that do,” he commented without premeditation.

She glanced at him again, and he saw that her eyes were gray, habitually half closed and inviting.

“I've had frightfully bad luck,” she went on; “once or twice when it seemed that I was to have a chance, when it appeared brighter— everything went to pieces.”

“Perhaps you want too much,” he suggested.

“Perhaps,” she agreed wearily; “ease and pretty clothes and—a man.” She added the latter with a more musical inflection than he had yet heard.

“Of course,” he proceeded importantly, “there are not a great many men. At least I haven't found them. As you say, most people are incapable of any power or decision. I always maintain it's something in the country. Now in——” He stopped, re−began: “In Europe they are different. There a man is better understood, and women as well.”

“I have never been out of America,” Miss Beggs admitted.

“But you might well have been,” he assured her; “you are more Continental than any one else I can think of.”

He moved toward the middle of the bench and she said quickly: “You must not misunderstand. I am not cheap nor silly. It might have been better for me.” She addressed the fading light on the sea. “Silly women, too, do remarkably well. But I am not young enough to change now.” She rose, gracefully drawn against space; her firm chin was elevated and her hands clenched. “I won't grow old this way and shrivel like an apple,” she half cried.

It would be a pity, he told himself, watching her erect figure diminish over the boardwalk. He had a feeling of having come in contact with an extraordinarily potent force. By heaven, she positively crackled! He smiled, thinking of the misguided people who had employed her, ignorant of all that underlay that severe prudent manner. At the same time he was flattered that she had confided in him. It was clear she recognized that he, at least, was a man. He was really sorry for her—what an invigorating influence she was!

She had spoken of being no longer young—something over thirty−five he judged—and that brought the realization that he was getting on. A few years now, ten or twelve, and life would be behind him. It was a rare and uncomfortable thought. Usually he saw himself as at the most desirable age—a young spirit tempered by wisdom and experience. But in a flash he read that his prime must depart; every hour left was priceless.

The best part of this must be dedicated to a helpless invalid; a strong current of self−pity set through him. But it was speedily lost in a more customary arrogance. August Turnbull repeated the favorite aphorisms from Frederick Rathe about the higher man. If he believed them at all, if they applied to life in general they were equally true in connection with his home; in short—his wife. Emmy Turnbull couldn't really be called a wife. There should be a provision to release men from such bonds.

It might be that the will−to−power would release itself. In theory that was well enough, but practically there were countless small difficulties. The strands of life were so tied in, one with another. Opinion was made up of an infinite number of stupid prejudices. In short, no way presented itself of getting rid of Emmy.

His mind returned to Meta Beggs. What a woman she was! What a triumph to master her contemptuous stubborn being!

IV

At least, August reflected with a degree of comfort at breakfast, Emmy didn't come down in the morning; she hadn't enough strength. He addressed himself to the demolishment of a ripe Cassaba melon. It melted in his mouth to the consistency of sugary water. His coffee cup had a large flattened bowl, and pouring in the ropy cream with his free hand he lifted the silver cover of a dish set before him. It held spitted chicken livers and bacon and gave out an irresistible odor. There were, too, potatoes chopped fine with peppers and browned; and hot delicately sweetened buns. He emptied two full spits, renewed his coffee and finished the potatoes.

With a butter ball at the center of a bun he casually glanced at the day's paper. The submarines, he saw, were operating farther south. A small passenger steamer, the *Veronica* had been torpedoed outside the Delaware Capes.

A step sounded in the hall, and Louise entered the dining room, clad all in white with the exception of a closely fitting yellow hat. After a moment Victorine, a girl small for her age, with a petulant satiated expression, followed.

"It's a shame," Louise observed, "that with Morice and his wife in the cottage you have to breakfast alone. I suppose all those theatrical people get up at noon."

"Not quite," Rosalie told her from the doorway.

Louise made no reply other than elevating her brows. Victorine looked at the other with an exact mirroring of her mother's disdain.

"Good morning," Morice said indistinctly, hooking the collar of his uniform. "It's a bloody nuisance," he asserted. "Why can't they copy the English jacket?"

"It is much better looking," Louise added.

"Well," Rosalie proclaimed, "I'm glad to see Morice in any; even if it means nothing more than a desk in the Quartermaster's Department."

"That is very necessary," August Turnbull spoke decidedly.

"Perhaps," she agreed.

"I think it is bad taste to raise such insinuations." Louise was severe.

"An army," August put in, "travels on its stomach. As Louise suggests— we must ask you not to discuss the question in your present tone." Morice's wife half−audibly spoke into her melon, and his face reddened. "What did I understand you to say?" he demanded.

"Oh, 'Swat the fly!'" Rosalie answered hardily.

"Not at all!" he almost shouted. "What you said was 'Swat the Kaiser!'"

"Well, swat him!"

"It was evident, also, that you did not refer to the Emperor of Germany—but to me."

"You said it," she admitted vulgarly. "If any house ever had a Hohenzollern this has."

"Shut up, Rosalie!" her husband commanded, perturbed; "you'll spoil everything."

"It might be better if she continued," Louise Foster corrected him. "Perhaps then we'd learn something of this—this beauty."

"I got good money for my face anyhow," Rosalie asserted. "And no cash premium went with it either. As for going on, I'll go." She turned to August Turnbull: "I've been stalling round here for nearly a year with Morice scared to death trying to get a piece of change out of you. Now I'm through; I've worked hard for a season's pay, but this is slavery. What you want is an amalgamated lady bootblack and nautch dancer. You're a joke to a free white woman. I'm sorry for your wife. She ought to slip you a bichloride tablet. If it was worth while I'd turn you over to the authorities for breaking the food regulations."

She rose, unceremoniously shoving back her chair. "For a fact, I'm tired of watching you eat. You down as much as a company of good boys on the march. Don't get black in the face; I'd be afraid to if I were you."

August Turnbull's rage beat like a hammer at the base of his head. He, too, rose, leaning forward with his napkin crumpled in a pounding fist.

"Get out of my house!" he shouted.

"That's all right enough," she replied; "the question is—is Morice coming with me? Is that khaki he has on or

a Kate Greenaway suit?”

Morice looked from one to the other in obvious dismay. He had a pleasant dull face and a minute spiked mustache on an irresolute mouth.

“If you stay with me,” she warned him further, “I'll have you out of that grocery store and into a trench.”

“Pleasant for you, Morice,” Louise explained.

“Things were so comfortable, Rosalie,” he protested despairingly. “What in the name of sense made you stir this all up? The governor won't do a tap for us now.”

His wife stood by herself, facing the inimical Turnbull front, while Morice wavered between.

“If you'll get along,” the former told him, “I can make a living till you come back. We can do without any Truebner money. I'm not a lot at German, but I guess you can understand me,” she again addressed August. “Not that I blame you for the change, such as it is.”

“I'll have to go with her,” Morice unhappily declared.

August Turnbull's face was stiff with congestion. The figures before him wavered in a sort of fog. He put out a hand, supporting himself on the back of his chair.

“Get out of my house,” he repeated in a hoarse whisper.

Fortunately Morice's leave had come to an end, and Rosalie and he withdrew in at least the semblance of a normal departure. August's rage changed to an indignant surprise, and he established himself with a rigid dignity on the veranda. There, happening on a cigar that burned badly, he was reduced to a state of further self−commiseration. That is, he dwelt on the general deterioration of the world about him. There was no discipline; there was no respect; authority was laughed at. All this was the result of laxness, of the sentimentality he condemned; a firmer hand was needed everywhere.

He turned with relief to the contemplation of Meta Beggs; she was enormously satisfactory to consider. August watched her now with the greatest interest; he even sat in his wife's room while her companion moved silently and gracefully about. Miss Beggs couldn't have noticed this, for scarcely ever did her gaze meet his; she had a habit of standing lost in thought, her slimness a little drooping, as if she were weary or depressed. She was in his mind continually—Miss Beggs and Emmy, his wife.

The latter had a surprising power to disturb him; lately he had even dreamed of her starving to death in the presence of abundant food. He began to be superstitious about it, to think of her in a ridiculous nervous manner as an evil design on his peace and security. She seemed unnatural with her shrunken face bowed opposite him at the table. His feeling for her shifted subconsciously to hatred. It broke out publicly in sardonic or angry periods under which she would shrink away, incredibly timid, from his scorn. This quality of utter helplessness gave the menace he divined in her its illusive air of unreality. She seemed—she was—entirely helpless; a prematurely aged woman, of the mildest instincts, dying of malnutrition.

Miss Beggs now merged into all his daily life, his very fiber. He regarded her in an attitude of admirable frankness. “Still it is extraordinary you haven't married.”

The tide was out, it was late afternoon, and they were walking over the hard exposed sand. Whenever she came on a shell she crushed it with a sharp heel.

“There were some,” she replied indifferently.

He nodded gravely. “It would have to be a special kind of man,” he agreed. “An ordinary individual would be crushed by your personality. You'd need a firm hand.”

Her face was inscrutable. “I have always had the misfortune to be too late,” she told him.

“I wish I had known you sooner!” he exclaimed.

Her arms, in transparent sleeves, were like marble. His words crystallized an overwhelming realization of how exactly she was suited to him. The desire to shut her will in his hand increased a thousandfold.

“Yes,” she said, “I would have married you. But there's no good discussing it.” She breathed deeply with a sinking forward of her rounded shoulders. All her vigor seemed to have left her. “I have been worried about Mrs. Turnbull lately,” she went on. “Perhaps it's my imagination—does she look weaker to you?”

“I haven't noticed,” he answered brusquely.

Curiously he had never thought of Emmy as dying; she appeared eternal, without the possibility of offering him the relief of such freedom as yet remained. Freedom for—for Meta Beggs.

“The doctor was at the cottage again Thursday,” she informed him. “I didn't hear what he said.”

“Humbugs,” August Turnbull pronounced.

A sudden caution invaded him. It would be well not to implicate himself too far with his wife's companion. She was a far shrewder woman than was common; there was such a thing as blackmail. He studied her privately. Damn it, what a pen he had been caught in! Her manner, too, changed immediately, as though she had read his feeling.

“I shall have to go back.”

She spoke coldly. A moment before she had been close beside him, but now she might as well have been miles away.

V

The fuse of the electric light in the dining room burned out, and dinner proceeded with only the illumination of the silk−hooded candles. In the subdued glow Meta Beggs was infinitely attractive. His wife's place was empty. Miss Beggs had brought apologetic word from Emmy that she felt too weak to leave her room. A greater degree of comfort possessed August Turnbull than he had experienced for months. With no one at the table but the slim woman on the left and himself a positive geniality radiated from him. He pressed her to have more champagne—he had ordered that since she preferred it to Rhine wine—urged more duckling, and ordered the butler to leave the brandy decanter before them.

She laughed—a rare occurrence—and imitated, for his intense amusement, Mrs. Frederick Rathe's extreme cutting social manner. He drank more than he intended, and when he rose his legs were insecure. He made his way toward Meta Beggs. She stood motionless, her thin lips like a thread of blood on her tense face.

“What a wife you'd make!” he muttered.

There was a discreet cough at his back, and swinging about he saw a maid in a white starched cap and high cuffs.

“Excuse me, sir,” she said; “Mrs. Turnbull wants to know would you please come up to her room.”

He swayed slightly, glowering at her with a hot face in which a vein throbbed persistently at his temple. Miss Beggs had disappeared.

“Very well,” he agreed heavily.

Mounting the stairs he fumbled for his cigar case, and entered the chamber beyond his, clipping the end from a superlative perfecto.

Emmy was in bed, propped up on a bank of embroidered pillows. A light from one side threw the shadow of her head on a wall in an animated caricature of life.

“I didn't want to disturb you, August.”

Her voice was weak and apologetic. He stood irritably beside her.

“It's hot in here.” His wife at once detected whatever assaulted his complete comfort. She fell into a silence that strained his patience to the utmost.

When at last she spoke it was in a tone of voice he had never heard from her—impersonal, with at the same time a note of fear like the flutter of a bird's wing.

“The doctor has been here two or three times lately. I didn't want to bother you, and he said——”

She broke off, and her hand raised from her side in a gesture of seeking. He held it uncomfortably, wishing that the occasion would speedily end.

“August, I've—I've got to leave you.”

He did not comprehend her meaning, and stood stupidly looking down at her spent face. “I'm going to die, August, almost any time now. I wanted to tell you first when we were quietly together; and then Louise and Bernard must know.”

His sensations were so confused, the mere shock of such an announcement had so confounded him that he was unable to penetrate the meaning of the sudden expansion of his blood. His attention strayed from the actuality of his wife to the immaterial shadow wavering on the wall. There Emmy's profile, grotesquely enlarged and sharpened, grimaced at him. August Turnbull's feelings disentangled and grew clearer, there was a conventional memory of his wife as a young woman, the infinitely sharper realization that soon he must be free, a vision of Meta Beggs as she had been at dinner that night, and intense relief from nameless strain.

He moved through the atmosphere of suspense that followed the knowledge of Emmy's condition with a feeling of being entirely apart from his family. Out of the chaos of his emotions the sense of release was most insistent. Naturally he couldn't share it with any one else, not at present. He avoided thinking directly of Meta Beggs, partly from the shreds of the superstitious dread that had once colored his attitude toward his wife and partly from the necessity to control what otherwise would sweep him into a resistless torrent. However, most of his impatience had vanished—a little while now, and in a discreet manner he could grasp all that he had believed so hopelessly removed.

Except for the occasions of Louise's informal presence he dined alone with Miss Beggs. They were largely silent, attacking their plates with complete satisfaction. On the day of her monthly payment he drew the check for a thousand dollars in place of the stipulated hundred, and gave it to her without comment. She nodded, managing to convey entire understanding and acceptance of what it forecast. Once, at the table, he called her Meta.

She deliberated a reply—he had asked her opinion about British bottled sauces—but when she answered she called him Mr. Turnbull. This, too, pleased him. She had an unerring judgment in the small affairs of deference. Dinner had been better than usual, and he realized he had eaten too much. His throat felt constricted, he had difficulty in swallowing a final gulp of coffee; the heavy odors of the dining room almost sickened him.

“We'll get out on the beach,” he said abruptly; “a little air.”

They proceeded past the unremitting sprinklers on the strip of lawn to the wide gray sweep of sand. At that hour no one else was visible, and a new recklessness invaded his discomfort. “You see,” he told her, “that bad luck of yours isn't going to hold.”

“It seems incredible,” she murmured. She added without an appearance of the least ulterior thought: “Mrs. August Turnbull.”

“Exactly,” he asserted.

A triumphant conviction of pleasure to come surged through him like a subtle exhilarating cordial.

“I'll take no nonsensical airs from Louise or the Rathes,” he proclaimed.

“Don't let that worry you,” she answered serenely.

He saw that it need not, and looked forward appreciatively to a scene in which Meta would not come off second.

Above them the long curve of the boardwalk was empty, with, behind it, the suave ornamental roofs of the cottages. A wind quartering from the shore had smoothed the ocean into the semblance of a limitless and placid lake. Minute waves ruffled along the beach with a continuous whispering, and the vault of the west, from which the sun had just withdrawn, was filled with light the color of sauterne wine.

It was inconceivable to August Turnbull that soon Emmy would be gone out of his life. He shook his thick shoulders as if by a gesture to unburden himself of her unpleasant responsibility. He smiled slightly at the memory of how he had come to fear her. It had been the result of the strain he was under; once more the vision of mountainous bread and Emmy returned. The devil was in the woman!

“What are you smiling at?” Meta asked.

“Perhaps it was because my luck, as well, has changed,” he admitted.

She came close up to him, quivering with emotion.

“I want everything!” she cried in a vibrant hunger; “everything! Do you understand? Are you willing? I'm starved as much as that woman up in her bed. Can you give me all the gayety, all the silks and emeralds there are in the world?”

He patted her shoulder. “You'll look like a Christmas tree. When this damned war is over we will go to Europe, to Berlin and Munich. They have the finest streets and theaters and cafes in the world. There things are run by men for men. The food is the best of all—no French fripperies, but solid rare cuts. Drinking is an art——”

“What is that out in the water?” she idly demanded.

He gazed impatiently over the unscored tide and saw a dark infinitesimal blot.

“I have been watching it for a long while,” she continued. “It's coming closer, I think.”

He again took up his planning.

“We'll stay two or three years; till things get on their feet here. Turn the bakery into a company. No work, nothing but parties.”

“Do look!” she repeated. “It's coming in—a little boat. I suppose it is empty.”

The blot was now near enough for him to distinguish its outline. As Meta said, no one was visible. It was drifting. Against his wish his gaze fastened on the approaching boat. It hesitated, appeared to swing away, and then resumed the progress inshore.

“I believe it will float into that cut in the beach below,” he told her.

His attention was divided between the craft and the image of all the pleasures he would introduce to Meta—Turnbull. It was a lucky circumstance that he had plenty of money, for he realized that she would not marry a poor man. This was not only natural but commendable. Poor men were fools, too weak for success; only

the strong ate white bread and had fine women, only the masterful conquered circumstance.

“Come,” she said, catching his hand; “it's almost here.”

She half pulled him over the glistening wet sand to where the deeper water thrust into the beach. Her interest was now fully communicated to him.

“We must drag it safely up,” he articulated, out of breath from her eagerness. The bow swept into the onward current, it moved more swiftly, and then sluggishly settled against the bottom. Painted on its blistering white side was a name, “*Veronica*,” and “Ten persons.” There was a slight movement at the rail, and a sharp unreasoning horror gripped August Turnbull.

“Something in it,” he muttered. He wanted to turn away, to run from the beach; but a stronger curiosity dragged him forward. Not conscious of stepping through shallow water he advanced.

A hunger−ravished dead face was turned to him from the bottom, a huddle of bony joints, dried hands. There were others—all dead, starved. In a red glimmer he saw the incredible travesty of a child, a lead−colored woman, shriveled and ageless from agony.

He fell back with a choking cry, “Emmy!”

There was a dull uproar in his head, and then a violent shock at the back of his brain. August Turnbull's body slid down into the tranquil ripples that ran along the boat's side.

ROSEMARY ROSELLE

It would be better for my purpose if you could hear the little clear arpeggios of an obsolete music box, the notes as sweet as barley sugar; for then the mood of Rosemary Roselle might steal imperceptibly into your heart. It is made of daguerreotypes blurring on their misted silver; tenebrous lithographs—solemn facades of brick with classic white lanterns lifted against the inky smoke of a burning city; the pages of a lady's book, elegant engravings of hooped and gallooned females; and the scent of crumbled flowers.

Such intangible sources must of necessity be fragile—a perfume linked to a thin chime, elusive faces on the shadowy mirror of the past, memories of things not seen but felt in poignant unfathomable emotions. This is a magic different from that of to−day; here perhaps are only some wistful ghosts brought back among contemptuous realities—a man in a faded blue uniform with a face drawn by suffering long ended, a girl whose charm, like the flowers, is dust.

It is all as remote as a smile remembered from youth. Such apparent trifles often hold a steadfast loveliness more enduring than the greatest tragedies and successes. They are irradiated by an imperishable romance: this is my desire—to hold out an immaterial glamour, a vapor, delicately colored by old days in which you may discover the romantic and amiable shapes of secret dreams.

I

It will serve us best to see Elim Meikeljohn first as he walked across Winthrop Common. It was very early in April and should have been cool, but it was warm—already there were some vermilion buds on the maples— and Elim's worn shad−belly coat was uncomfortably heavy. The coat was too big for him—his father had worn it for twenty years before he had given it to Elim for college—and it hung in somber greenish folds about his tall spare body. He carried an equally oppressive black stiff hat in a bony hand and exposed a gaunt serious countenance.

Other young men passing, vaulting lightly over the wooden rail that enclosed the common, wore flowing whiskers, crisply black or brown like a tobacco leaf; their luxuriant waistcoats were draped with a profusion of chains and seals; but Elim's face was austerely shaved, he wore neither brocade nor gold, and he kept seriously to the path.

He was, even more than usual, absorbed in a semi−gloom of thought. It was his birthday, he was twenty−six, and he had been married more than nine years. Already, with his inherited dark temperament, he was middle−aged in situation and feeling. He had been assistant to the professor of philosophy and letters for three of those married years; yes—he had been graduated when he was twenty−three. He arrived at an entrance to the common that faced the row of houses where he had his room, and saw that something unusual was in progress.

The front of his boarding house was literally covered with young men: they hung over the small portico from steps to ridge, they bulged from every window and sat astride of the dormer windows in the roof. Before them on the street a camera had been set up and was covered, all save the snout, by a black rubber cloth, backward from which projected the body and limbs of the photographer.

The latter, Elim realized, was one of a traveling band that took pictures of whatever, on their way, promised sufficient pecuniary return. Here the operator had been in luck—he would sell at least thirty photographs at perhaps fifty cents each. Harry Kaperton, a great swell, was in his window with his setter, Spot; his legs, clad in bags with tremendous checks and glossy boots, hung outward. On the veranda were Hinkle and Ben Willing, the latter in a stovepipe hat; others wore stovepipes set at a rakish angle on one ear. They were all irrepressibly gay, calling from roof to ground, each begging the photographer to focus on his own particular charm.

Perhaps fifty cents—Elim Meikeljohn would have liked a place in the picture; he would like to possess one, to keep it as a memento of the youthful life that flowed constantly about him, but the probable cost was prohibitive. He even wished, as he paused before making his way up the crowded veranda steps, that some one would ask him to stay and have his picture taken with the rest. He delayed, hoping for the mere formality of this friendliness. But it was not forthcoming. He had felt that it wouldn't be; he had divined the careless silence with which the men moved aside for him to mount. There was even a muttered allusion to his famous Scotch thrift, contained in a sharper word. Elim didn't mind—actively. He had been accustomed to the utmost monetary caution since the first dawn of his consciousness. He had come to regard the careful weighing of pennies as an integral part of his being. It had always been necessary for the Meikeljohns, father and son, on their rocky pastures. He didn't mind, but at the same time he bore a faint resentment at the injustice of the marked and perceptible disdain of the majority of his fellows.

They didn't understand, he told himself, still ascending to his room in the third floor back. Every cent that he could squeeze from his small salary must go back to the support of the invalid, his wife. He had never, of course, explained this to any one in Cambridge. They wouldn't be particularly interested and, in addition, his daily companions seemed far too young for such serious confidences. In reality Harry Kaperton was three years older than Elim; and Kaperton had been pleasantly at college, racing horses, for seven years; many others were Elim's age, but the maturity of the latter's responsibility separated them.

In his room he took off his formal coat and nankeen waistcoat and hung them on a pegged board. The room was bare, with two uncurtained windows that afforded a glimpse of the shining river; it contained a small air−tight stove, now cold and black, and a wood box, a narrow bed, a deal table with a row of worn text−books and neatly folded papers, a stand for water pitcher and basin, and two split−hickory Windsor chairs. Now it was filled with an afternoon glow, like powdered gold, and the querulously sweet piping of an early robin.

He dipped his face and hands in cooling water and, at the table, with squared elbows, addressed himself to a

set task.

II

Elim Meikeljohn laid before him a small docket of foolscap folded lengthwise, each section separately indorsed in pale flowery ink, with a feminine name, a class number and date. They were the weekly themes of a polite Young Ladies' Academy in Richmond, sent regularly north for the impressive opinion of a member of Elim's college faculty. The professor of philosophy and letters had undertaken the task primarily; but, with the multiplication of his duties, he had turned the essays over to Elim, whose careful judgments had been sufficiently imposing to secure for him a slight additional income.

He sat for a moment regarding the papers with a frown; then, with a sudden movement, he went over the names that headed each paper. Two he laid aside. They bore above their dates in March, eighteen sixty−one, the name Rosemary Roselle.

He picked one up tentatively. It was called A Letter. Elim opened it and regarded its tenuous violet script. Then, with an expression of augmented determination, he folded it again and placed it with its fellow at the bottom of the heap. He firmly attacked the topmost theme. He read it slowly, made a penciled note in a small precise hand on its margin, folded it once more and marked it with a C minus. He went carefully through the pile, jotting occasional comments, judging the results with A, B or C, plus or minus. Finally only the two he had placed at the bottom remained.

Elim took one up again, gazing at it severely. He wondered what Rosemary Roselle had written about—in her absurd English—this time. As he looked at the theme's exterior, his attention shifted from the paper to himself, his conscience towered darkly above him, demanding a condemnatory examination of his feelings and impulses.

Had he not begun to look for, to desire, those essays from a doubtless erroneous and light young woman? Had he not even, on a former like occasion, awarded her effort with a B minus, when it was questionable if she should have had a C plus? Had his conduct not been dishonest, frivolous and wholly reprehensible? To all these inexorable accusations he was forced to confess himself guilty. He had undoubtedly, only a few minutes before, looked almost impatiently for something from Rosemary Roselle. Beyond cavil she should have had an unadorned C last month. And these easily proved him a broken reed.

He must at once take himself in hand, flames were reaching hungrily for him from the pit of eternal torment. In a little more he would be damned beyond any redemption. He was married ... shame! His thoughts turned to Hester, his wife for nine and more years.

Her father's farm lay next to the Meikeljohns'; the two places formed practically one convenient whole; and when Elim had been no more than a child, Meikeljohn Senior and Hester's parents had solemnly agreed upon a mutually satisfactory marriage. Hester had always been a thin pale slip of a girl, locally famous for her memory and grasp of the Scriptures; but it was only at her fourteenth year that her health began perceptibly to fail, at the same time that a succession of material mischances overwhelmed her family. Finally, borne down to actual privation, her father decided to remove to another section and opportunity. He sold his place for a fraction more than the elder Meikeljohn could pay ... but there was Hester, now an invalid; and there was the agreement that Meikeljohn had made when it had seemed to his advantage. The latter was a rigidly upright man—he accepted for his son the responsibility he himself had assumed, and Hester was left behind. Space in the Meikeljohn household was valuable, the invalid presented many practical difficulties, and, with the solemn concurrence of the elders of their church, Elim—something short of seventeen but a grave mature−seeming boy—and Hester were married.

The winter of his marriage Elim departed for college—his father was a just man, who had felt obscurely that some reparation was due Elim; education was the greatest privilege of which Meikeljohn could conceive, so, at sacrifices that all grimly accepted, Elim was sent to Cambridge. There, when he had been graduated, he remained—there were already more at the Meikeljohn home than their labor warranted— assistant to the professor of philosophy and letters.

Elim again opened the paper before him and spread it severely on the table. The supposititious letter, “Two, Linden Row,” opened in proper form and spelling, addressed to “Dearest Elizabeth.” Its progress, however, soon wabbled, its periods degenerated into a confusion. It endeavored to be casual, easy, but he judged it merely trivial. At one paragraph, despite his resolution of critical impersonality, his interest deepened:

“On Thursday we have to have ready a Theme to send off to Harvard. Of course, every Thursday morning We, with one accord, begin to make excuses. Well, the Dread Day rolls around to−morrow, and consequently I am deep in the Slough of Despond. My only consolation is that our Geniuses can't write regularly, but then the mood to write never possesses me.... This week, in writing a comparison between Hamlet and Antonio, I did succeed in jotting down something, but unfortunately I found that I had said the same many times before, only about different heroes. My tale of Woe——”

Elim once more took himself firmly in hand; he folded the paper and sharply indorsed it with a C minus. Afterward he felt decidedly uncomfortable. He wondered if Rosemary Roselle would be made unhappy by the low marking? Probably she wouldn't care; probably all that occupied her mind were dress and company. Possibly she danced—light, godless.

The haze within deepened; he could see through the window the tops of the maples—they held a green sheen as if in promise of the leaves to follow. The robin whistled faint and clear.

Possibly she danced. Carried away on the gracious flood of the afternoon, he wondered what Rosemary Roselle looked like. He was certain that she was pretty—her writing had the unconscious assurance of a personable being. Well, he would never know.... Rosemary Roselle— the name had a trick of hanging in the memory; it was astonishingly easy to repeat. He tried it aloud, speaking with a sudden emphasis that startled him. The name came back to him from the bare walls of his room like an appeal. Something within him stirred sharp as a knife. He rose with a deep breath, confused, as if some one else, unseen, had unexpectedly spoken.

III

His conscience, stirring again, projected the image of Hester, with her pinched glistening countenance, on his conjecturing. He resolutely addressed himself to the judgment of Rosemary Roselle's second paper, his lighter thoughts drowned in the ascending dark tide of his temperament It was called Our Waitress, and an instant antagonism for the entire South and its people swept over him.

He saw that the essay's subject was a negro, a slave; and all his impassioned detestation of the latter term possessed him. The essence of the Meikeljohns was a necessity for freedom, an almost bitter pride in the independence of their bodies. Their souls they held to be under the domination of a relentless Omnipotence, evolved, it might have been, from the obdurate and resplendent granite masses of the highland where they had first survived. These qualities gave to Elim Meikeljohn's political enmity for the South a fervor closely resembling fanaticism. Even now when, following South Carolina, six other states had seceded, he did not believe that war would ensue; he believed that slavery would be abolished at a lesser price; but he was a supporter of drastic means for its suppression. His Christianity, if it held a book in one hand, grasped a sword in the other, a sword with a bright and unsparing blade for the wrong−doer.

He consciously centered this antagonism on Rosemary Roselle; he visualized her as a thoughtless and capricious female, idling in vain luxury, cutting with a hard voice at helpless and enslaved human beings. He condemned his former looseness of being, his playing with insidious and destructive forces. A phrase, “Babylonish women,” crept into his mind from some old yellow page. He read:

“Indy is a large light mulatto, very neat and very slow. She has not much Sense, but a great deal of Sensibility. Helping her proves Fatal. The more that is done for her the less well does she work.... Indy is very unfortunate: going out with a present of money she lost every penny. Of course she was incapable of work until the sum was replaced.”

Elim paused with an impatient snort at this exhibition of shiftlessness. If the negroes were not soon freed they would be ruined beyond redemption. He read the remainder of the paper rigid and unapproving. It gave, he considered, such an excellent picture of Southern iniquities that he marked it B plus, the highest rating his responsibility had allowed Rosemary Roselle. Now he was certain that her very name held a dangerous potentiality—it came too easily to the tongue; it had a wanton sound like a silk skirt.

The warm glow faded from the room; without, the tenuous and bare upper branches of the maples wavered in the oncoming dusk. The river had disappeared. Elim was acutely conscious of the approaching hour of supper; and in preparation to go out to it he donned again the nankeen waistcoat and solemn garment that had served his father so long and so well.

IV

The following day was almost hot; at its decline coming across Winthrop Common Elim was oppressed and weary. Nothing unusual was happening at the boarding house; a small customary group was seated on the veranda steps, and he joined it. The conversation hung exclusively to the growing tension between North and South, to the forming of a Confederate States of America in February, the scattered condition of the Union forces, the probable fate of the forts in Charleston harbor.

The men spoke, according to their dispositions, with the fiery emphasis or gravity common to great crises. The air was charged with a sense of imminence, the vague discomfort of pending catastrophe. Elim listened without comment, his eyes narrowed, his long countenance severe. Most of the men had gone into Boston, to the Parker House, where hourly bulletins were being posted. Those on the steps rose to follow, all except Elim Meikeljohn—in Boston he knew money would be spent.

He went within, stopping to glance through a number of lately arrived letters on a table and found one for himself, addressed in his father's painstaking script. Alone, once more without his coat, he opened the letter. Its beginning was commonplace—“My dear son, Elim”—but what followed confused him by the totally unexpected shock it contained: Hester, his wife, was dead.

At first he was unable to comprehend the details of what had happened to him; the fact itself was of such disturbing significance. He had never considered the possibility of Hester's dying; he had come to think of her as a lifelong responsibility. She had seemed, in her invalid's chair, withdrawn from the pressure of life as it bore upon others, more enduring than his father's haggard concern over the increasing difficulties of material existence and spiritual salvation, than his mother's flushed toiling.

Elim had lived with no horizon wider than the impoverished daily necessity; he had accepted this with mingled fatality and fortitude; any rebellion had been immediately suppressed as a wicked reflection upon Deity. His life had been ordered in this course; he had accepted it the more readily from his inherited distrust of worldly values and aspirations; it had, in short, been he, and now the foundations of his entire existence had been overthrown.

He read the letter more carefully, realizing the probable necessity of his immediate return home for the funeral. But that was dispelled—his father wrote that it had been necessary to bury Hester at once. The elder Meikeljohn proceeded relentlessly to an exact exposition of why this had been done. “A black swelling” was included in the details. He finished:

“And if it would be inconvenient for you to leave your work at this time it is not necessary for you to come here. In some ways it would be better for you to stay. There is little enough for you to do and it would stop your money at college.... The Lord is a swift and terrible Being Who worketh His will in the night.”

Hester was dead. Elim involuntarily walked to a window, gazing with unseeing eyes at the familiar pleasant prospect. A realization flashed unbidden through his mind, a realization like a stab of lightning—he was free. He overbore it immediately, but it left within him a strange tingling sensation. He directed his mind upon Hester and the profitable contemplation of death; but rebellion sprang up within him, thoughts beyond control whirled in his brain.

Free! A hundred impulses, desires, of which—suppressed by his rigid adherence to a code of duty—he had not been conscious, leaped into vitality. His vision of life swung from its focus upon outward and invisible things to a new surprising regard of his own tangible self. He grew aware of himself as an entity, of the world as a broad and various field of exploit and discovery.

There was, his father had bluntly indicated, no place for him at home; and suddenly he realized that his duties at college had been a tedious grind for inconsiderable return. This admission brought to him the realization that he detested the whole thing—the hours in class; the droning negligent recitations of the men; the professor of philosophy and letters' pedantic display; the cramped academic spirit of the institution. The vague resentment he had felt at the half−concealed disdain of his fellows gave place to a fiery contempt for their majority; the covert humility he had been forced to assume—by the thought of Hester and the few miserable dollars of an inferior position—turned to a bitter freedom of opinion.

The hour for supper approached and passed, but Elim did not leave his room. He walked from wall to wall, by turns arrogant and lost in his new situation. Of one thing he was certain—he would give up his occupation here. It might do for some sniveling sycophant of learning and money, but he was going forth to—what?

He heard footfalls in the bare hall below, and a sudden easy desire for companionship seized him; he drew on the sturdy Meikeljohn coat and descended the stairs to the lower floor. Harry Kaperton's door was open and Elim saw the other moving within. He advanced, leaning in the doorway.

“Back early,” Elim remarked. “What's new at Parker's?”

Kaperton was unsuccessful in hiding his surprise at the other's unexpected appearance and direct question. “Why—why, nothing when I left;” then more cordially: “Come in, find a chair. Bottle on the table—oh, I didn't think.” He offered an implied apology to Elim's scruples.

But Elim advanced to the table, where, selecting a decanter at random, he poured out a considerable drink of pale spirits. Harry Kaperton looked at him in foolish surprise.

“Had no idea you indulged!” he ejaculated. “Always took you to be a severe Puritan duck.”

“Scotch,” Elim corrected him, “Presbyterian.”

He tilted the glass and the spirits sank smoothly from sight. His throat burned as if he had swallowed a mouthful of flame, but there was a quality in the strong rum that accorded with his present mood: it was fiery like his released sense of life. Kaperton poured himself a drink, elevated it with a friendly word and joined Elim.

“I'm going home,” the former proceeded. “You see, I live in Maryland, and the situation there is getting pretty warm. We want to get our women out of Baltimore, and our affairs conveniently shaped, before any possible trouble. I had a message this evening to come at once.”

The two men presented the greatest possible contrast—Harry Kaperton had elegantly flowing whiskers, a round young face that expressed facile excitement at a possible disturbance, and sporting garb of tremendous emphasis. Elim's face, expressing little of the tumult within, harsh and dark and dogged, was entirely appropriate to his somber greenish−black dress. Kaperton gestured toward the bottle, and they took a second drink, then a third.

Kaperton's face flushed, he grew increasingly voluble, but Elim Meikeljohn was silent; the liquor made no apparent impression upon him. He sat across the table from the other with his legs extended straight before him. They emptied the decanter of spirits and turned to sherry, anything that was left. Kaperton apologized profoundly for the depleted state of his cellar—knowing that he was leaving, he had invited a party of men to his room the night before. He was tremendously sorry that Elim had been overlooked—the truth being that no one had known what a good companion Elim was.

It seemed to Elim Meikeljohn, drinking sherry, that the night before he had not existed at all. He did not analyze his new being, his surprising potations; he was proceeding without a cautious ordering of his steps. It was neither a celebration nor a protest, but instinctive, like the indiscriminate gulping of a man who has been swimming under the water.

“Why,” Kaperton gasped, “you've got a head like a cannon ball.”

He rose and wandered unsteadily about, but Elim sat motionless, silent, drinking. He was conscious now of a drumming in his ears like distant martial music, a confused echo like the beat of countless feet. He tilted his glass and was surprised to find it empty.

“It's all gone,” Kaperton said dully.

He was as limp as an empty doll, Elim thought contemptuously. He, Elim, felt like hickory, like iron; his mind was clear, vindicative. He rose, sweeping back the hair from his high austere brow. Kaperton had slid forward in his chair with hanging open hands and mouth.

The drumming in Elim's ears grew louder, a hum of voices was added to it, and it grew nearer, actual. A crowd of men was entering the boarding house, carrying about them a pressure of excited exclamations and a more subtle disturbance. Elim Meikeljohn left Kaperton and went out into the hall. An ascending man met him.

“War!” he cried. “The damned rebels have assaulted and taken Sumter! Lincoln has called for fifty thousand volunteers!” He hurried past and left Elim grasping the handrail of the stair.

War! The word carried an overwhelming significance to his mind dominated by the intangible drumming, to his newly released freedom. War upon oppression, upon the criminal slaveholders of the South! He descended the stairs, pausing above the small agitated throng in the hall.

A passionate elation swept over him. He held his long arms upward and out.

“How many of the fifty thousand are here?” he asked. His ringing voice was answered in an assent that rolled in a solid volume of sound up the stairs. Elim Meikeljohn's soul leaped in the supreme kinship that linked him, man to man, with all.

V

It was again April, extremely early in the morning and month, and thickly cold, when Brevet−Major Elim Meikeljohn, burning with the fever of a re−opened old saber wound, strayed away from his command in the direction of Richmond. His thoughts revolved with the rapidity of a pinwheel, throwing off crackling ideas, illuminated with blinding spurts and exploding colors, in every direction. A vague persistent pressure sent him toward the city. It was being evacuated; the Union forces, he knew, were to enter at dawn; but he had stumbled ahead, careless of consequences, oblivious of possible reprisal.

He was, he recognized by the greater blackness ahead, near the outskirts of the city—for Richmond was burning. The towering black mass of smoke was growing more perceptible in the slowly lightening dawn. Elim Meikeljohn could now hear the low sullen uprush of flames, the faint crackling of timbers, and a hot aromatic odor met him in faint waves.

His scabbard beat awkwardly about his heels, and he impatiently unhooked it and threw it into the gloom of the roadside. The service revolver was still in its holster; but he had forgotten its presence and use. In the multicolored confusion of his mind but one conscious impression remained; and, in its reiteration, he said aloud, over and over, in dull tones, “Two, Linden Row.”

The words held no concrete meaning, they constructed no vision, embodied no tangible desire; they were merely the mechanical expression of an obscure and dominating impulse. He was hardly more sensate in his progress than a nail drawn irresistibly by a magnet.

The gray mist dissolved, and his long haggard face grew visible; it had not aged in the past four years of struggle—almost from boyhood it had been marked with somber longitudinal lines—but it had grown keener, more intense, with the expression of a man whose body had starved through a great spiritual conflict. His uniform, creased and stained, and now silvery with dew, flapped about a gaunt ironlike frame; and from under the leather peak of his kepi, even in his fever, his eyes burned steady and compelling.

Scattered houses, seemingly as unsubstantial as shadows, gathered about him; they grew more frequent, joined shoulder to shoulder, and he was in a city street. On the left he caught a glimpse of the river, solid and smooth and unshining; a knot of men passed shouting hoarsely, and a wave of heat swept over him like a choking cloth. Like the morning, his mind partially cleared, people and scenes grew coherent. The former were a disheveled and rioting rabble; the conflagration spread in lurid waves.

The great stores of the tobacco warehouses had been set on fire, and the spanning flames threatened the entire city. The rich odor of the burning tobacco leaves rolled over the streets in drifting showers of ruby sparks. The groups on the streets resolved into individuals. Elim saw a hulking woman, with her waist torn from grimy shoulders, cursing the retreating Confederate troops with uplifted quivering fists; he saw soldiers in gray joined to shifty town characters furtively bearing away swollen sacks; carriages with plunging frenzied horses, a man with white−faced and despairingly calm women. He stopped hurrying in the opposite direction and demanded:

“Two, Linden Row?”

The other waved a vague arm toward the right and broke away.

The street mounted sharply and Elim passed an open space teeming with hurrying forms, shrill with cries lost in the drumming roar of the flames. Every third man was drunk. He passed fights, bestial grimaces, heard the fretful crack of revolvers. The great storehouses were now below him, and he could see the shuddering inky masses of smoke blotting out quarter after quarter. He was on a more important thoroughfare now, and inquired again:

“Two, Linden Row?”

This man ejaculated:

“The Yankees are here!” The fact seemed to stupefy him, and he stood with hanging hands and mouth.

Elim Meikeljohn repeated his query and was answered by a negro who had joined them.

“On ahead, capt'n,” he volunteered; “fourth turn past the capitol and first crossing.”

The other regained his speech and began to curse the negro and Elim, but the latter moved swiftly on.

Above him, through the shifting tenebrous banks, he saw a classic white building on a patch of incredible

greenery, infinitely remote; and then from the center of the city came a deafening explosion, a great sullen sheet of flame, followed by flashes like lightning in the settling blackness.

“The powder magazines,” Elim heard repeated from person to person. An irregular file of Confederate soldiers galloped past him, and the echo of their hoofs had hardly died before a troop of mounted Union cavalry, with slanting carbines, rode at their heels. They belonged, Elim recognized, to Kautz' command.

He had now reached the fourth turn beyond the withdrawn vision of the capitol, and he advanced through a black snowing of soot. Flames, fanlike and pallid, now flickered about his feet, streamed in the gutters and lapped the curbs. He saw heaps of broken bottles against the bricks, and the smell of fine spilled wines and liquors hung in his nostrils. His reason again wavered—the tremendous spectacle of burning assumed an apocalyptic appearance, as if the city had burst spontaneously into flame from the passionate and evil spirits engendered and liberated by war.

He stopped at the first crossing and saw before him a row of tall brick houses, built solidly and set behind small yards and a low iron fencing. They had shallow porticoes with iron grilling, and at this end a towering magnolia tree swept its new glossy greenery against the third−story windows.

“Linden Row,” he muttered. “Well—Number Two?”

He swung back a creaking gate and went up a flight of bricked steps to the door. He had guessed right; above a brass knocker filmed with the floating muck of the air he saw the numeral, Two, painted beneath the fanlight. The windows on the left were blank, curtained. The house rose silent and without a mark of life above the obscene clamor of the city. He knocked sharply and waited; then he knocked again. Nothing broke the stillness of the facade, the interior. He tried the door, but it was solidly barred. Then a second fact, a memory, joined the bare location in his brain. It was a name—Rose—Rosemary Roselle. He beat with an emaciated fist on the paneling and called, “Roselle! Roselle!”

There was a faint answering stir within; he heard the rattle of a chain; the door swung back upon an apparently empty and cavernous cool hall.

VI

A colored woman, in a crisp white turban, with a strained face more gray than brown, suddenly advanced holding before her in both hands a heavy revolver of an outworn pattern. Elim Meikeljohn could see by her drawn features that she was about to pull the trigger, and he said fretfully:

“Don't! The thing will explode. One of us will get hurt.” She closed her eyes, Elim threw up his arm, and an amazingly loud report crashed through the entry. He stood swaying weakly, with hanging palms, while the woman dropped the revolver with a gasp. Elim Meikeljohn began to cry with short dry sobs.... It was incredible that any one should discharge a big revolver directly at his head. He sank limply against a chest at the wall.

“Oh, Indy!” a shaken voice exclaimed. “Do you think he's dying?” The colored woman went reluctantly forward and peered at Elim. She touched him on a shoulder.

“'Deed, Miss Rosemary,” she replied, relieved and angry, “that shot didn't touch a hair. He's just crying like a big old nothing.” She grasped him more firmly, gave him a shake. “Dressed like a soldier,” she proceeded scornfully, “and scaring us out of our wits. What did you want to come here for anyhow calling out names?”

Elim's head rolled forward and back. The hall seemed full of flaming arrows, and he collapsed slowly on the polished floor. He was moved; he was half−conscious of his heels dragging upstairs, of frequent pauses, voices expostulating and directing thinly. Finally he sank into a sublimated peace in, apparently, a floating white cloud.

He awoke refreshed, mentally clear, but absurdly weak—he was lying in the middle of a four−posted bed, a bed with posts so massive and tall that they resembled smooth towering trees. Beyond them he could see a marble mantel; a grate filled with softly smoldering coals, and a gleaming brass hod; a highboy with a dark lustrous surface; oval gold frames; and muslin curtains in an open window, stirring in an air that moved the fluted valance at the top of the bed. It was late afternoon, the light was fading, the interior wavering in a clear shadow filled with the faint fat odor of the soft coal.

The immaculate bed linen bore an elusive cool scent, into which he relapsed with profound delight. The personality of the room, somber and still, flowed about him with a magical release from the inferno of the past years, the last hours. He heard a movement at a door, and the colored woman in the white turban moved to the side of the bed.

“I told her,” she said in an aggrieved voice, “there wasn't nothing at all wrong with you. I reckon now you're all ready to fight again or eat. Why did you stir things all up in Richmond and kill good folks?”

“To set you free!” Elim Meikeljohn replied.

She gazed at him thoughtfully.

“Capt'n,” she asked finally, “are you free?”

“Why, certainly——” he began, and then stopped abruptly, lost in the memory of the dour past. He recalled his father, with a passion for learning, imprisoned in the narrow poverty of his circumstances and surroundings; he remembered Hester, with her wishful gaze in the confines of her invalid chair; his own laborious lonely days. Freedom, a high and difficult term, he saw concerned regions of the spirit not liberated—solved—by a simple declaration on the body. The war had been but the initial, most facile step. The woman had silenced his sounding assertion, humiliated him, by a word. He gazed at her with a new, less confident interest. The mental effort brought a momentary recurrence of fever; he flushed and muttered: “Freedom ... spirit.”

“You're not as wholesome as you appeared,” the woman judged. “You can't have nothing beside a glass of milk.” She crossed the room and, stirring the fire, put on fresh coal that ignited with an oily crackle. Again at the door she paused. “Don't you try to move about,” she directed; “you stay right in this room. Mr. Roselle, he's downstairs, and Mr. McCall, and—” her voice took on a faint insistent note of warning. He paid little heed to her; he was lost in a wave of weariness.

The following morning, stronger, he rose and tentatively trying the door found it locked. The colored woman appeared soon after with a tray which, when he had performed a meager toilet, he attacked with a pleasant zest.

“The city's just burning right up,” she informed him, standing in the middle of the floor; “the boats on the river caught fire and their camions banged into Canal Street.” She had a pale even color, a straight delicate nose and sensitive lips.

“Are the Union troops in charge?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. They got some of the fire out, I heard tell. But that's not the worst now—a body can't set her foot in the street, it's so full of drunken roaring trash, black and white. It's good Mr. Roselle and Mr. McCall and Mr. John are here,” she declared again; “they could just finish off anybody that offered to turn a bad hand.”

This, Elim felt, was incongruous with his reception yesterday.

Still he made no inquiry. The breakfast finished, he relapsed once more on his pillows and heard the key stealthily turn in the door from the outside.

He told himself, without conviction, that he must rise and join his command. The war, he knew, was over; the courage that had sustained him during the struggle died. The simple question of the colored woman had largely slain it. His own personality, the vision of his forthcoming life and necessity, rose to the surface of his consciousness. Elim realized what had drawn, him to his present situation—it had, of course, been the memory of Rosemary Roselle. The days when he—an assistant to a professor of philosophy and letters—had read and marked her essays seemed to lie in another existence, infinitely remote. How would he excuse his presence, the calling of her name before the house? This was an inopportune—a fatal—moment for a man in the blue of the North to make his bow to a Richmond girl, in the midst of her wasted and burning place of home. He decided reluctantly that it would be best to say nothing of his connection with her academic labors, but to depart as soon as possible and without explanation of his first summons.... Rosemary Roselle—the name had clung persistently to his memory. It was probable that he would see her—once. That alone was extraordinary. He marveled at the grim humor of circumstance that had granted him such a wildly improbable wish, and at the same time made it humanly impossible for him to benefit from it.

VII

The leisurely progress of his thoughts was interrupted by hasty feet without; the bolt was shot back and his door flung open. It was the colored woman—the Indy of the essay—quivering with anger and fear.

"Capt'n," she exclaimed, gasping with her rapid accent, "you come right down to the dining room, and bring that big pistol of yours. There's two, two——" Words failed her. "Anyhow you shoot them! It's some of that liberty you brought along, I reckon. You come down to Miss Rosemary!"

She stood tense and ashen, and Elim rose on one elbow.

"Some of our liberty?" he queried. "Did Miss Roselle send for me?"

"No, sir, she didn't. Miss Rosemary she wouldn't send for you, not if you were the last man alive. I'm telling you to come down to the dining room.... We've tended you and—"

"Well," he demanded impatiently, "what do you want; whom shall I shoot?"

"You'll see, quick enough. And I can't stand here talking either; I've got to go back. You get yourself right along down!"

With painful slowness Elim made his preparations to descend; his fingers could hardly buckle the stiff strap of his revolver sling, but finally he made his way downstairs through a deep narrow hall. He turned from a blank wall to a darkened reception room, with polished mahogany, somber books and engravings on the walls, and a rosy blur of fire in the hearth. A more formal chamber lay at his right, empty, but through an opposite door he caught the faint clatter of a spoon.

Rosemary Roselle was seated, rigid and white, at the end of a table that bore a scattered array of dishes. There were shadows beneath her eyes, and her hands, on the table, were clenched. On her left a man in an unmarked blue uniform sat, sagging heavily forward in his chair, breathing stertorously, with a dark flush over a pouched and flaccid countenance. Opposite him, sitting formally upright, was a negro in a carefully brushed gray suit, with a crimson satin necktie surcharged by vivid green lightning. His bony face, the deep pits of his temples, were the dry spongy black of charcoal, and behind steel−rimmed glasses his eyes rolled like yellow agates. He glanced about, furtive and startled, when Elim Meikeljohn entered, but he was immediately reassured by Elim's disordered uniform. He made a solemn obeisance.

"Colonel," he said, "will you make one of a little informal repast? We are, you see, at the lady's table."

Overcome by a sharp weakness, Elim slipped into the chair at his side and faced Rosemary Roselle. The latter gave no sign of his presence. She sat frozen into a species of statuesque rage. "Like you," the negro continued pompously, "we invited ourselves. All things are free and easy for all. The glorious principle of equality instituted lately has swept away—swept away the inviderous distinctions of class and color. The millenium has come!" He made a grandiloquent gesture with a sooty hand.

"'Ray!" the sodden individual opposite unexpectedly cried.

"We came in," the other continued, "to uphold our rights as the exponents of—of——"

"You sneaked in the kitchen," the woman in the doorway interrupted; "and I found you rummaging in the press."

"Silence!" the orator commanded. "Are you unaware of the dignity now resting on your kinks—hair, hair." He rose, facing Elim Meikeljohn. "Colonel, gentleman, in a conglomeration where we are all glorious cohevals of—of—"

"Shut up!" said the apostrophized colonel, sudden and fretful. "Get out!"

The orator paused, disconcerted, in the midflow of his figures; and unaccustomed arrogance struggled with habitual servility. "Gentleman," he repeated, "in a corposity of souls high above all narrow malignations—"

Elim Meikeljohn took his revolver from its holster and laid it before him on the table. The weapon produced an electrical effect on the figure nodding in a drunken stupor. He rose abruptly and uncertain.

"I'm going," he asserted; "come on, Spout. You can be free and equal better somewheres else."

The negro hesitated; his hand, Elim saw, moved slightly toward a knife lying by his plate. Elim's fingers closed about the handle of his revolver; he gazed with a steady cold glitter, a thin mouth, at the black masklike countenance above the hectic tie and neat gray suit.

The latter backed slowly, instinctively, toward the rear door. His companion had already faded from view. The negro proclaimed:

"I go momentiously. There are others of us banded to obtain equality irrespectable of color; we shall be back and things will go different.... They have gone different in other prideful domestications."

Elim Meikeljohn raised the muzzle lying on the cloth, and the negro disappeared. Rosemary Roselle did not move; her level gaze saw, apparently, nothing of her surroundings; her hands were still clenched on the board. She was young, certainly not twenty, but her oval countenance was capable of a mature severity not to be ignored. He saw that she had wide brown eyes the color of a fall willow leaf, a high−bridged nose and a mouth—at present—a marvel of contempt. Her slight figure was in a black dress; she was without rings or ornamental gold.

"That talking trash gave me a cold misery," the colored woman admitted. She glanced at the girl and moved a bowl of salad nearer Elim Meikeljohn. "Miss Rosemary," she begged, "take something, my heart."

Rosemary Roselle answered with a slow shudder; she slipped forward, with her face buried in her arms on the table. Elim regarded her with profound mingled emotions. In the fantastic past, when he had created her from the studied essays, he had thought of her—censoriously—as gay. Perhaps she danced! He wondered momentarily where the men were Indy had spoken of as present; then he realized that they had been but a precautionary figment of Indy's imagination; the girl, except for the woman with the tender brown hand caressing her shoulder, was alone in the house.

He sat with chin on breast gazing with serious speculation at the crumpled figure opposite him. Indy, corroborating his surmise, said to the girl:

"I can't make out at all why your papa don't come back. He said yesterday when he left he wouldn't be hardly an hour."

"Something dreadful has happened," Rosemary Roselle insisted, raising a hopeless face. "Indy, do you suppose he's dead like McCall and—and—"

"Mr. Roselle he ain't dead," the woman responded stoutly; "he's just had to keep low trash from stealing all his tobacco."

"He could easily be found," Elim put in; "I could have an orderly detailed, word brought you in no time." The girl paid not the slightest heed to his proposal. From the street came a hoarse drunken shouting, a small inflamed rabble streamed by. It wouldn't be safe to leave Rosemary Roselle alone here with Indy. He recalled the threat of the black pomposity he had driven from the house—it was possible that there were others, banded, and that they would return. It was clear to him that he must stay until its head reappeared, order had been reestablished—or, if he went out, take the girl with him.

"You let the capt'n do what he says," the woman urged. Rosemary Roselle's eyes turned toward Elim; it was, seemingly, the first time she had become aware of his presence. She said in a voice delicately colored by hate:

"Thank you, I couldn't think of taking the—the orderly from his conquests."

"Then I'll find your father myself," Elim replied. "You will come with me, of course; show me where to go. It would be a good thing to start at once. I—we—might be of some assistance to him with his tobacco."

Indy declared with an expression of instant determination:

"We'll go right along with you." She silenced Rosemary's instinctive protest. "I'll get your hat and shawl," she told the girl.

And, before the latter could object, the colored woman hurried from the room.

Silence enveloped the two at the table. Elim replaced his revolver in its belt. He had never before studied a girl like Rosemary Roselle; fine white frills fell about her elbows from under the black short sleeves. Her skin was incredibly smooth and white. It was evident that her hands had never done manual labor; their pointed little beauty fascinated him. He thought of the toil−hardened hands of the women of his home. This girl represented all that he had been taught to abjure, all that—by inheritance—he had in the abstract condemned. She represented the vanities; she was vanity itself; and now he was recklessly, contumaciously, glad of it. Her sheer loveliness of being intoxicated him; suddenly it seemed as absolutely necessary to life as the virtues of moral rectitude and homely labor. Personally, he discovered, he preferred such beauty to the latter adamantine qualities. He had a fleet moment of amazed self−consciousness: Elim Meikeljohn—his father an elder in the house of God—astray in the paths of condemned worldly frivolities! Then he recalled a little bush of vivid red roses his mother carefully protected and cultivated; he saw their bright fragrant patch on the rocky gray expanse of the utilitarian acres; and

suddenly a light of new understanding enveloped his mother's gaunt drearily−clad figure. He employed in this connection the surprising word “starved.” ... Rosemary Roselle was a flower.

Indy returned with a small hat of honey−colored straw and a soft white− silk mantilla. The former she drew upon the girl's head and wrapped the shawl about the slim shoulders.

“Now,” she pronounced decisively, “we're going to find your papa.” She led Rosemary Roselle toward the outer door. Elim found his cap in the hall and followed them down the bricked steps to the street. It was at present deserted, quiet; and they turned to the left, making their way toward the river and warehouses.

The fires had largely subsided; below them rose blackened bare walls of brick, sullen twisting flags of smoke; an air of sooty desolation had settled over the city. Houses were tightly shuttered; some with broken doors had a trail of hastily discarded loot on the porticoes; still others were smoldering shells.

A bugle call rose clear and triumphant from the capital; at one place they passed Union soldiers, extinguishing flames.

They descended the flagged street over which Elim had come, turned into another called—he saw—Cary, and finally halted before a long somber facade. Here, too, the fire had raged; the charred timbers of the fallen roof projected desolately into air.

A small group at a main entrance faced them as they approached; a coatless man with haggard features, his clothes saturated with water, advanced quickly.

“Miss Rosemary!” he ejaculated in palpable dismay. He drew Elim Meikeljohn aside. “Take her away,” he directed; “her father ... killed, trying to save his papers.”

“Where?” Elim demanded. “Their house is empty. She can't stay in Richmond alone.”

“I'd forgotten that!” the other admitted. “McCall and John both gone, mother dead, and now—by heaven!” he exclaimed, low and distressed, “she has just no one. I'm without a place. Her friends have left. There's a distant connection at Bramant's Wharf, but that's almost at the mouth of the James.”

Rosemary Roselle came up to them.

“Mr. Jim Haxall,” she asked, direct and white, “is father dead?”

He studied her for a moment and then answered:

“Yes, Miss Rosemary.”

She swayed. Indy, at her side, enveloped her in a sustaining arm.

“Indy,” the girl said, her face on the woman's breast, “he, too!”

“I'm sending a few bales of leaf down the river,” Haxall continued to Elim; “the sloop'll pass Bramant's Wharf; but the crew will be just anybody. Miss Rosemary couldn't go with only her nigger—”

Elim Meikeljohn spoke mechanically:

“I'll be responsible for her.” The war was over; he had been ordered from the column when his wound had broken afresh, and in a maze of fever he had been irresistibly impelled toward Linden Row. “I'll take her to Bramant's Wharf.”

Haxall regarded suspiciously the disordered blue uniform; then his gaze shifted to Elim's somber lined countenance.

“Miss Rosemary's rubies and gold—” he said finally. “But I believe you're honest, I believe you're a good man.”

VIII

James Haxall explained this to Rosemary. Elim, standing aside, could see that the girl neither assented nor raised objection. She seemed utterly listless; a fleet emotion at the knowledge of her father's death had, in that public place, been immediately repressed. The sloop, Elim learned, was ready to start at once. The afternoon was declining; to reach Bramant's Wharf would take them through the night and into the meridian of tomorrow. They had made no preparations for the trip, there was neither bedding nor food; but Elim and Haxall agreed that it was best for Rosemary Roselle to leave the city at the price of any slight momentary discomfort.

Elim looked about for a place where he might purchase food. A near−by eating house had been completely wrecked, its floor a debris of broken crockery. Beyond, a baker's shop had been deserted, its window shattered but the interior intact. The shelves, however, had been swept bare of loaves. Elim searched behind the counters—nothing remained. But in walking out his foot struck against a round object, wrapped in paper, which on investigation proved to be a fruit cake of satisfactory solidity and size. With this beneath his arm he returned to Rosemary Roselle, and they followed Haxall to the wharf where the sloop lay.

The tiller was in charge of an old man with peering pale−blue eyes and tremulous siccated hands. Yet he had an astonishingly potent voice, and issued orders, in tones like the grating of metal edges, to a loutish youth in a ragged shirt and bare legs. The cabin, partly covered, was filled with bagged bales; a small space had been left for the steersman, and forward the deck was littered with untidy ropes and swab, windlass bar and other odds.

Elim Meikeljohn moved forward to assist Rosemary on to the sloop, but she evaded his hand and jumped lightly down upon the deck, Indy, grumbling and certain of catastrophe, was safely got aboard, and Elim helped the youth to push the craft's bow out into the stream. The grimy mainsail rose slowly, the jib was set, and they deliberately gathered way, slipping silently between the timbered banks, emerging from the thin pungent influence of the smoking ruins.

Behind them the sun transfused the veiled city into a coppery blur that gradually sank into a tender−blue dusk. Indy had arranged a place with the most obtainable comfort for Rosemary Roselle; she sat with her back against the mast, gazing toward the bank, stealing backward, at the darkening trees moving in solemn procession.

After the convulsed and burning city, the uproar of guns and clash of conflict, the quiet progress of the sloop was incredibly peaceful and withdrawn. Elim felt as if they had been detached from the familiar material existence and had been set afloat in a stream of silken shadows. The wind was behind them, the boom had been let far but, the old steersman drowsed at his post, and the youth had fallen instantly asleep in a strange cramped attitude.

Elim was standing at the stern—he had conceived it his duty to stay as far away from Rosemary Roselle as her wish plainly indicated; but, in this irrelated phase of living, he gradually lost his sense of responsibility and restrained conduct. He wanted extravagantly to be near Rosemary, to be where he could see her clearly. Perhaps, but this was unlikely, she would speak to him. His desire gradually flooded him; it induced a species of careless heroism, and he made his way resolutely forward and sat on a heap of rope at a point where he could study her with moderate propriety and success. She glanced at him momentarily when he took his place—he saw that her under lip was capable of an extremely human and annoying expression—and returned to her veiled scrutiny of the sliding banks.

An unfamiliar emotion stirred at Elim's heart; and in his painstaking introspective manner he exposed it. He found a happiness that, at the same time, was a pain; he found an actual catch in his throat that was a nebulous desire; he found an utter loneliness together with the conviction that this earth was a place of glorious possibilities of affinity. Principally he was conscious of an urging of his entire being toward the slight figure in black, staring with wide bereft eyes into the gathering evening. On the other side of the mast, Indy was sleeping with her head upon her breast. The feeling in Elim steadily increased in poignancy—faint stars appearing above the indefinite foliage pierced him with their beauty, the ashen−blue sky vibrated in a singing chord, the river divided in whispering confidences on the bow of the sloop.

Elim Meikeljohn debated the wisdom of a remark; his courage grew immeasurably reckless.

“The wind and river are shoving us along together.” Pronounced, the sentence seemed appallingly

compromising; he had meant that the wind and river together, not—

She made no reply; one hand, he saw, stirred slightly.

Since he had not been blasted into nothingness, he continued:

"I'm glad the war's over. Why," he exclaimed in genuine surprise, "you can hear the birds again." A sleepy twitter had floated out over the stream. Still no response. He should not, certainly, have mentioned the war. He wondered desperately what a fine and delicate being like Rosemary Roselle talked about? It would be wise to avoid serious and immediate considerations for commonplaces.

"Ellik McCosh," he said, "a girl in our village who went to Boston, learned to dance, and when she came back she taught two or three. Her communion medal was removed from her," he added with complete veracity. "Perhaps," he went on conversationally, "you don't have communion medals in Richmond—it's a little lead piece you have when you are in good standing at the Lord's table. Mine was taken away for three months for whistling by the church door. A long while ago," he ended in a different voice. He thought of the fruit cake, and breaking off a piece offered it to the silent girl. "It's like your own," he told her, placing it on a piece of paper at her side; "it's from Richmond and wasn't even paid for with strange silver."

At this last a sudden uneasiness possessed him, and he hurriedly searched his pockets. He had exactly fifty cents. Until the present he had totally overlooked the depleted state of his fortune. Elim had some arrears of pay, but now he seriously doubted whether they were collectible. Nothing else. He had emerged from the war brevetted major but as penniless as the morning of his enlistment. He doubted whether, in the hurry of departure, Rosemary Roselle had remembered to bring any money.

Still, she would be cared for, supplied with every necessity, at Bramant's Wharf. There he would leave her ... his breathing stopped, for, incredibly, he saw that her hand was suspended over the piece of cake. She took it up and ate it slowly, absently. This, he felt, had created a bond between them; but it was a conviction in which, apparently, she had no share. She might have thanked him but she didn't.

An underhanded and indefensible expedient occurred to him, and he sat for a perceptible number of minutes concentrating his memory upon a dim and special object. Finally he raised his head.

"Indy," he quoted, "a large light mulatto, hasn't much sense but a great deal of sensibility. That," he added of himself, "is evidently very well observed." He saw that Rosemary turned her head with an impatient curiosity. "She is very unfortunate," he continued uncertainly; "she lost a present of money and couldn't work till it was given back."

"But how," demanded Rosemary Roselle, "did you know that?" Curiosity had betrayed her.

Elim Meikeljohn concealed a grin with difficulty. It was evident that she profoundly regretted the lapse, yet she would not permit herself to retreat from her position. She maintained a high intolerant aspect of query.

"Have you forgotten," he went on, "how the dread day rolled around?" He paused wickedly. "The slough of despond?" he added.

"What silly stuff!" Rosemary pronounced.

"It was," he agreed, "mostly. But the paper about Indy was a superior production. B plus, I think."

A slow comprehension dawned on her face, blurred by the night.

"So that's where they went," she observed; "you marked them." He would have sworn that a smile hovered for the fraction of a moment on her pale lips. She drew up her shoulders slightly and turned away.

His best, his only hope had flickered for a minute and died away. Her silence was like impregnable armor. A puff of wind filled the sails, there was a straining of cordage, an augmented bubbling at the sloop's bow, and then the stir subsided. He passed into a darkness of old distresses, forebodings, grim recollections from his boyhood, inherited bleak memories. Rosemary Roselle's upright figure gradually sank. He realized that she was asleep on her arm. Elim bent forward shamelessly and studied her worn countenance. There was a trace of tears on her cheek. She was as delicate, as helpless as a flower sleeping on its stalk.

An impulse to touch her hair was so compelling that he started back, shaken; a new discordant tumult rose within him, out of which emerged an aching hunger for Rosemary Roselle; he wanted her with a passion cold and numbing like ether. He wanted her without reason, and in the desire lost his deep caution, his rectitude of conscience. He was torn far beyond the emotional possibilities of weak men. The fact that, penniless and without a home, he had nothing to offer was lost in the beat and surge of his feelings. He went with the smashing completeness of a heavy body, broken loose in an elemental turmoil. He wanted her; her fragrant spirit, the

essence that was herself, Rosemary Roselle. He couldn't take it; such consummations, he realized, were beyond will and act, they responded from planes forever above human desire—there was not even a rift of hope. The banks had been long lost in the night; the faint disembodied cry of an owl breathed across the invisible river.

IX

She woke with a little confused cry, and sat gazing distractedly into the dark, her hands pressed to her cheeks.

"Don't you remember," Elim Meikeljohn spoke, "Haxall and the sloop; your relatives at Bramant's Wharf?"

She returned to a full consciousness of her surroundings.

"I was dreaming so differently," she told him. It seemed to Elim that the antagonism had departed from her voice; he even had a feeling that she was glad of his presence. Indy, prostrate on the deck with her chin elevated to the stars, had not moved.

The darkness increased, broken only by the colored glimmer of the port and starboard lights and a wan blur about the old man bent over the tiller. Once he woke the youth and sent him forward with a sounding pole, once the sloop scraped heavily over a mud bank, but that was all; their imperceptible progress was smooth, unmarked.

Elim, recalling Joshua, wished that the sloop and night were anchored, stationary. Already he smelled the dawn in a newly stirring, cold air. The darkness thickened. Rosemary Roselle said:

"I'm dreadfully hungry."

He immediately produced the fruit cake.

"It's really quite satisfactory," she continued, eating; "It's like the rest of this—unreal.... What is your name?" she demanded unexpectedly.

"Elim Meikeljohn."

"That's a very Northern sort of name."

"It would be hard to come by one more so," he agreed. "It's from the highlands of Scotland."

"Then if you don't mind, I'll think of you as Scotch right now."

He conveyed to her the fact that he didn't.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "There's the morning!"

A thin gray streak widened across the east. Almost immediately the night dissolved. They were sweeping down the middle of a river that surprised Elim with its width and majesty. The withdrawn banks bore clustered trees, undulating green reached inland, the shaded facades of houses sat back on lawns that dipped to the stream.

Rosemary Roselle's face was pale with fatigue; her eyes appeared preternaturally large; and this, for Elim, made her charm infinitely more appealing. She smoothed her dress, touched her hair with light fingers. The intimacy of it all thrilled him. A feeling of happy irresponsibility deepened. He lost sight of the probable unhappiness of tomorrow, the catastrophe that was yesterday; Elim was radiantly content with the present.

"You look Northern too," she went on; "you are so much more solemn than the Virginia men—I mean your face is."

"I suppose I've had a solemn sort of existence," he agreed. "Life's an awful serious thing where I was born. The days are not long enough, life's too short, to get your work done. It's a stony pasture," he admitted. He described the Meikeljohn farm land, sloping steeply to swift rocky streams, the bare existence of the sheep, the bitter winters. He touched briefly on Hester and his marriage.

"It's no wonder," she pronounced, "that you have shadows in your eyes. You can't imagine," she continued, "how wonderful everything was in Richmond, before—I simply can't talk about it now. I suppose we are ruined, but there isn't a man or woman who wouldn't do the same thing all over again. I'm almost glad that father isn't—isn't here; misery of any kind made him so wretched ... perfect memories." She closed her eyes.

Her under lip, he saw, projected slightly, her chin was fine but stubborn. These details renewed his delight; they lent a warm humanity to her charm.

"Any one would know," she said, regarding him, "that you are absolutely trustworthy. It's a nice quality now, but I don't think I would have noticed it even a month ago. You can see that I have grown frightfully old in the littlest while. Yes, you are comfortable to be with, and I suspect that counts for a great deal. It's quite sad, too, to grow old. Oh, look, we've changed! Where do you suppose he is going? This can't nearly be Bramant's."

The mainsail had been hauled in, and the course of the sloop changed, quartering in toward the shore. The youth, moving forward, stopped to enlighten them. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the old man.

"He's got kin here at Jerico," he explained; "and we're setting in to see them. We won't stop long."

The mainsail came smoothly down, the jib fluttered, and the sloop slid in beside a sturdy old wharf, projecting from a deep fringe of willows. No sign of life or habitation was visible.

The youth made fast a hawser, the old man mounted painfully to the dock, and Indy stirred and rose.

“I must have just winked asleep,” she declared in consternation.

Rosemary Roselle lightly left the boat, and Elim followed. “If we explored,” he proposed, “perhaps we could get you a cup of coffee.” She elected, however, to stay by the river, and Elim went inward alone. Beyond the willows was an empty marshland. The old man had disappeared, with no trace of his objective kin. A road, deep in yellow mire, mounted a rise beyond and vanished a hundred yards distant. Elim, unwilling to get too far away from the sloop, had turned and moved toward the wharf, when he was halted by the sound of horses' hoofs.

He saw approaching him over the road a light open carriage with a fringed canopy and a pair of horses driven by a negro in a long white dust coat. In the body of the carriage a diminutive bonneted head was barely visible above an enormous circumference of hoops. Elim saw bobbing gray curls, peering anxious eyes, and a fluttering hand in a black silk−thread mit.

“Gossard,” a feminine voice cried shrilly to the driver, at the sight of Elim on the roadside, “here's a Yankee army; lick up those horses!”

The negro swung a vicious whip, the horses started sharply forward, but the carriage wheels, sinking in a deep slough, remained fixed; the harness creaked but held; the equipage remained stationary. The negro dismounted sulkily, and Elim crossed the road and put his shoulder to a wheel. Together with the driver, he lifted the carriage on to a firmer surface. The old lady was seated with tightly shut eyes.

“This here man ain't going to hurt you,” the driver exclaimed impatiently. “This exdus is all nonsense anyways,” he grumbled. “I got a mind to stop—I'm free.”

She directed upon him a beady black gaze.

“You get right into this carriage,” she commanded; “you'd be free to starve. You are a fool!” The man reluctantly obeyed her. “I thank you for your clemency,” she said to Elim. She fumbled among her flounces and hoops and produced an object carefully wrapped and tied. “Here,” she proclaimed; “I can still pay for a service. Gossard—” the carriage moved forward, was lost in the dip in the road. Elim opened the package in his hand and regarded, with something like consternation, a bottle of champagne.

Beyond the wharf the great yellow flood of the river gleamed in the sun; choirs of robins whistled in trees faintly green. Rosemary Roselle was seated with her feet hanging over the water.

“Champagne for breakfast,” she observed, shaking her head; “only the most habitual sports manage that.” He recounted the episode of the “Yankee army,” delighted by her less formal tone, then the old man returned as enigmatically as he had disappeared. The ropes were cast off, the sloop swung out into the current, and their smooth progress was resumed.

A few more hours and they would be at Bramant's Wharf. There, Elim knew, he would be expected to leave Rosemary. There would be a perfunctory gratitude from her relatives, perhaps a warmer appreciation from herself—a moment—a momentary pressure of her hand—and then— where? He would never again come in contact with so exquisite a girl; they were, he realized, customarily held in a circle where men like himself, outsiders, rarely penetrated; once more with her family and he would be forgotten. Anyhow, he had nothing.

But in spite of these heavy reflections his irresponsible happiness increased. In this segment of existence no qualifications from the shore were valid. Time, himself, at the tiller, seemed drifting, unconcerned. Rosemary Roselle regarded Elim with a franker interest. She took off a small slipper and emptied some sand from the shore; the simple act seemed to him burdened with gracious warmth. Now she was infinitely easier than any girl he had known before. Those about his home met the younger masculine world either with a blunt sarcasm or with an uneasy voiceless propriety. Rosemary, propped on an elbow, was as unconcerned as a boy. This made her infinitely more difficult of approach. Her slight beautiful body, not hidden by clothes—as decency demanded in the more primitive state—was delightfully marked, suggested. Here was beauty admitted, lauded, even studied, in place of the fierce masking and denouncement of his father and the fellow elders.

He remembered, from collegiate hours, the passion of the Greeks for sheer earthly strength and loveliness—Helen and Menelaus, Sappho on the green promontories of Lesbos. At the time of his reading he had maintained a wry brow ... now Elim Meikeljohn could comprehend the siege of Troy.

He said aloud, without thinking and instantly aghast at his words:

“You are like a bodied song.” He was horrified; then his newer spirit utterly possessed him, he didn't care; he nodded his long solemn head.

Rosemary Roselle turned toward him with a cool stare that was lost in irresistible ringing peals of laughter.

“Oh!” she gasped; “what a face for a compliment. It was just like pouring sirup out of a vinegar cruet.”

He became annoyed and cleared his throat in an elder−like manner, but her amusement strung out in silvery chuckles.

“It's the first I've said of the kind,” he admitted stiffly; “I've no doubt it came awkward.”

She grew more serious, studied him with thoughtful eyes. “Do you know,” she said slowly, “I believe you. Compliments in Virginia are like cherries, the trees are full of them; they're nice but worth—so much.” She measured an infinitesimal degree with a rosy nail against a finger. “But I can see that yours are different. They almost hurt you, don't they?”

He made no reply, struggling weakly against what, he perceived, was to follow.

“You're like a song that to hear would draw a man about the world,” said Elim Meikeljohn, pagan. “He would leave his sheep and byre, he'd drop his duty and desert his old, and follow. I'm lost,” he decided, in a last perishing flicker of early teaching; and then he smiled inexplicably at the wrath to come.

Rosemary Roselle grew more serious.

“But that's not a compliment at all,” she discovered; “it's more, and it makes me uncomfortable. Please stop!”

“About the world,” echoed Elim, “and everything else forgotten.”

“Please,” she repeated, holding up a prohibitory palm.

“Rose petals,” he said, regarding it. His madness increased. She withdrew her hand and gazed at him with a small frown. She was sitting upright, propped on her arms. Her mouth, with its slightly full under lip, was elevated, and an outrageous desire possessed him. His countenance slowly turned hotly red, and slowly a faint tide of color stained Rosemary Roselle's cheeks. She looked away; Elim looked away. He proceeded aft and learned that Bramant's Wharf lay only a few miles ahead.

The old man cursed the wind in his stringent tones. Elim hadn't noticed anything reprehensible in the wind. It appeared that for a considerable time there hadn't been any. A capful was stirring now, and humanity— ever discontented—silently cursed that.

“We're nearly there,” he said, returning to Rosemary Roselle.

He was unable to gather any intelligence from her expression.

She rose, and stood with a hand on Indy's shoulder, murmuring affectionately in the colored woman's ear. The sloop once more headed at a long angle for the shore. Bramant's Wharf grew visible, projecting solidly from a verdant bank. They floated silently up to the dock, and the youth held the sloop steady while Rosemary Roselle and Indy mounted from its deck. Elim followed, but suddenly he stopped, and his hand went into his pocket. A half dollar fell ringing into the boat. Elim indicated the youth; he was now penniless.

X

"The house," Rosemary explained, "is almost a mile in. There is a carriage at the wharf when they expect you. And usually there is some one about."

Elim, carrying the cake and bottle, followed over a grassy road between tangles of blackberry bushes. On either hand neglected fields held a sparse tangle of last year's weeds; beyond, trees closed in the perspective. The sun had passed the zenith, and the shadows of walnut trees fell across the road. Elim's face was grim, a dark tide rose about him, enveloping his heart, bothering his vision. He wanted to address something final to the slim girl in black before him, something now, before she was forever lost in the gabble of her relatives; but he could think of nothing appropriate, expressive of the tumult within him. His misery deepened with every step, grew into a bitterness of rebellion that almost forced an incoherent reckless speech. Rosemary Roselle didn't turn, she didn't linger, there were a great many things that she might say. The colored woman was positively hurrying forward. A great loneliness swept over him. He had not, he thought drearily, been made for joy.

"It's queer there's no one about," Rosemary Roselle observed. They reached the imposing pillars of an entrance—the wooden gate was chained, and they were obliged to turn aside and search for an opening in a great mock−orange hedge. Before them a wide sweep of lawn led up to a formal dark facade; a tanbark path was washed, the grass ragged and uncut. Involuntarily they quickened their pace.

Elim saw that towering brown pillars rose to the roof of the dwelling and that low wings extended on either hand. Before the portico a stiffly formal garden lay in withered neglect.

The flower beds, circled with masoned rims and built up like wired bouquets, held only twisted and broken stems.

A faint odor of wet plaster and dead vegetation rose to meet them. On the towering wall of the house every window was tightly shuttered. The place bore a silent and melancholy air of desertion.

The girl gave a dismayed gasp. Elim hastily placed his load on the steps and, mounting, beat upon the door. Only a dull echo answered. Dust fell from the paneling upon his head.

"Maybe they have shut up the front for protection," he suggested. He made his way to the rear; all was closed. Through the low limbs of apple trees he could see a double file of small sad brick quarters for the slaves. They, too, were empty. The place was without a living being. He stood, undecided, when suddenly he heard Rosemary Roselle calling with an acute note of fear.

He ran through the binding grass back to the garden.

"Elim Meikeljohn!" She stumbled forward to meet him. "Oh, Elim," she cried; "there's no one in the world——" A sob choked her utterance.

He fell on his knees before her:

"There's always me."

She sank in a fragrant heap into his arms.

Elim Meikeljohn laughed over her shoulder at his entire worldly goods on the steps—the fragmentary fruit cake and a bottle of champagne.

Here they are lost on the dimming mirror of the past.

THE THRUSH IN THE HEDGE

I

Harry Baggs came walking slowly over the hills in the blue May dusk. He could now see below him the clustered roofs and tall slim stack of a town. His instinct was to avoid it, but he had tramped all day, his blurred energies were hardly capable of a detour, and he decided to settle near by for the night. About him the country rose and fell, clothed in emerald wheat and pale young corn, while trees filled the hollows with the shadowy purple of their darkening boughs. A robin piped a belated drowsy note; the air had the impalpable sweetness of beginning buds.

A vague pleasant melancholy enveloped him; the countryside swam indistinctly in his vision—he surrendered himself to inward sensations, drifting memories, unformulated regrets. He was twenty and had a short powerful body; a broad dusty patient face. His eyes were steady, light blue, and his jaw heavy but shapely. His dress—the forlorn trousers, the odd coat uncomfortably drawn across thick shoulders, and incongruous hat—held patently the stamp of his worldly position: he was a tramp.

He stopped, looking about. The road, white and hard, dipped suddenly down; on the right, windows glimmered, withdrawn behind shrubbery and orderly trees; on the left, a dark plowed field rose to a stiff company of pines and the sky. Harry Baggs stood turned in the latter direction, for he caught the faint odor of wood smoke; behind the field, a newly acquired instinct told him, a fire was burning in the open. This, now, probably meant that other wanderers—tramps—had found a place of temporary rest.

Without hesitation he climbed a low rail fence, found a narrow path trod in the soft loam and followed it over the brow into the hollow beyond. His surmise was correct—a fire smoldered in a red blur on the ground, a few relaxed forms gathered about the wavering smoke, and at their back were grouped four or five small huts.

Harry Baggs walked up to the fire, where, with a conventional sentence, he extended his legs to the low blaze. A man regarded him with a peering suspicious gaze; but any doubts were apparently laid, for the other silently resumed a somnolent indifference. His clothes were an amazing and unnecessary tangle of rags; his stubble of beard and broken black hat had an air of unreality, as though they were the stage properties of a stupid and conventional parody of a tramp.

Another, sitting with clasped knees beyond the fire, interrupted a monotonous whining recital to question Harry Baggs. “Where'd you come from?”

“Somewhere by Lancaster.”

“Ever been here before?” And, when Baggs had said no: “Thought I hadn't seen you. Most of us here come back in the spring. It's a comfortable dump when it don't rain cold.” He was uncommonly communicative. “The Nursery's here for them that want work; and if not nobody's to ask you reasons.”

A third, in a grimy light overcoat, with a short bristling red mustache and morose countenance, said harshly: “Got any money?”

“Maybe two bits.”

“Let's send him in for beer,” the other proposed; and a new animation stirred the dilapidated one and the talker.

“You can go to hell!” Baggs responded without heat.

“That ain't no nice way to talk,” the second proclaimed. “Peebles, here, meant that them who has divides with all that hasn't.”

Peebles directed a hard animosity at Harry Baggs. His gaze flickered over the latter's heavy−set body and unmoved face. “Want your jaw slapped crooked?” he demanded with a degree of reservation.

“No,” the boy placidly replied.

A stillness enveloped them, accentuated by the minute crackling of the disintegrating wood. The dark increased and the stars came out; the clip−clip of a horse's hoofs passed in the distance and night. Harry Baggs became flooded with sleep.

“I s'pose I can stay in one of these brownstones?” he queried, indicating the huts.

No one answered and he stumbled toward a small shelter. He was forced to bend, edge himself into the close damp interior, where he collapsed into instant unconsciousness on a heap of bagging. In the night he cried out, in

a young strangely distressed voice; and later a drift of rain fell on the roof and ran in thin cold streams over his still body.

II

He woke late the following morning and emerged sluggishly into a sparkling rush of sunlight. The huts looked doubly mean in the pellucid day. They were built of discarded doors and variously painted fragments of lumber, with blistered and unpinned roofs of tin, in which rusted smokepipes had been crazily wired; strips of moldy matting hung over an entrance or so, but the others gaped unprotected. The clay before them was worn smooth and hard; a replenished fire smoked within blackened bricks; a line, stretched from a dead stump to a loosely fixed post, supported some stained and meager red undergarb.

Harry Baggs recognized Peebles and the loquacious tramp at the edge of the clearing. The latter, clad in a grotesquely large and sorry suit of ministerial black, was emaciated and had a pinched bluish countenance. When he saw Baggs he moved forward with a quick uneven step.

"Say," he proceeded, "can you let me have something to get a soda−caffeine at a drug store? This ain't a stall; I got a fierce headache. Come out with a dime, will you? My bean always hurts, but to−day I'm near crazy."

Harry Baggs surveyed him for a moment, and then, without comment, produced the sum in question. The other turned immediately and rapidly disappeared toward the road.

"He's crazy, all right, to fill himself with that dope," Peebles observed; "it's turning him black. You look pretty healthy," he added. "You can work, and they're taking all the men they can get at the Nursery."

The boy was sharply conscious of a crawling emptiness—hunger. He had only fifteen cents; when that was gone he would be without resources. "I don't mind," he returned; "but I've got to eat first."

"Can't you stick till night?" his companion urged. "There's only half a day left now. If you go later there'll be nothing doing till tomorrow."

"All right," Harry Baggs assented.

The conviction seized him that this dull misery of hunger and dirt had settled upon him perpetually—there was no use in combating it; and, with an animal−like stoicism, he followed the other away from the road, out of the hollow, to where row upon row of young ornamental trees reached in mathematical perspective to broad sheds, glittering expanses of glass, a huddle of toolhouses, and office.

His conductor halted at a shed entrance and indicated a weather−bronzed individual.

"Him," he said. "And mind you come back when you're through; we all dish in together and live pretty good."

Harry Baggs spent the long brilliant afternoon burning bunches of condemned peach shoots. The smoke rolled up in a thick ceaseless cloud; he bore countless loads and fed them to the flames. The hungry crawling increased, then changed to a leaden nausea; but, accepting it as inevitable, he toiled dully on until the end of day, when he was given a dollar and promise of work to−morrow.

He saw, across a dingy street, a small grocery store, and purchased there coffee, bacon and a pound of dates. Then he returned across the Nursery to the hollow and huts. More men had arrived through the day, other fires were burning, and an acrid odor of scorched fat and boiling coffee rose in the delicate evening. A small group was passing about a flasklike bottle; a figure lay in a stupor on the clay; a mutter of voices, at once cautious and assertive, joined argument to complaint.

"Over this way," Peebles called as Harry Baggs approached. The former inspected the purchased articles, then cursed. "Ain't you got a bottle on you?"

But when the bacon had been crisped and the coffee turned into a steaming thick liquid, he was amply appreciative of the sustenance offered. They were shortly joined by Runnel, the individual with the bluish poisoned countenance, and the elaborately ragged tramp.

"Did you frighten any cooks out of their witses?" Peebles asked the last contemptuously. The other retorted unintelligibly in his appropriately hoarse voice. "Dake knocks on back doors," Peebles explained to Harry Baggs, "and then fixes to scare a nickel or grub from the women who open."

Quiet settled over the camp; the blue smoke of pipes and cigarettes merged imperceptibly into the dusk of evening. Harry Baggs was enveloped by a momentary contentment, born of the satisfaction of food, relaxation after toil; and, leaning his head back on clasped hands, he sang:

"I changed my name when I got free

To Mister, like the res'.
But now ... Ol' Master's voice I hears
Across de river: 'Rome,
You damn ol' nigger, come and bring
Dat boat an' row me home!'"

His voice rolled out without effort, continuous as a flowing stream, grave and round as the deep tone of a temple bell. It increased in volume until the hollow vibrated; the sound, rather than coming from a single throat, seemed to dwell in the air, to be the harmony of evening made audible. The simple melody rose and fell; the simple words became portentous, burdened with the tragedy of vain longing, lost felicity. The dead past rose again like a colored mist over the sordid reality of the present; it drifted desirable and near across the hill; it soothed and mocked the heart—and dissolved.

The silence that followed the song was sharply broken by a thin querulous question; a tenuous bent figure stumbled across the open.

"Who's singing?" he demanded.

"That's French Janin," Peebles told Harry Baggs; "he's blind."

"I am," the latter responded—"Harry Baggs."

The man came closer, and Baggs saw that he was old and incredibly worn; his skin clung in dry yellow patches to his skull, the temples were bony caverns, and the pits of his eyes blank shadows. He felt forward with a siccated hand, on which veins were twisted like blue worsted over fleshless tendons, gripped Harry Baggs' shoulder, and lowered himself to the ground.

"Another song," he insisted; "like the last. Don't try any cheap show."

The boy responded immediately; his serious voice rolled out again in a spontaneous tide.

"'Hard times,'" Harry Baggs sang; "'hard times, come again no more.'"

The old man said: "You think you have a great voice, eh? All you have to do to take the great roles is open your mouth!"

"I hadn't thought of any of that," Baggs responded. "I sing because— well, it's just natural; no one has said much about it."

"You have had no teaching, that's plain. Your power leaks like an old rain barrel. What are you doing here?"

"Tramping."

Harry Baggs looked about, suddenly aware of the dark pit of being into which he had fallen. The fires died sullenly, deserted except for an occasional recumbent figure. Peebles had disappeared; Dake lay in his rags on the ground; Runnel rocked slowly, like a pendulum, in his ceaseless pain.

"Tramping to the devil!" he added.

"What started you?" French Janin asked.

"Jail," Harry Baggs answered.

"Of course you didn't take it," the blind man commented satirically; "or else you went in to cover some one else."

"I took it, all right—eighteen dollars." He was silent for a moment; then: "There was something I had to have and I didn't see any other way of getting it. I had to have it. My stepfather had money that he put away—didn't need. I wanted an accordion; I dreamed about it till I got ratty, lifted the money, and he put me in jail for a year.

"I had the accordion hid. I didn't tell them where, and when I got out I went right to it. I played some sounds, and—after all I'd done—they weren't any good. I broke it up—and left."

"You were right," Janin told him; "the accordion is an impossible instrument, a thing entirely vulgar. I know, for I am a musician, and played the violin at the Opera Comique. You think I am lying; but you are young and life is strange. I can tell you this: I, Janin, once led the finale of Hamlet. I saw that the director was pale; I leaned forward and he gave me the baton. I knew music. There were five staves to conduct—at the Opera Comique."

He turned his sightless face toward Harry Baggs.

"That means little to you," he spoke sharply; "you know nothing. You have never seen a gala audience on its feet; the roses—"

He broke off. His wasted palms rested on knees that resembled bones draped with maculate clothing; his sere head fell forward. Runnel paced away from the embers and returned. Harry Baggs looked, with doubt and

wonderment, at the, ruined old man.

The mere word musician called up in him an inchoate longing, a desire for something far and undefined. He thought of great audiences, roses, the accompaniment of violins. Subconsciously he began to sing in a whisper that yet reached beyond the huts. He forgot his surroundings, the past without light, the future seemingly shorn of all prospect.

French Janin moved; he fumbled in precarious pockets and at last produced a small bottle; he removed the cork and tapped out on his palm a measure of white crystalline powder, which he gulped down. Then he struggled to his feet and wavered away through the night toward a shelter.

Harry Baggs imagined himself singing heroic measures; he finished, there was a tense pause, and then a thunderous acclamation. His spirit mounted up and up in a transport of emotional splendor; broken visions thronged his mind of sacrifice, renouncement, death. The fire expired and the night grew cold. His ecstasy sank; he became once more aware of the human wreckage about him, the detritus of which he was now a part.

III

He spent the next day moving crated plants to delivery trucks, where his broad shoulders were most serviceable, and in the evening returned to the camp, streaked with fine rich loam. French Janin was waiting for him and consumed part of Harry Baggs' unskilfully cooked supper. The old man was silent, though he seemed continually at the point of bursting into eager speech. However, he remained uncommunicative and followed the boy's movements with a blank speculative countenance. Finally he said abruptly:

“Sing that song over—about the 'damn ol' nigger.'“

Harry Baggs responded; and, at the end, Janin nodded.

“What I should have expected,” he pronounced. “When I first heard you I thought: 'Here, perhaps, is a great voice, a voice for Paris;' but I was mistaken. You have some bigness—yes, good enough for street ballads, sentimental popularities; that is all.”

An overwhelming depression settled upon Harry Baggs, a sense of irremediable loss. He had considered his voice a lever that might one day raise him out of his misfortunes; he instinctively valued it to an extraordinary degree; it had resembled a precious bud, the possible opening of which would flood his being with its fragrant flowering. He gazed with a new dread at the temporary shelters and men about him, the huts and men that resembled each other so closely in their patched decay.

Until now, except in brief moments of depression, he had thought of himself as only a temporary part of this broken existence. But it was probable that he, too, was done—like Runnel, and Dake, who lived on the fear of women. He recalled with an oath his reception in the village of his birth on his return from jail: the veiled or open distrust of the adults; the sneering of the young; his barren search for employment. He had suffered inordinately in his narrow cell—fully paid, it had seemed, the price of his fault. But apparently he was wrong; the thing was to follow him through life—and he would live a long while—; condemning him, an outcast, to the company of his fellows.

His shoulders drooped, his face took on the relaxed sullenness of those about him; curiously, in an instant he seemed more bedraggled, more disreputable, hopeless.

French Janin continued:

“Your voice is good enough for the people who know nothing. Perhaps it will bring you money, singing at fairs in the street. I have a violin, a cheap thing without soul; but I can get a thin jingle out of it. Suppose we go out together, try our chance where there is a little crowd; it will be better than piggin' in the earth.”

It would, Baggs thought, be easier than carrying heavy crates; subtly the idea of lessened labor appealed to him. He signified his assent and rolled over on his side, staring into nothingness.

French Janin went into the town the following day—he walked with a surprising facility and speed—to discover where they might find a gathering for their purpose. Harry Baggs loafed about the camp until the other returned with the failing of light.

“The sales about the country are all that get the people together now,” he reported; “the parks are empty till July. There's to be one tomorrow about eight miles away; we'll try it.”

He went to the shelter, where he secured a scarred violin, with roughly shaped pegs and lacking a string. He motioned Harry Baggs to follow him and proceeded to the brow of the field, where he settled down against a fence, picking disconsolately at the burring strings and attempting to tighten an ancient bow. Baggs dropped beside him. Below them night flooded the winding road and deepened under the hedges; a window showed palely alight; the stillness was intense.

“Now!” French Janin said.

The violin went home beneath his chin and he improvised a thin but adequate opening for Harry Baggs' song. The boy, for the first time in his existence, sang indifferently; his voice, merely big, lacked resonance; the song was robbed of all power to move or suggest.

Janin muttered unintelligibly; he was, Harry Baggs surmised, speaking his native language, obscurely complaining, accusing. They tried a second song: “Hard times, hard times, come again no more.” There was not an accent of longing nor regret.

“That'll do,” French Janin told him; “good enough for cows and chickens.”
He rose and descended to the camp, a bowed unsubstantial figure in the gloom.

IV

They started early to the sale. Janin, as always, walked swiftly, his violin wrapped in a cloth beneath his arm. Harry Baggs lounged sullenly at his side. The day was filled with a warm silvery mist, through which the sun mounted rayless, crisp and round. Along the road plum trees were in vivid pink bloom; the apple buds were opening, distilling palpable clouds of fragrance.

Baggs met the morning with a sullen lowered countenance, his gaze on the monotonous road. He made no reply to the blind man's infrequent remarks, and the latter, except for an occasional murmur, fell silent. At last Harry Baggs saw a group of men about the fence that divided a small lawn and neatly painted frame house from the public road. A porch was filled with a confusion of furniture, china was stacked on the grass, and a bed displayed at the side.

The sale had not yet begun; A youth, with a pencil and paper, was moving distractedly about, noting items; a prosperous−appearing individual, with a derby resting on the back of his neck, was arranging an open space about a small table. Beyond, a number of horses attached to dusty vehicles were hitched to the fence where they were constantly augmented by fresh arrivals.

“Here we are!” Baggs informed his companion. He directed Janin forward, where the latter unwrapped his violin. A visible curiosity held the prospective buyers; they turned and faced the two dilapidated men on the road. A joke ran from laughing mouth to mouth. Janin drew his bow across the frayed strings; Harry Baggs cleared the mist from his throat. As he sang, aware of an audience, a degree of feeling returned to his tones; the song swept with a throb to its climax:

“'*You damn ol' nigger, come and bring*
Dat boat an' row me home!'“

There was scattered applause.

“Take your hat round,” Janin whispered; and the boy opened the gate and moved, with his battered hat extended, from man to man.

Few gave; a careless quarter was added to a small number of pennies and nickels. Janin counted the sum with an unfamiliar oath.

“That other,” he directed, and drew a second preliminary bar from his uncertain instrument.

“Here, you!” a strident voice called. “Shut your noise; the sale's going to commence.”

French Janin lowered the violin.

“We must wait,” he observed philosophically. “These things go on and on; people come and go.”

He found a bank, where he sat, after stumbling through a gutter of stagnant water. Harry Baggs followed and filled a cheap ornate pipe. The voice of the auctioneer rose, tiresome and persistent, punctuated by bids, haggling over minute sums for the absurd flotsam of a small house keeping square of worn oilcloth, a miscellany of empty jars. A surprisingly passionate argument arose between bidders; personalities and threats emerged. Janin said:

“Listen! That is the world into which musicians are born; it is against such uproar we must oppose our delicate chords—on such hearts.” His speech rambled into French and a melancholy silence.

“It's stopped for a little,” Baggs reminded him.

Janin rose stiffly and the other guided him to their former place. The voice and violin rose, dominated a brief period, and the boy went among the throng, seeking newcomers. The mist thickened, drops of water shone on his ragged sleeves, and then a fine rain descended. The crowd filled the porch and lower floor, bulged apparently from door and windows. Harry Baggs made a motion to follow with his companion, but no one moved; there was no visible footing under cover. They stayed out stolidly in the wet, by an inadequate tree; and whenever chance offered Harry Baggs repeated his limited songs. A string of the violin broke; the others grew soggy, limp; the pegs would tighten no more and Janin was forced to give up his accompanying.

The activities shifted to a shed and barn, where a horse and three sorry cows and farming implements were sold. Janin and Harry Baggs followed, but there was no opportunity for further melody; larger sums were here involved; the concentration of the buyers grew painful. The boy's throat burned; it was strained, and his voice grew hoarse. Finally he declared shortly that he was going back to the shelter by the Nursery.

As they tramped over the rutted and muddy road, through a steadily increasing downpour, Harry Baggs counted the sum they had collected. It was two dollars and some odd pennies. Janin was closely attentive as the money passed through the other's fingers. He took it from Baggs' hand, re−counted it with an unfailing touch, and gave back a half.

The return, even to the younger's tireless being, seemed interminable. Harry Baggs tramped doggedly, making no effort to avoid the deepening pools. French Janin struggled at his heels, shifting the violin from place to place and muttering incoherently.

It was dark when they arrived at the huts; the fires were sodden mats of black ash; no one was visible. They stumbled from shelter to shelter, but found them full. One at last was discovered unoccupied; but they had no sooner entered than the reason was sharply borne upon them—the roof leaked to such an extent that the floor was an uneasy sheet of mud. However, there was literally nowhere else for them to go. Janin found a broken chair on which he balanced his bowed and shrunken form; Harry Baggs sat against the wall.

He dozed uneasily, and, wakened by the old man's babbling, cursed him bitterly. At last he fell asleep; but, brought suddenly back to consciousness by a hand gripping his shoulder, he started up in a blaze of wrath.

He shook off the hand and heard French Janin slip and fall against an insecure wall. The interior was absolutely black; Harry Baggs could see no more than his blind companion. The latter fumbled, at last regained a footing, and his voice fluctuated out of an apparent nothingness.

“There is something important for you to know,” Janin proceeded.

“I lied to you about your voice—I, once a musician of the orchestra at the Opera Comique. I meant to be cunning and take you round to the fairs, where we would make money; have you sing truck for people who know nothing. I let you sing to−day, in the rain, for a dollar—while I, Janin, fiddled.

“I am a *voyou*; there is nothing in English low enough. The thought of it has been eating at me like a rat.” The disembodied words stopped, the old man strangled and coughed; then continued gasping: “Attention! You have a supreme barytone, a miracle! I heard all the great voices for twenty years, and know.

“At times there is a voice with perfect pitch, a true art and range; not many—they are cold. At times there is a singer with great heart, sympathy ... mostly too sweet.

“But once, maybe, in fifty, sixty years, both are together. You are that—I make you amends.”

The rain pounded fantastically on the roof a few inches above Harry Baggs' head and the water seeped coldly through his battered shoes; but, in the violent rebirth of the vague glow he had lost a short while before, he gave no heed to his bodily discomfort. “A supreme barytone!” The walls of the hut, the hollow, dissolved before the sudden light of hope that enveloped him; all the dim dreams, the unformulated aspirations on which subconsciously his spirit had subsisted, returned.

“Can you be sure?” he demanded uncertainly.

“Absolutely! You are an artist, and life has wrung you out like a cloth—jail, hungry, outcast; yes, and nights with stars, and water shining; men like old Janin, dead men, begging on the roads—they are all in your voice, jumbled—serious barytone——” The high thin recital stopped, from exhaustion.

Harry Baggs was warm to the ends of his fingers. He wiped his wet brow with a wetter hand.

“That's fine,” he said impotently; “fine!”

He could hear French Janin breathing stertorously; and, suddenly aware of the other's age, the misery of their situation, he asked:

“Don't you feel good?”

“I've been worse and better,” he replied. “This is bad for your throat, after singing all day in the rain. *Voyou*!” he repeated of himself.

Silence enveloped them, broken by the creaking of the blind man's chair and the decreasing patter of the rain. Soon it stopped and Harry Baggs went outside; stars glimmered at the edges of shifting clouds, a sweet odor rose from the earth, a trailing scent of blossoming trees expanded.

He sang in a vibrant undertone a stave without words. An uneasy form joined him; it was Runnel.

“I b'lieve my head'll burst!” he complained.

“Leave that soda−caffeine be.”

He would never forget Runnel with his everlasting pain; or Dake, who lived by scaring women.... Great audiences and roses, and the roar of applause. He heard it now.

V

Harry Baggs returned to the Nursery, where, with his visions, his sense of justification, he was happy among the fields of plants. There he was given work of a more permanent kind; he was put under a watchful eye in a group transplanting berry bushes, definitely reassigned to that labor to−morrow. He returned to the camp with a roll of tar paper and, after supper, covered the leaking roof of the shelter. French Janin sat with his blank face following the other's movements. Janin's countenance resembled a walnut, brown and worn in innumerable furrows; his neck was like a dry inadequate stem. As he glanced at him the old man produced a familiar bottle and shook out what little powder, like finely ground glass, it contained. He greedily absorbed what there was and, petulantly exploring the empty container, flung it into the bushes. A nodding drowsiness overtook him, his head rolled forward, he sank slowly into a bowed amorphous heap. Harry Baggs roused him with difficulty.

“You don't want to sit like this,” he said; “come up by the field, where it's fresher.”

He lifted Janin to his feet, half carried him to the place under the fence. Harry Baggs was consumed by a desire to talk about the future— the future of his voice; he wanted to hear of the triumphs of other voices, of the great stages that they finally dominated. He wanted to know the most direct path there; he was willing that it should not be easy. “I'm as strong as an ox,” he thought.

But he was unable to move French Janin from his stupor; in reply to his questions the blind man only muttered, begged to be let alone. Life was at such a low ebb in him that his breathing was imperceptible. Harry Baggs was afraid that he would die without a sound—leave him. He gave up his questioning and sang. He was swept to his feet by a great wave of feeling; with his head back, he sent the resonant volume of his tones toward the stars. Baggs stopped suddenly; stillness once more flooded the plowed hill and he raised imploring arms to the sky in a gust of longing.

“I want to sing!” he cried. “That's all—to sing.”

Janin was brighter in the morning.

“You must have some exercises,” he told the boy. “I'll get new strings for the violin; it'll do to give you the pitch.”

At the day's end they went again to the hilltop. French Janin tightened and tuned his instrument.

“Now!” he measured, with poised bow. “Ah!” Both his voice and violin were tremulous, shrill; but they indicated the pitch of the desired note. “Ah!” the old man quavered, higher.

“Ah!” Harry Baggs boomed in his tremendous round tone.

They repeated the exercises until a slip of a new moon, like a wistful girl, sank and darkness hid the countryside. A palpitating chorus of frogs rose from the invisible streams. Somnolence again overtook Janin; the violin slipped into the fragrant grass by the fence, but his fingers still clutched the bow.

Pity for the other stirred Baggs' heart. He wondered what had ruined him, brought him—a man who had played in an opera house—here. A bony elbow showed bare through a torn sleeve—the blind man had no shirt; the soles of his shoes gaped, smelling evilly. Yet once he had played in an orchestra; he was undoubtedly a musician. Life suddenly appeared grim, a sleepless menace awaiting the first opportune weakness by which to enter and destroy.

It occurred to Harry Baggs for the first time that against such a hidden unsuspected blight his sheer strength would avail him little. He had stolen money; that in itself held danger to his future, his voice. He had paid for it; that score was clear, but he must guard against such stupidities in the years to come. He had now a conscious single purpose—to sing. A new sense of security took the place of his doubts. He stirred Janin from his collapsed sleep, directed him toward their hut.

He returned eagerly in the evening to the vocal exercises. French Janin struggled to perform his part, but mostly Harry Baggs boomed out his Ahs! undirected. The other had been without his white powder for three days; his shredlike muscles twitched continually and at times he was unable to hold the violin. Finally:

“Can you go in to the post−office and ask for a package for me at general delivery?” he asked Harry Baggs. “I'm expecting medicine.”

“That medicine of yours is bad as Runnel's dope. I've a mind to let it stay.”

The other rose, stood swaying with pinching fingers, tremulous lips.

“I'm afraid I can't make it,” he whimpered.

“Sit down,” Harry Baggs told him abruptly; “I'll go. Too late now to try pulling you up. Whatever it is, it's got you.”

It was warm, almost hot. He walked slowly down the road toward the town. On the left was a smooth lawn, with great stately trees, a long gray stone house beyond. A privet hedge, broken by a drive, closed in the withdrawn orderly habitation. A young moon bathed the scene in a diffused silver light; low cultivated voices sounded from a porch.

Harry Baggs stopped; he had never before seen such a concretely desirable place; it filled him with a longing, sharp like pain. Beyond the hedge lay a different world from this; he could not even guess its wide possession of ease, of knowledge, of facility for song. A voice laughed, gay and untroubled as a bird's note. He wanted to stay, seated obscurely on the bank, saturate himself with the still beauty; but the thought of French Janin waiting for the relief of his drug drove him on.

The maple trees that lined the quiet streets of the town were in full early leaf. Groups paced tranquilly over the brick ways; the houses stood in secure rows. A longing for safety, recognition, choked at Harry Baggs' throat. He wanted to stop at the corner, talk, move home to a shadowy cool porch. He hurried in his ragged clothes past the pools of light at the street crossings into the kinder gloom. At that moment he would have surrendered his voice for a place in the communal peace about him.

He reached the post−office and asked for a package addressed to Janin. The clerk delayed, regarded him with suspicion, but in the end surrendered a small precisely wrapped box. As he returned his mood changed; all he asked, he muttered bitterly, was a fair trial for his voice. He recognized obscurely that a singer's existence must be different from the constricted life of a country town; here were no stage, no audience, for the great harmonies he had imagined himself producing. He had that in his heart which would make mere security, content, forever impossible.

In the dilapidated camp French Janin eagerly clutched the box. He almost filled his palm with the crystalline powder and gulped it hastily. Its effect was produced slowly.... Janin waited rigidly for the release of the drug.

The evening following, under the fence on the hill, the blind man dozed while Harry Baggs exercised his voice.

“Good!” the former pronounced unexpectedly. “I know; heard all the great voices for twenty years; a violin in the Opera Comique. Once I led the finale of Hamlet. I saw the Director stop.... He handed me the baton. He died soon after, and that was the beginning of my bad luck. I should have been Director; but I was ignored, and came to America— Buenos Aires; then Washington, and—and morphia.”

There was a long silence and then he spoke again with a new energy:

“I'm done, but you haven't started. You're bigger than ever I was; you'll go on and on. I, Janin, will train you; when you sing the great roles I'll sit in a box, wear diamond studs. Afterward, as we roll in a carriage down the Grandes Boulevards, the people in front of the cafes will applaud; the voice is appreciated in Paris.”

“I have a lot to learn first,” Baggs put in practically.

The old man recovered his violin. “Ah!” He drew the note tenuous but correct from the uncertain strings. “Ah!” Harry Baggs vociferated to the inattentive frogs, busy with their own chorus.

VI

The practice proceeded with renewed vigor through the evenings that followed; then French Janin sank back into a torpor, varied by acute depression.

“I haven't got the life in me to teach you,” he admitted to Harry Baggs. “I'll be dead before you get your chance; besides, you ought to be practising all day, and not digging round plants and singing a little in the evening. You've got the voice, but that's not enough; you've got to work at exercises all your life.”

“I'm strong,” Harry Baggs told him; “I can work more than most men.”

“No, that won't do alone; you've got to go at it right, from the start; the method's got to be good. I'll be dead in some hospital or field when you'll be hardly starting. But remember it was Janin who found you, who dug you out of a set of tramps, gave you your first lessons.” He changed. “Stay along with me, Harry,” he begged; “take me with you. You're strong and'll never notice an old man. You will be making thousands some day. I will stop the morphia; perhaps I've got a good bit in me yet. Attention!” He raised the bow.

“No!” he cried, interrupting. “Breathe deep, below the chest. Control! Control! Hold the note steady, in the middle; don't force it into your head.”

His determination scion expired. Tears crept from under his sunken lids. He reached furtively into his pocket, took morphia. The conviction seized Harry Baggs that nothing could be accomplished here. The other's dejection was communicated to him. Where could he find the money, the time for the necessary laborious years of preparation? He was without credentials, without clothes; there was no one to whom he could go but the old spent man beside him. They were adrift together outside life, as the huts they inhabited were outside the orderly town beyond the hill.

He rose, left Janin, and walked slowly along the fence to the road. The moon had increased in size and brilliancy; the apple trees had bloomed and their fallen petals glimmered on the ground. He thought of the house on the smooth sward, with its hedge and old trees; a sudden longing seized him to linger at its edge, absorb again the profound peaceful ease; and he quickened his pace until he was opposite the low gray facade.

He sat on the soft steep bank, turned on his elbow, gazing within. The same voices drifted from the porch, voices gay or placid, and contained laughter. A chair scraped. It was all very close to Harry Baggs—and in another world. There was a movement within the house; a window leaped into lighted existence and then went out against the wall. Immediately after, a faint pure harmony of strings drifted out to the hedge. It was so unexpected, so lovely, that Harry Baggs sat with suspended breath. The strings made a pattern of simple harmony; and then, without warning, a man's voice, almost like his own, began singing. The tones rose fluid and perfect, and changed with feeling. It seemed at first to be a man; and then, because of a diminuendo of the voice, a sense of distance not accounted for by his presence near the hedge, he knew that he heard a record of the actual singing.

The voice, except for its resemblance to his own, did not absorb his attention; it was the song itself that thrilled and held him. He had never before heard music at once so clear and capable of such depths. He realized instinctively, with a tightening of his heart, that he was listening to one of the great songs of which Janin had spoken. It hung for a minute or more in his hearing, thrilling every nerve, and then died away. It stopped actually, but its harmony rang in Harry Baggs' brain. Instantly it had become an essential, a permanent part of his being. It filled him with a violent sense of triumph, a richness of possession that gave birth to a new unconquerable pride.

He rose, waited for a short space; but nothing more followed. He was glad of that; he had no wish to blur the impressions of the first. Harry Baggs hurried up the road and crossed the field to where he had left French Janin. The latter was still sleeping, crumpled against the vegetation. Baggs grasped the thin shoulder, shook him into consciousness.

“I have just heard something,” he said. “Listen! What is it?”

He sang without further preliminary, substituting a blank phrasing for uncomprehended words; but the melody swept without faltering to its conclusion. Janin answered irritably, disturbed by his rude awakening:

“The Serenade from Don Giovanni—Mozart. Well, what about it?”

“It's wonderful!” Harry Baggs declared. “Are there any more as great?”

“It is good,” Janin agreed, his interest stirred; “but there are better—the Dio Possente, the Brindisi from

Hamlet. Once I led the finale of Hamlet. I saw the Director——”

“I'll get every one,” the boy interrupted.

“There are others now, newer—finer still, I'm told; but I don't know.” Janin rose and steadied himself against the fence. “Give me a start. I've been getting confused lately; I don't seem to keep a direction like I could. From Don Giovanni: 'Deh vieni alla finestra'— 'Come to the window' 's about it. I'm glad you're not a tenor; they're delicate and mean. But you are a fine boy, Harry; you'll take the old man up along with you!”

He talked in a rapid faint voice, like his breathing. Harry Baggs grasped his arm and led him down to their shanty. French Janin entered first, and immediately the other heard a thin complaint from within:

“Somebody's got that nice bed you made me.”

Harry Baggs went into the hut and, stooping, shook a recumbent shape.

“Get out of the old man's place!” he commanded.

A string of muffled oaths responded.

“There's no reserved rooms here.”

“Get out!” Baggs insisted.

The shape heaved up obscurely and the boy sent him reeling through the door. French Janin sank with weary relief on the straw and bagging. He grasped the thick young arm above him.

“We won't be long in this,” he declared; “diamond studs!”

He fell asleep instantly, with his fingers caught in Harry Baggs' sleeve. The latter, with the supreme egotism of youth, of a single ambition, loosened the hand and moved out of the narrow confinement of the shanty. He wanted space, the sky, into which to sing his imaginary triumphant songs.

VII

The next day moved toward its end without arresting incident. Janin and Harry Baggs had walked to the public road, where they stood leaning against the rail fence. The smoke from Baggs' pipe uprose in unbroken spheres; the evening was definitely hot. French Janin said:

“In the town to−day I asked about that house here at the bend. It seems he's got money; comes for a couple of months in the spring—just like us—and then goes to Europe like as not. Perhaps he knows a voice.”

The blind man fell silent, contemplative.

“Trouble is,” he broke out fretfully, “we've got nothing to sing. That about the 'damn old nigger' won't do. You ought to know something like the Serenade.

“Well,” he added after a moment, “why not? I could teach you the words —it's Italian; you've nearly got the air. It's all wrong and backward; but this isn't the Conservatoire. You can forget it when you have started; sing exercises again.”

“When can we begin?” Harry Baggs asked.

“We'll brush our clothes up best we can,” Janin proceeded, absorbed in his planning, “and go up to the porch of an evening. 'Mr. Brinton'— that's his name—I'll say, 'I'm M. Janin, once of the orchestra at the Opera Comique, and I'd like you to listen to a pupil of mine. I've heard them all and this boy is better——'“ He stopped; took morphia.

“Can't you stop that for a day?” Harry Baggs demanded desperately. “Can't you?”

He watched with bitter rebellion the inevitable slackening of the other's being, the obfuscation of his mind. Janin hung over the fence, with hardly more semblance of life than an incredibly tattered and empty garment.

“Come on, you old fool!” Baggs exclaimed, burning with impatience, balked desire; he half carried him brusquely to his bed.

Yet, under the old man's fluctuating tuition, he actually began the Serenade within twenty−four hours. “*Deh vieni alla finestra*,” French Janin pronounced. “*Deh vieni*——” Harry Baggs struggled after him. His brow grew wet with the intensity of his effort; his tongue, it seemed to him, would never accomplish the desired syllables.

Janin made a determined effort to live without his drug; the abstinence emphasized his fragility and he was cold, even in the heart of the long sunny day; but the effort stayed him with a flickering vitality, bred visions, renewed hopes of the future. He repeated the names of places, opera houses—the San Carlo, in Naples; the Scala—unknown to Harry Baggs, but which came to him with a strange vividness. The learning of the Serenade progressed slowly; French Janin forgot whole phrases, some of which returned to memory; one entire line he was forced to supply from imagination.

At last the boy could sing it with a degree of intelligence; Janin translated and reconstructed the scene, the characters.

“You ought to have some good clothes,” he told Harry Baggs; he spoke again of the necessity of a diamond stud.

“Well, I haven't,” the other stated shortly. “They'll have to listen to me without looking.”

He borrowed a rusted razor and subjected himself to the pain of an awkward shaving; then inadequately washed his sole shirt and looped the frayed collar with a nondescript tie.

The night was immaculate; the moon, past the full, cast long segments of light and shadow across the countryside. Harry Baggs drew a deep breath:

“We might as well go.”

French Janin objected; he wasn't ready; he wasn't quite sure of what he was going to say. Then:

“I haven't anything to show. Perhaps they will laugh at me—at Janin, of the Opera Comique. I couldn't allow that.”

“I'm going to sing,” the boy reminded him; “if it's any good they won't laugh. If what you say's right they'll have to believe you.”

“I feel bad to−night, too, in my legs.”

“Get your violin.”

A fresh difficulty arose: French Janin positively refused to play on his present instrument before a critical audience.

“It's as thin as a cat,” he protested. “Do you want me to make a show of myself?”

“All right; I'll sing alone. Come on!”

Janin's legs were uncertain; he stumbled over the path to the road and stopped at the fence. He expressed fresh doubts, the hesitation of old age; but Harry Baggs silenced him, forced him on. A cold fear possessed the boy, which he resolutely suppressed: if Janin were wrong, his voice worthless, if they laughed, he was done. Opportunity, he felt, would never return. With his voice scorned, no impetus remained; he had no other interest in life, no other power that could subdue the slight inward flaw.

He saw this in a vivid flash of self−knowledge.... If he couldn't sing he would go down, lower than Janin; perhaps sink to the level of Dake.

“Come on!” he repeated grimly, assisting his companion over the luminous white road.

Janin got actually feebler as he progressed. He stopped, gasping, his sightless face congested.

“I'll have to take a little,” he whispered, “just a taste. That puts life in me; it needs a good deal now to send me off.”

He produced the familiar bottle and absorbed some powder. Its effect was unexpected—he straightened, walked with more ease; but it acted upon his mind with surprising force.

“I want to stop just a little,” he proclaimed with such an air of decision that Harry Baggs followed him without protest to the fragrant bank. “You're a good fellow,” Janin went on, seated; “and you're going to be a great artist. It'll take you among the best. But you will have a hard time for a while; you won't want anybody hanging on you. I'd only hurt your chances—a dirty old man, a drugtaker. I would go back to it, Harry; it's got me, like you said. People wouldn't have me round. I doubt if I'd be comfortable with them. They'd ask me why I wasn't Director.”

“Come on,” Baggs repeated for the third time; “it's getting late.”

He lifted French Janin to his feet and forced him on. “You don't know life,” the other continued. “You would get sick of me; you might get influenced to put me in a Home. I couldn't get my breath right there.”

Harry Baggs forced him over the road, half conscious of the protesting words. The fear within him increased. Perhaps they wouldn't even listen to him; they might not be there.

His grip tightened on French Janin; he knew that at the first opportunity the old man would sink back into the oblivion of morphia.

“I've done all I could for you, Harry”—the other whimpered. “I've been some—good. Janin was the first to encourage you; don't expect too much.”

“If I get anywhere, you did it,” Harry Baggs told him.

“I'd like to see it all,” French Janin said. “I know it so well. Who'd have thought”—a dull amazement crept into his voice—“that old Janin, the sot, did it?... And you'll remember.”

They stopped opposite the entrance to the place they sought. Harry Baggs saw people on the porch; he recognized a man's voice that he had heard there before. On the right of the drive a thick maple tree cast a deep shadow, but beyond it a pool of clear moonlight extended to the house. He started forward, but Janin dragged him into the gloom of the maple.

“Sing here,” he whispered in the boy's ear; “see, the window—*Deh vieni alla finestra*.”

Harry Baggs stood at the edge of the shadow; his throat seemed to thicken, his voice expire.

“No,” he protested weakly; “you must speak first.”

He felt the old man shaking under his hand and a sudden desperate calm overtook him.

He moved forward a little and sang the first phrase of the Serenade.

A murmur of attention, of surprised amusement, arose from the porch; then, as his voice gained in bigness, flowed rich and thrilling and without effort from his deep powerful lungs, the murmur died away. The song rose toward its end; Harry Baggs saw nothing but the window above him; he put all the accumulated feeling, the longing, of the past miserable years into his ending.

A silence followed, in which Harry Baggs stood with drooping head. Then an unrestrained patter of applause followed; figures advanced. French Janin gave the boy a sharp unexpected shove into the radiance beyond the tree.

“Go on and on,” he breathed; “and never come back any more!”

He turned and shambled rapidly away into the shadows, the obscurity, that lined the road.