VALIANT DUST

KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD

AN ILLUSTRATED PIGGY STORY STUDIO EDITION

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An Honest Man

The first time that Annette, Countess Chudenitz, met Andrew Radin was at a hectic "function" in her cousin's (Mrs. Livingston Dollard's) house. I hardly know how to describe the occasion, for it was of no social genre. Radin talked for an hour; New York's intelligentsia listened, rubbing shoulders with débutantes, bewildered matrons, and glib young women who were officially garment-workers (on strike), but who would have been more accurately labelled dynamite. In positions of vantage sat the clever creatures, male and female, who were running Mrs. Dollard's newest publication--the third and by far the most important that she had yet financed. They were the ones who asked the proper questions at the proper time, and gave Radin a chance to make his points. The débutantes were as bewildered as the matrons, but their bewilderment did not--if you will pardon the paradox--bewilder them. They knew that this was the proper atmosphere for them to breathe--Mrs. Dollard said so--and they took their tea from the hands of the second footman without perceiving that it should, logically speaking, have choked them. Radin himself drank tea. So did the garment-workers. So did all the intelligentsia. So did every one except Annette Chudenitz, to whom the whole scene was at once incredibly familiar and alluringly strange.

Annette Davidge had married, in the 'nineties, Ishtvan, Count Chudenitz, ornament of embassies and wily Nestor of the Ballplatz. Now, a childless widow, by no means in love with her husband's country, she spent the better part of her time in America. Bertha Dollard gathered in her garment-workers, her socialists (real ones), her Radins, knowing them for queer, priding herself on their queerness, but feeling them none the less sacred--as if they had been a new phenomenon, creatures half-fish, half-divine. She had never seen anything like them, but she believed that they, and they only, knew the truth. The Countess Chudenitz had seen thousands like them; their features took her back to the Styrian countryside, to the ghettos of Pest, to the streets of Vienna on the Kaiser's birthday. But she had never sat next them on chairs before, and her Americanism thrilled within her. Radin held her from the first. She had read some of it before, but she had never been face to face with it--not without the police, in a firm wall, between. This was what her forefathers had done for her; something that Ishtvan's forefathers could not have conceived, much less performed. She could meet Andrew Radin, could talk to him as one

human being to another; they could agree or differ, in Bertha Dollard's music-room, as if they were in naked space. It was not sex that made her ignore the garment-workers, push aside the brilliant young women who helped edit Mrs. Dollard's subsidized but very independent review, and make, with assurance, for Radin himself--forgetting tea, forgetting the spectacle of the social salad before her, which at another time might have intrigued her. Something in her went fearlessly out to meet something in Radin; there was born in her that afternoon one of those bitter passions of the brain which often go farther than any physical infatuation to make love a disease. Sex never called to sex more imperiously than the quality of Radin's intellect called to what she had of mind.

She was less than woman when she made her way to him and tacitly offered herself. What she offered was her brain, but she did it inwardly with as abandoned a gesture as though it had been her body. If you ask me whether such mental surrender is not one of the known approaches of what folk call love, I can only say that it has never struck me that way, though there is no road which love cannot take. Annette Davidge never had loved; so far as I know, never did love. If she could have loved any man, it would have been Peter Dollard, her cousin Bertha's bachelor brother-in-law. It may be that Radin kept her, in the end, from Peter; but, if he did, it was only by shutting her off for a time from any human interest. Socialism, communism, internationalism, are not human interests--which is why they invoke the New Testament in vain. Not even by calling humanity an organism can you inject the human element into them. Annette Davidge did not know this, though Radin probably did, at the very moment he bent to her. It is no part of my purpose to discuss, even indirectly, any economic or "social" problem whatsoever; only to give you the true tale of Annette, Countess Chudenitz, for its own interest. Heaven and hell shall have become less than names when the irony of fate ceases to be perceived by human nature. Or, rather--let me not plagiarize--

Earth and ocean shall be shadows when Prometheus shall be dead.

All I wish to point out now is that Annette Davidge was, one might say, a discarnate being when she made her way through the crowd to Radin.

I have said that it is not my purpose to discuss theories. This is a story--a raw piece of human life--not, I take my oath, a fable. Nor is it my purpose to analyze Andrew Radin for such as may read. Equally, I can take my oath that about Radin I do not know. I do not, that is, know the whole of that

personality--which, though it acted so simply, must have been, with his combined gifts, so complex. Annette Davidge I think I do know; but I trace Radin chiefly through his effect on her and certain outstanding visible acts of his own. I do not even pretend (though I have shrewd guesses) to be more accurately informed than you as to his origin and his heritage. He was ever a man of mystery and, I believe, chose to be. Otherwise, why doesn't the world know, to this day, whether he was--is, I should say--pure Russian, Galician, Lithuanian, Pole, or German Jew? He was perfectly polyglot, and his blood may have been as mixed as his speech. I confess that it does not concern me much. He was Radin (and may be, again, though he is now as lost to the world as Enver Pasha) and an internationalist. To Annette Davidge he brought a whole new gospel. And yet one hates to call it a gospel, for reasons before stated. A whole new theory of life, let us say. Some of the catchwords she had heard before, and now and then an editorial in The Life Everlasting, Bertha Dollard's review, explained to her some side-issue that she had never understood. But Radin was the fountain-head, and she took her pitcher all the way to him. Radin encouraged The Life Everlasting just as he encouraged a strike here, an incendiary lecture there, sabotage somewhere else, a bomb on the other side of the world. I doubt if he ever thought it of prime importance, though he must have chuckled to himself over the type of person who took it seriously. No; I take that back. Radin doubtless thought it quite proper, moderately useful, and not at all funny, that rich, well-educated Americans should lend their money and their patronage to anarchy; should give funds to the socialists and tea to the I. W. W. Radin and his like walk in a queer twilit world, never penetrated by the rays of mirth. Saturn is their sun. Under Saturn there is no such thing as a paradox--or a joke. As Annette Davidge had wit but no humor, she was able to breathe that air.

I call it Mrs. Dollard's review by courtesy and for convenience. Really, she had given it its head, and had about as much control over it as though she had paid for a tank and sent it into action with her blessing. Eventually, anyhow, it became self-supporting.

It was during the winter of 1913-14 that she saw most of Radin. I do not know whether the man was ever known to like any one, but he was with her a good deal--just as if he did like her. She gave him a substantial amount of money for purposes that he seldom did more than sketch for her. She trusted him completely, and, I believe, with reason; in the sense, that is, that the money actually went, every penny of it, to the purposes he had sketched.

There was certainly a Slavic vein in that extraordinary man, for he talked to her sometimes for hours on end, over countless cups of tea. (She had come to a samovar, all for Radin.) Nor was it merely master and neophyte, for Annette talked, too. Her altruism was as different from Radin's as grape-juice from vodka, but they called the two by the same name as they tipped their glasses.... It was a curious relationship. She believed implicitly everything he said, though all along she found difficulty in co-ordinating his points. He cannot have been interested in her philosophy, for he was adamant, a finished product, not one inch of him left plastic--not even an Achilles tendon. He asked no more of her than to do what he advised. I cannot conceive that Annette could have furnished him with anything of value besides an occasional cheque. Yet he let her talk to him as glibly as he talked to her. Something in the quality of her mind appealed, too, to the quality of his. Flattery, comfort, money, blind devotion, personal passion even, he could find--did find, doubtless--elsewhere. What he got exclusively from Annette must have been something else. I give it as my theory that his feeling for her partook of the nature of hers for him, though certainly it did not go so far. Annette can never have filled the brain of this busy man as he filled hers. But that curious relationship was mental, and fed on talk of the most impersonal. It was--if you'll pardon the phrase--as if two vocabularies met and interbred. Sex comes into it only by analogy; not by the slightest participation. Radin obviously appreciated these odd facts as well as, or better than, Annette Chudenitz.

We did not talk of Bolsheviki in the spring of 1914. Radin, of course, was a Bolshevik--a complete case. But the tag had not yet been invented; decent people over here had never heard of Lenin and Trotzky; and he passed, in Mrs. Dollard's and Annette's circle, rather vaguely as a socialist, or a communist, or some such thing. The world in which he spent most of his time, and where he was more completely understood and more intelligently sympathized with, was quite unknown to that circle. I doubt if he described those other groups much, even to Annette, except by way of statistics or rotund prophecy. Annette, that is, was permitted to know that the Social Revolution would come and would find millions ready. And since the Social Revolution seemed, in those days, no more imminent than Gabriel's trumpet-call, many people alluded to it as easily as church members allude to Doomsday. It was scarcely more than a metaphor, though it had a thrill to it. For the next three years, of course, no one thought of anything but war.

In the spring of 1914, the Countess Chudenitz found it necessary to return to Austria--business of some sort, under her husband's complicated will. She was living in his Styrian stronghold when the Archduke was murdered at Serajevo. The Countess Chudenitz had little sympathy for war; and though she had at Kirchberg no access to the facts, she had distrusted the Ballplatz for many years. It was all that Count Berchtold and his kind stood for, which had driven her back, with avid mouth, to America. Altruism was not their tipple. The mobilization left her well-nigh servantless and tenantless. She found herself surrounded by toothless males and weeping females. From the great terrace that looked down upon the Enns, she saw stretches of empty fields and forsaken vineyards. There was an unnatural number of children in the landscape.... All the women in the villages seemed to be pregnant.... It was a landscape given over to babes and tears.... Or so, in those first changed weeks, she saw it; and her conception of her duty shifted to match the physical change. This was too mediæval, by half, for her to deal with. I neither defend nor accuse her; but I think that if she had ever loved Ishtvan, her husband, flower of chancelleries though he was, she might have seen her duty differently. She might, that is, have adjusted herself to the feudal idea. Or if she had had children. But she was too detached. A European war seemed to her not only frightful, but decadent. She had never liked Berchtold, Aerenthal, any of them, though she admitted Berchtold's charm. Radin had not taught her, certainly, to like Russia. Germany and France--yes, even England--had involved themselves in this uncivilized behavior. She installed a clever cousin of her husband--a cripple from childhood--to co-operate with the aged steward; and after a distasteful week in Vienna (where she was made to realize what she had forgotten, that she was not an American citizen, but an Austrian subject) she left for Rome.

Let us pass over, as briefly as may be, her Roman sojourn. Physically, it might be summed up in a single sentence: months upon months of Red Cross work that led eventually to a breakdown and a rest cure. I think she would have tried to get back to America, but that her American letters were so discouraging. Her ancestral world had, apparently, lost its head over the war. You were hardly safe in New York unless you were pro-Ally. That made New York--to Annette, who was not pro-anything--as unthinkable as Vienna. Even Bertha Dollard did nothing but work for France. The President might recommend neutrality, but the fact was that in America if you were neutral, you were called pro-German; if you were a pacifist, you were called

pro-German. Poor Annette felt homeless indeed, and even her belated copies of The Life Everlasting did not comfort her. They lacked something. No, it was a world where, if you were not mad, you were suspect.... Even her New York had gone back on her. When Italy went in with the Allies, she, metaphorically speaking, turned her face to the wall. Sonnino and Giolitti were equally bad. No wonder that her nerves weakened, along with her body, and that she took to a lonely little villa in the high hills.

Even in her lonely villa she found much to do, for misery stalked everywhere. But being unorganized, the work was more fitful, less gruelling. She could snatch quiet hours.... And in those hours she had leisure to remember Radin. Sentence after sentence of his, page after page, you might say, though it had all been talk, rang through her solitude. Her subconsciousness flung up whole arguments, speeches, perorations of Radin's. It seemed to her that she had not really forgotten anything he had ever said. She was enabled gradually to forget the interval, to gaze over the bloody battle-field of Europe to a millennial horizon. In her villa she became, as far as she had it in her, what Radin was. There was nothing to distract her from his logic, nothing in the squalid misery about her to contradict his premises. She wondered where he was; but it was two years since she had so much as heard his name mentioned. Mrs. Dollard and her kind had forgotten him; he had been merely one sensation like another. If some of his teaching stuck, that was all he could have hoped for.

When the Russian revolution came, Annette wondered yet more. Had he been sucked into that maelstrom, and would he yet rise on the very crest of some unforeseen and mighty wave? Her memory was solid Radin; she had only in solitude to open it like a huge volume, a thick-printed magnum opus. She distrusted Miliukoff, Kerensky, from the start. Annette, without knowing it, was a Bolshevik before Bolshevism entered into the Western vocabulary. She was internationalist, proletarian, all the rest of it, before Kerensky requested the British to let Trotzky through the blockade. She had never heard of Trotzky, but her heart prophesied him. She held her tongue among her hills for lack of any one to talk to. The peasants knew her only as a fitful ministrant to their woes--a silent, handsome forestiera with burning eyes, who helped when and where she could and then withdrew herself from the scene. The eyes, as they did not know, were burning for Radin; with hope that somewhere he was in a position to make his philosophy tell, to redeem this war-mad world. Annette Davidge hardly read the newspapers. The Italian press was not

sympathetic to her. Her magnificent, right-minded Russia was there treated with contumely and contempt. Meanwhile, her American birth and accent and atmosphere saved her from the natural consequences of being an Austrian subject. She was watched, but there was nothing to report. Official Americans in Rome held her to be pure American, bar that old accident of her marriage. She got, of course, no mail from Austria, and her American letters were all that was most praiseworthy from a censor's point of view.

No one of American birth was more miserable, in April, 1917, than the Countess Chudenitz. America, too--and all her friends at home triumphant over the sorry fact! Even The Life Everlasting--which came very irregularly--seemed to bow down in the house of Rimmon. Yes, the world was mad. She ministered less and less to her people. They offended her with their chauvinism, their lust of vengeance, their tales of Austrian atrocities. Propaganda and counter-propaganda alike made her sick. So much passion spent on the wrong issues! As if it mattered whether the Kaiser or King Victor Emmanuel were victorious! She fixed her eyes more rigidly than ever on the millennial horizon. If she could only be in Russia--the one nation in the world that was concerning itself with fundamentals! A thick veil of censorship and silence hung between her and Russian events, but behind that veil she felt saints and sages to be moving; baffled, opposed, stricken, yet imperturbably bent on saving mankind--not Russia only, but the world. Brotherhood, equality, the rights of man--and in no corrupt or mincing Anglo-French version. After Brest-Litovsk she would not even touch the newspapers. She was convinced that they lied. She withdrew herself into absolute seclusion, walking in her wilderness of a garden with the spirit of Radin. From every point of the compass his words came back to her. They fell into alluring sequences; his formulæ had never been so clear. Small wonder; for this time there was no context to challenge him or distract her mind. She wished she knew where he was, that she might send him money for his great task of reformation. If she only knew, she would find ways. Countess Chudenitz would stoop to any illegality or evasion to save the world. Almost without realizing why, she lessened her gifts to the Croce Rossa. An ailing child, a destitute family, could always wring something from her; but she became niggardly with all official funds. No one wondered: times were hard, taxes unbelievable, her status and her fortune not quite clear in men's minds. Who could have suspected that she was hoarding as best she could, in the hope of some day lavishing her hoard on the brothers of Andrew Radin?

There--just there--Annette Davidge, Countess Chudenitz, stood when the armistice was signed.

The rest is narrative of the crudest. We need not dwell on the means she employed, after the armistice, to get back to her husband's country, or the incidents of her progress thither. It was conscience that took her, partly--the sense that she would find duties there which she could not hope to find in America. War paralyzed Annette: in a world at peace she could work as hard as any woman. True, there would still be hatred, but with the war at an end, it was no crime not to hate. It was characteristic of her neutrality, her pacifism, that she felt happier once over the Austrian border; happier, that is, in a defeated than in a victorious land. Besides, was not the emperor in hiding; was not there hope for the empire--hope of revolution, of popular rule, of the sudden end of a loathed régime? She would stand by her husband's "people"; would be their champion in their demands--play Joan of Arc, if need be, to a peasantry on whom the millennial light was dawning. A red republican should lead them; they should find an earnest proletarian in the frowning stronghold. Perhaps she even saw herself presiding over the local soviet.... At all events, she blessed the idealism that had made her withdraw herself, season after season, from her guests, to study and practise the local patois. Annette Davidge was not given to self-praise; but now, for the first time in her life, she felt herself really important. She had never before been powerful where she was right, right where she was powerful. Happy Annette!

She found Nicholas Chudenitz still in charge at Kirchberg, and dismissed him. His tales of hardship, of famine, of vain sacrifice and heart-rending impotence, left her, I fear, cold. Nicholas was a Chudenitz, an aristocrat, unfit for the new times. No doubt he had done his best to feed and doctor the people--as though the Chudenitz estates were the Chudenitz kennels--but the root of the matter was not in him. She was even impatient with his gloom. If you had the right point of view, if you burned with the holy emotions, would not bread be added unto you? She was uneasy until Nicholas--a poor wraith of a man--got off.

Upon the Countess Chudenitz's immediate labors we need not dwell. Every step she took was clogged with the mire of suspicion. Food the people would take at her hands--but nothing else. There was no soviet for her to talk to. All talk stopped when she appeared, except the sullen or whining complaints. Now and then soldiers returned to their villages, and drunken figures would caper all night round bonfires. She could see the fitful lights, far below, from

her lonely, stately, grass-and-weed-grown terrace. She came soon to Nicholas Chudenitz's theory--that food was the best thing, for the time being, she could offer them. But her negotiations for food went slowly. Letters were lost, and telegrams seldom delivered. After a month or two of vain, disorganized struggle, she went to Vienna to fight it out on the spot.

But Vienna was, if anything, more discouraging than Kirchberg. It was a city of wild rumors, of occasional riots, of suffering and hatred and menace in every form; a city where the facts of one day were the fictions of the next; a city that changed over-night, yet always went by some means or other from bad to worse. And--the last straw on the breaking back of Annette Davidge--never had Vienna been so gay: with the hectic gayety of those, alike, who have everything, and those who have nothing, to lose. Its gloom was as if it mourned for centuries, not years, of death; yet its frivolity had never been so brainless and abandoned. The official folk of Ishtvan Chudenitz's connection were, for the most part, absent or in fateful retirement; she could not have gone to them had she wished. Even with the new officials it was difficult to deal, for they changed constantly. On Wednesday you won promises from a black beard and a pair of spectacles; and on Thursday you faced a jaunty blond youth who had never heard of those promises and would by no means keep them. She resorted to cablegrams, but got few replies, and those discouraging. The affairs of the world and all the individuals therein, apparently, were to be settled in Paris; and out of Paris came only misleading head-lines of newspapers that altered their "policy" weekly, and went out of business even oftener. Annette Davidge, in her dusty, dismantled sitting-room, knew not what to do. But she had learned enough of conditions to know that Nicholas Chudenitz, whose address she possessed, would be of no use to her, and she did not send for or seek him. She sat waiting for the turbid tide to turn.

Then, one day, the heavens opened. It is impossible to exaggerate the effect on Annette Davidge of the news that Radin was in Buda-Pest. When she learned that fact, she turned, on the spot, to a fanatic. The Light of her World was in Pest. Radin figured to her as that; also, as the measure of all things, and as a positive solution for every difficulty, major or minor. He would tell her what to do; he would guide her on the path of infallible truth; he would show her how to get food, or else prove to her that her duty was other than food-getting. Annette had been sorely beaten down from her pedestal of importance and beneficence; she did not hope to be the leader of the

Revolution; but to work with Radin, under him, within the sphere of his influence, would be to live to the glory of God. Her perplexities were over if she could only get to Pest. She would carry banners, she would work in an office, she would strip herself of every available penny--she would do anything, however conspicuous or however humble, so long as it had Radin's sanction. She did not even ask now to be allowed to save the world; it would be enough if she could be allowed, under Radin, to help save Hungary--to help save even Pest. Pride faded in the immanence of the master. She asked only to be one of the crowd of chosen, a little implement for a mighty hand. She had at the same time a shrewd notion that she could help best with such beastly capitalistic weapons as she did, or could, possess.

Behold, then, Annette Davidge, Countess Chudenitz, in the heart of revolutionary Pest. Her life there is indescribable. Radin--she got through to him at once--used her in many ways. He expected her to take a furnished house in a good street--and she took it. He expected her to have servants, and food and wine, telephone and limousine, for the use of himself and his various committees--and, by superhuman effort, she got them. She was too much a woman of the world not to realize that the leaders must be served, must have their time and energy saved. She gave her drawing-rooms over cheerfully to the muddy boots and muddier manners of Radin's chief henchmen. A villa in the country that Count Chudenitz had owned she turned over to him also. Meanwhile, as she could, she drank in enough of Radin's eloquence to keep her in a glow. Not speaking Magyar, she could not understand most of the talk that went on in her house; but she would have trusted Radin, though he only mopped and mowed, to be serving the ends of righteousness. She was expected, she found, to be only a landlady and a purse--not to plan or to counsel. But again, her shrewd sense told her that it was eminently necessary that the saviors of the proletariat should have shelter and money. You didn't make even a revolution with bare hands--not in these days. In return, she was protected; furnished with grubby papers that permitted her to go about the city--papers so dirty with much countersigning that the dirtiest Red patrolman bowed down to them, recognizing the signs of his own régime. When she used her car, it passed the most truculent sentinels as being Radin's. The masters of Pest recognized her for a good proletarian; for some one in the counsels of Radin himself, possibly even known to the distant godhead of Lenin. That the hunted remnant of Pest, cowering behind its palace shutters, fitfully raided and fitfully ignored, called her Radin's mistress

and somehow (between appeals to Mr. Hoover) blamed America and President Wilson for her unspeakable renegadeship, she did not, of course, know. Nor would it have concerned her if she had, since never once had she looked upon Radin as a man. Their scandal would have been, for her, only another nail in the coffin of the late Count Chudenitz.

Meanwhile the Reds were making their new laws for Hungary--laws that most citizens might have found unintelligible except for the death penalty. Being uncertain as to what you might do and keep your life, you went further than you conceived it necessary; you did a little more than your damnedest. But in early 1919 Annette was privileged. Her car, her house, her personal belongings, went untouched. She was never raided or summoned, or stripped of anything that was hers. It did not go with Annette's sense of fitness to wear jewelry in these times, but when she saw women handing over their pearls to the appointed officials, she remembered that she had pearls of her own in her unmolested jewel-box, and assumed that the afflicted ladies had been convicted of conspiracy, or hoarding, or smuggling gold to Vienna or Switzerland.

Even in Buda-Pest the Countess Chudenitz was not notorious. Radin was too clever--or perhaps too single-minded--for that. If he drew more freely on Annette's resources than on others', it was because she had more resources than his other allies. She was allowed to realize that there were other houses, other rendezvous, other hospitalities, for him and his innumerable committees, other loyal women besides herself. She knew little of, and cared little for, those other women. It stood to reason that she could not be the only internationalist of her sex. Perhaps her cognizance of other handmaidens to the Cause served to keep her away from meetings. Perhaps, that is, brotherhood was more to her mind, as a slogan, than sisterhood. But let it be put down to Annette Davidge's credit that she was content to satisfy Radin's demands upon her without complacence or jealousy. Her fervor was impersonal; and when the soviet elections drew on, she refused to write herself down housekeeper or stenographer in order to be allowed to vote. Annette Davidge was honest up to the limits of her logic.

Even revolutions do not always have an easy time of it. The Reds had their own troubles, and Radin had need, indeed, to be a clever man. Trolley-cars were running in Pest; shops were open; restaurants, also, that served you next to nothing. All bourgeois were barred from voting; and no one had respect or protection who did not work with his hands. Bela Kun was great in the land.

Yet, with all these advantages, Hungary was not happy. These folk did not at once find all things added unto them. Rumania bothered them; the unguessable decisions in Paris bothered them; Czecho-Slovakia and Jugoslavia drove them to frenzy. In other words, the sovereign people was irritable and illogical as folk are only when the little money they possess has no purchasing power. Soviet rule did not bring bread; still less, luxuries, which, as every one knows, are an integral part of any millennium. The bourgeois were suffering even more than the populace; but the populace, which from childhood had been accustomed to envy the bourgeois with reason, could not, all at once, see that. And because they were not getting what they wanted, they threatened to take it by force, even if it was not there. At such a time, Red leaders have to make quick decisions. A great many quick decisions were made in 1919.... But Radin took the way of his great compeers, Trotzky and Lenin. No one can say, I believe, what his real policy was; how far he directed and how far he was dragged. Even the staff of The Life Everlasting cannot really have known. He may have thought that it was better to lead a mob than to leave the mob unled, or led by those without a philosophy. Or he may have believed the things he told the wild torch-bearing thousands in the Freiheits-Platz: that if their peaceful government had not succeeded, because of corrupt remnants and the natural depravity of all but the Reddest, it was time for something more extreme still--time for the utmost humanitarian violence. Certain it is that when Pest became a Bolshevik hell, Radin played Sathanas.

Annette Davidge, Countess Chudenitz, endured that hell for three days. Her faith in Radin--whom she had not seen for a week--did not waver. Her house stood empty, she its sole inhabitant, for those three days. The last night she spent crouched in a corner of the cellar. As a matter of curious fact, her house was not molested. They passed, reeling, screaming, shooting, but they neither fired through her windows, nor applied the torch. Too many of them had seen Radin go in and out of the great door; they were not sure. Some said (for the people were no nicer-minded than the aristocracy) there was a woman of Radin's in there--better let the place alone. There were plenty of other houses to loot. But the noise and the lurid uncertainty were the same; and on the third day Annette decided that she could bear it no longer. Possibly, she said to herself, the worst element had got out of hand, and Radin was helpless in another quarter. She did not dare trust her passports. It might be that a new party, which would not honor them, had come into power. As she crept up

from her cellar in the comparative quiet of early dawn, she saw the light of many fires in the city, and débris unspeakable in the heart of her own street--furniture, empty wine-bottles, a wrecked machine-gun, bodies.... It came over Annette, crouching behind her window-curtain, that in the present situation she was quite useless to the Cause. I believe that even then, if she could have felt sure of serving Radin's revolution, she would have crept out into the ruined, smoking street. But to be both useless and in danger revolted her common-sense. If no obvious duty called her, then she would at least try for safety.

The city, having gone to rest well after midnight, waked late; and she had some clear time before her. She made up a parcel of food, a parcel of valuables, and stowed money inside her dress. She clad herself completely, to the very skin, in clothing left behind by her maid, who had grown panicky and fled, the week before, to Vienna. She did not forget the bundle of passports, which might or might not serve her. Then she crept furtively, like an animal wriggling through cover, to the garage. The limousine would have been worse than useless, but a battered Ford had been housed there, and she blessed the chance that had made her learn in Italy to take such a car over rough hill roads. There was enough petrol to start it, and she knew personally a Jew on the city outskirts who would sell her more. Even Radin's limousine had sometimes chosen out-of-the-way places to stop for petrol, and the Jew in question would, beyond the shadow of a doubt, recognize her. Of how many people in Pest, after all, could she say that, she asked herself.

Again, of Annette Davidge's progress to the villa (property of the late Count Chudenitz) we do not need the detail. She skirted many dangers, but, thanks to the early, listless hour, she escaped them. Her passports served, the only times she was challenged--amazingly few, until you realize that, in the very nature of things, early morning is revolution's slack hour. By eight she was at the villa, where she waked the surly caretakers. The place was shrouded and dismantled, for it had seldom been used, though she had opened it up a few months before for Radin's occasional use. Now and then there were interviews which were better held outside the city. Dust lay thick everywhere, and some of the furniture was stained and broken; larder and cellar were nearly bare; but the garage was water-tight, and the telephone in working order. A cheerless habitation; yet it was peace beyond peace to be removed from the tumult of the last days. She sank into that peace as though wrapped in the innermost fold of a cloud.

But revolutions have their own logic, and the soviet omelette takes a notorious amount of egg-breaking. Annette had found sullenness at Kirchberg on the Enns; here she was to see the fire when it had passed the smouldering stage. The two caretakers (male and female) were creatures of Radin's, not hers--and that had always been sufficient. Now she realized that in a world of strange faces, theirs were almost the strangest. She trusted them for Radin, but she hardly trusted them for herself, though they must know that the villa was hers. Certainly she had never been so insolently served.

The villa was on the outskirts of the little town, removed from it only by the extent of its own small park. Late that night she sat, fully dressed, by the window of her bedroom, wondering if she had done well. Perhaps, if she had stayed on, that day, in Pest, Radin would have come to her, would have explained. Here, she was more uncertain than ever. The wilderness of shrubbery and trees was darkly alive. There was no light by which she could discern, or count, the forms that crouched, that wriggled, that shook the boughs stealthily and made darker blots upon the herbage. There might be only half a dozen inquisitive marauders--peasantry come up to spy upon the villa. Or, for all her senses could tell her, the people might be investing the grounds in force, furtively but inimically intending--what? Annette was so

used now to the strange, scarce-human régime of revolution as to tell herself, without humor, almost without irony, that this invasion, which might mean arson and murder, might equally well be a mere gathering for shrill talk. All the same, it shook her nerves.

She slept, the next day, by snatches. She did not dare--she, the friend and helper of Radin--to set foot in the streets. Towards night she heard a methodical succession of shots. She was used enough to chaotic firing, yet she noticed this ... even to her innocent ears it had the rhythm of--execution. At nightfall, she descended and addressed the man, who could speak, with an impossible accent, a little German. His manner, always insolent, was oddly reflective, she thought. Annette, who understood nothing of what was going on around her, who had only metaphors and analogies to define her context with--who could not say "this is," but only "it is as if"--felt that he regarded her for once less as an enemy than as an enemy disarmed; as (why not say it at once?) a prisoner. His insolence had told her that he hated her; now leisure and calm seemed to have entered into his hatred. He was at ease about her; she no longer irked him; she was caught, and could be regarded almost with tolerance. The sense of this made her, for the first time in her life, personally afraid. In her cellar she had known terror, but only as one fears the lightning, which may strike but may not. There was all the difference in the world between happening to be in a dangerous situation and being directly, deliberately threatened. His contemplative manner frightened her as nothing else ever had done; therefore she held her head very high--not from bravado, but just in order to keep herself going.

For ten minutes they talked in broken, monosyllabic German; she standing, he seated, with a mug of beer beside him. Now and then he drank, and set the mug down to spill over on a gilded table. He wiped his ragged beard from time to time with a bit of Venice point torn from a cushion cover. And it was a world in which Countess Chudenitz could not reprove him. These, she told herself, were the inevitable initial excesses. You cannot have capitalism at night, and smooth-running communism before the day breaks. Even Radin could not put his formulæ through all at once, with no hitches. She thought of Radin's programme--but that way lay abstract terms. Annette passed a hand over her aching forehead--spurred herself to her last dreaded questions--got her guttural, illiterate answers--turned on her heel and left the man. For the first time in her life, she was feeling a sex fear.

Because her mind told her to, she dragged herself on tired feet to the garage. Not an ounce of petrol left. The tank had been scrupulously emptied, and the car was a mere useless heap of machinery; as cunning a device, as logical an invention, as perfect in plan, as ever, but deprived of all that gave it purpose and direction. Some such reflection crossed her mind, but she bit off the analogy. She had fed on too many, these latter days. Then she locked herself into a room on the lower floor, to think. She was afraid to go up-stairs. Up-stairs was too traplike.

The orgies in Pest continued, she had learned--though her uncouth interlocutor had not called them orgies. This little town, virtuously inspired by the example, had determined to do itself proud in another way. The local soviet had been meeting almost continuously, and had decided on a programme that had no blemish on its Red purity. Hungary must not be slower than Russia; and if the larger towns would not show the way, the small ones must. The municipality--which meant the soviet--was, of course, self-governing and accountable to none. The man's gibberish had not been elaborate, but she had grasped the gist of the programme. The "workmen's and soldiers' council" had, as usual, done the planning. Within their local limits, it was to be thorough and complete. They were very pleased with themselves, she gathered from the intonations of her informant.

For the first time since she had known Radin, Annette Chudenitz translated a "programme," completely and without expurgation, into concrete terms; dealt with revolution in plain English. Everything that could be conceived of as property was to be seized and pooled, then redistributed as seemed best to the council, provided always that no one outside the working-classes was to share in the distribution. In order not to be the dupes of capitalistic devices, they had created a kind of "grandfather" clause: no one was to be haloed as a "worker" who had employed labor in any way before the Revolution. That provision took care of those folk who might have been driven to manual labor by the Revolution itself, but had been originally tainted with bourgeoisie. All things were to be held in common, for the good of the community itself, allotted only temporarily to worthy individuals, and resumable at will by the council, should the individual take too individualistic an attitude towards his new possessions. That, on the other hand, would dispose of the capitalistically inclined of their own class. Children, though they might or might not be left to the care of parents, were the wards of the municipality, and might be transferred to whatever custody the council

thought best. Women, of course, were to be nationalized--municipalized, in this case. Works of art, jewelry, objects of luxury, were to be sent to the melting-pot; whatever of their substance, mineral or vegetable, could be removed for useful purposes would be saved, the rest burned in the market-place. Animals, like children, were wards of the council, and their custody was a matter for determination.

The awkward sentences of the caretaker had made all this plain to her. Her perfect familiarity with the theories of Bolshevism had enabled her to fill in the grinning gaps. When he had sputtered lazily over his beer, "All property in common: cattle--children--women," she knew the programme; knew, moreover, who would be eligible to committees and who would not. She knew every twist and turn. Her sole surprise had been to learn at the end that since she had once possessed the villa, she was personally involved in the reforms--a subject of the local council, to be officially despoiled. She had withheld her tongue from mentioning that her legal residence was elsewhere. She could not deny that, in their logic, the villa created for her a legal residence within reach of their tentacles.

The villa! It was nothing to her. But the few belongings she had with her; jewels of her girlhood, her wedding-ring.... They took wedding-rings always, she realized; on principle, as much as for patriotic cupidity. She fought with herself a long time before she consented to face the essential fact, the one thing that mattered. But face it she did, and the vision grayed her cheek and brow, her very lips, so that she looked like a ghost in the twilight as she questioned him.

Annette Davidge was in many ways a strong woman. When she found that there was no petrol for her in the garage, she turned herself aside from hysteria by sheer pluck and main force. She was sure the petrol was merely hidden, and she would have tried to bribe the man to give it to her, save that her common sense told her he would gain more by keeping her there than by aiding her to escape--and that, inevitably, he knew it. There was only one thing in the world to do, and that she must accomplish without delay. She must get through by telephone to Radin. She unlocked her door and sought her keeper. He should stand beside her and hear every word. Therefore she would have to speak German. It might be that Radin was lost to her; but she trusted still in the magic of his name.

Indeed, if Annette Davidge had tried to reach by telephone any place in Pest except Radin's headquarters, she would have been defeated. It took two

hours as it was. But she got through to him at last. Her arm ached to numbness by the time his voice answered her. The caretaker was half asleep in his chair, but whenever she raised her voice he shook himself awake to listen. In few words--words she had decided on and learned by heart in her two hours' waiting--she told him where she was, and her necessity for seeing him; she described the independent action of the municipality, and the danger of her being caught in this backwater, when she belonged with the larger movement outside. She repressed, even in her tone, every hint of her self-pity, her sense of injustice. As a practical matter, would he come and see her, as she could not go to him? It would also, of course, be a great compliment to the soviet.... Reluctance, wonder, annoyance, seemed to be mingled in Radin's voice, speaking English at the other end. Yes, he would come, in the first hours after dawn--for an hour. Annette realized, in mid-gust of her relief, that unless it had been otherwise convenient to him, he could not and would not have consented; that she had virtually appealed to a commanding general in the thick of the hour of battle. She was proportionately grateful; but even so, it seemed natural that he should have made an effort--with the thousands upon thousands he had had from her. Natural--of course. Yet she turned upon the caretaker, who had listened greedily, and ordered--as she would not have dared to do an hour earlier--coffee for herself, in her own room. It was brought.

I have said that there was no hint of sex in the comradeship of Annette Chudenitz and Radin. Yet even Radin cannot have helped noticing that he faced, physically speaking, a woman he had never seen. In her shabby maid's dress, with her eyes hollowed out by sleeplessness, her face paled by vigil, confinement, and fear, her very voice shaken by the strangeness of her world, their contact lost through the events of their separation, she must have seemed to him different indeed. They breakfasted together in the dirty dining-room. Annette had not been so well fed in many days. She had Radin's presence to thank for that, she knew. Yet her jailers were scarcely more than civil, even to him. She remarked on this to Radin, when the meal was finished. Radin, with the utmost frankness, at once explained....

It was then, after the incredible explanation, that Annette began really to readjust herself. All along, she had known her danger, but she had still thought of Radin, at least, as all-powerful, and all her fear had departed when she saw him enter the hall. Now from his own lips she learned that he was not omnipotent--or, in any case, that he declined to take advantage of his

omnipotence. Either he feared to interfere with the local soviet, or--he did not wish to. Either alternative was terrible to her, but she chose the first, and tried persuasion.

"Surely they would not touch me if you took me back in your car?"

"Perhaps--probably--not," he agreed.

"Then--why?"

He spoke very soberly. "It would discredit me."

"Is it possible for you to be discredited?"

"Quite possible. And I am too important at the moment to do anything foolish. It would be a crime. I am very much needed yonder." He jerked his thumb Pestwards.

"Of course you are. But, after all, I, too, have been loyal. Can't you explain that to the committee?"

Radin sat down heavily. Then he looked at his watch. He leaned forward and tapped her knee. "I am very sorry." Nothing had ever been more metallic, more perfunctory than his tone. "It was a mistake for you to come here. For your own sake, you should have stayed in Pest. As things stand--I cannot possibly interfere with the local council. They are within their rights. They are only doing what all communes will presently do. They are naturally proud of their readiness, their thoroughness. If I interfered, it would throw the gravest doubts on my own good faith, and my work would be seriously impeded. If it were a personal matter--but it is not. In fact, there are no personal matters, as far as I am concerned. There is only the Revolution."

Even then, she could not believe it. "I am not asking you to make it a personal matter."

"Pardon me, tovarischa" (was it deliberately, or by mere instinct, that he used the reeking Russian word?), "that is just what you are doing. They would say--"

"I do not care what these creatures say about me!" she cried.

"Nor I. I was about to tell you that if I asked for immunity for you, they would say that I demanded privileges, that my programme was good enough for others, but not good enough for me and my friends; that I do not really believe what I teach; that I prefer, in my heart, the old bourgeois régime." He looked her straight in the eyes. "Comrade Annetta, I do not make a revolution only to go back on it. When I tell them in the Freiheits-Platz that there is to be no privileged class, no private property, that they are right to confiscate, to

communize, I cannot afford to have some one in the crowd fling exceptions in my face."

"Do I understand you to mean that you yourself are willing, for yourself, to submit to this sort of thing? To be ruled, in every detail of your life, by a soviet?"

"Absolutely, yes. What do you take me for? A charlatan?"

"But you," she replied, sarcastically, "are going back to Pest, unmolested, in your automobile. Do you mean that if some mob in the city decides to-morrow to take your car and your freedom away, and to set you to work with your hands, or make you one of a thousand Red guards, you will submit?"

"Theoretically, yes. Why not? But they will not do that," he went on, gravely, "I hope. They need me in another capacity for a time. They need me to direct; to counsel. The people are not yet in the saddle. They need me to set them there, and they know it. Even a revolution must have some one to think for it."

"And you intend always to occupy that superior position!"

"As long as may be. Because"--he spoke with great emphasis, but with no emotion--"the Revolution needs me. Who do you think has brought the Revolution about in Hungary? Bela Kun? Lenin, over there in Russia? By no means. I, Radin." There was not a trace of self-praise in his tone; he might have been teaching her statistics from a book. "Show me any man who can do my work better, and I gladly give my place to him. But the man has not arrived yet."

"I believe you." For that matter, she did. "And"--she worked carefully for logic--"your services are rewarded by immunity."

"If so you choose to put it. But that is a mere matter of practical politics. If I serve the Revolution best by being free to plan my days and my work, that is right. If my immunity ceases to serve the Revolution--away with it!" He flicked the ash off his cigar.

"You are very sure of yourself."

"I have spent my life in training," he replied, simply.

"I am not questioning your fitness, your value--your supremacy, even," she went on. This was, after all, the presence she had walked with among the Italian hills. "Should I have left Vienna, given all I had, if I had not been heart and soul with the cause and believed you to be the mouthpiece of humanity?"

Radin scanned her carefully. “I think not. I think, as far as you understood, you agreed. But perhaps you could not understand much. Daughter of the American bourgeoisie and widow of Count Chudenitz!”

“You took my money, my houses, my servants, my food ...” she cried.

“Again, why not? Would I have taken them so simply if I had not thought it right? You offered the people nothing that did not belong, morally speaking, to the people. Did I ever insult you, or myself, or the Revolution, by thanking you?”

“You never thanked me.”

“Exactly. Because I should have considered it quite legitimate for us to take by force, had it been physically necessary, everything that you freely gave. That you gave freely proved you a friend of the Revolution, merely.”

“And now that I can do nothing more for you--that my consent is not necessary--I am not to be treated as a friend! No immunity comes my way.”

Radin rose and stood above her. “Have I ever told you that you were to be immune from the régime you were working to bring about? Did you not believe what you said you believed? You told me you were a proletarian; you gave, I thought, evidences of your sincerity. Did you all the time expect to bring about a rule for others and not for yourself? To be a sort of republican queen? If you wanted to be a bourgeoise, you should have stayed out of the movement to abolish the bourgeoisie. The smallest logic would have taught you that. Ours, as you well knew, is not a local but a world programme.”

“I might at least have been treated as a friend, not as an enemy.”

“But who is treating you like an enemy?” He spoke as to a child who cannot reason, yet with no show of irritation. “Is any one proposing to imprison you?”

“What they propose is worse than imprisonment, as you well know.” Her voice trembled with anger.

“Tchk!” He flung out his arms. “All I can say is that I thought better of your intellect. Your sincerity I still do not question. The people are proposing to treat you as they treat themselves. You are, as far as may be, a citizen of the state you professed yourself a passionate believer in. I give you nothing you did not profess to think desirable for your own country, for all mankind. And now you want to play the old game of exceptions! Once a bourgeoise, always a bourgeoise!... You are not inexorable, Comrade Annetta.”

“Certainly, for myself, I do not go as far as they go.”

“That is no one’s fault but your own.”

“Did you ever tell me--in New York when you first instructed me--that I might look forward to having all my belongings stolen, myself ... ‘nationalized’....” The word came with difficulty, but she brought it out.

“Did I ever tell you”--he looked at his watch again, not impatiently, but as if forced to calculate--“that I contemplated anything else? Did I ever hint to you that I believed in one law for the masses, another for the privileged? Did I not explicitly say that the abolition of privilege was the root of the social revolution?”

“Yes. But I assumed that these plans were to be worked slowly--as far as might be without injustice to the individual....”

“A revolution that comes slowly is not a revolution. And there is no question of injustice. The injustice would be in making an exception for the individual who objected to the policy of the government.”

“You call that orgy in Pest a government?”

“It is on its way to become so.”

“Therefore you excuse the excesses.”

“If there are excesses, I excuse them on the score of inevitability. But I do not call the plans of your local soviet excesses. They are doing nothing that you did not subscribe to, in theory, some years ago.”

“About women ... I never subscribed.”

“Perhaps that was a detail that we did not discuss. But the least logic would have enabled you to see that the old-fashioned marriage is, in the last analysis, insistence on a property right. In twenty years, every one will take it all quite naturally. The first moment of change is bound to seem violent to some people. When they take your pearls, you will probably consider them thieves. I should not have expected it, but I see that you will. In spite of all your fine talk, you do not see that the council which takes your pearls and sells them for the common good is not a thief.”

“Pearls are--only pearls,” she protested.

“True; a commodity. And if you proceed logically, you will see that what you would call your ‘virtue’ is also a commodity. Anything necessary, or even universally desired, is a commodity.”

“But”--she reverted to the less distasteful instance--“some one will eventually wear the pearls. How can one individual have more right to them than another?”

“Eventually, no individual will wear pearls--so long as their money value is what it is. Only when they become valueless as sea-shells will they be

innocent. At present, I do not think any one in revolutionary Hungary will be allowed to wear them. We can sell them to the foreigner for money to spend on necessities."

"I am likeliest to see them on the neck of whatever woman in the commune has the lightest morals," she threw in bitterly.

"Not for long, I think. And the morals of all women will be controlled by the committee."

"We are getting into by-paths. I ask you, once for all, Radin, are you going to turn me over to be the victim of any peasant who chooses to pay?"

He frowned as if in sheer weariness. "You speak over-dramatically. These things will be arranged more calmly than that. You will be disposed of in accordance with the best judgment of the committee. But you will find, I think, that there is more freedom under the Revolution than there was under the old régime."

"Under the old régime I was free not to take a husband or a lover."

"You will find, I believe, that most women prefer the freedom to take one. Assuming that, we say that no woman shall take one without the sanction of the authorities. The production of children is not a private matter. It is of the gravest import to the state. To look upon it as a matter of personal pleasure is obscurantism pure and simple. Because it is fraught with such vital consequences, we must limit and control the sexual relation as we limit and control the money-making power of the individual.... But if I failed to make myself clear in New York, when we had time, I cannot make myself clear now when we are all in a hurry."

Radin rose again, and called to the man. Annette rose, too.

"Then you will do nothing for me?" she asked, in a shaking voice.

"I will tell the local committee that you are a benevolent friend of the Revolution and to be treated with the respect due to any good citizen. Can I do more?"

"You throw me into that?" She could hardly shape the words.

Radin turned on her then with the first flicker of irritation that he had shown. "I? I throw you into nothing. You hung on my words in America, and I told you nothing but truth--nothing that I have ever had to deny. If you were amusing yourself, that was your lookout. I thought you sincere. Especially when you came to Pest to help us, did I think you sincere. Many of those men and women in New York, I knew well, had not the brains to see what revolution meant. But I really believed you had thought it out. I talked to you

with the utmost freedom. And when you came to Pest to join us, I was sure. I believe in the Revolution; I care only for the Revolution. I would kill only obstructionists. Them I would kill because the people must not be hindered. But I am exactly what I was when we sat over your samovar in Sixty-second Street. I have been perfectly honest from the beginning. If you were not honest, how was I to know?"

He would not even ask her to bear witness to his honesty. As far as he was concerned--this mongrel incorruptible--it stood proved. But had she wished, she could not have denied it. She had been, at some stage or other of the game, a fool; but, even now, she could not say where or when. How could she have been expected not to misunderstand?

Radin held out his hand for farewell. "I will recommend you as a good proletarian down yonder--on my way back. If I did that and also tried to smuggle you out of the country, I should not be honest. I am sorry if you have mistaken yourself. But you, and none other, did it. The revolution is not a box of toys. Never once have I spoken to you as if it were. I repeat, I am sorry if you have misapprehended. But I could not suffer you to be so much as a pinch of dust to clog the wheels. The fault"--he tapped his forehead--"was apparently with the brain. You adhered emotionally, not with your intellect. I did not realize that."

"And if you had realized"--she poured forth the bitterness of her defeat--"you would still have done the same. You would have used me."

"I would have used you just so much as you were fool enough to let yourself be used, without my lying to you. I would not have lied to you for the sake of no matter how many millions of dollars. But if you persisted in thinking I did not mean what I said, I could not have helped that. I told you over and over again that I had no god except the will of the sovereign masses; that your silly democracy meant nothing to me; that I cared only for the Revolution. I stand where I stood then. Good-bye--madame."

"You may pay, too ..." she flung out.

"I dare say. Human nature is not perfect. But if I do, it will not be because I have misunderstood myself." He passed out of the door, honest as ever.

Annette, Countess Chudenitz, "Comrade Annetta," daughter of John Davidge and cousin of Bertha Dollard, went slowly up to her bedroom. She had decided to make them mount the stairs to find her; not to lessen their journey by one step. It was a pity she had no pistol. Perhaps Radin would have

given her one if she had asked. Her torture, like her safety, was nothing he had set his cold heart on. But it was too late now.

Through the afternoon she mediated on the technique of non-resistance. Finally, too worn out for even fear to keep her awake, she fell asleep. When she woke, it was nearly dusk. She was stronger after her sleep, and that she resented. She hated her own alertness, and would infinitely have preferred the anaesthesia of exhaustion. A ray of sunlight struck the dressing-table. She arranged her jewels for the public view. They should not say that she kept anything back. Only her wedding-ring she stowed away inside her clothing, thinking almost with tenderness of Ishtvan. Then she began to hate Ishtvan for bringing her here.... But the truth was that Radin, not Ishtvan, had brought her now; and if she had not returned to her own country, she would never have known Radin. Only once did her fear make her ignoble--when she stretched out her hand to her vanity-case. But she drew her hand back; she would make no bid for desire. As she strained her eyes towards the twilit mirror, she saw herself stripped of beauty as of a garment. Better so. For every reason--pride, expediency, what not--better so.

She sat down at the window then to watch the night come on. And with the paling of the west, the brightening of the stars, the darkening of the air, she found things to notice. Again the great evergreens were stirred and peopled. A little later the shrubs, too, came alive. When the moon rose clear, the shadows ceased to be stealthy. They formed in groups. In the end it was the ordered march of confident folk. Lights flared out from the drawing-rooms below, making a broad, yellow path upon the grass. Along that path, several abreast, they approached. She heard the low, staccato hum of their talk. She could better have borne guns and torches, the loose fabric of riot that would offer interstices for escape. This was soberness itself; evidently a meeting of the local soviet to be held in the great rooms of the villa that had been hers. To this had it come; that not even in the midst of red revolution last week had she so sensed her doom as now. Annette Davidge's humor had been a weakling that perished in Annette's own childhood. Her irony had grown up with her, but it, too--a weak thing--had passed away long since in Pest. Not with mirth, but with prostrating fear, she noted those ordered ranks. Annette Davidge was to meet her fate at a committee-meeting--in a drawing-room--precisely as, long ago, she had met Radin. The two settings were extraordinarily alike. Only this time, if she listened, she would not understand the words; and this time it meant something. Perhaps some of Bertha Dollard's guests, besides Radin,

had meant something before; but the tea, the debutantes, and the footmen had been there to prove that Bertha Dollard meant nothing. Annette wished--still without humor--that this had been anything but a meeting.

An immense distaste came to her for being summoned by the chairman. She dragged herself up from her post by the window, took her jewels and money in her hand, and went down-stairs to the assembly in which she had no vote. As she entered the room, her eyes dazzled; but she laid her treasures on the table in front of the bearded man who presided. The woman who sat beside him snatched at the gems, but the president laid a heavy hand on the woman's arm and pushed them to the front of the table where all could see. Then Annette sat quietly down in a corner; she felt very shabby in her frayed black. The scarves and shawls and petticoats of the peasant women over-powered her. Their eyes raked her--all the eyes present, focussing themselves into one stare, which she felt like a burning-glass. But presently the chairman spoke again, and the heads turned back to him. His hand played with the gold before him. Annette fixed her gaze upon the glinting pile. The strange sounds the man uttered probably concerned her; but she left those strange sounds over there, as she had left her money and her jewels. She refused to have anything to do with it--with any of it. There was something austere in the bearded man's guarding of her valuables. But she was tired of honest men.

Before, in Bertha Dollard's house she had been unaware of her crisis, because she had misunderstood. Now, in spite of her ignorance of their speech, she understood better. Yet she had the luck, a second time, to be unaware of her crisis when it came. For presently, as if really hypnotized by the glint of her own gold, she fainted--so quietly, however, that no one noticed it.

Habakkuk

When they carried Kathleen Somers up into the hills to die where her ancestors had had the habit of dying--they didn't gad about, those early Somerses: they dropped in their tracks, and the long grass that they had mowed and stacked and trodden under their living feet flourished mightily over their graves--it was held to be only a question of time. I say "to die," not because her case was absolutely hopeless, but because no one saw how, with her spent vitality, she could survive her exile. Everything had come at once, and she had gone under. She had lost her kin, she had lost her money, she had lost her health. Even the people who make their meat of tragedy--and there are a great many of them in all enlightened centres of thought--shook their heads and were sorry. They thought she couldn't live; and they also thought it much, much better that she shouldn't. For there was nothing left in life for that sophisticated creature but a narrow cottage in a stony field, with Nature to look at.

Does it sound neurotic and silly? It wasn't. Conceive her if you can--Kathleen Somers, whom probably you never knew. From childhood she had nourished short hopes and straitened thoughts. At least: hopes that depend on the æsthetic passion are short; and the long perspectives of civilized history are very narrow. Kathleen Somers had been fed with the Old World: that is to say, her adolescent feet had exercised themselves in picture-galleries and cathedrals and palaces; she had seen all the right views, all the right ceremonies, and all the censored picturesqueness. Don't get any Cook's tourist idea, please, about Miss Somers. Her mother had died young, and her gifted father had taken her to a hundred places that the school-teacher on a holiday never gets to and thinks of only in connection with geography lessons. She had followed the Great Wall of China, she had stood before the tomb of Tamburlaine, she had shaded her eyes from the glare of Kaïrouan the Holy, she had chaffered in Tiflis and in Trebizond. All this before she was twenty-five. At that time her father's health broke, and they proceeded to live permanently in New York. Her wandering life had steeped her in delights, but kept her innocent of love-affairs. When you have fed on historic beauty, on the great plots of the past, the best tenor voices in the world, it is pretty hard to find a man who doesn't, in his own person, leave out something essential to romance. She had herself no particular beauty, and

therefore the male sex could get on without her. A few fell in love with her, but she was too enchanted and amused with the world in general to set to work at the painful process of making a hero out of any one of them. She was a sweet-tempered creature; her mental snobbishness was not a pose, but perfectly inevitable; she had a great many friends. As she had a quick wit and the historic imagination, you can imagine--remembering her bringing-up--that she was an entertaining person when she entered upon middle age: when, that is, she was proceeding from the earlier to the later thirties.

It was natural that Kathleen Somers and her father--who was a bit precious and pompous, in spite of his ironies--should gather about them a homogeneous group. The house was pleasant and comfortable--they were too sophisticated to be "periodic"--and there was always good talk going, if you happened to be the kind that could stand good talk. Of course you had to pass an examination first. You had at least to show that you "caught on." They were high-brow enough to permit themselves sudden enthusiasms that would have damned a low-brow. You mustn't like "Peter Pan," but you might go three nights running to see some really perfect clog-dancing at a vaudeville theatre. Do you see what I mean? They were eclectic with a vengeance. It wouldn't do for you to cultivate the clog-dancer and like "Peter Pan," because in that case you probably liked the clog-dancer for the wrong reason--for something other than that sublimated skill which is art. Of course this is only a wildly chosen example. I never heard either of them mention "Peter Pan." And the proper hatreds were even more difficult than the proper devotions. You might let Shakespeare get on your nerves, provided you really enjoyed Milton. I wonder if you do see what I mean? It must be perfect of its kind, its kind being anything under heaven; and it must never, never, never be sentimental. It must have art, and parti pris, and point of view, and individuality stamped over it. No, I can't explain. If you have known people like that, you've known them. If you haven't, you can scarcely conceive them.

By this time you are probably hating the Somerses, father and daughter, and I can't help it--or, rather, I've probably brought it about. But when I tell you that I'm not that sort myself, and that I loved them both dearly and liked immensely to be with them, you'll reconsider a little, I hope. They were sweet and straight and generous, both of them, and they knew all about the grand manner. The grand manner is the most comfortable thing to live with that I know. I used to go there a good deal, and Arnold Withrow went even more

than I did, though he wasn't even hanging on to Art by the eyelids as I do. (I refer, of course, to my little habit of writing for the best magazines, whose public considers me intellectual. So I seem to myself, in the magazines.... "But out in pantry, good Lord!" Anyhow, I generally knew at least what the Somerses were talking about--the dears!) Withrow was a stock-broker, and always spent his vacation in the veritable wilds, camping in virgin forests, or on the edge of glaciers, or in the dust of American deserts. He had never been to Europe, but he had been to Buenos Aires. You can imagine what Kathleen Somers and her father felt about that: they thought him too quaint and barbaric for words; but still not barbaric enough to be really interesting.

I was just beginning to suspect that Withrow was in love with Kathleen Somers in the good old middle-class way, with no drama in it but no end of devotion, when the crash came. Mr. Somers died, and within a month of his death the railroad the bonds of which had constituted his long-since diminished fortune went into the hands of a receiver. There were a pitiful few hundreds a year left, besides the ancestral cottage--which had never even been worth selling. His daughter had had an operation, and the shock of that, plus the shock of his death, plus the shock of her impoverishment, brought the curtain down with a tremendous rush that terrified the house. It may make my metaphor clearer if I put it that it was the asbestos curtain which fell suddenly and violently; not the great crimson drop that swings gracefully down at the end of a play. It did not mark the end; it marked a catastrophe in the wings to which the plot must give place.

Then they carried Kathleen Somers to the hills.

It was Mildred Thurston who told me about it first. Withrow would have rushed to the hills, I think, but he was in British Columbia on an extended trip. He had fought for three months and got them, and he started just before Kathleen Somers had her sudden operation. Mildred Thurston (Withrow's cousin, by the way) threw herself nobly into the breach. I am not going into the question of Mildred Thurston here. Perhaps if Withrow had been at home, she wouldn't have gone. I don't know. Anyhow, when she rushed to Kathleen Somers's desolate retreat she did it, apparently, from pure kindness. She was sure, like every one else, that Kathleen would die; and that belief purged her, for the time being, of selfishness and commonness and cheap gayety. I wouldn't take Mildred Thurston's word about a state of soul; but she was a good dictagraph. She came back filled with pity; filled, at least, with the means of inspiring pity for the exile in others.

After I had satisfied myself that Kathleen Somers was physically on the mend, eating and sleeping fairly, and sitting up a certain amount, I proceeded to more interesting questions.

"What is it like?"

"It's dreadful."

"How dreadful?"

Mildred's large blue eyes popped at me with sincere sorrow.

"Well, there's no plumbing, and no furnace."

"Is it in a village?"

"It isn't 'in' anything. It's a mile and a half from a station called Hebron. You have to change three times to get there. It's half-way up a hill--the house is--and there are mountains all about, and the barn is connected with the house by a series of rickety woodsheds, and there are places where the water comes through the roof. They put pails under to catch it. There are queer little contraptions they call Franklin stoves in most of the rooms and a brick oven in the kitchen. When they want anything from the village, Joel Blake gets it, if he doesn't forget. Ditto wood, ditto everything except meat. Some other hick brings that along when he has 'killed.' They can only see one house from the front yard, and that is precisely a mile away by the road. Joel Blake lives nearer, but you can't see his house. You can't see anything--except the woods and the 'crick' and the mountains. You can see the farmers when they are haying, but that doesn't last long."

"Is it a beautiful view?"

"My dear man, don't ask me what a beautiful view is. My education was neglected."

"Does Kathleen Somers think it beautiful?"

"She never looks at it, I believe. The place is all run down, and she sits and wonders when the wallpaper will drop off. At least, that is what she talks about, when she talks at all. That, and whether Joel Blake will remember to bring the groceries. The two women never speak to each other. Kathleen's awfully polite, but--well, you can't blame her. And I was there in the spring. What it will be in the winter!--But Kathleen can hardly last so long, I should think."

"Who is the other woman?"

"An heirloom. Melora Meigs. Miss Meigs, if you please. You know Mr. Somers's aunt lived to an extreme old age in the place. Miss Meigs 'did' for her. And since then she has been living on there. No one wanted the

house--the poor Somerses!--and she was used to it. She's an old thing herself, and of course she hasn't the nerves of a sloth. Now she 'does' for Kathleen. Of course later there'll have to be a nurse again. Kathleen mustn't die with only Melora Meigs. I'm not sure, either, that Melora will last. She's all crooked over with rheumatism."

That was the gist of what I got out of Mildred Thurston. Letters to Miss Somers elicited no real response--only a line to say that she wasn't strong enough to write. None of her other female friends could get any encouragement to visit her. It was perhaps due to Miss Thurston's mimicry of Melora Meigs--she made quite a "stunt" of it--that none of them pushed the matter beyond the first rebuff.

By summer-time I began to get worried myself. Perhaps I was a little worried, vicariously, for Withrow. Remember that I thought he cared for her. Miss Thurston's pity for Kathleen Somers was the kind that shuts the door on the pitied person. If she had thought Kathleen Somers had a future, she wouldn't have been so kind. I may give it to you as my private opinion that Mildred Thurston wanted Withrow herself. I can't swear to it, even now; but I suspected it sufficiently to feel that some one, for Withrow's sake, had better see Kathleen besides his exuberant and slangy cousin. She danced a little too much on Kathleen Somers's grave. I determined to go myself, and not to take the trouble of asking vainly for an invitation. I left New York at the end of June.

With my perfectly ordinary notions of comfort in travelling, I found that it would take me two days to get to Hebron. It was beyond all the resorts that people flock to: beyond, and "cross country" at that. I must have journeyed on at least three small, one-track railroads, after leaving the Pullman at some junction or other.

It was late afternoon when I reached Hebron; and nearly an hour later before I could get myself deposited at Kathleen Somers's door. There was no garden, no porch; only a long, weed-grown walk up to a stiff front door. An orchard of rheumatic apple-trees was cowering stiffly to the wind in a far corner of the roughly fenced-in lot; there was a windbreak of perishing pines.

In the living-room Kathleen Somers lay on a cheap wicker chaise-longue, staring at a Hindu idol that she held in her thin hands. She did not stir to greet me; only transferred her stare from the gilded idol to dusty and ungilded me. She spoke, of course; the first time in my life, too, that I had ever heard her speak ungently.

"My good man, you had better go away. I can't put you up."

That was her greeting. Melora Meigs was snuffling in the hallway outside--listening, I suppose.

"Oh, yes, you can. If you can't, I'm sure Joel Blake will. I've come to stay a while, Miss Somers."

"Can you eat porridge and salt pork for supper?"

"I can eat tenpenny nails, if necessary. Also I can sleep in the barn."

"Melora!" The old woman entered, crooked and grudging of aspect. "This friend of my father's and mine has come to see me. Can he sleep in the barn?"

I cannot describe the hostility with which Melora Meigs regarded me. It was not a pointed and passionate hatred. That, one could have examined and dealt with. It was, rather, a vast disgust that happened to include me.

"There's nothing to sleep on. Barn's empty."

"He could move the nurse's cot out there, if he really wants to. And I think there's an extra washstand in the woodshed. You'll hardly need more than one chair, just for a night," she finished, turning to me.

"Not for any number of nights, of course," I agreed suavely. I was angry with Kathleen Somers, I didn't know quite why. I think it was the Hindu idol. Nor had she any right to address me with insolence, unless she were mad, and she was not that. Her eyes snapped very sanely. I don't think Kathleen Somers could have made her voice snap.

Melora Meigs grunted and left the room. The grunt was neither assent nor dissent; it was only the most inclusive disapproval: the snarl of an animal, proceeding from the topmost of many layers of dislike.

"I'll move the things before dark, I think." I was determined to be cheerful, even if I had to seem impertinent; though the notion of her sticking me out in the barn enraged me.

"You won't mind Melora's locking the door between, of course. We always do. I'm such a cockney, I'm timid; and Melora's very sweet about it."

It was almost too much, but I stuck it out. Presently, indeed, I got my way; and moved--yes, actually lugged and lifted and dragged--the cot, the chair, and the stand out through the dusty, half-rotted corridors and sheds to the barn. I drew water at the tap in the yard and washed my perspiring face and neck. Then I had supper with Miss Somers and Melora Meigs.

After supper my hostess lighted a candle. "We go to bed very early," she informed me. "I know you'll be willing to smoke out-of-doors, it's so warm. I doubt if Melora could bear tobacco in the house. And you won't mind her

locking up early. You can get into the barn from the yard any time, of course. Men are never timid, I believe; but there's a horn somewhere, if you'd like it. We have breakfast at six-thirty. Good-night."

Yes, it was Kathleen Somers's own voice, saying these things to me. I was still enraged, but I must bide my time. I refused the horn, and went out into the rheumatic orchard to smoke in dappled moonlight. The pure air soothed me; the great silence restored my familiar scheme of things. Before I went to bed in the barn, I could see the humor of this sour adventure. Oh, I would be up at six-thirty!

Of course I wasn't. I overslept; and by the time I approached the house (the woodshed door was still locked) their breakfast was long over. I fully expected to fast until the mid-day meal, but Kathleen Somers relented. With her own hands she made me coffee over a little alcohol lamp. Bread and butter had been austerely left on the table. Miss Somers fetched me eggs, which I ate raw. Then I went out into the orchard to smoke.

When I came back, I found Miss Somers as she had been the day before, crouched listlessly in her long chair, fondling her idol. I drew up a horsehair rocking-chair and plunged in.

"Why do you play with that silly thing?"

"This?" She stroked the idol. "It is rather lovely. Father got it in Benares. The carving is very cunningly done. Look at the nose and mouth. The rank Hinduism of the thing amuses me. Perhaps it was cruel to bring it up here where there are no other gods for it to play with. But it's all I've got. They had to sell everything, you know. When I get stronger, I'll send it back to New York and sell it, too."

"Why did you keep it out of all the things you had?"

"I don't know. I think it was the first thing we ever bought in India. And I remember Benares with so much pleasure. Wasn't it a pity we couldn't have been there when everything happened?"

"Much better not, I should think. You needed surgeons."

"Just what I didn't need! I should have liked to die in a country that had something to say for itself. I don't feel as though this place had ever existed, except in some hideous dream."

"It's not hideous. It's even very beautiful--so wild and untouched; such lovely contours to the mountains."

"Yes, it's very untouched." She spoke of it with just the same scorn I had in old days heard her use for certain novelists. "Scarcely worth the trouble of touching, I should think--shouldn't you?"

"The beauty of it last night and this morning has knocked me over," I replied hardily.

"Oh, really! How very interesting!" By which she meant that she was not interested at all.

"You mean that you would like it landscape-gardened?" Really, she was perverse. She had turned her back to the view--which was ripping, out of her northern window. I could tell that she habitually turned her back on it.

"Oh, landscape-gardened? Well, it would improve it, no doubt. But it would take generations to do it. The generations that have been here already don't seem to have accomplished much. Humanly speaking, they have hardly existed at all."

Kathleen Somers was no snob in the ordinary sense. She was an angel to peasants. I knew perfectly what she meant by "humanly." She meant there was no castle on the next hill.

"Are you incapable of caring for Nature--just scenery?"

"Quite." She closed her eyes, and stopped her gentle, even stroking of the idol.

"Of course you never did see America first," I laughed.

Kathleen Somers opened her eyes and spoke vehemently. “I’ve seen all there is of it to see, in transit to better places. Seeing America first! That can be borne. It’s seeing America last that kills me. Seeing nothing else forever, till I die.”

“You don’t care for just beauty, regardless,” I mused.

“Not a bit. Not unless it has meant something to man. I’m a humanist, I’m afraid.”

Whether she was gradually developing remorse for my night in the cobwebby barn, I do not know. But anyhow she grew more gentle, from this point on. She really condescended to expound.

“I’ve never loved Nature--she’s a brute, and crawly besides. It’s what man has done with Nature that counts; it’s Nature with a human past. Peaks that have been fought for, and fought on, crossed by the feet of men, stared at by poets and saints. Most of these peaks aren’t even named. Did you know that? Nature! What is Nature good for, I should like to know, except to kill us all in the end? Don’t Ruskinize to me, my dear man.”

“I won’t. I couldn’t. But, all the same, beauty is beauty, wherever and whatever. And, look where you will here, your eyes can’t go wrong.”

“I never look. I looked when I first came, and the stupidity, the emptiness, the mere wood and dirt and rock of it seemed like a personal insult. I should prefer the worst huddle of a Chinese city, I verily believe.”

“You’ve not precisely the spirit of the pioneer, I can see.”

“I should hope not. ‘But, God if a God there be, is the substance of men, which is man.’ I have to stay in the man-made ruts. They’re sacred to me. I’ll look with pleasure at the Alps, if only for the sake of Hannibal and Goethe; but I never could look with pleasure at your untutored Rockies. They’re so unintentional, you know. Nature is nothing until history has touched her. And as for this geological display outside my windows--you’ll kindly permit me to turn my back on it. It’s not peevishness.” She lifted her hand protestingly. “Only, for weeks, I stared myself blind to see the beauty you talk of. I can’t see it. That’s honest. I’ve tried. But there is none that I can see. I am very conventional, you know, very self-distrustful. I have to wait for a Byron to show it to me. American mountains--poor hulking things--have never had a poet to look at them. At least, Poe never wasted his time that way. I don’t imagine that Poe would have been much happier here than I am. I haven’t even the thrill of the explorer, for I’m not the first one to see them. A few thin generations of people have stared at these hills--and much the hills have done

for them! Melora Meigs is the child of these mountains; and Melora's sense of beauty is amply expressed in the Orthodox church in Hebron. This landscape, I assure you"--she smiled--"hasn't made good. So much for the view. It's no use to me, absolutely no use. I give you full and free leave to take it away with you if you want it. And I don't think the house is much better. But I'm afraid I shall have to keep that for Melora Meigs and me to live in." It was her old smile. The bitterness was all in the words. No, it was not bitterness, precisely, for it was fundamentally as impersonal as criticism can be. You would have thought that the mountains were low-brows. I forebore to mention her ancestors who had lived here: it would have seemed like quibbling. They had created the situation; but they had only in the most literal sense created her.

"Why don't you get out?"

"I simply haven't money enough to live anywhere else. Not money enough for a hall bedroom. This place belongs to me; the taxes are nothing. The good farming land that went with it was sold long since. And I'm afraid I haven't the strength to go out and work for a living. I'm very ineffectual, besides. What could I do even if health returned to me? I've decided it's more decent to stay here and die on three dollars a year than to sink my capital in learning stenography."

"You could, I suppose, be a companion." Of course I did not mean it, but she took it up very seriously.

"The people who want companions wouldn't want me. And the one thing this place gives me is freedom--freedom to hate it, to see it intelligently for what it is. I couldn't afford my blessed hatreds if I were a companion. And there's no money in it, so that I couldn't even plan for release. It simply wouldn't do."

Well, of course it wouldn't do. I had never thought it would. I tried another opening.

"When is Withrow coming back?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard from him." She might have been telling a squirrel that she didn't know where the other squirrel's nuts were.

"He has been far beyond civilization, I know. But I dare say he'll be back soon. I hope you won't put him in the barn. I don't mind, of course, but his feelings might be hurt."

"I shall certainly not let him come," she retorted. "He would have the grace to ask first, you know."

"I shall make a point of telling him you want him." But even that could strike no spark from her. She was too completely at odds with life to care. I realized, too, after an hour's talk with her, that I had better go--take back my fine proposition about making a long visit. She reacted to nothing I could offer. I talked of books and plays, visiting virtuosos and picture exhibitions. Her comments were what they would always have been, except that she was already groping for the cue. She had been out of it for months; she had given up the fight. The best things she said sounded a little stale and precious. Her wit perished in the face of Nature's stare. Nature was a lady she didn't recognize: a country cousin she'd never met. She couldn't even "sit and play with similes." If she lived, she would be an old lady with a clever past: an intolerable bore. But there was no need to look so far ahead. Kathleen Somers would die.

Before dinner I clambered up or down (I don't remember which) to a brook and gathered a bunch of wild iris for her. She had loved flowers of old; and how deftly she could place a spray among her treasures! She shuddered. "Take those things away! How dare you bring It inside the house?" By "It" I knew she meant the wild natural world. Obediently I took the flowers out and flung them over the fence. I knew that Kathleen Somers was capable of getting far more pleasure from their inimitable hue than I; but even that inimitable hue was poisoned for her because it came from the world that was torturing her--the world that beat upon her windows, so that she turned her back to the day; that stormed her ears, so that she closed them even to its silence; that surrounded her, so that she locked every gate of her mind.

I left, that afternoon, very desolate and sorry. Certainly I could do nothing for her. I had tried to shock her, stir her, into another attitude, but in vain. She had been transplanted to a soil her tender roots could not strike into. She would wither for a little under the sky, and then perish. "If she could only have fallen in love!" I thought, as I left her, huddled in her wicker chair. If I had been a woman, I would have fled from Melora Meigs even into the arms of a bearded farmer; I would have listened to the most nasal male the hills had bred. I would have milked cows, to get away from Melora. But I am a crass creature. Besides, what son of the soil would want her: unexuberant, delicate, pleasant in strange ways, and foreign to all familiar things? She wouldn't even fall in love with Arnold Withrow, who was her only chance. For I saw that Arnold, if he ever came, would, fatally, love the place. She might have put up with the stock-broking, but she never could have borne his liking the view.

Yes, I was very unhappy as I drove into Hebron; and when I finally achieved the Pullman at the Junction, I was unhappier still. For I felt towards that Pullman as the lost child feels towards its nurse; and I knew that Kathleen Somers, ill, poor, middle-aged, and a woman, was a thousand times more the child of the Pullman than I.

I have told this in detail, because I hate giving things at second-hand. Yet there my connection with Kathleen Somers ceased, and her tragedy deepened before other witnesses. She stayed on in her hills; too proud to visit her friends, too sane to spend her money on a flying trip to town, too bruised and faint to fight her fate. The only thing she tried for was apathy. I think she hoped--when she hoped anything--that her mind would go a little: not so much that she would have to be "put away"; but just enough so that she could see things in a mist--so that the hated hills might, for all she knew, be Alps, the rocks turn into castles, the stony fields into vineyards, and Joel Blake into a Tuscan. Just enough so that she could re-create her world from her blessed memories, without any sharp corrective senses to interfere. That, I am sure, was what she fixed her mind upon through the prolonged autumn; bending all her frail strength to turn her brain ever so little from its rigid attitude to fact. "Pretending" was no good: it maddened. If her mind would only pretend without her help! That would be heaven, until heaven really came.... You can't sympathize with her, probably, you people who have been bred up on every kind of Nature cult. I can hear you talking about the everlasting hills. Don't you see, that was the trouble? Her carefully trained imagination was her religion, and in her own way she was a ritualist. The mountains she faced were unbaptized: the Holy Ghost had never descended upon them. She was as narrow as a nun; but she could not help it. And remember, you practical people who love woodchucks, that she had nothing but the view to make life tolerable. The view was no mere accessory to a normal existence. She lived, half-ill, in an ugly, not too comfortable cottage, as far as the moon from any world she understood, in a solitude acidulated by Melora Meigs. No pictures, no music, no plays, no talk--and this, the whole year round. Would you like it yourselves, you would-be savages with Adirondack guides? Books? Well: that was one of life's little stupidities. She couldn't buy them, and no one knew what to send her. Besides, books deferred the day when her mind should, ever so little, go back on her. She didn't encourage gifts of literature. She was no philosopher; and an abstraction was of no use to her unless she could turn it to a larger concreteness, somehow enhancing, let us say, a sunset from the

Acropolis. I never loved Kathleen Somers, as men love women, but many a time that year I would have taken her burden on myself, changed lives with her, if that had been possible. It never could have been so bad for any of us as for her. Mildred Thurston would have gone to the church sociables and flirted as grossly as Hebron conventions permitted; I could have chopped wood. But to what account could Kathleen Somers turn her martyrdom?

Withrow felt it, too--not as I could feel it, for, as I foretold, he thought the place glorious. He went up in the autumn when everything was crimson and purple and gold. Yet more, in a sense, than I could feel it, for he did love her as men love women. It shows you how far gone she was that she turned him down. Many women, in her case, would have jumped at Withrow for the sake of getting away. But she was so steeped in her type that she couldn't. She wouldn't have married him before; and she wasn't going to marry him for the sake of living in New York. She would have been ashamed to. A few of us who knew blamed her. I didn't, really, though I had always suspected that she cared for him personally. Kathleen Somers's love, when it came, would be a very complicated thing. She had seen sex in too many countries, watched its brazen play on too many stages, within theatres and without, to have any mawkish illusions. But passion would have to bring a large retinue to be accepted where she was sovereign. Little as I knew her, I knew that. Yet I always thought she might have taken him, in that flaming October, if he hadn't so flagrantly, tactlessly liked the place. He drank the autumn like wine; he was tipsy with it; and his loving her didn't tend to sober him. The consequence was that she drew away--as if he had been getting drunk on some foul African brew that was good only to befuddle woolly heads with; as if, in other words, he had not been getting drunk like a gentleman.... Anyhow, Arnold came back with a bad headache. She had found a gentle brutality to fit his case. He would have been wise, I believe, to bring her away, even if he had had to chloroform her to do it. But Withrow couldn't have been wise in that way. Except for his incurable weakness for Nature, he was the most delicate soul alive.

He didn't talk much to me about it, beyond telling me that she had refused him. I made out the rest from his incoherences. He had not slept in the barn, for they could hardly have let a cat sleep in the barn on such cold nights; but Melora Meigs had apparently treated him even worse than she had treated me. Kathleen Somers had named some of the unnamed mountains after the minor prophets; as grimly as if she had been one of the people they cursed. I thought that a good sign, but Withrow said he wished she hadn't: she ground

the names out so between her teeth. Some of her state of mind came out through her talk--not much. It was from one or two casually seen letters that I became aware of her desire to go a little--just a little--mad.

In the spring Kathleen Somers had a relapse. It was no wonder. In spite of the Franklin stoves, her frail body must have been chilled to the bone for many months. Relief settled on several faces, when we heard--I am afraid it may have settled on mine. She had been more dead than alive, I judged, for a year; and yet she had not been able to cure her sanity. That was chronic. Death would have been the kindest friend that could arrive to her across those detested hills. We--the "we" is a little vague, but several of us scurried about--sent up a trained nurse, delaying somewhat for the sake of getting the woman who had been there before; for she had the advantage of having experienced Melora Meigs without resultant bloodshed. She was a nice woman, and sent faithful bulletins; but the bulletins were bad. Miss Somers seemed to have so little resistance: there was no interest there, she said, no willingness to fight. "The will was slack." Ah, she little knew Kathleen Somers's will! None of us knew, for that matter.

The spring came late that year, and in those northern hills there were weeks of melting snow and raw, deep slush--the ugliest season we have to face south of the Arctic circle. The nurse did not want any of her friends to come; she wrote privately, to those of us who champed at the bit, that Miss Somers was fading away, but not peacefully; she was better unvisited, unseen. Miss Somers did not wish any one to come, and the nurse thought it wiser not to force her. Several women were held back by that, and turned with relief to Lenten opera. The opera, however, said little to Withrow at the best of times, and he was crazed by the notion of not seeing her before she achieved extinction. I thought him unwise, for many reasons: for one, I did not think that Arnold Withrow would bring her peace. She usually knew what she wanted--wasn't that, indeed, the whole trouble with her?--and she had said explicitly to the nurse that she didn't want Arnold Withrow. But by the end of May, Withrow was neither to hold nor to bind: he went. I contented myself with begging him at least not to poison her last hours by admiring the landscape. I had expected my earnest request to shock him; but, to my surprise, he nodded understandingly. "I shall curse the whole thing out like a trooper, if she gives me the chance." And he got into his day-coach--the Pullmans wouldn't go on until much later--a mistaken and passionate knight.

Withrow could not see her the first evening, and he talked long and deeply with the nurse. She had no hope to give him: she was mystified. It was her opinion that Kathleen Somers's lack of will was killing her, speedily and surely. "Is there anything for her to die of?" he asked. "There's nothing, you might say, for her to live of," was her reply. The nurse disapproved of his coming, but promised to break the news of his presence to her patient in the morning.

Spring had by this time touched the hills. It was that divine first moment when the whole of earth seems to take a leap in the night; when things are literally new every morning. Arnold walked abroad late, filling his lungs and nostrils and subduing his pulses. He was always faunishly wild in the spring; and for years he hadn't had a chance to seek the season in her haunts. But he turned in before midnight, because he dreaded the next day supremely. He didn't want to meet that face to face until he had to. Melora Meigs lowered like a thunderstorm, but she was held in check by the nurse. I suppose Melora couldn't give notice: there would be nothing but the poor-farm for her if she did. But she whined and grumbled and behaved in general like an electrical disturbance. Luckily, she couldn't curdle the milk.

Withrow waked into a world of beauty. He walked for an hour before breakfast, through woods all blurred with buds, down vistas brushed with faint color. But he would have given the spring and all springs to come for Kathleen Somers, and the bitter kernel of it was that he knew it. He was sharp-faced and sad (I know how he looked) when he came back, with a bunch of hepaticas, to breakfast.

The nurse was visibly trembling. You see, Kathleen Somers's heart had never been absolutely right. It was a terrible responsibility to let her patient face Withrow. Still, neither she nor any other woman could have held Withrow off. Besides, as she had truly said, there was nothing explicitly for Kathleen Somers to die of. It was that low vitality, that whispering pulse, that listlessness; then, a draught, a shock, a bit of over-exertion, and something real and organic could speedily be upon her. No wonder the woman was troubled. In point of fact, though she had taken up Miss Somers's breakfast, she hadn't dared tell her the news. And finally, after breakfast, she broke down. "I can't do it, Mr. Withrow," she wailed. "Either you go away or I do."

Withrow knew at first only one thing: that he wouldn't be the one to go. Then he realized that the woman had been under a long strain, what with the

spring thaws, and a delicate patient who wouldn't mend--and Melora to fight with, on behalf of all human decency, every day.

"You go, then," he said finally. "I'll take care of her."

The nurse stared at him. Then she thought, presumably, of Kathleen Somers's ineffable delicacy, and burst out laughing. Hysteria might, in all the circumstances, be forgiven her.

Then they came back to the imminent question.

"I'll tell her when I do up her room," she faltered.

"All right. I'll give you all the time in the world. But she must be told I'm here--unless you wish me to tell her myself." Withrow went out to smoke. But he did not wish to succumb again to the intoxication Kathleen Somers so disdained, and eventually he went into the barn, to shut himself away from temptation. It was easier to prepare his vilifying phrases there.

To his consternation, he heard through the gloom the sound of sobbing. The nurse, he saw, after much peering, sat on a dusty chopping-block, crying unhealthily. He went up to her and seized her arm. "Have you told her?"

"I can't."

"My good woman, you'd better leave this afternoon."

"Not"--the tone itself was firm, through the shaky sobs--"until there is some one to take my place."

"I'll telegraph for some one. You shan't see her again. But I will see her at once."

Then the woman's training asserted itself. She pulled herself together, with a little shake of self-disgust. "You'll do nothing of the sort. I'll attend to her until I go. It has been a long strain, and, contrary to custom, I've had no time off. I'll telegraph to the Registry myself. And if I can't manage until then, I'll resign my profession." She spoke with sturdy shame.

"That's better." Withrow approved her. "I'm awfully obliged. But honestly, she has got to know. I can't stand it, skulking round, much longer. And no matter what happens to the whole boiling, I'm not going to leave without seeing her."

"I'll tell her." The nurse rose and walked to the barn-door like a heroine. "But you must stay here until I come for you."

"I promise. Only you must come. I give you half an hour."

"I don't need half an hour, thank you." She had recovered her professional crispness. In the wide door she stopped. "It's a pity," she said irrelevantly, "that she can't see how lovely this is." Then she started for the house.

"I believe you," muttered Withrow under his breath.

In five minutes the nurse came back, breathless, half-running. Arnold got up from the chopping-block, startled. He believed for an instant (as he has since told me) that it was "all over." With her hand on her beating heart the woman panted out her words:

"She has come down-stairs in a wrapper. She hasn't been down for weeks. And she has found your hepaticas."

"Oh, hell!" Withrow was honestly disgusted. He had never meant to insult Kathleen Somers with hepaticas. "Is it safe to leave her alone with them?" He hardly knew what he was saying. But it shows to what a pass Kathleen Somers had come that he could be frightened at the notion of her being left alone with a bunch of hepaticas.

"She's all right, I think. She seemed to like them."

"Oh, Lord!" Withrow's brain was spinning. "Here--I'll go. If she can stand those beastly flowers, she can stand me."

"No, she can't." The nurse had recovered her breath now. "I'll go back and tell her, very quietly. If she could get down-stairs, she can stand it, I think. But I'll be very careful. You come in ten minutes. If she isn't fit, I'll have got her back to bed by that time."

She disappeared, and Withrow, his back to the view, counted out the minutes. When the large hand of his watch had quite accomplished its journey, he turned and walked out through the yard to the side door of the house. Melora Meigs was clattering dish-pans somewhere beyond, and the noise she made covered his entrance to the living-room. He drew a deep breath: they were not there. He listened at the stairs: no sound up there--no sound, at least, to rise above Melora's dish-pans, now a little less audible. But this time he was not going to wait--for anything. He already had one foot on the stairs when he heard voices and stopped. For just one second he paused, then walked cat-like in the direction of the sounds. The front door was open. On the step stood Kathleen Somers, her back to him, facing the horizon. A light shawl hung on her shoulders, and the nurse's arm was very firmly round her waist. They did not hear him, breathing heavily there in the hall behind them.

He saw Kathleen Somers raise her arm slowly--with difficulty, it seemed. She pointed at the noble shoulder of a mountain.

"That is Habakkuk," said her sweet voice. "I named them all, you know. But I think Habakkuk is my favorite; though of course he's not so stunning as

Isaiah. Then they run down to Obadiah and Malachi. Joel is just peeping over Habakkuk's left shoulder. That long bleak range is Jeremiah." She laughed, very faintly. "You know, Miss Willis, they are really very beautiful. Isn't it strange I couldn't see it? For I honestly couldn't. I've been lying there, thinking. And I found I could remember all their outlines, under snow ... and this morning it seemed to me I must see how Habakkuk looked in the spring." She sat down suddenly on the top step; and Miss Willis sat down too, her arm still about her patient.

"It's very strange"--Withrow, strain though he did, could hardly make out the words, they fell so softly--"that I just couldn't see it before. It's only these last days.... And now I feel as if I wanted to see every leaf on every tree. It wasn't so last year. They say something to me now. I don't think I should want to talk with them forever, but you've no idea--you've no idea--how strange and welcome it is for my eyes to find them beautiful." She seemed almost to murmur to herself. Then she braced herself slightly against the nurse's shoulder, and went on, in her light, sweet, ironic voice. "They probably never told you--but I didn't care for Nature, exactly. I don't think I care for it now, as some people do, but I can see that this is beautiful. Of course you don't know what it means to me. It has simply changed the world." She waved her hand again. "They never got by, before. I always knew that line was line, and color was color, wherever or whoever. But my eyes went back on me. My father would have despised me. He wouldn't have preferred Habakkuk, but he would have done Habakkuk justice from the beginning. Yes, it makes a great deal of difference to me to see it once, fair and clear. Why"--she drew herself up as well as she could, so firmly held--"it is a very lovely place. I should tire of it some time, but I shall not tire of it soon. For a little while, I shall be up to it. And I know that no one thinks it will be long."

Just then, Withrow's absurd fate caught him. Breathless, more passionately interested than he had ever been in his life, he sneezed. He had just time, while the two women were turning, to wonder if he had ruined it all--if she would faint, or shriek, or relapse into apathy.

She did none of these things. She faced him and flushed, standing unsteadily. "How long have you been cheating me?" she asked coldly. But she held out her hand before she went up-stairs with the nurse's arm still round her.

Later he caught at Miss Willis excitedly. "Is she better? Is she worse? Is she well? Or is she going to die?"

“She’s shaken. She must rest. But she’s got the hepaticas in water beside her bed. And she told me to pull the shade up so that she could look out. She has a touch of temperature--but she often has that. The exertion and the shock would be enough to give it to her. I found her leaning against the door-jamb. I hadn’t a chance to tell her you were here. I can tell you later whether you’d better go or stay.”

“I am going to stay. It’s you who are going.”

“You needn’t telegraph just yet,” the nurse replied dryly. She looked another woman from the nervous, sobbing creature on the chopping-block.

The end was that Miss Willis stayed and Arnold Withrow went. Late that afternoon he left Kathleen Somers staring passionately at the sunset. It was not his moment, and he had the grace to know it. But he had not had to tell her that the view was beastly; and, much as he loved her, I think that was a relief to him.

None of us will ever know the whole of Kathleen Somers’s miracle, of course. I believe she told as much of it as she could when she said that she had lain thinking of the outlines of the mountains until she felt that she must go out and face them: stand once more outside, free of walls, and stare about at the whole chain of the earth-lords. Perhaps the spring, which had broken up the ice-bound streams, had melted other things besides. Unwittingly--by unconscious cerebration--by the long inevitable storing of disdained impressions--she had arrived at vision. That which had been, for her, alternate gibberish and silence, had become an intelligible tongue. The blank features had stirred and shifted into a countenance; she saw a face, where she had seen only odds and ends of modelling grotesquely flung abroad. With no stupid pantheism to befuddle her, she yet felt the earth a living thing. Wood and stone, which had not even been an idol for her, now shaped themselves to hold a sacrament. Put it as you please; for I can find no way to express it to my satisfaction. Kathleen Somers had, for the first time, envisaged the cosmic, had seen something less passionate, but more vital, than history. Most of us are more fortunate than she: we take it for granted that no loom can rival the petal of a flower. But to some creatures the primitive is a cipher, hard to learn; and blood is spent in the struggle. You have perhaps seen (and not simply in the old legend) passion come to a statue. Rare, oh, rare is the necessity for such a miracle. But Kathleen Somers was in need of one; and I believe it came to her.

The will was slack, the nurse had said; yet it sufficed to take her from her bed, down the stairs, in pursuit of the voice--straight out into the newly articulate world. She moved, frail and undismayed, to the source of revelation. She did not cower back and demand that the oracle be served up to her by a messenger. A will like that is not slack.

Now I will shuffle back into my own skin and tell you the rest of it very briefly and from the rank outsider's point of view. Even had I possessed the whole of Arnold Withrow's confidence, I could not deal with the delicate gradations of a lover's mood. He passed the word about that Kathleen Somers was not going to die--though I believe he did it with his heart in his mouth, not really assured she wouldn't. It took some of us a long time to shift our ground and be thankful. Withrow, with a wisdom beyond his habit, did not go near her until autumn. Reports were that she was gaining all the time, and that she lived out-of-doors staring at Habakkuk and his brethren, gathering wild flowers and pressing them between her palms. She seemed determined to face another winter there alone with Melora, Miss Willis wrote. Withrow set his jaw when that news came. It was hard on him to stay away, but she had made it very clear that she wanted her convalescent summer to herself. When she had to let Miss Willis go--and Miss Willis had already taken a huge slice of Kathleen's capital--he might come and see her through the transition. So Withrow sweltered in New York all summer, and waited for permission.

Then Melora Meigs was gracious for once. With no preliminary illness, with just a little gasp as the sun rose over the long range of Jeremiah, she died. Withrow, hearing this, was off like a sprinter who hears the signal. He found laughter and wit abiding happily in Kathleen's recovered body. Together they watched the autumn deepen over the prophets. Habakkuk, all insults forgiven, was their familiar.

So they brought Kathleen Somers back from the hills to live. It was impossible for her to remain on her mountain side without a Melora Meigs; and Melora, unlike most tortures, was unreplaceable. Kathleen's world welcomed her as warmly as if her exile had been one long suspense: a gentle hypocrisy we all forgave each other. Some one went abroad and left an apartment for her use. All sorts of delicate little events occurred, half accidentally, in her interest. Soon some of us began to gather, as of old. Marvel of marvels, Withrow had not spoken in that crimson week of autumn. Without jealousy, he had apparently left her to Habakkuk. It was a brief winter--for Kathleen Somers's body, a kind of spring. You could see her grow, from week

to week: plump out and bloom more vividly. Then, in April, without a word, she left us--disappeared one morning, with no explicit word to servants.

Withrow once more--poor Withrow--shot forth, not like a runner, but like a hound on a fresh scent. He needed no time-tables. He leaped from the telephone to the train.

He found her there, he told me afterwards, sitting on the step, the door unlocked behind her but shut.

Indeed, she never entered the house again; for Withrow bore her away from the threshold. I do not think she minded, for she had made her point: she had seen Habakkuk once more, and Habakkuk had not gone back on her. That was all she needed to know. They meant to go up in the autumn after their marriage, but the cottage burned to the ground before they got back from Europe. I do not know that they have ever gone, or whether they ever will go, now. There are still a few exotic places that Kathleen Withrow has not seen, and Habakkuk can wait. After all, the years are very brief in Habakkuk's sight. Even if she never needs him again, I do not think he will mind.

Miss Marriott and the Faun

"Love?" repeated Hoyting queryingly.

I don't know how the word had been mentioned between us. Love doesn't bulk big in Hoyting's vocabulary, or in mine when I'm talking to him. But occasionally one comes in sight of this great natural wonder and can scarcely refrain from alluding to it. This must have been one of the occasions.

"What about it?" I was curious to hear what Hoyting had to say. I could have sworn that he himself had never known the "sacred terror." His lurching bulk and his brown face have been shaped and tempered to other adventures and other solutions. What a time (I've often thought, without blasphemy) St. Peter will have with Hoyting's pack when he dumps it at the pearly gates for appraisal! No one I have ever known has wandered so far afield--disinterestedly. I don't think Hoyting has ever plucked an orchid or brought home--but he has no home--the skin of a beast. What has ever mattered to him save the encounter, in minor seas and insignificant ports, with things that, to the end, did not concern him? No Aziyadés and Chrysanthèmes, I feel sure, for Hoyting.

"Love?" he repeated again, relaxing his huge body slowly and flinging one leg over the other. "I've seen as much of love as the next man, in more places than most. I've never been mixed up with it myself--not with the real thing. But most things are mixed up with it. You'll believe that I don't read poetry. If you people could ever get the beat of life, you'd get it with prose. Imagine fitting human beings--black or white--into a stanzaic form! I realized that young. I've seen people make love all over the shop. I'm not denying it's effective. But the one thing I've never seen it do is really change a person. That's why I don't believe in all the things they tell me the poets say about it. Time and again I've seen the trick tried; and time and again I've seen the woman or the man slump back into the shape God made 'em in. Puffing out like the frog in the fable--and bursting, sometimes--but never turning into the ox, you know. Humph!" Hoyting snorted mildly, emitting blue smoke from his nostrils like a djinn.

I didn't care to take up the challenge. I have always suspected Hoyting of suspecting me of perpetrating fiction--if you called it "literature," it would make no difference to Hoyting. He must have read a few books in his time, for now and then he quotes. But if you placed Hoyting on the classic uninhabited

island, with the traditional spoils of shipwreck clustered about him; if you went the wild length of floating in a properly labelled Mudie box on the seventh wave: well, my guess is that when the rescuing party came, they would find Hoyting--or perhaps his skeleton--sitting on the sand, hunched into the most comfortable position the scene afforded, and the box lying unopened in the middle distance. I don't know any other human creature of whom I could, with conviction, predicate that. Hoyting prefers humanity to anything; but he would prefer the barest vegetation to books.

As I said, I never supposed Hoyting an authority on the "sacred terror"--for one thing, I don't believe any woman has ever gone the length of falling in love with him--but I should always be exceedingly interested to know what he thought of anything so variously human. So I egged him on, as the years have taught me how: with vermouth close to his hand, the cigarettes just by, and my own face turned non-committally to the fresh sea-wind. The lights of the little café were going out one by one as the prudent proprietor discovered that they were no longer needed, and François himself withdrew on tiptoe to some region at the back, like an inspired accomplice. Hoyting sleeps when he feels like it, and no vigil discourages him.

I had to wait for a time, and I almost wondered if Hoyting were not giving himself up to one of his inconsiderate silences--silences which, far into the evening, he will end by rising and lurching into the dusk, leaving you a coin with which to pay his shot, as if you were his valet. Out of those silences something may always come; but any show of curiosity snaps the time-lock into place. If you question too airily, you are sure to have to wait until the next day's sun has renewed all things. And, with the next day's sun, Hoyting may be anywhere.

He poured out the vermouth and screwed his lips impatiently. "Yes, I've seen the thing tried--honestly and fervently tried. Did you ever know a girl named Marriott--Eva Marriott--or a man named Dallas?"

"I've known two or three men named Dallas."

"Was any one of them English?"

"One of them was."

"What was he like?"

"A red-haired bruiser with a game leg that he got from being thrown in the hunting-field. Or so he said."

"Big, then?"

"Six feet three, and bulky in proportion."

"That is not the man. And you never knew the girl?"

"Never. And I am safe, in any case," I reminded him.

"Oh--yes. Only I shouldn't like to ticket them. But since you don't know either of them"--Hoyting's gesture shed the pair down the windy ways of time.

"She was young, very young; and he had the hopeless un-selfconsciousness of the pagan. 'Pagan' is a stupid word to use; but you know what I mean."

Hoyting knitted his brows and jerked his chin towards me inquiringly. I didn't know, precisely, but I wasn't going to delay him over a definition. "Yes." I spoke very quietly.

"Well, then, let it go at that. He knew his way about among his sensations, too, and was as serious about them as if they had been his morals. Perhaps they were. I don't mean he was a rotter--though, again, perhaps he was--but that he couldn't see why taking a cold bath when you needed it wasn't as virtuous as selling all you had and giving to the poor. He hadn't any brains, I think; neither had she--not twopence worth between them. If they had been ants, the community would have executed them. And, of course, they had to knock up against each other. She was chaperoned by an intellectual aunt who expected to write a book about her experiences in those dangerous and exotic lands where Cook has to buy your railway ticket for you. Nothing could persuade the aunt that she wasn't a sort of Marco Polo. She had no brains, either: she was all intellect. They had got to Biskra, and the aunt was filling note-books. You can imagine how much brain she had if she was taken in by Biskra. I won't stop to explain why I was there myself. You can be sure it was by no fault of my own."

"My dear Hoyting," I ventured, "it's unworthy of you to apologize."

"I wasn't apologizing. I only meant that these people and their kind had nothing to do with me. I ran into them by accident--as you might run into sticking-plaster by accident. The result was much the same. I was caught by the leg in that painted and powdered and generally meretricious town. For certain reasons, I had to be there a fortnight. And the woman stalked me--me! Some one had told her that I had been in Persia. She wanted to know all about Persia. Can you imagine me sitting in the garden of the Palace Hotel answering questions about Persia? I tried to make it clear to her that she couldn't go to Persia. I didn't think her fit to go anywhere; but I thought she would do less harm in Biskra than she would anywhere else. Biskra, if she had only known it, was just her size. I never put her wise; why should I? My chief

object was to keep her in Biskra the rest of her life, so that I should never have to see her again."

"What was she like?"

"Haven't I just told you?"

"Not wholly. She might have been a nice woman or a harpy."

"She was a very curious person," Hoyting mused. "I had some respect for her, you know. Apparently she had wanted, all her life, to travel in strange places, and had never been able to stir from her ancestral homestead. Recently she had inherited a lot of money and a niece to chaperone; and she had chucked all the photographs and books that she had been feeding her poor lean soul on, and started out, dragging the niece with her. She was as respectable as even a woman of her antecedents could possibly be; but she had no prejudices. That was the one thing that distinguished her from any other fussy old maid. It made her rather pathetic. She had gradually, in the long, busy, baffled years, managed to discard every tradition she had. She was sceptical of everything that her native community held for gospel. She didn't believe in revealed religion, or the Ten Commandments, or the sacredness of the marriage tie, or the superiority of the female sex, or any of the things she must have been supposed at home to stand for. She had sat perfectly still in her own village for fifty years, and her only recreation had been to burst silently, one by one, her intellectual bonds. She wasn't in the least revolutionary; she didn't want to preach or subvert. She only wanted to see things with an unprejudiced eye. She might have been magnificent if she had had youth or strength or beauty; but she had none of those. Her body went back on her mind at every turn. She was afraid of every beast that walks, from camels to spiders; she was dependent on a whole set of special medicaments that had to be renewed every now and then from America--she couldn't have conceived of using a foreign substitute, even British. She kept the vocabulary of her prejudices, too, though she dispensed with the prejudices. I am sure, for example, she hadn't the slightest objection to the Ouled Naïls, but she always referred to them as 'fallen women.' She would have been amusing if she hadn't been such a bore. In retrospect, and safe from her, I do find her amusing. She was naïve to the last degree: any shifty Arab could take her in. She bought things in the bazaars that simply smelled of Birmingham. But not the shiftiest Arab of the lot, even if he had once in a way told her the truth, could have shocked her. And she wasn't morbid, you understand. She wasn't hunting horrors; she was only hunting something different from all the things she had

been fed up with. Everything was fish that came to her net--everything. But she was about as well equipped as a baby, to write a book. Now do you know what she was like? She had sandy hair, and a blue veil that hung crooked over it, and always wore dirt-colored clothes, and always had a clean handkerchief in her left hand."

"I see perfectly," I replied. "What about the niece?"

"Oh, the niece? Well, little Eva Marriott had all the prejudices her aunt hadn't. Morally speaking, she went round in her aunt's discarded clothes. But she was exquisitely pretty--even I could see that. I'm no judge of female beauty--I have lost all my standards--but I could see that her coloring was exceedingly satisfactory. She had red hair, and a white skin, and sad green eyes, and a wonderful veil of sweetness over all. She held herself badly, like all American girls, but you could have written Chinese poetry to her head and neck. She was about twenty, I believe, and by the time the aunt clutched me in the hotel garden young Eva and young Dallas were head over heels in love with each other."

Hoyting refilled his glass, and turned his head slowly from side to side as if to feel the wind move across his skin.

"A civilized love-affair is the devil. It doesn't even interest me. It's like trying to wrestle with stays on: a fine exhibition of endurance, no doubt, but certainly not good wrestling--and most certainly not beautiful to the onlooker. Oh, the heroine of this tale is the aunt, if you like. I don't think even she had any imagination; but a complete absence of prejudice is almost as good. She liked Dallas no end--I could see that out of the tail of my eye. They didn't grow his kind in her little Colonial village. He was as exotic, from her point of view, as a palm-tree--and, from mine, no more interesting."

"Who was interesting, if none of them was?" I asked. Hoyting does not deal in the platitudinous human, and I didn't believe for a moment that he was asking me to assist at any pious dissection of a spinster's wanderlust.

"None of them was; but the combination of the two young things was irresistible. Puritan and pagan have met often enough; but never were two such pure and unprotected specimens of their different types. She had been bred in the kind of atmosphere that I'd forgotten about. It never was mine, even when I was a kid, but I'd always heard of it. 'Eva reads a great deal--a great deal. I have given up books for life,' Miss Marriott said to me once. A perfectly decent thing to do if you don't talk about it!--and then gaze like a love-sick owl at the filthy little 'village nègre' across the way. You know what

‘villages nègres’ are in French colonial towns--so new that it’s a wonder they can be so dirty. The woman was a terrible bore!”

“I didn’t know you were ever terribly bored by the same person more than once.” Indeed, no one has ever had less right than Hoyting to pose as a social martyr.

“Um--no. But I was in Biskra because I had to be--as I explained. I had definite business there. I was bound to be bored anyhow, and I’d rather be bored sitting still in a hotel garden than riding round on a mule to see what the avaricious Arab has prepared for people like Miss Marriott. Of course, sitting still let me in for a certain amount of Miss Marriott, but it was otherwise comfortable.”

“I didn’t know you ever had business anywhere.”

“I seldom do. But I had then. It was not wholly my own business, so I won’t go into it.”

Hoyting frowned and was silent for a moment. I had naturally no intention of questioning him further; but it was the first hint I had ever had of his doing anything save what the instant suggested. Was it possible that even he was at the mercy of past and future, like the rest of us? I put the thought aside, for I have got no end of mental luxury, first and last, out of the Everlasting Now that is Hoyting.

“She let me understand that her young people were engaged. She gave it to me like a piece of gossip, as if it weren’t her affair. I hadn’t seen much of young Eva, and scarcely more of young Dallas, but I was curious to know if the aunt approved. It seemed to me that in her place--though I don’t pretend to say I could put myself there very successfully--I shouldn’t. I said something. ‘Oh, it’s Eva’s affair,’ she answered. ‘In----’ (she named their State) ‘a girl’s of age at eighteen.’

“‘My dear Miss Marriott,’ I said, ‘a State in which a girl is of age at eighteen doesn’t exist north of Cancer or south of Capricorn. I don’t know much about the laws of my precious country, but I do know something about climate.’

“‘I think he’s fascinating.’ That is all I could get out of her. Not that I tried very hard to get anything out of her. It would have been like going a-fishing in a provincial aquarium.

“Now, mind you”--Hoyting frowned again, then shrugged his great shoulders as if to reassure himself that the burden was gone from them--“I don’t say the chap wasn’t fascinating. He had bowled over Eva Marriott, anyhow. Their love-affair had grown under that sun like the perfect date-palm

in the perfect oasis. It looked as if they'd hunt up their respective consuls and be married before they left Biskra. But they didn't. At least, not before I left Biskra, and I fancy not since. I am sure not since. He wasn't fit to marry any one."

"You said he wasn't--not past doubt, at least--a rotter."

"'Rotter' has nothing to do with him. You might as well call him something in Coptic."

Hoyting frowned again. Then he turned suddenly. "Let's not talk about it. I don't know why I started out to tell you, anyhow. It's none of your business or mine. Therefore it doesn't interest us. Only, you mentioned love.... Let me tell you about the only time I ever tried pig-sticking. It was a few months ago, and I must have looked like one afflicted of God."

"I'll hear that later." I was firm. "Tell me more about these people. I shall never see them."

"No, I dare say not. But it isn't our business, all the same."

"Probably I shouldn't agree with you," I went on. "Until you prove it to me I sha'n't believe you know the sacred terror when you see it."

"'The sacred terror.' Um.... Probably, as you say, you won't agree with me. But what does it matter? I know what I know." He sealed his lips for a moment, and I was afraid I hadn't overcome his reluctance. But presently I knew that I had. Hoyting narrowed his eyes until they were almost shut. Head thrown back, he began to talk.

"I don't pretend, for a moment, to understand young Dallas. He had obviously been brought up like every one else, and he certainly had no theories. I think he just wanted--whatever he wanted at the moment. Whether it was something to eat, or something to look at, or something to go out and do, or something to possess. He was a little more complicated than a faun, but he was more like a faun than like anything else that has ever had human shape."

"Furry ears? Donatello? All that sort of thing?"

Hoyting opened his puzzled eyes. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, of course, you never read novels. Go on."

"If there has ever been a novel about a faun, you can be sure it had nothing to do with Dallas. I only meant that he seemed to have really no inhibitions. He tried for what he wanted, and if such brawn and brain as he had didn't give it to him, he lay down placidly in the shade, as it were, and licked his wounds and waited until he wanted something else. Then he would try for that. He

wouldn't have been likely to raise his voice unduly or fail to dress for dinner, or blaspheme before ladies; but if he had thought any of those little things would give him real pleasure, he'd have done it. He was just a mass of desires and the means to satisfy them. I said he had no brains. He hadn't, I think; but he had a very keen knowledge of what you might call physical arithmetic. He could calculate his sensations, like lightning, to the fifth place of decimals. If he wanted a glass of water badly, and he had to go a distance to get it, he knew like a shot whether the joy of the glass of water totted up to more or less than the annoyance of going that distance. And he went, or didn't, quite regardless of the social situation at the moment. Do you see what I mean?"

"Quite. But why did you say he wasn't a rotter?"

"I don't know." Hoyting answered very simply. "But there was something exhilarating in his sweetness, his simplicity, his health, his gayety. He didn't even seem precisely selfish. He simply carried on the business of his own organism as piously and efficiently as if it had been a model orphanage. I didn't like either of them--but I saw trouble ahead, in spite of Miss Marriott's optimism. And the trouble came.

"You see, he had fallen in love with Eva Marriott. His desires were concentrated upon her. And she was in love with him. I think she thought her soul was in love with him--though how a soul can be in love with a man passes my comprehension. If we have souls, I'm sure they don't mess about like that. Anyhow, the two had so little in common, temperamentally, that it must have been what you call the 'sacred terror.' You couldn't account for it except by the unforeknowable thunderbolt. Her face, I suppose, had focussed his desires; he would never be satisfied until he had kissed it into weariness. She--oh, I suppose he stood to her for all kinds of things she had never so much as laid her fingers on. Probably in her village none of the worthy male souls had had such exteriors. A fortiori, the soul inside his exterior must be ten times worthier than they. I may be wrong, but that's the way I figured it out. The aunt loved him for his looks and his way of getting things. It was extraordinarily interesting to her to find a man who owned up to his physical tastes. She had been used to seeing all desires either concealed or apologized for.

"If Dallas had had any brains, I think he could have taught Eva Marriott his own hedonism. She was a blank page, in spite of those austere Puritan head-lines; and I fancy anything that sounded theoretical could have got her for a disciple in no time. But Dallas couldn't explain anything; he could only

manifest himself. And she was taken by that supple exhibition. They wanted each other--that was what it came to. Why reason about it any more? You can take my word for it that they did. And I suppose he must have seemed to her very much her own kind when all North Africa was jostling them in the streets. But the aunt! No, I never supposed that her sort existed. It was too futile. I dare say her sort doesn't really exist--she was probably a 'sport.' But she was there in the flesh, anyhow.

"And then she decided that she wanted to go to Touggourt. Some women in the hotel had been, and that started her off. She wouldn't go alone with Eva, though. She found the natives much too interesting to be trustworthy. Eva wouldn't go without Dallas--not she! Miss Marriott therefore said Dallas might go. I advised her to give it up; especially as she wouldn't go by diligence. She wanted a little caravan of her own--camels, and the rest. It shocked me to think of Miss Marriott on a camel; it somehow seemed disrespectful both to the camel and to her. Let Dallas and Eva go to Touggourt on their honeymoon if they wanted to, but why drag two young things, who had to be chaperoned, out into the desert? They would either be dreadfully bored or frightfully unhappy. Hotel life and the distractions of Biskra--the day all chopped up into little amusements--were much better for them. But the aunt wouldn't see it. She thought it would be romantic. What my senses told me wasn't her business. I only gave her the results in a little brief advice.

"'They are very much in love,' she remarked. 'I should like to see them in the desert.'

“The retort was easy enough, but I couldn’t make it. I couldn’t even tell her just why I thought they would be very unhappy in the desert. If she wanted to sacrifice them to her lack of prejudices, I couldn’t stop her without being rude. I’m not sure I could have stopped her even then. She was a most extraordinary creature. I knew enough about the desert to know she’d be damned sorry, some time, that she had done it--that is, if she had a grain of the human aunt left in her--but my lips were sealed. After all, from any serious point of view, young Dallas and young Eva were perfectly unimportant. And the relief of getting them all out of Biskra would be very great.

“Well--they went. Dallas made their arrangements for them. They were so busy for two days beforehand that I hardly saw them. But I did see them start. It came over me then, like a presentiment, that it was all wrong. It isn’t safe to have no more prejudices than Miss Marriott. She ought to have seen that God never meant her to go anywhere on a camel; that He never even meant her to go to the places that camels take you to. Anything so silly as that had to come to grief. It made me sick; and I was glad to see the last of Miss Marriott’s blue veil. She was so exalted that she hardly spoke to me; she was surer than ever that she was Marco Polo. Miss Marriott was capable of anything; but I was a little puzzled by Dallas’s acquiescence. If you could have seen Miss Marriott hunched up in an attatouch! I was sure that he would much rather have stayed

respectably behind and made love to Eva in Biskra. I know he wanted to marry her on the spot; and I gathered that she wouldn't. There are women--girls, anyhow--who love being engaged. It's like--well, never mind what it's like. They don't analyze; they merely know it's delightful. I fancy most men don't find it delightful, and Dallas was certainly the last man in the world to find it so. The fact that he did go to Touggourt with no trouble showed me at least that he wasn't liking Biskra, and that he was probably in a state of nerves. The rate of progress of a Saharan camel wasn't going to improve his nerves; neither was Touggourt, or any other place where he didn't have to dress for dinner--where the physical habits of the European world couldn't be reproduced. I've seen men in that condition before, plenty of times. We all have. But I never saw one in that condition going to Touggourt, on a camel, with Miss Marriott."

Hoyting spoke almost with bitterness. I could have fancied that in his heart of hearts he blamed young Dallas for everything--whatever it was--that had happened. In spite of his cynical flings at the aunt, it was clear that he had a particular respect for her. He couldn't have been more irritated by her follies if he had been really fond of her.

The evening was wearing on to night--François was dropping with sleep somewhere behind us. I summoned him, and had with him a brief whispered colloquy while Hoyting, his back turned to us, snuffed up the wind as thirstily as if it had been a love-philtre. I didn't know how long the tale might last, and I wanted to forestall any interruption by a poor creature who had to work and therefore had to sleep. Our table was outside in the garden, and from the garden a little path led, by way of a gate in the scrubby hedge, to the sea-strand. I paid for the vermouth that stood on the table, and bade François lock up the café behind us and leave us to our talk. A few sibilant whispers arranged it, and François had disappeared before Hoyting had got his fill of the wind. Whether he knew what had been accomplished behind his back, I could not tell. Hoyting never troubles himself with details. The world more or less swings into his stride, I've noticed. Finally he turned to me and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Never mind what I thought.... Let's get ahead with this. I've a notion I shall sleep to-night, and sleep's a good thing. Um."

You understand that I can't report Hoyting verbatim. He has no structure. But I've learned to remember the gist of what he says, and more or less in his own words. I wish I could remember his every phrase, for my own equivalents

are poor stuff. But Hoyting wouldn't help you reproduce him if he could. He talks obstinately into the void. If he ever saw himself recorded, he'd never speak again. Yet the best I have to give is Hoyting's. You'll pardon my way of dealing with him, I hope.

"Never mind me." It was with some such phrase that he returned to the tale. "I put in ten days more in Biskra. I had to. Never Biskra again for me! Odd, isn't it, how you hate any place where you've ever had to be?--even though, if you like to look at it in that way, you've always got to be somewhere or other until you die. Anyhow, in about eight days, Miss Marriott and her niece returned to the hotel. They came suddenly into the dining-room one night, and I knew that if they had been to Touggourt at all, they must have come back by diligence. Their kind of camel--for even Miss Marriott had had the wit to stop short of a mehari--couldn't have done the round trip under a fortnight. Dallas wasn't with them; and, somehow, from the moment I saw them come in, I knew he wasn't even in Biskra. My first thought was that I had been plain cheated. I had expected to be off well before they returned, and if I ever saw Marco Polo again, it wouldn't be my fault."

"Come, Hoyting, you liked her!"

"I didn't like her. I don't like people I run across in that way--women, especially. I should be a nervous ghost by this time if I had stopped to like people. Fancy all one's chance encounters turning into pulls on one's affection--like the ropes the Lilliputians tied round Gulliver. If I had been Gulliver, I should have gone mad. I'd rather be tied with one stout steel cable than with a million threads. Liked her! Ugh!"

"Very well: you didn't like her. What did she do?"

"She did nothing--except crumple her handkerchief hard in her left hand. She spoke to me with a kind of gasp. The girl was white as a Carrara cliff. All her color had gone into her hair: that flamed out in the most wicked way, as if every curl had been a licking tongue of fire. After dinner, Miss Marriott indicated that she would like to talk to me. I responded, for evidently my purgatory wasn't yet over. I must have sinned pretty often to have had that Biskra sojourn so prolonged.

"We went out into the garden. Eva disappeared. She hadn't said a word. She hadn't even answered my polite questions. I might have been speaking to a wax-work. It is uncanny to go on talking to a person who pays no attention--who doesn't even smirk; and after five minutes I stopped. I was glad to have her go away. I learned from Miss Marriott that they had reached

Touggourt on their camels, and that the next morning she and her niece had taken the diligence back. Dallas had stayed behind and said he was going to Guerrara--perhaps on to Ghardaïa. She didn't know when he would return.

"'Then the desert wasn't so romantic as you thought it would be--if your little trip went to smash?'

"She didn't answer straight, only said: 'I'm not broken in to camels yet, I find. I was really ill when we got to Touggourt.'

"Poor thing! She did look a beastly color. I hoped she had had all her American medicines in her attatouch. I was sure she had needed them.

"'Did your niece mind it?'

"'Oh, Eva soon learned. She wasn't ill, anyhow.'

"'Very sporting of her! So Dallas wanted to go on, and as you weren't up to it, you had to bring your niece back? It's a pity they weren't married before you started.'

"I was being merely flippant, and you can imagine that I was surprised when she laid her foolish-virgin claw on my arm and exclaimed tearfully: 'Oh, it is! it is!'

"'Do you mean it's off, and that's why Dallas has gone to Guerrara? Did the desert finish them?'

"Miss Marriott mopped her eyes with the crumpled handkerchief, and pulled herself together.

"'I suppose it did. I shouldn't have taken them. But Eva is a little fool.' Her tone was not untender.

"'She looks as if she were paying for it, then. Isn't she ill?'

"'Eva's never ill. She was gloriously well when we reached Touggourt.'

"'And Dallas?'

"Miss Marriott looked back across the garden at the lighted windows of the hotel. Then she spoke, as it seemed to me, irrelevantly.

"'I wish you would take me to one of those Ouled Naïl places.'

"'And Eva?' I mocked.

"'Certainly not Eva. She's gone to bed.'

"I paused a moment. I didn't want to insult the woman; but for pure maniacal cheek!

"'I'm sorry to be disobliging, Miss Marriott, but I certainly won't. Let me tell you something: it's either a silly make-believe and not worth paying for, or it's the real thing, and in that case you've no business there. I dare say one of your pet native guides will take you, but I won't.'

"'Have you prejudices, then?'

"'A few.'

"'Ah, I have none.'

"I had heard her affirm that many times, but never before in the tone of despair. I turned and looked at her.

"'What is up, Miss Marriott?'

"A mesh of her sandy hair was straying across her forehead. She pushed it back, and still it wouldn't stay. Finally she drew out a hairpin and stuck it through the lock like a skewer. When she had succeeded in making herself uglier than ever, she gazed up at me, with her pale, stupid eyes.

"'I suppose you think it's very queer of me. But I thought perhaps it would help me to understand.'

"'Understand what?'

"'Eva and Herbert Dallas. There are two points of view there, you see. They seem to me to have quarrelled over nothing. That sort of thing is very strange to me. I have never been in love. They are, you know--immensely. I thought I should like to watch them. And they've come to grief, and talking to Eva does no good.'

"'What did you expect the Ouled Naïls would do for you?'

"'I thought,' the flat little voice of this extraordinary creature went on, 'that if they were very disgusting, I might work myself up to be more tactful with Eva. I have been very tactless. But of course nothing does disgust me.' She sighed. 'To tell the truth, I'm very tired of her. I quite hated her in the diligence.'

"'What did happen out there?' I really wanted to know.

"The first and last gleam of humor I ever detected in Marco Polo came into her eyes then. 'I don't think I can tell you--though I haven't any prejudices. I'm just not used to talking about such things. My words would probably shock you.'

"'No one could shock me.'

"'Oh yes, I could!' And she got up and trailed into the hotel, her dust-colored skirt hanging somehow like an Englishwoman's.

"I sat there for some time, wondering. As far as I could make it out, young Eva and young Dallas had quarrelled about the Ouled Naïls. Yet they were much too directly and personally in love with each other to let sociology separate them. Still, Marco Polo was capable de tout. She might have got them going some evening under the desert moon. What a fool! I made nothing of it,

except that there must have been a quarrel, or Dallas wouldn't have gone on by himself to Guerrara. I don't know how long I sat there in the sweet air. I know that, at one moment, a white figure suddenly stood before me. It was Eva Marriott, and she looked, all in white, with her white face and her tortured, flaming hair, like a ghost that has just begun to burn in hell. I pulled out a chair for her, and she sat down. It was certainly her turn to speak, so I waited for her.

"She said nothing for a long time. Then she looked at me.

"'Do you like my aunt?'

"'Very much. Why?'

"'I don't. I think she's dreadful.'

"'Well, my child, does it really matter?'

"'It matters, since she's all I've got in the world.'

"'What about Dallas?'

"'Oh, I mustn't have him--I mustn't.' Not 'can't' or 'won't,' you notice, but 'mustn't.'

"'Why not?'

"'Didn't Aunt Cordelia tell you? She came out here with you after dinner.'

"'She did not. She said only that you and your fiancé had quarrelled. I should have known that anyhow, from the fact that you came back without him.'

"'Well, I can't tell you.'

"'Apparently no one can. But why you both want to talk to me about something you can't tell me, puzzles me a good deal.'

"'Did Aunt Cordelia say nothing else?'

"'Nothing except that she didn't like camels. I could have told her that before, but she wouldn't listen to me.'

"'Yes; she was awfully ill before we got to Touggourt.' The girl spoke listlessly.

"I had an indiscreet impulse, which I followed. 'She wanted me to take her to see the Ouled Naïls dance. I wouldn't.'

"'Oh, the dreadful, dreadful creature!' Eva Marriott wailed.

"'I don't believe she's dreadful, you know, for a moment. Every one goes. I'd have taken her like a shot if the notion hadn't bored me so.'

"'It would be more to the point,' Eva Marriott said suddenly, 'if you'd take me.'

"'So I gathered from your aunt--though she didn't tell me why, any more than you do. But how can you call her dreadful, after what you've just said?'

"'She is dreadful. She is.'

"'She strikes me as being an unusually nice woman.' I don't know why I flung compliments at Marco Polo's back. Probably because it didn't seem wise to sow dissension between the two.

"'Do you think any one can change?'

"'Do you mean your aunt? I shouldn't want her to.'

"'No, I mean myself.'

"'Oh, I shouldn't want you to, either.'

"I don't know where those silly answers of mine came from. I felt like a heavy fool making them. A trained nurse read me a lot of Tauchnitz trash in a hospital once. Perhaps my faithless memory was doing it for me. In any case, that girl wasn't real. You couldn't talk to her. If she hadn't been so deadly white, I'd have turned my back on her.

"'But I want to. I want to change, for Herbert. He doesn't like me the way I am.'

"'More probably you don't like him the way he is.'

"'Oh, I don't, I don't! And yet I do. Don't you see?' She broke down and cried hard. Fortunately there was no one else in that corner of the garden. 'I don't see'--she got her words out between sobs--'who brought him up. He's been to Eton and Oxford like any one else. Are all men like that? No, they aren't, for I've known men before--nice ones.'

"'Then you did discuss sociology, you little fools!'

"'We never discussed anything, he and I. Aunt Cordelia did all the discussing--afterwards.'

"'Do you mean that'--I fished about for a word--'he insulted you'?

"'He was perfectly lovely to me. But of course I went away.' Lucid, wasn't it? But I knew that she wouldn't have defined over-insistent love-making as 'lovely,' whatever she might have felt about it. Dallas, in the sandy distance, suddenly grew interesting to me. I tried another lead.

"'If you don't want to marry him, you've only to say so.'

"The fire stole down into her face again for an instant, but it couldn't strive against that whiteness.

"'I want dreadfully to marry him! If he would only say the right things, I would. But he won't.'

"'Have you given him a chance?'

"'He didn't wait for it. So he can't have meant to say them.'

"I was desperate. I couldn't stand this much longer. I was beginning to feel like Gulliver. I got up and stood in front of her. It was a relief to find that I was able to get up. They had rooted me there so long, those two!

"'Is he still in love with you?'

"'He says he is.'

"'Dallas would never say it if he weren't.'

"'So I should think. Yet how can he be? Perhaps he is. But what difference does it make--except that, in that case, I can't ever see him again. For I am so in love with him that my principles would never hold out against him.'

"It was all said rather stupidly, yet with obvious sincerity. I shook my head.

"'When is he coming back?'

"'In a week, I think. Just long enough to give me time. But I've had as much time as I can stand. It will kill me. He'll never say the right thing. How can I marry him?'

"'Of course I don't know what you want him to say. But if you make love to him, he'll say it.'

"I know I was brutal, but she was such a negligible little idiot! My relief in knowing that a crisis, which would come after Dallas's return, would also come after my own departure, was too great. I couldn't choose words.

"'Oh no, not that! That wouldn't prove anything, you see.'

"I did see, of course, perfectly; but it seemed too arrogant for a child like that to expect to be both loved and 'understood.' I lost all patience with her.

"'You had better go to bed now, and buy a lot of things in the bazaars to-morrow. A whole new shipload has come in from Germany while you've been away. Run along, there's a good girl. And I wouldn't worry. Worry never cleared up any situation.' Then I repented a little, for her suffering would have been clear to a blind man. 'Don't you see, my dear Miss Marriott, that, when you won't tell me the whole thing, I can't advise? But it doesn't matter, for I honestly believe that even Solomon would be a mere nuisance to people who are in love with each other. They don't need advice. Or put it that it's of no use to them. Good-night.'

"'I wish I were different,' she sighed out, 'even if it meant that I was wrong.' Then she slipped away, and I could get them off my mind.

"Nor did I keep them on my mind the next day. I went out to El-Kantara, merely to get rid of the Marriotts. If you realize that I went with a Cook's automobile party, you can imagine how much I wanted to get rid of them. I

should have changed my hotel but for the nuisance of it. Besides, Miss Marriott would have hunted me down anywhere, if she had felt like it. She had no prejudices. I dined elsewhere; but I went back to the Palace in the evening. Luckily the Marriotts weren't about. I was just turning to go out into the garden (having assured myself by careful reconnaissance that they weren't in the landscape) when I heard some stir behind me. There, very dusty, very worn and tired, but handsome as usual, stood Dallas. I nodded at him and almost ran. I didn't even go to the garden. I went to my room. I had no reason to suppose that Dallas would pursue me, but you never could tell. I decided to be safe, though hot, in my own quarters. Didn't I curse the Marriotts as I sat there under the lamp! Why are we such a beastly articulate race? There are people in the world, you know, who keep their affairs to themselves. Creatures that are so damn confidential ought to be made to stay at home!"

Hoyting flung his latest cigarette away half smoked. The silence round us was phenomenal. I ought to have been able to hear the patron and his wife snoring, but I couldn't. Perhaps they slept without it. No; that was inconceivable. In such ridiculous little spirals my mind went wandering while Hoyting took breath beside me.

"Let's get this thing over. I'm sleepy. I'll compress as much as I can.... The end of that was that after an hour or two, when I thought I was safe, I sneaked down to the garden to get some air. Would you believe it? I had no sooner sat down and hidden myself well in the foliage when Dallas was upon me like a cat. I don't know where he had come from, or how he had seen me. He had to talk to me, too, apparently. Well: even that was almost better than staying within--and indeed Dallas was the only one of the three about whom I had the least curiosity left.

"He did give me the clue--the key to the enigma. Apparently, by the way, he had sent up word to Miss Marriott that he had returned, and she had sent word down that Eva was asleep and she herself in bed, and that she would see him in the morning.

"He had given up going to Guerrara when he was a few miles out of Touggourt--couldn't stand the notion; had rushed back to Touggourt and come on to Biskra as fast as he could, by the same old blessed diligence. He was in a state! He asked me about the Marriotts, first off; and when I told him I could make nothing out except that there was a moral crisis of sorts, which the aunt and niece were both muddling according to their respective stupidities, he didn't wait for more. He blurted out the whole thing....

"Then I saw what a damned fool Marco Polo had been. To take those young things out into the desert! I suppose there are young things you could take into the desert with impunity; but Dallas! Even a woman who had never laid eyes on any man before ought to have seen that Dallas was a special, a very special case. She did see; she liked him because he was so special; but--well, it doesn't do for ignorance to have no prejudices. Dallas was in no condition for a journey of that sort with a very beautiful girl who loved him and whom he was anxious, for every reason, to marry as soon as possible. He didn't insult Eva Marriott--except in one indirect but fatally illuminating way, as you'll see. If he had insisted on their being married by a marabout at M'raïer or Djemaâ or some other Saharan hole on the way, I'm not absolutely sure she wouldn't have done it--it being perfectly understood that they should run to their consuls as soon as they got back. She was off her head about him. And he, who had never seen why he shouldn't have anything his organism craved, had had, for the first time in his life, I judged, an inhibition. That is, he didn't ask her to be married to him by a marabout. He didn't say a word to her. He hadn't even seen her alone since they left Biskra. Miss Marriott wanted to watch romance; I wonder if she ever considered whether romance would like to watch her. Eva Marriott must have managed to madden Dallas without much talk ... and you can imagine them at the door of a Saharan caravanserai, under a Saharan moon--with Marco Polo egging them on. Humph! The indencies of the decent are among the strangest things in the world.

"Oh, well, never mind.... Isn't there any end to this thing?... Yes, there was an end, just there in Touggourt, where they turned up at nightfall after six days at camels' pace. Miss Marriott was completely done up, and Eva had to look after her. And Dallas--well, Dallas broke away and ran amok in the Sahara. Touggourt isn't very big, but it's big enough for that. Almost any place is, in point of fact; and the Sahara would, of course, have understood Dallas perfectly."

"And you said he wasn't a rotter?"

"I didn't say he wasn't a rotter. I said it seemed a singularly inept word to apply to him. I tell you he was like a faun. Fauns aren't perpetually sitting for their portraits, are they? They're very pretty when they are; but they must eat and drink, and scratch themselves, and sprawl in the sun. After all, he could have carried young Eva off if he had decided to. I give you my word he could. Do you suppose any Bedouin or Berber of them all would have stopped him, so long as he could pay more than the aunt? And he didn't so much as touch

the hem of her skirt. She was the cause of it all; but the results had nothing to do with her. That, at least, was the way Dallas saw it.

"He was as much in love with Eva Marriott," went on Hoyting, with annoyance, as if I had interrupted him, "as he could be with any one; that is to say, he worshipped her face. He wouldn't have understood the 'soul' part of it. Neither did she, if she had but known it. But she mixed up his inches with the Ten Commandments. I'm not defending him; defending him would imply a point of view, and I have none. I mean only that, take him as he was, he behaved as he couldn't help behaving. And she couldn't see it. Certainly he was no person for her to marry, since she couldn't see it. I don't say she oughtn't to have been shocked. I say that she never understood. She would have forgiven him like a shot for any insult to herself--though he hadn't the faintest wish to insult her, poor pagan!" (Hoyting said it as one says "poor devil!") "She would have condoned any sin if he had once admitted that he had sinned, and was sorry. He was sorry enough; but he couldn't consider that he had sinned. He was willing to die if he had hurt her--willing to die at the thought that he had hurt her--willing to admit that it was natural she should be hurt; but as for sin, he didn't know what it meant. He must have heard about it all his life, but his organism had thrown it off like a germ; he was perfectly immune to any such notion as hers of 'morality.' ... So they came back to Biskra, and he tried to go to Guerrara, and couldn't."

"Do you mean to say that he owned up, and they had it out in Touggourt?"

"I don't think he so much owned up as was taxed with it by the aunt and didn't lie. I doubt if there was anything very explicit said, but the women somehow jumped to the right conclusion. A little place like that--it would have been easy enough. His apologies didn't satisfy Eva--of course fauns weren't made for apologizing--and she left."

"Naturally," I retorted.

"Yes, naturally," Hoyting rejoined quietly. "Well, you see that Dallas's confession to me threw a white light on all that Eva Marriott had said the night before. I couldn't say anything to him except that I thought he and Eva were utterly unsuited to each other. That sounded rather colorless, but what else could I say? I got up and went in; left him there with a puzzled look on his face. He understood jealousy, he understood pique, he understood passion; but he didn't understand why, if she could personally forgive him and take him back, she still had to nourish a grievance on behalf of the Almighty. Just

couldn't understand. And as long as he couldn't understand that, she wouldn't take him back. A nice thing Miss Marriott did when she took to travelling!

"I found the next morning, to my delight, that I could leave Biskra in twenty-four hours more. I didn't even have to go to El-Kantara again, for Dallas himself, after one interview with Miss Marriott, had gone there. I knew I must bid farewell to Marco Polo, so I sent word to her that I should hope for a few minutes after dinner in the garden.

"She came--with Eva. And the first thing she asked me--before the girl--was what Dallas had said to me the night before. Imagine my position! I would have talked biology all night with Miss Marriott if necessary, but I wasn't going to discuss Dallas's temperament with his ex-fiancée. So I held my tongue.

"'But I want to know.' This, if you please, from the ex-fiancée.

"I was desperate. 'I won't tell you. What Dallas said is Dallas's affair. You have already made each other suffer a good deal. I should advise you both to go away from Biskra--in opposite directions. Otherwise you will make each other suffer more.'

"'He wants to marry me, and I want to marry him; but he won't, he just won't, make it right for me to.' Apparently Eva Marriott couldn't face my knowledge of the situation, for, with that despairing little utterance, she fled.

"Marco Polo could face anything, though. 'You are a fool, Eva,' she called after the girl, in her flat, slightly nasal voice. There was no reply from the speeding white figure--just a little twitch of the shoulder, as if she had heard.

"I turned to the aunt. 'So you sympathize with Dallas?'

"'I don't sympathize with him!' She blushed--actually blushed and turned her head away. But the weakness was very brief. 'How should I?' she went on. 'But I do think she's a fool not to marry him.'

"'Can't you understand her principles?'

"'Who should if I don't? I was brought up on them. But they haven't anything to do with life as I see it. Those two want each other desperately. Why shouldn't they take each other?'

"'Because your niece disapproves of him.' That was easy.

"Then Marco Polo turned her face away and stared hard at a palm. 'I've never been in love with any one in my life,' she said. 'I don't know what it may do to you. But I am quite sure that, if Eva wants him, she had better take him while he wants her.'

"'And you didn't disapprove of his behavior?'

"She turned her pale eyes on me. 'I thought it very interesting. I have never seen human passion at such close range before.'

"Really, she made me sit up, that woman. 'You'd trust your niece to him, then?'

"'I would. He's fascinating. But she won't have him because he won't lie to her. He told me this morning that he had tried. He said: "I'd say anything, Miss Marriott; but she'd catch me out, because, you see, I can't get it through my head what she really wants me to say."'

"'Can't you get it through yours, Miss Marriott, and put him wise?'

"'Oh, I understand what she wants. But she'll never get it out of him. He'd make some mistake. I shall pack her off home, and she can marry a vestryman. There's one who wants her.'

"'I can't understand why you take his side.' Nor could I.

"Miss Marriott rose. 'Because he's so real. That vestryman isn't. And I have no prejudices.'

"She shook hands with me and went into the hotel. That was the last I saw of any of them.

"I left, the next morning, myself. I happen to know from other sources that young Dallas went to Egypt immediately and stayed there many months, and I heard last year, in Trebizond, of a solitary woman who had been there en route for Persia, and who sounded, in the descriptions I got, extraordinarily like Marco Polo. I didn't follow up her trail to see. Obviously, the affair never came off. The faun couldn't twist his lips to a Christian confession. If you had ever seen Dallas, you would know what I mean. He really couldn't. That section of his brain didn't work; it was atrophied. Eva Marriott could have walked all over him, but he couldn't lie his way about among her convictions. He wasn't a rotter. He was made like that. I don't believe the girl married her vestryman, though. You wouldn't, you know, after you had been in love with a faun.

"And all that is left of it for me, really"--Hoyting threw away the ultimate cigarette, and rose--"is that sometimes, in a tropically humorous situation, I see that blue veil, and hear that flat voice saying: 'You know, I have no prejudices.' If you ever run across the woman in the flesh, telegraph me. I'll get into the other hemisphere."

I made no reply, for evidently Hoyting had absolutely nothing more to say. We went through the little gate. I closed it carefully, and five minutes later I separated from Hoyting on the deserted strand.

Martin's Hollow

I have always been of the opinion that, as a good wine needs no bush, a good story needs no psychology to speak of. Yet before I tell mine, I think I had better describe myself briefly as I seem to myself to have been at the moment of my adventure.

I was that most jaded of all types, the professional scorner of fiction. I had my tongue in my cheek for almost everything that came off a printing-press. I was tired of red blood; I was even more tired of the blue blood that drips out of a fountain-pen. I was tired--oh, very tired--of "penny plain," and almost more tired of "twopence colored." I had hunted for a real, healthy thrill in the books spread out before me, until I believed there was no such thing. I was like the boy in the folk-tale who could not shiver. I had searched the newspapers for a sensation and found there nothing but musical comedy. Most mysteries turn into farce. Do you remember the Italian opera company that went broke in Samarkand? Or the true tale of Death Valley Scotty? Or the gentleman who discreetly offered a fine Tudor house rent-free for a year to any one intending murder? The prima donna was entertained by the Russian governor-general; Death Valley Scotty (I believe) went into vaudeville; and the gentleman with the Tudor mansion was the mildest of men: a thwarted romantic who wanted an authentic ghost on the premises, and had to be content with an expensive mechanical device that frightened his friends but never, alas! deluded him. Even life seemed to have declined in quality from Gilbert and Sullivan to comic movies.

All this, not so very long ago, suddenly became acute, and I planned an escape. I decided to leave town, and go for a solitary walking-tour in and about and over a certain range of mountains. I knew some of the more important points in the region, but I had never explored the remoter valleys, though I was aware that they were lonely and lovely and sparsely inhabited. Be it understood that I did not go in search of mystery: I went to get back my appetite for plainer food and simpler sensations; to savor to the core the blessed impossibility of reading over-night, and reviewing the next day, ten volumes of the latest trash. I went to get back my tone; to recapture a normal attitude. The return to Nature, if taken seriously, is apt to have bad effects; but I was in no danger of growing mawkish over a woodchuck, or addressing the garter-snake as "brother." I was willing to pay for hillwinds as I would have

paid for a good brand of Burgundy; and to have the sunset thrown in like the smile of the perfect waiter. These things had a value and a charm, a positive virtue of their own. I could not get them in town; so Mohammed went to the mountains, though in no transcendental frame of mind. He took with him survey maps, a rubber cape, a flask, plenty of tobacco, and some of the other things that Baedeker recommends to the pedestrian.

I shall not chart my course for you; I shall not name my mountains or my valleys. I shall make no sociological estimates of the people I met; I shall not account for them in any recognizable way, by descent or occupation, politics or dialect. Let me content myself with describing accurately. Too many people know the trains I took, the towns through which I passed, and the names of the heights I crossed. I have, above all, no wish to fling discredit on that loveliest and loneliest of remote valleys which I shall call Martin's Hollow. Perhaps I am more sensitive than I need be, because in my early youth I spent many summers in and about these mountains, and have, myself, a vicarious patriotism for the locality. Good men, honest citizens and prosperous, have come out of the district school in Martin's Hollow--but few of them live in Martin's Hollow now.

I had been tramping a week or more when the rain came on. Usually I had managed to spend the night in some village hotel or other, but this once I had had to make shift with an atrocious boarding-house half-way up a lovely wooded slope. It was filled with women in cheap frills, who walked on the narrow porches with their arms round each other's waists, and danced awkwardly together, after the dining-room was cleared, to the nasal tones of a cheap victrola. Some of the older ones played halma in the corners. After a talk with the melancholy proprietor, the next morning, I decided to spend that night on the mountain that lifted itself above the boarding-house. I was to climb it that day, and by the next night I could probably get to one of the bigger hotels in the second valley beyond.

I started out early, and presently struck a trail of which the boarding-house-keeper had told me. It was not on my map. All went well until I reached the summit--or what I took to be the summit. The mountain was wooded to the top, and there was no clearing from which one could get a view. I had a glimpse of the sky, however, from a desolate spot which had, at some time, been cut over; and the sky looked ominous. I decided to make for lower ground and the possibility of a barn-roof, if nothing else, over my head. I always leave behind something of importance, and this time I had forgotten

my compass. I had no means of knowing surely into which valley I was going to drop; but I took a trail that came to hand. It looked like an old one; which augured well, I thought, for habitations below me. The rain came on; and I dripped my way along between the dripping trees, at a tremendous downward slant. A little past sunset-time the rain let up, and I stopped on a rock by a spring to eat and drink and look at my map. It marked the trail I had taken; and I gathered from the somewhat unfeatured section of the map that I should presently strike the Martin's Hollow brook, which, carefully followed, would lead me into Martin's Hollow.

I have, since then, heard about Martin's Hollow. It is one of the "shiftless" valleys; a place where the farms have a curse on them and every other family will probably count its degenerates. There are plenty such among our older mountain communities, as every one knows. They get a bad name, and the best element goes away to other countrysides. The feeble and the mad and the shiftless and the hard drinkers are apt to stay; and when they too are withdrawn, their houses fall to ruin, until in after years you trace human histories by old cellar foundations. None of this was in my mind when I took the trail from somewhere near the top of Silvernail Mountain. Martin's Hollow was a mere name on a map to me; a place where I hoped to find shelter of some sort from the gregarious showers that were chasing each other about the hills.

It must have been eight o'clock when I got below the timber-line on the southern spur of Silvernail. Darkness was thickening, and I could see little except a few separated lights below and beyond me to the southward. The valley is very narrow and very steep; at the bottom, in the middle, there is room only for the brook and a little bordering meadowland. The noose-like road runs higher up, on the hillsides, and along it the farms are scattered. I say noose-like; and yet the loop is incomplete, for the curved head of the hollow is all woods and wilderness, and there is no road across. If you wish to make the tour of the little valley, you can only go up one side, make your way back nearly to the mouth, where the single cross-road lies, and take the other side. The valley opens out at the mouth ever so slightly, so that from the head, on a fine day, you would get a magnificent mountain glimpse.

Here, then, at the head of Martin's Hollow, I found myself, in the twilight. I knew from the mere look of the place in the dimness that the farms were not good. There was no big bulk of barns, and the hillsides had the rough outline of rocky pasture. Here and there, before me, I could see the glimmer of an

irregular and desultory patch of buckwheat. I cursed the weather and my compassless condition, which had combined to pitch me into this stupid gorge. I also cursed a blister on my heel, which had joined itself to the catastrophes of the afternoon. The proprietor of the boarding-house had not mentioned Martin's Hollow by name. "Better go through the next valley and over to Woodelton," he had advised. "Or, better still, keep along the lower ridge of Silvernail and Kettletop, and drop right into Woodelton itself." I had not inquired further, for I had intended fully to sleep on Silvernail and walk for miles through the woods along the irregular ridge, until I found the Woodelton trail. But here I was in Martin's Hollow; and if the people were an unprosperous lot, I could the more easily induce them to let me sleep in a haymow. The houses would be impossible--of that I was sure. I had seen shiftless valleys before.

And now I come to my adventure: which is nothing more, really, than my single fluttering contact with the devil. If I cannot explain how the walk down the valley, with its casual encounters, was like a sudden hypochondria progressing by leaps and bounds, I cannot make you feel why even the climax seemed to have the terror of inexorable logic, as well as its own unpleasantness, to inflict. I know how Dante felt--except that I had no Virgil by my side.

The first farmstead I came upon was a small, ramshackle, malodorous place. There was a light somewhere within at the back, which illuminated a filthy bit of barnyard. Some tuneless drunken singing of Moody and Sankey hymns was going on inside. I decided to knock and ask for information. There are worse people in the world than men who sing hymns in their cups. The knock called forth the hoarse barking of a dog, but the singing stopped. A youth opened the door. He was surly, but sober. He did not think there was any place in the Hollow where I could sleep, but perhaps Foster's might take me in. They were over on the other side, beyond the cross-road. But I had better go six miles on to the village. He slammed the door to; the barking subsided, and another hymn began, more tuneless than ever. I went out into the road, slightly depressed. The clouds were ominous; I could hear the soft mutter of distant thunder, and there were already a few practice flashes of lightning. As I got into the road, an upper window was flung up, and I heard the wail of a baby. I turned, but could see nothing. A cracked voice issued from the window, however, bidding me "go away, go away." I went, with what dignity I could muster--tired of the rücksack on my back, tired of my own

spleen and depression, wearying unspeakably for the fly-blown boarding-house of the night before.

I had gone a third of a mile, still on the same side of the Hollow, before I came to another habitation. The darkness had grown thicker: it was virtually night. There was no rain yet, but the wind was tearing over the top of Silvernail, behind me, and the mutter of the thunder had deepened into long, weary, reverberating rolls. Each casual lightning-flash showed me the pinkish road winding on ahead of me. This house was larger than the other, but there was no light in it. I knew all about country hours, and hesitated to rouse folk from their beds; but I should have the rain pelting on my shoulders in five minutes, and I was desperate. There was a bigger barn, and I had hopes of bribing them to drive me to the village. So I knocked. There was dead silence for two minutes. People sleeping so soundly as that would not want to drive any one anywhere, even if they waked to hear my request. I turned to go away again, thoroughly disgusted, for there was no doubt that this wind carried rain with it. Just as I turned, a sudden creak broke through the perfect silence--the door was flung open. I started: for there had not been the faintest sound of footsteps. You would have thought that the person who opened had been sleeping against the door, like an animal. I grasped my stick firmly in my hand and lifted my cap. A lightning-flash came to help me out--the tenant of the house had no light--and I saw a bent and toothless old man staring at me. I put my question, but got no answer. He did not even shake his head. He simply looked me over with an incompetent and hostile eagerness. His eyes rested on my stick, and peered over my shoulder at my rücksack. He was, clearly, very much interested in me, but he did not speak. I pulled the matches out of my pocket, struck one, and gave him stare for stare. He did not seem insulted by my inspection; only craned his neck a little more, as if to see the rücksack better. Apparently his examination was reassuring; but he still made no sound. I tried sign language, thinking he might be dumb; I pointed in various directions queryingly. He made no gesture of reply; simply continued to look me over, with a slow, snakelike motion of the head. Apparently he was satisfied by the time I grew utterly disgusted, for as I turned my back on him he shut the door. I was, for some indefinite reason, on my guard; and I stopped and listened after the door was shut. I heard no voices, but I thought I caught a faint, senile cackle. If there had been whispering, I could not have heard it, for, though it was a warm night, the windows were all shut. I stumbled over a rusted woodchuck trap, and found myself in the road again.

Then the rain came on in earnest--great sheets of it torn from the skies and flung broadcast through the valley. I was tempted to climb through a pasture to the shelter of trees, but the thunder and lightning had now reached the Hollow, peal simultaneous with flash, and I pushed on, with my rubber cape over my shoulders. The violence of the shower took half an hour to spend itself, and in that half-hour--though, to be sure, I walked very slowly, impeded at every step by the gurgling mud of the road--I passed no inhabited dwelling. One ruined house I saw, and I thought of climbing in through one of the paneless windows and taking such shelter as I could; but some fastidiousness of the imagination restrained me. In that hour, I dare say, the trash I spent my life in scorning told upon me. I preferred encountering any of the detrimentals of Martin's Hollow to spending the night in a hole those detrimentals had forsaken. I do not think, at the moment, I would have accepted the shelter of the noblest castle if I had had to sleep in the haunted room. I leaned against the house wall for a few moments--porch or other outside shelter there was none--but went on.

The thunder and lightning had pretty well stopped by the time I reached the cross-road. The rain still fell and the wind churned up and down the gorge, so that I had reason to expect another shower would presently cross the ridge of Silvernail. I quickened my pace as well as I could for the mud, for I saw lights ahead on the other side of the valley. The six miles to the village--five, by this time--were not to be thought of. At that house I would stop, until the rain was over, at least, come what might.

It was about nine o'clock, I fancy, when I reached the house with the lights--just beyond the cross-road, a little way up the valley on the other side. I lit a match on the door-step before I knocked. It was an ancient stone house, low and small, but at least not ruinous. One of the lights I had seen must have been a lantern carried between house and barn, for at present only one window was illuminated. My knock was answered at last by the sliding of a bolt, and an uncouth young fellow stood in the door before me. He was heavily built and strong, but looked stupid. Behind him two fraternal faces appeared. One of the youths behind carried a gun.

"He ain't here." The man spoke briefly.

I protested. "I don't know whom you mean. I don't belong in this place. I've been on a walking-trip, and have got caught in the rain and want some place to spend the night. If you know of a haymow anywhere in this valley--" I

stopped. By this time I did not in the least wish to spend the night in his haymow.

The three men had closed in round the door. There was no consulting among them, but presently the second one--the one with the gun--spoke in exactly the tone of his brother.

"We ain't got no haymow. We gin up keepin' cattle. You better go on to Foster's. They got thirty cows."

"Where is Foster's? And how far is it?"

The third one spoke. "It's on a piece, up the road. A white house with two red barns. Them's the only painted barns in the Hollow. You better hustle. It's gittin' late."

"Could you give me a glass of water?"

The first one answered. "We ain't got no glass." The door was shut in my face.

I stepped down the bank into the road again and turned--but not in the direction of "Foster's." It was foolish of me, I dare say, but my chief desire was to get nearer the entrance to the Hollow, nearer the village, nearer the world. "Foster's" was the only suggestion of hospitality, apparently, that the inhabitants of Martin's Hollow could make. But "Foster's" was up the valley, nearer that unfinished loop where the woods came down. I wanted every step I took to lead me out of the Hollow, not deeper in. And "Foster's" was problematical, in any case. The painted barns sounded promising, as if they held whatever prosperity the valley had to offer; yet the recurring suggestion might as easily be sinister as helpful. At all events, I would not go up the gorge instead of down. I was alone, by night, between two storms, in a valley where I trusted no one. I would go down the road. There would be comfort in seeing it--or, rather, feeling it--gradually widen to the outer world. So I plodded on, away from the stone house, away from "Foster's."

The thing was becoming dreamlike: my clogged steps taking me, with decreasing speed, nowhere; and each human encounter more sinister than the last. The wind rose and fell, the trees swayed, and now and then dark forms wavered in a hillside pasture. The atmosphere, too, was not without that electrical suspense which is the very breath of thunderous weather. The Hollow seemed to be keyed up, waiting for something. The drunken singing, the foolish ancient's curiosity, the malicious cackle behind the closed door, the surly speech of the armed brothers, the way in which I was flung to "Foster's" at every turn--all made me feel an imperilled outsider in some crazy tragedy.

The very winds seemed to be in the business: every one in that abominable valley was in it except me. Whatever it was--if it was only a human mood--I did not wish to be in it. I only desired, with a direct childlike passion, a roof over my head, a chance to change into dry socks and shoes, and a stiff drink of Scotch out of my flask against the chill. The very road seemed to catch at my feet as I walked; the unbroken darkness ahead of me defied my efforts to emerge from the detestable gorge, or to make connections with anything, any one, of my own kind. I had lost all sense of time: I no longer took out my watch, even for irony's sake. I walked on and on, wet, tired, footsore, fatalistically oppressed, dreading every rod of the valley road that stretched on before me in the illimitable dark of a nightmare. Only dawn could rescue me, I suspected; and dawn was far away. But rest I would find; and shelter, even though I could not sleep and a chill was unescapable. I would not, I felt with blind wrath, be beaten by a few fools in a God-forsaken valley not ten miles from a railway.

Finally, I came to another house, set far back from the road. The shutters were closed, but between the slats I could see scattered lights within. No flame could live in that wind, so this time I groped to the bottom of my rücksack and found my little electric flashlight. This enabled me to get a good look at the place before I undertook the flagged path. The house was large and ill-kept, but I could see by the proportions and the general hint of detail that it had once had dignity. Though it was in sad need of paint and, I suspected from my brief survey, of repairs, it looked water-tight--which was all I cared for. The same could hardly be said of the barns. Great gaps between the boards, and a crazy inclination of the walls, showed that they had long been unused to shelter anything. The roof of that house should cover my head until morning, or I would know why. The perfectly responsible pedestrian is by no means unknown in these hills, and I flattered myself that, if I was disreputable, it was at all events not after the fashion of a tramp. I knocked authoritatively on the front door with my stick--making it rattle, and flaking off, I regret to say, a little more of its scanty paint.

I saw a light passing from room to room within the house, then saw it extinguished. Presently I heard footsteps. The door was neither locked nor bolted, evidently, for it opened easily.

The figure that stood before me on the threshold struck me dumb. I could not get out my prepared speech, with its cunning combination of pathos, simplicity, and graceful firmness. The room behind the woman was lighted

faintly by four candles set in a row on a central table. They did not flicker in the draught from the open door. I dare say there was no draught; that the wind was, at the moment, hurrying round the other corners of the house, and that the exceeding stillness of the flames in all that hurly-burly was natural enough. But, at the instant, it did not seem natural; and I wondered, somewhere at the back of my brain, “Why four? Why four?”

The woman who surveyed me in silence was enough, as I think any one would have admitted, to put a curse on the candles for any traveller to whom she stood suddenly revealed. She was well above middle height, but her shoulders were fearfully bowed; and her thick white hair, cropped short, stood out like a wild mane. The candles were behind her, so that I could not see her eyes, but I could make out the thinness of the face, and the nose and the chin that approached each other over the toothless mouth. I knew at once that all the stage crones I had ever seen were mere mockeries of make-up. Still I was absolutely silent, and still she did not ask me my business. Over her misshapen shoulder, behind the table, I saw four chairs precisely placed, and, behind those, four-ill-assorted mirrors hung askew on the wall from which the paper was peeling. And still we stared at each other with no word.

Finally she stood aside, obviously meaning for me to come in.

Then I stammered out the ruins of my speech--hypnotized, simply, by the situation; for as soon as I saw her and the room in which she stood, my intention to stop there had slipped quite away. She paid no attention to my words, but put her hand on my arm and drew me inside the door. I hardly realized what I was doing. Not a muscle opposed her touch. Only when I found myself standing in the room itself, I wondered why I had gone in. I put my hand on the knob, intending to pass back at once across the threshold, but she shook her head. I waited, simulating patience, to see what she would do, for one look at her eyes and one quick comprehensive glance about the room had explained everything. There were four spoons on the table and four shovels carefully stacked in the corner against one of the doors. Otherwise--except for a heap of red woollen cloth, evidently an old curtain, on the floor beside me--the room was empty. The careful art of madness had arranged the room, and the hand that had done it was the hand that, a moment since, had been laid on my arm. The eyes and the room together told me everything.

Then she spoke. “Have you seen them?”

I shook my head. “I haven’t seen any one.” And I started to go out, but she twisted herself behind me and shut the door.

She seemed disappointed. “You haven’t seen her, have you?” The dreadful brown eyes came an inch nearer my face.

“No--no one.”

She nodded satisfied. “He isn’t here.”

“No, I am sure he isn’t. There isn’t any one here except you, is there?” I spoke conversationally, edging my way to the door, pushing her slightly before me. My hand was on the knob again.

“Oh, yes, the house is full. But he isn’t here. I wouldn’t let him in. You know I wouldn’t.”

Her voice was very deep, and her speech, though ordinary enough, was not the slipshod idiom of the other inhabitants of the Hollow whom I had encountered.

I opened the door an inch or two--open it farther I could not, she was so close to it. A big moth flew into one of the nearly burned-out candles, sizzling loudly. She started towards it, and I opened the door wider. I did not wish to make any sudden dash, for somewhere back in my head was book-wisdom to the effect that one must be intensely quiet with the insane. She pulled the moth out with her long fingers and came back. Her movements were exceedingly quick, but before she reached me I had time to open the door

wide, and to pick up the red curtain and drop it on the floor again between her and me. It parted and fell in four pieces. She did not tread on it; she got down on her knees to push it aside. But by that time I was on the flagging in front of the house.

"Good-night," I said, as I turned--still forcing myself to move slowly.

"He isn't here. Come in, come in." The wind blew the white mop of hair wildly as she craned her neck out into the darkness.

"I know he isn't. But I have to go, you see." I was half-way down the path, walking very slowly, though every muscle cried haste, and I was dripping with sweat.

"You're going to find him," the voice boomed after me. But, thank heaven, she did not stir.

"Not I." I was still walking on, but looking back at her over my shoulder as I went. A coquettish, prancing effect it must have given me! At the gate I turned squarely and looked up at the house. One of the candles guttered out, and she must have heard the faint sputter of it, for she turned from the wind and the night and rushed back into the room, slamming the door. Mingled with the crash of the closing door I heard an angry scream--not like other screams. The singular volume of her voice, quite uncontrolled by mind or sense, lent it a quality that I can never describe. Evidently her mad logic saw in the four candle-flames some desperate symbol. I stepped down into the road, and almost immediately I heard a clatter of breaking glass, as if she had mistaken a window for the door. I did not wait to hear more, but broke across the road into the orchard opposite, where I could neither be seen nor divined. Behind a twisted apple-tree, long past bearing, I listened; but at the end of five minutes all was still silent, except for the steady choral chanting of the wind.

I reconnoitred carefully with my flashlight, taking good care to interpose my body constantly between the little spot of illumination and the road. I had no desire to make any further attempt at demanding shelter, though my watch, which I drew out gingerly, showed me it was scarcely past ten o'clock. I asked only to live out the hours between then and daylight with no human interruption. My cautious search revealed to me a little cave ahead of me in the hillside--the entrance shored up with stones, after the troglodyte fashion of the countryside. Very slowly I made my way to it. A vegetable-cellar was not the retreat I should have chosen, but the broken and gaping door suggested that it was no longer used--that at least it was not likely to be occupied. It was a loathsome hole, I found, when I got in. My battery ran down at that moment,

and I was reduced to striking more matches. Their little flicker made almost no impression on the stenchy blackness of the place, but by dint of feeling the entire circumference of the walls with a firm hand, I assured myself of its proportions and its emptiness. A rough trough was half-filled with rotten sacking, and across the hard earth floor something brilliant and green writhed in a hundred convolutions. I started--it was so rankly serpentine in that wavering match-flare--but it was only a potato-vine grossly intent on surviving. My chief comfort in being reduced to this shelter was that it had obviously long been out of use. "If she wants potatoes in the middle of the night, she won't come here for them," I found myself gravely whispering. I pulled to the rotten door--there was, of course, no inside fastening, and I could only wedge it with sacking in a makeshift fashion, against the wind. The gaps in the boards were many, however, and I withdrew into a corner of the cellar to light my pipe, calculating angles of vision as best I could. I did not care to have the tiniest spot of light visible from the road.

With a great deal of meticulous labor I got out socks and shoes and flask from my rücksack. It really took two hands on that windy night to keep a match going. Finally I managed it, and sitting in the dark on the edge of the trough, I changed into dry footgear and took the most solitary drink I have ever had. There was no hope of a restful position, but by sitting cross-legged in the trough I could lean against the cold stones of the wall behind. I hoped that somnolence would come, if not sleep.

In a measure, I suppose, it did; for though I heard--hours later, as it seemed--the baying of hounds, the sound had some fantastic context that must have belonged in part to a dream. A pistol-shot followed the dogs' baying, but it, too, wove itself into some vision that I was sufficiently awake to know was partly sleep-induced. The rest of the night was silent except for the sudden gusts of wind and the patter of milder rains. Now and then I relieved my cramped discomfort by pacing the narrow floor of the cellar, but, luckily for me, I was too tired to keep, through the endless hours, unbrokenly alert. My nervousness dropped: I did not feel alarmed. I was in a kind of trance, and my only hold on waking sanity was to say to myself occasionally in a whisper: "Morning will come." I was to that extent safe on the outer edge of nightmare, and I spurred myself with the assurance now and then, to keep myself on that outer edge. But Martin's Hollow was very nearly impregnable to common sense.

Dawn finally came. I have had, ever since that night, an absurd consideration for the solar system. Quite honestly, it seemed to me in the hour before sunrise as if nothing less fundamental and august than the central mechanism of the spheres could release me. If anything in magic or human science could have perpetuated that night, I should have felt sure that dawn would never break. If I had not known beyond a doubt that Martin's Hollow was ultimately subject to the laws of the planet, I should have imagined suns rising over other valleys of earth and leaving this free in its own Stygian aberration. But against that doubt the muscles of my mind contrived to array themselves. Otherwise I should probably long since have qualified myself for residence in Martin's Hollow.

When the light came, in a blessed irresistible flow, I shook myself together and prepared to start on my way. I was cold to the marrow, and stiff in every joint. Somewhere inside me an insistent little pain protested that I needed food. I was hungry, in no ravenous way, but with a factitious exhaustion, as if I had been fasting for forty hours. And, reassured though I was by the first streaks of light on the orchard outside, I was loath to break my flimsy barricade. I had no wish to look at the house across the road, though it was morning of a perfect summer day. But the desire to have done with Martin's Hollow overbore all else, and about five o'clock I stepped into the worn-out orchard (not without bravado) like a free man. I kept to the fields for a time, for even in the light I did not care to be hailed from the house opposite. I was not more than three-quarters of a mile above the entrance--or the outlet, rather, as my mood put it--of the Hollow, and I made my way at a good pace to the main road. I passed a few houses, but did not stop. Even if I should have luck, I preferred to eat elsewhere.

In half an hour I was clear of the gorge and on a road that, as my map showed, would take me to Hebron--the "village" of my over-night colloquies. I had turned for one view of the Hollow as I stepped into the main road, and was constrained to admit that it was very lovely. Far up the right-hand side I saw some red barns--undoubtedly "Foster's."

Presently a buckboard overtook me. The driver half pulled up as he passed and nodded mechanically. He was a cheerful, shrewd-looking farmer, and I decided to ask him for a lift. The man stopped and looked me over.

"Get in," he said abruptly.

I thanked him politely, and described my general situation. Instinct warned me not, at the moment, to mention how I had spent the night. Some

careful references to the countryside at large, the mention of a certain judge I knew in a small town down the railway, and probably my obvious cockneyism, seemed to reassure him. He broke through one or two of the outer walls of his reserve.

"Got caught in the rain on Silvernail, did you? Well, them showers will come up, this time o' year. Seems as if we'd had more'n our fair share this season, though. Been awful bad for the hayin'."

I made a few remarks well calculated to show that I was familiar with the problems of the farmer. I also put a few questions as to crops. My English was as careful as I could make it. A few more outlying bastions crumbled silently. Finally he turned to me.

"Pretty early start I got this mornin'."

"It is early for any one who didn't get caught on Silvernail in a shower."

"Yes--had to take the constable over to Curtis. He come to my place about half-past three. 'Go 'way, John,' says I, 'chickens ain't up yet.' 'You harness up your team an' take me over to Curtis,' says he. 'County business.' An' county business it was, but I ain't had my breakfast yet, 'count of his county business." He laughed. "They had the hounds out all night, but the rain come an' spoiled the scent, an' he went over to Curtis to get the sheriff an' a posse, an' they'll be back some time along. I won't be drivin' 'em, though. I'm goin' to have my breakfast."

At this moment I happened to remember a college acquaintance of mine who had been born most respectably in Hebron. The man slewed his horses skilfully round a bad break in the road and settled down to comfortable narrative.

"I knew there was trouble up in Martin's Hollow weeks ago, but I didn't know when I went to bed last night as how it had broke out again. One of the Teeder boys shot up his cousin yesterday, an' made for the woods. His three brothers helpin' him, of course."

"What was the trouble?" I asked.

"Oh, the trouble goes back a piece, I guess. You can't keep track o' things over in Martin's Hollow. We don't see them over our side much, except the Fosters. They've got a fine farm up there, but they're down sick with typhoid now. They're about the only folks in the Hollow that amounts to anything. It's kind o' gone to seed. If Jim Foster didn't have a hankerin' after his father's old place, he'd move away, too. Guess he'd sell, but people ain't buyin' much in

Martin's Hollow. It's too discouragin'. Used to be some good places up there, too."

We went over a dangerous grade crossing with due solemnity.

"I never want to see the place again," I ventured. And I told him of my vain hunt for a lodging, without going into details. I was sure that the brothers in the old stone house were Teeders, and I had no desire to be detained as a witness in a clumsy country trial.

"Sho!" He laughed. "Excuse me, but the idea of your goin' round from one of those houses to the other for a Christian lodgin' is a little too much. How come you didn't go to Foster's? 'Twouldn't have done any good, for they're down sick, but you could have slept in the barn, maybe. The hired man's all right. 'Less they took you for Sam Teeder in the dark!" He chuckled over his mild joke. "It was a bad night to be in Martin's Hollow. Constable had the dogs all over the place. Between you an' me, I don't think they'll find Sam. He might be in most any house over there."

"Are they all such desperate characters?"

"Well, I wouldn't say desperate. Most of 'em ain't up to that." He laughed again. "But they're all connected up over there--Teeders an' Rowells an' Skeeles--an' I guess they've got sense enough to stick by each other. The man that was shot was a Skeele, but he an' his family quarrelled, an' I guess the whole crowd would stick by Sam Teeder. Andy Skeele didn't have anybody much left but his old father, an' he's half cracked."

"Is there also an old woman in the Hollow who's more than half cracked?"

"Old Mrs. Rowell, the Teeder boys' aunt? She's crazy as a loon. You didn't go there?"

"I did." Again I gave no details.

The man slapped his thigh. "Well, of all the--Guess you didn't want to stop after you seen her, did you? I drove a patent-medicine fellow over to Martin's Hollow last spring. Hebron's dry as a bone, an' all those folks can get is some kind of tonic with a big per cent of alcohol in it. Well, he wanted to stop there--the house is kind of imposin', you know--an' I thought I'd let him. I don't care about agents much. I stayed with the horses. Old Mrs. Rowell come to the door, an' he lit out with one whoop. I had to laugh. I don't know what she said to him, but he wouldn't go anywheres else except Foster's, an' of course they didn't want his stuff. Excuse me, but you certainly did get the worst of the bunch. My father's told me she used to be a real pretty woman, too, before anythin' happened to her. There was plenty of good stock up in

Martin's Hollow once, but--well, you know how 'tis." He looked a little shamefaced and lowered his voice. "Fact is, they've intermarried and intermarried over there, till you don't know what relation any of them is to each other. Guess they don't know themselves. Now and then they have a row. Them Teeder boys won't last long. They ain't worth the stones in their own pasture."

"What was the Teeder-Skeele quarrel about?"

"Oh, it began with a girl. She died last winter, but there's been bad blood ever since."

"Was she from Martin's Hollow?"

He did not answer my question directly. "Her name was Rowell."

Though I had known Pete Manning at college, I was still an outsider, and Martin's Hollow was in the township. I quite understood the psychology of it, and did not press him further. We drove into the peaceful village of Hebron, and I went to the hotel for breakfast.

I did not go on with my walking-trip. I was afraid that my tone was past recovering. I took the afternoon train, very glad to escape from hotel-porch and corner-store gossip. The talk was all of Martin's Hollow, and I was so bursting with the knowledge of how I could have interested the inhabitants of Hebron, had I chosen, that I was afraid I should proceed to interest them in spite of myself.

Towards noon I met the man who had driven me into Hebron. He waved his hand. "'Spose you're goin' up Silvernail to-night?" he inquired jocosely as he passed. The question was purely rhetorical. My answer also was purely rhetorical.

I went back to town where there were a dozen thrillers on my desk, and I reviewed them with a pen dipped in vitriol. With a Martin's Hollow in the world, there really seemed no excuse for people's not doing better.

The Knight's Move

Havelock the Dane settled himself back in his chair and set his feet firmly on the oaken table. Chantry let him do it, though some imperceptible inch of his body winced. For the oak of it was neither fumed nor golden; it was English to its ancient core, and the table had served in the refectory of monks before Henry VIII decided that monks shocked him. Naturally Chantry did not want his friends' boots havocking upon it. But more important than to possess the table was to possess it nonchalantly. He let the big man dig his heel in. Any man but Havelock the Dane would have known better. But Havelock did as he pleased, and you either gave him up or bore it. Chantry did not want to give him up.

Chantry was a feminist; a bit of an æsthete but canny at affairs; good-looking, and temperate, and less hipped on the matter of sex than feminist gentlemen are wont to be. That is to say, while he vaguely wanted l'homme moyen sensuel to mend his ways, he did not expect him to change fundamentally. He rather thought the women would manage all that when they got the vote. You see, he was not a socialist: only a feminist.

Havelock the Dane, on the other hand, was by no means a feminist, but was a socialist. What probably brought the two men together--apart from their common likableness--was that each, in his way, refused to 'go the whole hog.' They sometimes threshed the thing out together, unable to decide on a programme, but always united at last in their agreement that things were wrong. Havelock trusted Labor, and Chantry trusted Woman; the point was that neither trusted men like themselves, with a little money and an inherited code of honor. Havelock wanted his money taken away from him; Chantry desired his code to be trampled on by innumerable feminine feet. But each was rather helpless, for both expected these things to be done for them.

Except for this tie of ineffectually, they had nothing special in common. Havelock's life had been adventurous in the good old-fashioned sense: the bars down and a deal of wandering. Chantry had sown so many crops of intellectual wild oats that even the people who came for subscriptions might be forgiven for thinking him a mental libertine, good for subscriptions and not much else. Between them, they boxed the compass about once a week. Havelock had more of what is known as "personality" than Chantry; Chantry more of what is known as "culture." They dovetailed, on the whole, not badly.

Havelock, this afternoon, was full of a story. Chantry wanted to listen, though he knew that he could have listened better if Havelock's heel had not been quite so ponderous on the saecular oak. He took refuge in a cosmic point of view. That was the only point of view from which Havelock (it was, by the way, his physical type only that had caused him to be nicknamed the Dane: his ancestors had come over from England in great discomfort two centuries since), in his blonde hugeness, became negligible. You had to climb very high to see him small.

"You never did the man justice," Havelock was saying.

"Justice be hanged!" replied Chantry.

"Quite so: the feminist slogan."

"A socialist can't afford to throw stones."

The retorts were spoken sharply, on both sides. Then both men laughed. They had too often had it out seriously to mind; these little insults were mere convention.

"Get at your story," resumed Chantry. "I suppose there's a woman in it: a nasty cat invented by your own prejudices. There usually is."

"Never a woman at all. If there were, I shouldn't be asking for your opinion. My opinion, of course, is merely the rational one. I don't side-step the truth because a little drama gets in. I am appealing to you because you are the average man who hasn't seen the light. I honestly want to know what you think. There's a reason."

"What's the reason?"

"I'll tell you that later. Now, I'll tell you the story." Havelock screwed his tawny eyebrows together for a moment before plunging in. "Humph!" he ejaculated at last. "Much good anybody is in a case like this. What did you say you thought of Ferguson?"

"I didn't think anything of Ferguson--except that he had a big brain for biology. He was a loss."

"No personal opinion?"

"I never like people who think so well of themselves as all that."

"No opinion about his death?"

"Accidental, as they said, I suppose."

"Oh, 'they said!' It was suicide, I tell you."

"Suicide? Really?" Chantry's brown eyes lighted for an instant. "Oh, poor chap; I'm sorry."

It did not occur to him immediately to ask how Havelock knew. He trusted a plain statement from Havelock.

"I'm not. Or--yes, I am. I hate to have a man inconsistent."

"It's inconsistent for any one to kill himself. But it's frequently done."

Havelock, hemming and hawing like this, was more nearly a bore than Chantry had ever known him.

"Not for Ferguson."

"Oh, well, never mind Ferguson," Chantry yawned. "Tell me some anecdote out of your tapestried past."

"I won't."

Havelock dug his heel in harder. Chantry all but told him to take his feet down, but stopped himself just in time.

"Well, go on, then," he said, "but it doesn't sound interesting. I hate all tales of suicide. And there isn't even a woman in it," he sighed maliciously.

"Oh, if it comes to that, there is."

"But you said----"

"Not in it exactly, unless you go in for post hoc, propter hoc."

"Oh, drive on." Chantry was pettish.

But at that point Havelock the Dane removed his feet from the refectory table. He will probably never know why Chantry, just then, began to be amiable.

"Excuse me, Havelock. Of course, whatever drove a man like Ferguson to suicide is interesting. And I may say he managed it awfully well. Not a hint, anywhere."

"Well, a scientist ought to get something out of it for himself. Ferguson certainly knew how. Can't you imagine him sitting up there, cocking his hair" (an odd phrase, but Chantry understood), "and deciding just how to circumvent the coroner? I can."

"Ferguson hadn't much imagination."

"A coroner doesn't take imagination. He takes a little hard, expert knowledge."

"I dare say." But Chantry's mind was wandering through other defiles. "Odd, that he should have snatched his life out of the very jaws of what-do-you-call-it, once, only to give it up at last, politely, of his own volition."

"You may well say it." Havelock spoke with more earnestness than he had done. "If you're not a socialist when I get through with you, Chantry, my boy----"

"Lord, Lord! don't tell me your beastly socialism is mixed up with it all! I never took to Ferguson, but he was no syndicalist. In life or in death, I'd swear to that."

"Ah, no. If he had been! But all I mean is that, in a properly regulated state, Ferguson's tragedy would not have occurred."

"So it was a tragedy?"

"He was a loss to the state, God knows."

Had they been speaking of anything less dignified than death and genius, Havelock might have sounded a little austere and silly. As it was--Chantry bit back, and swallowed, his censure.

"That's why I want to know what you think," went on Havelock, irrelevantly. "Whether your damned code of honor is worth Ferguson."

"It's not my damned code any more than yours," broke in Chantry.

"Yes, it is. Or, at least, we break it down at different points--theoretically. Actually, we walk all round it every day to be sure it's intact. Let's be honest."

"Honest as you like, if you'll only come to the point. Whew, but it's hot! Let's have a gin-fizz."

"You aren't serious."

Havelock seemed to try to lash himself into a rage. But he was so big that he could never have got all of himself into a rage at once. You felt that only part of him was angry--his toes, perhaps, or his complexion.

Chantry rang for ice and lemon, and took gin, sugar, and a siphon out of a carved cabinet.

"Go slow," he said. He himself was going very slow, with a beautiful crystal decanter which he set lovingly on the oaken table. "Go slow," he repeated, more easily, when he had set it down. "I can think just as well with a gin-fizz as without one. And I didn't know Ferguson well; and I didn't like him at all. I read his books, and I admired him. But he looked like the devil--the devil, you'll notice, not a devil. With a dash of Charles I by Van Dyck. The one standing by a horse. As you say, he cocked his hair. It went into little horns, above each eyebrow. I'm sorry he's lost to the world, but it doesn't get me. He may have been a saint, for all I know; but there you are--I never cared particularly to know. I am serious. Only, somehow, it doesn't touch me."

And he proceeded to make use of crushed ice and lemon juice.

“Oh, blow all that,” said Havelock the Dane finally, over the top of his glass. “I’m going to tell you, anyhow. Only I wish you would forget your prejudices. I want an opinion.”

“Go on.”

Chantry made himself comfortable.

“You remember the time when Ferguson didn’t go down on the Argentina?”

“I do. Ferguson just wouldn’t go down, you know. He’d turn up smiling, without even a chill, and meanwhile lots of good fellows would be at the bottom of the sea.”

“Prejudice again,” barked Havelock. “Yet in point of fact, it’s perfectly true. And you would have preferred him to drown.”

“I was very glad he was saved.” Chantry said it in a stilted manner.

“Why?”

“Because his life was really important to the world.”

Chantry might have been distributing tracts. His very voice sounded falsetto.

“Exactly. Well, that is what Ferguson thought.”

“How do you know?”

“He told me.”

“You must have known him well. Thank heaven, I never did.”

Havelock flung out a huge hand. “Oh, get off that ridiculous animal you’re riding, Chantry, and come to the point. You mean you don’t think Ferguson should have admitted it?”

Chantry’s tone changed. “Well, one doesn’t.”

The huge hand, clenched into a fist, came down on the table. The crystal bottle was too heavy to rock, but the glasses jingled and a spoon slid over the edge of its saucer.

“There it is--what I was looking for.”

“What were you looking for?” Chantry’s wonder was not feigned.

“For your hydra-headed Prejudice. Makes me want to play Hercules.”

“Oh, drop your metaphors, Havelock. Get into the game. What is it?”

“It’s this: that you don’t think--or affect not to think--that it’s decent for a man to recognize his own worth.”

Chantry did not retort. He dropped his chin on his chest and thought for a moment. Then he spoke, very quietly and apologetically.

"Well--I don't see you telling another man how wonderful you are. It isn't immoral, it simply isn't manners. And if Ferguson boasted to you that he was saved when so many went down, it was worse than bad manners. He ought to have been kicked for it. It's the kind of phenomenal luck that it would have been decent to regret."

Havelock set his massive lips firmly together. You could not say that he pursed that cyclopean mouth.

"Ferguson did not boast. He merely told me. He was, I think, a modest man."

Incredulity beyond any power of laughter to express settled on Chantry's countenance. "Modest? and he told you?"

"The whole thing." Havelock's voice was heavy enough for tragedy. "Listen. Don't interrupt me once. Ferguson told me that, when the explosion came, he looked round--considered, for fully a minute, his duty. He never lost control of himself once, he said, and I believe him. The Argentina was a small boat, making a winter passage. There were very few cabin passengers. No second cabin, but plenty of steerage. She sailed, you remember, from Naples. He had been doing work, some very important work, in the Aquarium. The only other person of consequence--I am speaking in the most literal and unsnobbish sense--in the first cabin, was Benson. No" (with a lifted hand), "don't interrupt me. Benson, as we all know, was an international figure. But Benson was getting old. His son could be trusted to carry on the House of Benson. In fact, every one suspected that the son had become more important than the old man. He had put through the last big loan while his father was taking a rest-cure in Italy. That is how Benson père happened to be on the Argentina. The newspapers never sufficiently accounted for that. A private deck on the Schrecklichkeit would have been more his size. Ferguson made it out: the old man got wild, suddenly, at the notion of their putting anything through without him. He trusted his gouty bones to the Argentina."

"Sounds plausible, but--" Chantry broke in.

"If you interrupt again," said Havelock, "I'll hit you, with all the strength I've got."

Chantry grunted. You had to take Havelock the Dane as you found him.

"Ferguson saw the whole thing clear. Old Benson had just gone into the smoking-room. Ferguson was on the deck outside his own stateroom. The only person on board who could possibly be considered as important as Ferguson was Benson; and he had good reason to believe that every one would

get on well enough without Benson. He had just time, then, to put on a life-preserver, melt into his stateroom and get a little pile of notes, very important ones, and drop into a boat. No, don't interrupt. I know what you are going to say. 'Women and children.' What do you suppose a lot of Neapolitan peasants meant to Ferguson--or to you, and me, either? He didn't do anything outrageous; he just dropped into a boat. As a result, we had a big book a year later. No" (again crushing down a gesture of Chantry's), "don't say anything about the instincts of a gentleman. If Ferguson hadn't been perfectly cool, his instincts would have governed him. He would have dashed about trying to save people, and then met the waves with a noble gesture. He had time to be reasonable; not instinctive. The world was the gainer, as he jolly well knew it would be--or where would have been the reasonableness? I don't believe Ferguson cared a hang about keeping his individual machine going for its own sake. But he knew he was a valuable person. His mind was a Kohinoor among minds. It stands to reason that you save the Kohinoor and let the little stones go. Well, that's not the story. Only I wanted to get that out of the way first, or the story wouldn't have meant anything. Did you wish," he finished graciously, "to ask a question?"

Chantry made a violent gesture of denial. "Ask a question about a hog like that? God forbid!"

"Um-m-m." Havelock seemed to muse within himself. "You will admit that if a jury of impartial men of sense could have sat, just then, on that slanting deck, they would have agreed that Ferguson's life was worth more to the world than all the rest of the boiling put together?"

"Yes, but----"

"Well, there wasn't any jury. Ferguson had to be it. I am perfectly sure that if there had been a super-Ferguson on board, our Ferguson would have turned his hand to saving him first. In fact, I honestly believe he was sorry there hadn't been a super-Ferguson. For he had all the instincts of a gentleman; and it's never a pleasant job making your reason inhibit your instincts. You can't look at this thing perfectly straight, probably. But if you can't, who can? I don't happen to want an enlightened opinion: I've got one, right here at home. You don't care about the State: you want to put it into white petticoats and see it cross a muddy street."

"I don't wonder the socialists won't have anything to do with you."

"Because I'm not a feminist? I know. Just as the feminists won't have anything to do with you because you're so reactionary. We're both out of it.

Fifty years ago, either of us could have been a real prophet, for the price of a hall and cleaning the rotten eggs off our clothes. Now we're too timid for any use. But this is a digression."

"Distinctly. Is there anything more about Ferguson?"

"I should say there was. About a year ago, he became engaged. She's a very nice girl, and I am sure you never heard of her. The engagement wasn't to be announced until just before the marriage, for family reasons of some sort--cockering the older generation somehow. I've forgotten; it's not important. But they would have been married by now, if Ferguson hadn't stepped out."

"You seem to have been very intimate with Ferguson."

"He talked to me once--just once. The girl was a distant connection of my own. I think that was why. Now I've got some more things to tell you. I've let you interrupt a good lot, and if you're through, I'd like to start in on the next lap. It isn't easy for me to tell this thing in bits. It's an effort."

Havelock the Dane set down his second emptied glass and drew a long breath. He proceeded, with quickened pace.

"He didn't see the girl very often. She lives at some little distance. He was busy--you know how he worked--and she was chained at home, more or less. Occasionally he slipped away for a week-end, to see her. One time--the last time, about two months ago--he managed to get in a whole week. It was as near happiness as Ferguson ever got, I imagine; for they were able to fix a date. Good heaven, how he loved that girl! Just before he went, he told me of the engagement. I barely knew her, but, as I said, she's some sort of kin. Then, after he came back, he sent for me to come and see him. I didn't like his cheek, but I went as though I had been a laboratory boy. I'm not like you. Ferguson always did get me. He wanted the greatest good of the greatest number. Nothing petty about him. He was a big man.

"I went, as I say. And Ferguson told me, the very first thing, that the engagement was off. He began by cocking his hair a good deal. But he almost lost control of himself. He didn't cock it long: he ruffled it instead, with his hands. I thought he was in a queer state, for he seemed to want to give me, with his beautiful scientific precision--as if he'd been preparing a slide--the details of a country walk he and she had taken the day before he left. It began with grade crossings, and I simply couldn't imagine what he was getting at. It wasn't his business to fight grade crossings--though they might be a very pretty symbol for the kind of thing he was fighting, tooth and nail, all the time.

I couldn't seem to see it, at first; but finally it came out. There was a grade crossing, with a 'Look out for the Engine' sign, and there was a towheaded infant in rags. They had noticed the infant before. It had bandy legs and granulated eyelids, and seemed to be dumb. It had started them off on eugenics. She was very keen on the subject; Ferguson, being a big scientist, had some reserves. It was a real argument.

"Then everything happened at once. Towhead with the sore eyes rocked on to the track simultaneously with the whistle. They were about fifty yards off. Ferguson sprinted back down the hill, the girl screaming pointlessly meanwhile. There was just time--you'll have to take my word for this; Ferguson explained it all to me in the most meticulous detail, but I can't repeat that masterpiece of exposition--for Ferguson to decide. To decide again, you understand, precisely as he had decided on the Argentina. Rotten luck, wasn't it? He could just have flung towhead out of the way by getting under the engine himself. He grabbed for towhead, but he didn't roll on to the track. So towhead was killed. If he had got there ten seconds earlier, he could have done the trick. He was ten seconds too late to save both Ferguson and towhead. So--once more--he saved Ferguson. Do you get the situation?"

"I should say I did!" shouted Chantry. "Twice in a man's life--good Lord! I hope you walked out of his house at that point."

"I didn't. I was very much interested. And by the way, Chantry, if Ferguson had given his life for towhead, you would have been the first man to write a pleasant little article for some damned highbrow review, to prove that it was utterly wrong that Ferguson should have exchanged his life for that of a little Polish defective. I can even see you talking about the greatest good of the greatest number. You would have loved the paradox of it: the mistaken martyr, self-preservation the greatest altruism, and all the rest of it. But because Ferguson did exactly what you would have said in your article that he ought to have done, you are in a state of virtuous chill."

"I should have written no such article. I don't see how you can be so flippant."

"Flippant--I? Have I the figure of a flippant man? Can't you see--honestly, now, can't you see?--that it was a hideous misfortune for that situation to come to Ferguson twice? Can't you see that it was about as hard luck as a man ever had? Look at it just once from his point of view."

"I can't," said Chantry frankly. "I can understand a man's being a coward, saving his own skin because he wants to. But to save his own skin on

principle--humph! Talk of paradoxes: there's one for you. There's not a principle on earth that tells you to save your own life at someone's else expense. If he thought it was principle, he was the bigger defective of the two. Of course it would have been a pity; of course we should all have regretted it; but there's not a human being in this town, high or low, who wouldn't have applauded, with whatever regret--who wouldn't have said he did the only thing a self-respecting man could do. Of course it's a shame; but that is the only way the race has ever got on: by the strong, because they were strong, going under for the weak, because they were weak. Otherwise we'd all be living, to this day, in hell."

"I know; I know." Havelock's voice was touched with emotion. "That's the convention--invented by individualists, for individualists. All sorts of people would see it that way, still. But you've got more sense than most; and I will make you at least see the other point of view. Suppose Ferguson to have been a good Catholic--or a soldier in the ranks. If his confessor or his commanding officer had told him to save his own skin, you'd consider Ferguson justified; you might even consider the priest or the officer justified. The one thing you can't stand is the man's giving himself those orders. But let's not argue over it now--let's go back to the story. I'll make you 'get' Ferguson anyhow--even if I can't make him 'get' you.

"Well, here comes in the girl."

"And you said there was no girl in it!"

Chantry could not resist that. He believed that Havelock's assertion had been made only because he didn't want the girl in it--resented her being there.

"There isn't, as I see it," replied Havelock the Dane quietly. "From my point of view, the story is over. Ferguson's decision: that is the whole thing--made more interesting, more valuable, because the repetition of the thing proves beyond a doubt that he acted on principle, not on impulse. If he had flung himself into the life-boat because he was a coward, he would have been ashamed of it; and whatever he might have done afterwards, he would never have done that thing again. He would have been sensitive: not saving his own life would have turned into an obsession with him. But there is left, I admit, the murder. And murders always take the public. So I'll give you the murder--though it throws no light on Ferguson, who is the only thing in the whole accursed affair that really counts."

"The murder? I don't see--unless you mean the murdering of the towheaded child."

"I mean the murder of Ferguson by the girl he loved."

"You said 'suicide' a little while ago," panted Chantry.

"Technically, yes. She was a hundred miles away when it happened. But she did it just the same. Oh, I suppose I've got to tell you, as Ferguson told me."

"Did he tell you he was going to kill himself?" Chantry's voice was sharp.

"He did not. Ferguson wasn't a fool. But it was plain as day to me after it happened, that he had done it himself."

"How--"

"I'm telling you this, am I not? Let me tell it, then. The thing happened in no time, of course. The girl got over screaming, and ran down to the track, frightened out of her wits. The train managed to stop, about twice its own length farther down, round a bend in the track, and the conductor and brakeman came running back. The mother came out of her hovel, carrying twins. The--the--thing was on the track, across the rails. It was a beastly mess, and Ferguson got the girl away; set her down to cry in a pasture, and then went back and helped out, and gave his testimony, and left money, a lot of it, with the mother, and--all the rest. You can imagine it. No one there considered that Ferguson ought to have saved the child; no one but Ferguson dreamed that he could have. Indeed, an ordinary man, in Ferguson's place, wouldn't have supposed he could. It was only that brain, working like lightning, working as no plain man's could, that had made the calculation and seen. There were no preliminary seconds lost in surprise or shock, you see. Ferguson's mind hadn't been jarred from its pace for an instant. The thing had happened too quickly for any one--except Ferguson--to understand what was going on. Therefore he ought to have laid that super-normal brain under the wheels, of course!

"Ferguson was so sane, himself, that he couldn't understand, even after he had been engaged six months, our little every-day madnesses. It never occurred to him, when he got back to the girl and she began all sorts of hysterical questions, not to answer them straight. It was by way of describing the event simply, that he informed her that he would just have had time to pull the creature out, but not enough to pull himself back afterwards. Ferguson was used to calculating things in millionths of an inch; she wasn't. I dare say the single second that had given Ferguson time to turn round in his mind, she conceived of as a minute at least. It would have taken her a week to turn round in her own mind, no doubt--a month, a year, perhaps. How do I know? But

she got the essential fact: that Ferguson had made a choice. Then she rounded on him. It would have killed her to lose him, but she would rather have lost him than to see him standing before her, etc., etc. Ferguson quoted a lot of her talk straight to me, and I can remember it; but you needn't ask me to soil my mouth with it. 'And half an hour before, she had been saying with a good deal of heat that that little runt ought never to have been born, and that if we had decent laws it never would have been allowed to live.' Ferguson said that to me, with a kind of bewilderment. You see, he had made the mistake of taking that little fool seriously. Well, he loved her. You can't go below that: that's rock-bottom. Ferguson couldn't dig any deeper down for his way out. There was no deeper down.

"Apparently Ferguson still thought he could argue it out with her. She so believed in eugenics, you see--a very radical, compared with Ferguson. It was she who had had no doubt about towhead. And the love part of it seemed to him fixed: it didn't occur to him that that was debatable. So he stuck to something that could be discussed. Then--and this was his moment of exceeding folly--he caught at the old episode of the Argentina. That had nothing to do with her present state of shock. She had seen towhead; but she hadn't seen the sprinkled Mediterranean. And she had accepted that. At least, she had spoken of his survival as though it had been one of the few times when God had done precisely the right thing. So he took that to explain with. The fool! The reasonable fool!

"Then--oh, then she went wild. (Yet she must have known there were a thousand chances on the Argentina for him to throw his life away, and precious few to save it.) She backed up against a tree and stretched her arms out like this"--Havelock made a clumsy stage-gesture of aversion from Chantry, the villain. "And for an instant he thought she was afraid of a Jersey cow that had come up to take part in the discussion. So he threw a twig at its nose."

Chantry's wonder grew, swelled, and burst.

"Do you mean to say that that safety-deposit vault of a Ferguson told you all this?"

"As I am telling it to you. Only much more detail, of course--and much, much faster. It wasn't like a story at all: it was like--like a hemorrhage. I didn't interrupt him as you've been interrupting me. Well, the upshot of it was that she spurned him quite in the grand manner. She found the opposites of all the nice things she had been saying for six months, and said them. And

Ferguson--your cocky Ferguson--stood and listened, until she had talked herself out, and then went away. He never saw her again; and when he sent for me, he had made up his mind that she never intended to take any of it back. So he stepped out, I tell you."

"As hard hit as that," Chantry mused.

"Just as hard hit as that. Ferguson had had no previous affairs; she was very literally the one woman; and he managed, at forty, to combine the illusions of the boy of twenty and the man of sixty."

"But if he thought he was so precious to the world, wasn't it more than ever his duty to preserve his existence? He could see other people die in his place, but he couldn't see himself bucking up against a broken heart. Isn't that what the strong man does? Lives out his life when he doesn't at all like the look of it? Say what you like, he was a coward, Havelock--at the last, anyhow."

"I won't ask for your opinion just yet, thank you. Perhaps if Ferguson had been sure he would ever do good work again, he wouldn't have taken himself off. That might have held him. He might have stuck by on the chance. But I doubt it. Don't you see? He loved the girl too much."

"Thought he couldn't live without her," snorted Chantry.

"Oh, no--not that. But if she was right, he was the meanest skunk alive. He owed the world at least two deaths, so to speak. The only approach you can make to dying twice is to die in your prime, of your own volition." Havelock spoke very slowly. "At least, that's the way I've worked it out. He didn't say so. He was careful as a cat."

"You think"--Chantry leaned forward, very eager at last--"that he decided she was right? That I'm right--that we're all of us right?"

Havelock the Dane bowed his head in his huge hands. "No. If you ask me, I think he kept his own opinion untarnished to the end. When I told him I thought he was right, he just nodded, as if one took that for granted. But it didn't matter to him. I am pretty sure that he cared only what she thought."

"If he didn't agree with her? And if she had treated him like a criminal? He must have despised her, in that case."

"He never said one word of her--bar quoting some of her words--that wasn't utterly gentle. You could see that he loved her with his whole soul. And--it's my belief--he gave her the benefit of the doubt. In killing himself, he acted on the hypothesis that she had been right. It was the one thing he could do for her."

"But if no one except you thinks it was suicide--and you can't prove it--"

“Oh, he had to take that chance--the chance of her never knowing--or else create a scandal. And that would have been very hard on her and on his family. But there were straws she could easily clutch at--as I have clutched at them. The perfect order in which everything happened to be left--even the last notes he had made. His laboratory was a scientist’s paradise, they tell me. And the will, made after she threw him over, leaving everything to her. Not a letter unanswered, all little bills paid, and little debts liquidated. He came as near suggesting it as he could, in decency. But I dare say she will never guess it.”

“Then what did it profit him?”

“It didn’t profit him, in your sense. He took a very long chance on her guessing. That wasn’t what concerned him.”

“I hope she will never guess, anyhow. It would ruin her life, to no good end.”

“Oh, no.” Havelock was firm. “I doubt if she would take it that way. If she grasped it at all, she’d believe he thought her right. And if he thought her right, of course he wouldn’t want to live, would he? She would never think he killed himself simply for love of her.”

“Why not?”

“Well, she wouldn’t. She wouldn’t be able to conceive of Ferguson’s killing himself for merely that--with his notions about survival.”

“As he did.”

“As he did--and didn’t.”

“Ah, she’d scarcely refine on it as you are doing, Havelock. You’re amazing.”

“Well, he certainly never expected her to know that he did it himself. If he had been the sort of weakling that dies because he can’t have a particular woman, he’d have been also the sort of weakling that leaves a letter explaining.”

“What then did he die for? You’ll have to explain to me. Not because he couldn’t have her; not because he felt guilty. Why, then? You haven’t left him a motive.”

“Oh, haven’t I? The most beautiful motive in the whole world, my dear fellow. A motive that puts all your little simple motives in the shade.”

“Well, what?”

“Don’t you see? Why, I told you. He simply assumed, for all practical purposes, that she had been right. He gave himself the fate he knew she considered him to deserve. He preferred--loving her as he did--to do what she

would have had him do. He knew she was wrong; but he knew also that she was made that way, that she would never be right. And he took her for what she was, and loved her as she was. His love--don't you see?--was too big. He couldn't revolt from her: she had the whole of him--except, perhaps, his excellent judgment. He couldn't drag on a life which she felt that was about. He destroyed it, as he would have destroyed anything she found loathsome. He was merely justifying himself to his love. He couldn't hope she would know. Nor, I believe, could he have lied to her. That is, he couldn't have admitted in words that she was right, when he felt her so absolutely wrong; but he could make that magnificent silent act of faith."

Chantry still held out. "I don't believe he did it. I hold with the coroner."

"I don't. He came as near telling me as he could without making me an accessory before the fact. There were none of the loose ends that the most orderly man would leave if he died suddenly. Take my word for it, old man."

A long look passed between them. Each seemed to be trying to find out with his eyes something that words had not helped him to.

Finally Chantry protested once more. "But Ferguson couldn't love like that."

Havelock the Dane laid one hand on the arm of Chantry's chair and spoke sternly. "He not only could, but did. And there I am a better authority than you. Think what you please, but I will not have that fact challenged. Perhaps you could count upon your fingers the women who are loved like that; but, anyhow, she was. My second cousin once removed, damn her!" He ended with a vicious twang.

"And now"--Havelock rose--"I'd like your opinion."

"About what?"

"Well, can't you see the beautiful sanity of Ferguson?"

"No, I can't," snapped Chantry. "I think he was wrong, both in the beginning and in the end. But I will admit he was not a coward. I respect him, but I do not think, at any point, he was right--except perhaps in 'doing' the coroner."

"That settles it, then," said Havelock. And he started towards the door.

"Settles what, in heaven's name?"

"What I came to have settled. I shan't tell her. If I could have got one other decent citizen--and I confess you were my only chance--to agree with me that Ferguson was right--right about his fellow-passengers on the Argentina, right about towhead on the track--I'd have gone to her, I think. I'd rather like to ruin her life, if I could."

A great conviction approached Chantry just then. He felt the rush of it through his brain.

"No," he cried. "Ferguson loved her too much. He wouldn't like that--not as you'd put it to her."

Havelock thought a moment. "No," he said in turn; but his "no" was very humble. "He wouldn't. I shall never do it. But, my God, how I wanted to!"

"And I'll tell you another thing, too." Chantry's tone was curious. "You may agree with Ferguson all you like; you may admire him as much as you say; but you, Havelock, would never have done what he did. Not even"--he lifted a hand against interruption--"if you knew you had the brain you think Ferguson had. You'd have been at the bottom of the sea, or under the engine-wheels, and you know it."

He folded his arms with a hint of truculence.

But Havelock the Dane, to Chantry's surprise, was meek. "Yes," he said, "I know it. Now let me out of here."

"Well, then"--Chantry's voice rang out triumphant--"what does that prove?"

“Prove?” Havelock’s great fist crashed down on the table. “It proves that Ferguson’s a better man than either of us. I can think straight, but he had the sand to act straight. You haven’t even the sand to think straight. You and your reactionary rot! The world’s moving, Chantry. Ferguson was ahead of it, beckoning. You’re an ant that got caught in the machinery, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Oh, stow the rhetoric! We simply don’t agree. It’s happened before.” Chantry laughed scornfully. “I tell you I respect him; but God Almighty wouldn’t make me agree with him.”

“You’re too mediæval by half,” Havelock mused. “Now, Ferguson was a knight of the future--a knight of Humanity.”

“Don’t!” shouted Chantry. His nerves were beginning to feel the strain. “Leave chivalry out of it. The Argentina business may or may not have been wisdom, but it certainly wasn’t cricket.”

“No,” said Havelock. “Chess, rather. The game where chance hasn’t a show--the game of the intelligent future. That very irregular and disconcerting move of his.... And he got taken, you might say. She’s an irresponsible beast, your queen.”

“Drop it, will you!” Then Chantry pulled himself together, a little ashamed. “It’s fearfully late. Better stop and dine.”

“No, thanks.” The big man opened the door of the room and rested a foot on the threshold. “I feel like dining with some one who appreciates Ferguson.”

“I don’t know where you’ll find him.”

Chantry smiled and shook hands.

“Oh, I carry him about with me. Good-night,” said Havelock the Dane.

Blue Bonnet

“Here is the letter.”

George Delano squared his fine shoulders judicially as he presented a handful of thin, blue sheets to his brother-in-law.

Harold Redreeve frowned. He looked like a tired hawk, muscles relaxed, eyes dull, but muscles and eyes pre-eminently meant for speed and light.

“I left my glasses up-stairs. Would Mary mind reading it aloud? I don’t believe there’s anything in it. Millicent is always upsetting you.”

“I am not easily upset, Harry,” Delano answered reproachfully. “Your wife--Millicent--has all the family nerves. But I think you will agree with us that the letter is alarming. I have far too many important things on my mind to be perturbed over nothing. I think it extremely fortunate that your business called you in our direction. Frankly, I don’t know how to answer it, nor does Mary. It is a family matter, I should say; a delicate one. I am sorry to trouble you when you are so busy with your own big case, but troubles have a knack of falling in at the wrong time. You have to learn to meet a good many things at once in this world.”

He squared his shoulders again with the gesture of a hopeful Atlas. George Delano was the type of person to whom you must never suggest, in any given case, that he has had luck. Harold Redreeve knew him of old; was fond of him; sometimes wished that old George would come a mild cropper, so that he could know how it felt to hit the dust when you weren’t expecting to. Mary Delano murmured sympathetically in her corner as she unfolded the letter. She never doubted, when each big deal went through, that George had done it all himself, with the least possible aid from the Almighty. His pompousness was sweet to her; his wealthy and able associates were to her merely the inevitable parasites of a great man. George was solid; he was reckoned brilliant by people who had seen their own inheritances dwindle.

Then her sweet voice proceeded to the letter, emphasizing faithfully every underlined word. Harold Redreeve listened keenly to his wife’s letter, letting his cigarette go out. Delano, standing in front of the chimney-piece, rocked gently and safely to and fro, frowning judicially now and then, as one accustomed to weigh evidence. Harold had often felt that his brother-in-law, in marble, would symbolize democratic justice admirably on the façade of a

courthouse. He didn't look like a judge; but he was the platonic idea of the foreman of a jury.

"'My dear George,'" began Mary, then: "I'll skip all the first, about the garden and that girl's camp she recommended to us for Violet. Here is the important part.

"'I write surrounded by strange people--very strange. Harry doesn't know about them. Two of them are men, gray-bearded men with eye-glasses, reading newspapers. Annette has a dreadful habit of letting them pile up on the tables. But there are one or two women; one is wearing a great many pearls. I think they must be imitation--the kind that are set with real diamonds in platinum--for no one could carry about so many real ones on a hot day in a stranger's house. Also, there is the most dreadful little girl in a blue sunbonnet who goes about and hits the furniture with her hard little knuckles. The older people change, but the little girl almost always comes. I suppose they can't lose her. She looks as if she would hang on behind, with her legs dangling, and then lean over the seat and crow horridly at them. But why she comes here!

"'Indeed, why any of them come! I haven't spoken to Harry about it. They have always arrived and left before he gets home from town. I haven't even spoken to the maids. They are well-bred people, who just might come over from the club or stop in their motors on their way back to town. Once or twice Annette has looked a little surprised. You see, I can't tell Annette I don't know who they are. They are precisely the kind of people one does know--all except the little girl, and she may be the offspring of some family mésalliance. They come in and speak charmingly, then sit down and make themselves comfortable, and fan themselves, and admire the view, and talk about Maria. The first time I thought they must be friends of the Outamaros, and had come to call. We didn't expect to have the house until the last moment. I thought they might think I was Mrs. Outamaro. You know he married again very suddenly last spring. But they never called me that. I went away for a fortnight, the day after their first visit, and forgot to tell Harold anything about it. When I came back, they arrived again, and said they had called once or twice meantime, but had been told I was away. I asked Annette who had been here in my absence, and she said no one had been except the Stacys and some men for Harold. I don't like Annette, she's so inaccurate and careless. Think of how I should like to know their names!

"'It's a killing situation in which to be. You see, they always come on fine days, when every approach to the house is wide open. They don't ring any bells; they just camp on the porches or the terrace, and speak to me very charmingly, as if they were old friends. They rest and chat, or read, and then go on to the club or to Fawneck or in the direction of town. I nearly die of laughter; and sometime I shall burst out and say, "Who are you, anyway, and who do you think I am?" I leave them quite to themselves, as if they were aunts and uncles and cousins who came so often they didn't have to be bothered with. To-day, you see, I'm writing a letter at the wicker desk on the porch. One of the men--he really must be somebody, for he has a gray imperial, and a Legion of Honor ribbon in his buttonhole--has gone to sleep in the chaise-longue. Presently he'll apologize, I know, for he's Chesterfied to the life. Blue Bonnet isn't here to-day, or I shouldn't be writing. She would think it a beautiful joke to grab the ink and throw it from behind (she does all her tricks behind your back) over my new white serge.

"'Now, you see, they've come so often that it has almost gone beyond a joke. If Harry should come home early and notice all their little familiar ways, he couldn't believe I didn't know them. I don't believe they know I don't know them. It would be an awful moment when I was unable to introduce properly. They are the kind to think it quite immodest of me to be greeting them constantly when I didn't know them. And I really couldn't face Legion-of-Honor going sadly down the terrace to the car, thinking I wasn't a lady. Isn't it screaming, when you realize that the original mistake was all theirs? I've always known, from the first moment, that I had never laid eyes on them before.

"'The first time it happened so naturally: I was on the porch when they got out of the car; Legion-of-Honor and Mock-Pearls-and-Platinum (she is his wife, I make out) came up and said: "We've been wanting to know you for so long, and now that we're comparatively near, we can drop in often on our way to and fro." They just took it for granted I knew all about them. I thought it was amusing, and would never happen again. I didn't write to Harry (he was up in Canada with Jack Lee, and letters didn't get to him much) for I thought it would be a good story to tell him after he got back. But they came twice again before he did get back, and by that time they were a habit. Yes, a habit. And now I'm so deep in, all on account of their mistake, that I dread to have Harry meet them.

"'Annette has no manners at all. I rang for her one day when it looked thunder-showery, and I had begged them not to start off again, and told her to bring tea early. "Six cups," I said; for I knew Blue Bonnet would make a fuss if she didn't have some. While she and Lily were getting it inside, the clouds got blacker and blacker, and they suddenly said they thought they'd get home before the storm broke. I begged them to have some tea at least; but they were very pretty about it--said they couldn't wait, for if they once began to drink my delicious tea they would never get off in time, and I might have to keep them until evening. So they piled off at top speed in the motor, and when Annette finally came out with the things, she had only one cup. Of course I reproved her. "Why, Annette, I told you six cups." "Yes, ma'am, but I thought you wanted your tea right now, and I knew there wouldn't be any one else." Of course I shall get rid of Annette in the autumn. Even if she was wise enough to see they'd go before tea was ready, she should have obeyed orders, and been surprised, like any well-bred servant. I should have felt disgraced forever if they had been there when that small tray came. I only said: "When I tell you tea for six, Annette, bring tea for six. Lily can always help you to hurry it." No one else did come, though, and I didn't insist on her trotting out a lot more dishes in the middle of the thunder-storm. I had to run for cover, as it was, with my own tea-cup.

"'This is an endless letter, and I don't know what you and Mary will make of it, you think me so irresponsible anyway; but I really had to tell some one. I laugh and laugh over my predicament, and yet I dread telling Harry. These people were no bigger than a man's hand at first, and now they overspread the heavens. I actually dress for them; I try to go out when I feel sure they won't come--they never do when there's a high wind; Pearls-and-Platinum won't wear motoring things, and her bonnet goes askew if there's a wind; she explained it to me in such a sweet old-lady fashion--and I ask people in bad weather if I ask them at all. Very few people do come, anyhow, except for dinner; the distances are such that we all meet at the club. And up to this time they have never run into any other guests. But I can't be preserved forever. It's too silly of me to mind telling Harry. Only he'd think me such an incompetent not to have found out all about them the first time! I quite dread being laughed at. And you know he's fearfully worried and busy over that beast of a Tractions case. So I prolong the misunderstanding with them, and shall say nothing about it until events force it on me. They have certainly shown up Annette. She is perfect except when they're here, and then she seems to lose

her head. Point of pride: not to let Annette know they're not my most intimate friends. She slipped and nearly knocked into Legion-of-Honor the other day, and only said "Oh!" not even "I beg your pardon." Fortunately, he was staring through the field-glasses at the golf-links, and only backed away blindly with a little murmur. I must keep her until we leave, for it would be impossible to get any one else up here now; and except for these people, she's a treasure. So I weakly ignore it.

"'I'm so sorry you and Mary weren't able to come to us this year. I keep pretty quiet and go out very little, as the doctor bade me, and am immensely better. It's a little lonely sometimes, Harry is so busy--gets home so late and never takes a day off--and I'm positively grateful for these people, if truth were told. All except Blue Bonnet. The other people they bring are just as nice as they are. But who are they? Do you and Mary know any friends of the Outamaros who answer to my description? If so, do tell me privately, and then I can, by discreet allusions, straighten it all out before I tell Harry. The comfort it would give me, too, to be able to mention a name or two in a good firm voice to Annette!

"'Your affectionate sister,
"'MILLICENT.'"

Harold Redreeve had not moved since she began. Except for a faint, occasional motion of the lips, even his features had not stirred. When Mary's voice had quite died away, George Delano spoke:

"I think you will agree with me, Harry, that this is something you ought to know about. You see how clear it is that no one sees these people except my sister. Annette is, I suppose, a perfectly normal creature--and well recommended?"

"Oh, yes, admirably recommended. Quite normal, I should say. Millicent has always seemed to like her. Though, really, I've been at home so little, and so busy, that I haven't noticed her much."

"Yes, of course, the Tractions case. It's a big thing, and we all wish you luck. If you pull that off, Conway says you're made." Perhaps he noticed how tired the hawk-face before him was; for he went on: "We did a good deal of consulting together before we decided to tell you of this just now. Indeed, I asked Boyce about it--putting it, of course, as a hypothetical case, but quoting the letter largely; I have an excellent verbal memory--and he thought it an interesting and probably serious case. The whole point in these matters is to

take the person at the start, before the delusions go too far. Boyce says--do you know Boyce?"

"Not personally."

"He has been called in by the district attorney so often I thought you might have run across him. I shall be delighted to introduce you, and you could ask him to run down. He is very busy, but he would do it for us. Quite the best alienist in the state and, I think, one of the best in the country. They are teaching us nowadays to be very hopeful about insanity--treat it just like any other illness, with large chances of cure. I've dipped into it a good deal, talking with Boyce and reading his books, and I know something about it myself."

"Well?" The weariness had an odd likeness to patience.

"I should say, if it weren't my poor sister who is concerned, that it was a very interesting case. You notice the--ah--the cunning shown in not reproving the maid Annette. Depend upon it, she has a suspicion that she's going off the track. Also the desire to tell somebody, which is why Mary and I get the letter. She still thinks there's something odd in it; the delusions aren't complete. She hasn't reached the point of telling every one; tries not to have people meet them, and so forth. But she herself is perfectly convinced, for herself. The violent aversion to the little girl she calls--ah--Blue Bonnet, is also characteristic. And she has gone so far that all the circumstantial evidence of their unreality--the maid Annette bumping into an invisible old gentleman, and not bringing tea-cups for non-existent people--ceases to be evidence for her at all: it is merely a ground for annoyance. Her endeavor to rationalize the situation by hypotheses as to their origin, their possible relation to the owners of the house, is also interesting. It is a complicated case, as Boyce at once saw. Of course I could not be expected to find it interesting when it was in reality my poor sister who was suffering from this mental lesion; but I was glad for her sake that it interested him. I think you had better have him down as soon as you can manage it. This week-end, perhaps? I am sure Boyce would make sacrifices if I explained to him. He could come as a friend; and if the delusions came on while he was there, it would be singularly fortunate."

"Yes, yes. I'll try to arrange it. But hadn't I better see Millicent first and have it all out with her?"

"She'll be furious that we've shown you the letter, won't she?" This was Mary, sweet-voiced and sympathetic.

"This is not a moment for such considerations. I am willing to shoulder that with poor Millicent. She may be permitted to think that we were worried

about the character of her callers, and thought you should know. Millicent has often, in her youth, called me officious." George Delano smiled with perfect good humor.

"I am afraid I must let you take that on yourselves. Millicent won't be angry for long. She hasn't a trace of bad temper in her, you know. And she's perfectly normal with me, a little tired of late, but nothing else. After all, remember that I've been living with my wife all summer, even if, in the course of things, we have had to be separated more or less."

"I take that as most encouraging," Delano commented judicially. "They are apt to make their scenes with the people they care for most. The fact that she hasn't turned on you in any way shows that she hasn't gone beyond the point of recapture. Of course there is a slight hint in her concealing from you a thing that she would normally tell you at once."

"Yes"--Harold Redreeve frowned painfully--"that is quite true. I dare say if she had known I was to spend the night here, she wouldn't have written. Poor child! I must get back at once, though I ought to go on to-morrow and see Stephenson. But I can't leave her another day. I shall have to write him." He sighed. The strain of the Tractions case had been great. He had staked a good deal on it, and it seemed to his wearied imagination that he would stand or fall by it. But Millicent--he couldn't leave her another day with her delusions. Thank heaven! they weren't horrible ones yet. He must get back and question Annette discreetly; and Boyce--yes, Boyce had better come down, if he would.

"Do you know Boyce well enough to make a point, for me, of his coming to us? Could you run up to town and manage for me to meet him at luncheon? Could you somehow arrange it all? That is, if, after I've been home, it seems best."

"Certainly. Leave it to me. Wire me what day. Boyce is near town this summer. Oughtn't you to see Stephenson, anyhow? Surely one day more couldn't matter."

"What I should say to Stephenson, if I saw him in my present state of mind, would matter. Do you suppose I should be sitting here now if I didn't know it was too late to get home to-night? Perhaps you think this is gay for me."

"I don't. Indeed, I don't," Delano hastened to assure him. "I think it's the devil and all. If Mary and I hadn't felt it so serious, I should have waited until the Tractions case came off before saying anything to you. But the great thing is to take it in time."

"Oh, I know that; I may not be a friend of Boyce's, but I read magazine articles occasionally--on the train. I've heard of psychiatry myself, George." He could not keep bitterness out of his tone, before the spectacle of his brother-in-law's interested immunity.

"It's very hard, having it come just now. If Mary could go down; but there are the Vincents coming on from the West next week, and a hundred things. Of course she would go if she could do any real good. I know all about it. Didn't Violet have pneumonia last winter just when we were putting the screws on Singer and all the C. & O. gang? But life is like that."

"I didn't tell you about Violet until you had got your screws on." Mary spoke mildly, in the interests of literal truth.

"I hope you don't mean, Mary"--Delano turned to his wife--"that you think we shouldn't have told Harry. Last night you said--"

But Mary was already in a flutter of compunction.

"Oh, my dearest George, how could you think so? We talked it all over for an hour before you decided. Only I am sorry Harry doesn't feel he can see Stephenson."

"I think myself he might as well. Twenty-four hours could make no difference. Millicent is quite happy. All the first part of the letter was about the garden. See." He picked up the letter Mary had left on the table, and handed it to Redreeve.

"I haven't my glasses," Redreeve muttered as he took up the thin sheets in the familiar hand--the hand that might have been his own, so intimately for years had it written of his deepest concerns. "May I take it?"

Delano pursed his lips.

"Why--yes, I suppose so. Hadn't you better see Stephenson to-morrow? You have an appointment, haven't you?"

"Yes, but I'll telegraph."

"Will it look well?"

"I don't care a damn how it looks. He'll get a letter explaining. I'd like an early breakfast, Mary, if it isn't too much trouble. I must take the six forty-five. Thank you both--very much. Good-night." He marched away, clutching the letter in his hand.

When Harold Redreeve reached his summer home after a hot, broken journey, the westering sun was falling in long, level streaks across his wide lawn; the porches were empty; the big doors stood restfully open; and only a bird-call was to be heard. He felt a slovenly creature, thirsty, tired, and

unsuccessful, to be coming into such a peaceful haunt. For a moment his obsession seemed a thing to be washed off presently with the dirt of travel; the only things he could conceivably need were a shower and iced tea. He rang to give warning of his presence, then stepped into the wide tiled hall. Millicent was not in sight, but Annette appeared at once, surprised, obviously, to see him.

"Where is Mrs. Redreeve?"

"At the club, sir. She usually goes there for tea. She wasn't expecting you."

"No, I know." He started to the stairs. "Have the Stacys been here this week?" He had to approach the matter as awkwardly as that.

"No one has been here, sir, since you went away, except Mr. and Mrs. Carle to dinner last night. Mrs. Redreeve plays bridge most afternoons now with the other ladies at the club."

"What time do you expect her back?"

"Just in time to dress, sir. Nobody is here to-night."

"Have some tea for me, will you, Annette, in about twenty minutes? I'll be down on the porch for it." He went up to his dressing-room for his bath.

Redreeve had time for thought before Millicent returned. His letter to Stephenson, following up his telegram, he had had just time to dictate from his office in town between trains. He had hated the look of concern that came over the face of his stenographer when he announced, in the letter, that he had been suddenly called home by his wife's illness. It seemed as if, so long as they could keep the trouble secret, it need hardly be a trouble at all. But, after all, what could be more public than George Delano, with his perpetual air of speaking for a cowed group, behind him, of eleven good men and true? The whole house was so peaceful, Annette so little seemed to want her opportunity of speaking to him privately, Millicent seemed by inference so happy and harmless over at the club yonder, he felt almost a fool not to have seen Stephenson. And yet, could he have done otherwise? He took the letter from his pocket and read it through once more. No; George had been right. It was alarming; and, more probably than not, Annette was simply frightened and puzzled, or else silently laying plans to take another place. Every element for apprehension that George had mentioned was certainly there. Probably he never should see Stephenson; probably he would simply have to turn over the Tractions case to Welby and miss his chance. If anything went wrong with Millicent, it would go wrong with him. George might be the kind to put a big

deal through with a thing like that going on at home. Harry Redreeve knew he himself wasn't.

Then he turned with a start, for Millicent was before him.

"You here? Why did you come? Anything wrong?" She smothered him for an instant in her frills.

"No, nothing wrong. I just came."

"But didn't you see Stephenson?"

"No. To-day's interview was called off. I hope to see him in a few days."

The letter had still not attracted her attention. If she was aware of it, she probably thought it a letter of hers to him. He must study her, he thought wearily; must note every detail as if he were a doctor. And indeed she did seem a little nervous, a little thin. But that was positively all. She glanced at the letter once or twice, uneasily, he thought. Of course, they hadn't been apart enough for her to have written him recently so many pages. He laid his arm over the thin, blue sheets.

"Much doing down here?"

"Nothing. That's why I have to go over to the club every blessed afternoon and play auction. We make it a kind of half-way house--go there instead of going to each other."

"Do you like this place?"

"Do you?"

"I haven't been here a great deal so far. It seems restful."

"Oh, restful, yes. Sometimes"--her brow knotted; she seemed to hesitate--"sometimes I do get a little bored. You aren't here, you see, to share the restfulness."

"Doesn't anything happen to interest you all the long days?"

She looked at him with wide, honest blue eyes.

"Not anything, Harry, except the bridge, which doesn't really interest me. No; I haven't seen an intriguing human being all summer."

"You know we chose it particularly for quiet."

"Oh, yes; and I'm sure it's the right thing. Only, next year, I hope I shall be strong enough, and you will be free enough, for us to do something amusing. I'm perfectly happy, but no one could say the place is riotous. But, by the way, Harry, who called off the Stephenson interview? Does that mean he will make trouble?"

Harry Redreeve lifted both hands and pushed his hair back from his forehead. His sudden gesture loosened the pages of the letter at his elbow.

Millicent leaned over and looked at them. One glance was enough, for, without listening to her husband's explanation, she clutched it.

"Harry Redreeve, where did you get this?"

"I spent last night at George's."

"And he gave you this? The beast!"

Redreeve looked his wife gravely in the eyes, bracing himself for a scene of some unknown kind. "I don't know why he's a beast. He couldn't well do other."

"But I particularly told him I wasn't telling you."

"Yes; but you can see that, if George thought the thing serious, he would feel I must know sooner or later."

"Did you call off the interview with Stephenson?" She rose and stood, very flushed, before him.

"I did."

"Because of this?"

"Yes, dear. I was worried."

"Oh, my poor darling, my poor darling! I wouldn't have had it happen for anything. What a pompous fool George is! I'll never forgive him. And Mary sat in a corner and said how wonderful George was. I know. Oh, you poor darling! But when can you see Stephenson?"

"I don't know. Later in the week, I hope."

"And you let George make you come home straight, and cut the interview?"

"Certainly not, my dear. I didn't need any advice to make me come home as straight as I could."

"You don't mean that that wretched letter worried you?"

"Why shouldn't it?"

"How could it? George is capable of any idiocy, but you mustn't tell me that you believed those people in there were real."

"No; and neither did George."

"Oh, George deserves to be steeped to the lips in a saturated solution of himself. But you! I never meant you to see the thing--naturally. I shall never get over your having called off the Stephenson interview on my account. I'll owe George one for that to the end of time. But you don't mean to say that you didn't see?"

"See what?" He was bewildered. He felt as if he himself were perhaps a little mad. Certainly Millicent looked the acme of sanity, with her eyes shining and all that delicate color in her face.

"Why, that it was a gigantic hoax on George, of course! If I had ever dreamed of your seeing the letter at all, I should have expected you to rock with delight over my cleverness. I got so tired of his encyclopaedic ways, I thought I'd give him a stoss. I meant George to think I was going off my head. Though I thought he might be dull enough to stop at wondering if I wasn't doing something unconventional. But you--I should have thought you would see it the first minute. You must have been tired, if you thought your old Millikins would spend her afternoons with a lot of spooks and, on top of that, write to George about it! It must have been a good rag, if it could take you in. I'm rather proud of it. Why, I was afraid even George would see through that little girl in the blue sunbonnet." She lay back in her chair and laughed consumingly. "Forgive me; I'll put my mind on the serious things of life in a moment. But it is funny!"

If it had not been for the accident with the Stephenson interview, Harry Redreeve would have been tempted to laugh himself. As it was, there was the practical worry at the heart of his great relief.

"I nearly didn't post the letter, you know. I just started out to see what I could do, and then it grew so beautifully under my hand that I thought George ought to have it. So I posted it, after all, and it has led to this! It comes of being bored. I always used to startle George when I was bored. But if I had dreamed of your going up there--"

"I didn't expect to; but it turned out to be convenient, and I telephoned them yesterday afternoon that I would come for the night."

"What did you say to Stephenson?"

"Wired him that my wife was ill."

"And you haven't written him?"

"Yes, to-day, from the office, before I took the train up here."

"What did you say?"

"That I hoped for a later appointment."

"Very well; you can telegraph him from here to-night. Say that I'm out of danger, and fix another day. He will forgive you if he knows you telegraphed him as soon as I was out of danger. I'm sorry about the fibbing, but this is a good deal truer than the lie George got you into. Don't send until after dinner. That will be more plausible. Now I must dress."

As Mrs. Redreeve went through the door, she turned to look at her husband and laughed again.

"I can't help it, dear. I know I was a beast to do it just because I was bored. When I think of Blue Bonnet, I feel like Mrs. Piper or Palladino or 'Sally.' But I shan't laugh about it again. You see, the cream of the joke is gone forever if you were taken in, too. I'm glad I didn't 'register' delirium tremens for George. He would have had an ambulance and a strait-jacket down here on the afternoon train."

At last Harry Redreeve grinned.

"He nearly did have Dr. Boyce. He's expecting to send him down over Sunday."

Millicent leaned against the lintel of the door, and closed her eyes in mock-consternation.

"An alienist? For me? Oh, George Delano, you have such an unclean mind! It isn't decent to be so up to date as George is. He gave me Freud to read last winter, you remember, and for a week I dreamed things that didn't need any interpreting. And you were going to let the man into the house?"

Redreeve looked at her very gravely.

"Yes, I was going to let him in."

Mrs. Redreeve dashed back to the porch and picked up the letter. Then she tore it viciously, scattering the pieces over the porch-floor.

"There! I'm sorry to make a mess, but Annette's a saint. She won't mind. I must have been inspired by the devil to write stuff that would affect you like that. It's pretty bad, you know, that you could have thought me off my head."

Her husband leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

"Yes, dear, it is pretty bad. But I'm awfully tired, and George considers he has a gift for presenting evidence. He isn't easy to interrupt. I'm very sorry; but you must take it as a compliment. It was damnably well done--to the lay mind, at least."

By the time that Redreeve had had a chance to communicate with Delano, Delano's zeal had outstripped their original plan. He himself had run in on Boyce, and disclosed his fears. Dr. Boyce promised to hold himself in readiness to go to the Redreeves should he be summed, and Delano then set himself frantically to recover the lost letter from Millicent's husband. He naturally wished to submit it to Boyce. Redreeve was, however, far too busy with the Tractions case to inform Delano that the letter, in a thousand pieces, had been swept into the dust-bin by "the maid Annette." He had to arrange to see Stephenson and a dozen other men. He was caught in the big machine and had to keep time to the engines. Beyond once reassuring Delano in a cryptic

telegram, he had done nothing. George's letters he had no time to answer. Millicent promised to attend to the matter.

The crisis drew nearer, and sometimes Redreeve felt as if the days lengthened in arithmetical progression. By late September, when the case was actually called, it seemed to him that the sun took fifty hours for its diurnal course. Yet he could not have spared one of the fifty, if he was to go fully armed, with not an inch of unprotected skin, into court. There was excitement in it, a kind of fury of astuteness, a Pythian rage of foresight, that lifted him above the crowd he directed. It divorced him from country peace, and he saw little of Millicent in the fervid autumn weeks. Sometimes she went up to town for a few days in order to lunch and dine with him; but after the case was actually on, she found that such jaunts tired her, and she went back to the country to rest and wait for her husband to be free. It had been decided that they should keep the house until November, and try for a quiet holiday there together in the late autumn when the case was over. Harry now came home, unless he gained a brief respite from the law's delays, only at the week-end. On the long Sundays, before he took the evening train, they sat, almost silent, on the wide porch, in the subdued autumn warmth. He was too tired even for her chatter; too tired to dare to relax, when his nerves would have to be taut as a singing rope on the morrow. And when at last the case was over, and Redreeve's clients had got their verdict, he was almost too tired to be glad.

Still, she pushed him off for a little golf now and then on a fine day; and occasionally they had friends, belated birds like themselves, to dinner. It marked one of the long stages of Harry Redreeve's relief when he asked her one night:

"Did George ever answer your letter? I positively forgot to ask."

"What letter?"

"Your letter explaining about the hoax."

"I never wrote it." She flushed.

"Never wrote it? Oh, my dear girl, you said you would. That's why he has never congratulated me on my luck."

"I'm sorry," she faltered. "I will write to-morrow, honor bright. If I hadn't thought so much about just what to write him, I dare say I could have done it long since. When I haven't been thinking of the case, I've been thinking of George. I wish you could have got a verdict against him."

"Well, I suppose I can write now. Perhaps it will be easier for me. Only you must give me carte blanche to say all sorts of things for you. George had a right to be cut up, I think, dear."

"He'd take every right of the sort he had, you may be sure." But her tone was listless.

"Yes, George is not an easy-going person. However, we'd best not quarrel with them. Have they asked us up there next month?"

"Not yet. We didn't intend to go, in any case."

"No; but it's odd they haven't asked us. They always do. I think I'd better write to-night."

"Won't it do as well to-morrow?"

"I dare say. But why not to-night?"

"Because I want to talk to you." They rose from the table at this point, and she put her arm through his. "Coffee on the porch, Annette, please."

"A very odd thing has happened," she went on a few moments later, as they faced the harvest moon. "You remember those people I wrote about? Those people I made up to bother George with?"

"Yes."

"Well"--she turned her head away, and he saw her pure profile in the moonlight--"I saw them this afternoon."

"At the club?"

"No, here on the porch, where I told George they used to come. Blue Bonnet and all. They sat in the chairs. They went away in the motor. They did all the things I said they did. Only this time they did them."

"Millicent!"

"Harry, dear, I'm not such a fool as to play the same game twice. Besides, I never meant to play it on you. Of course it's a hallucination. It must be. It"--her voice broke a little--"it takes some courage to say it, because every sense I have could swear that they were real. If I hadn't made them up in the first place, I should say now, to you, that they were real. I don't dare to, having invented them once. Life doesn't give you coincidences like that. But, as far as I am concerned, I would believe in them. I took the little girl's blue sunbonnet off and felt of it--crumpled the stiff edge in my hand. It's gingham, starched. For your sake, I didn't ask Annette to bring them tea." She stopped.

"You're very tired," began Redreeve in a shaking voice.

"No, I'm not tired that way. I'm horribly--yes, horribly, that's the word--rested. I wish I were tired. But I'll do anything you say."

"Then go to the club to-morrow while I'm in town. I'll come back right after luncheon, and pick you up there. I'm afraid I have to go, dear. I've promised to see the district attorney. Do you want to come?"

"Oh, no, I'd rather stay here. Must I go to the club? There won't be any one there except a few golfing men. No one goes any more."

"I'd rather you would. I wish we had a motor: I'd send you over to the Stacys' for the day."

"I'm quite all right here, dearest; but I'll telephone and ask Kate Stacy to come over and lunch and take me for a drive."

"Good. And don't worry about it. We'll consult a nerve-man; and if you have to go to Europe on a bat, off you go. You've never seen them before, have you?"

"Never."

"You'll do, dear. That was a brick to tell me. And I'll write to George to-morrow. I think if you put him and the damned apology quite out of your mind, you'll pull through with no further trouble. Don't worry about it: that's the thing I beg of you."

"I won't." And she turned her face to him again.

When Redreeve came home late the next afternoon, he did not see his wife in her accustomed chair. "Hardly time yet for Kate Stacy to bring her back," he muttered to himself. Just then Annette, the maid came through the door of the service wing, very quietly, into the hall where he stood.

"What time did Mrs. Redreeve say she would be back?" he asked.

"She didn't go out at all, sir. Mrs. Stacy was in town, she found when she telephoned."

"Where is she?"

"Up-stairs in her room, I think, sir."

"Well, tell her I'm here. And you might bring me something to drink, Annette. I'm frightfully thirsty."

"Yes, sir. Would you mind stepping on the porch a moment--just a moment, sir?"

He followed her. There was the tea-tray still uncleared. Six cups stood on it, and all had been used.

"I left them for you to see, sir. Now I must clear them, or Mrs. Redreeve will be displeased."

"What is the matter?" The six cups seemed somehow reassuring.

The maid looked behind her furtively into the empty hall, then bent and whispered quickly:

"There was no one here to-day, sir. And from inside I saw Mrs. Redreeve wet the spoons, and drink a little sip out of each cup."

Redreeve turned on her angrily, but the maid's eyes were full of tears. He pushed past her and went up-stairs, while she began quietly clearing the tea-things away.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry! I've been asleep. I meant to be down to meet you." Millicent raised a flushed face from her pillows. "And the Carles are coming to dinner to-night. I telephoned them this afternoon. Kate Stacy was in town to-day, so I couldn't get her to lunch or motor or anything."

He felt a wild impulse to sneak down and ask Annette or some other maid if the Carles really were coming, but he forbore.

"Good! What sort of day have you had?"

"All right, dear. Only"--she roused herself to a sitting position, and began patting his knee softly with her hand--"they came again to-day--and took tea. They've never done that before. I had to ask Annette to bring tea for them, Blue Bonnet and all. I wasn't sure even this afternoon, you see, that they were real, though I think they are. And Annette brought the tea perfectly. She didn't stumble over any of them."

"Did they drink the tea?"

Mrs. Redreeve flushed.

"You can ask Annette if she didn't find every cup used!"

A great wave of pity swept over him, bringing a kind of choking relief with it. She wouldn't lie to him, poor darling, so long as she could keep truth on her lips. But how real they must have been to her, for her to adopt that subterfuge--to try to prove to Annette, in Annette's own crude terms, that they were there. She must have a hideous, baffled sense of being the only person with eyes in a blind world--so much worse than being blind in a world of those who see. He bent and kissed her.

"I must dress if the Carles are coming. So must you. Don't worry, sweetheart. We'll work it all out. I'll stay and see them to-morrow. They never come in the morning, do they?"

"Never."

"Well, then, it's all right. I have to go round the links with Stacy in the morning, but I'll be on deck all the afternoon."

The next morning Redreeve went to the club. He was glad Stacy was a scratch man; he might have had to try to beat him if he had been in his own class. It would have been pretty hard to try to beat any one that day. The links were all hazards and bunkers, and on the fifth green--his ball had got to within a few inches of the hole, he couldn't remember how--he swung his cleek mechanically as if for a tremendous drive.

"Good Lord!" murmured Stacy.

"Good Lord, indeed," echoed Redreeve. Fact is,"--he pulled himself together quickly--"my mind is anywhere, and my general game is too poor to go on by itself. Sorry to have played tennis all the morning. A man telegraphed he was coming down this afternoon for an important conference. I'm wool-gathering. I think I'll pull out."

Stacy nodded good-humoredly.

"I'm just out for the fun of the thing. I'll finish and see what I can do with Bogey. You have a right to be off your feed. So long!"

Redreeve went home, dully thankful that he had won his big case, and the consideration of men with it. He had tried deliberately to keep life in the normal round, thinking that, until he could decide, that was the safest thing to do for Millicent. Whatever happened or didn't, in these few crucial days, he would make her take everything sanely. He wouldn't deviate; he wouldn't turn the house into a psychopathic ward. People should come and go, and the business of life should be pursued, until he knew. She was still quite perfect with outsiders: she had been delightful with the Carles the night before; she would be charming with the district attorney if he got there in time for luncheon. And never again, during this little period of suspense, would he leave her alone in the afternoon. Everything should go by the board rather than that. If he could once be present when the "people" came! He thought it unlikely that he ever should; yet he hoped once at least to watch her with the hallucination full upon her. Perhaps he could hold her tight to his side, make her see with his eyes, force her to stare until the chairs were empty, even for her. He built great hopes on the fact that she hadn't lied to him; that she had kept, poor dear, the mirror of her consciousness as clear for him as she could. Some little spring that still worked in her brain had clicked out, at his direct question, an evasion instead of a lie. But he wouldn't play golf again until it was over. He should have to see Boyce sooner or later, he supposed.

Mrs. Redreeve met him on the porch. Though Annette was beside her, pulling chairs into place, his wife spoke at once:

“Harry, I told you they never came except in the afternoon. But they did come this morning--to say good-bye. They’re going back to town. Isn’t it extraordinary that I don’t know their names yet?”

“Come in, dear, come in.” He tried to draw her into the house.

“No, wait a minute. The old gentleman looked at his watch and said they would be late for luncheon if they didn’t hurry. And his wife said how unfortunate it was, and how odd, they had never met you. You don’t have to worry about me any more, darling, for this time I know they were real. See?” She pulled out a blue sunbonnet from behind her back.

He had his arm about her and was leading her into the house. But she detained him.

“Tell Mr. Redreeve where you found it, Annette.”

“On the long chair, under the cushion.” The maid’s eyes were lowered.

“She’s such a madcap! They’ll hardly send back for it; it’s perfectly worthless. Throw it away, Annette. But you see they are real.”

Redreeve stopped in the hall. “Hadn’t you better put on something else? The district attorney may be here to luncheon.”

“Of course. I was just going to dress. You’d better hurry, yourself. Don’t you want a shower first? It’s extraordinarily hot for October. Bye-bye.” She ran up the stairs, but leaned over the rail and spoke again:

“I’m glad Blue Bonnet left it, so you could see. Tell Annette to throw it away. It’s a horror. No, you can call to her. Come up at once, dear. You’ll be late, and he’ll be here.”

But Redreeve went back to the porch. The maid, as white as wax, was holding the blue sunbonnet in a shaking hand. When she saw Redreeve emerge from the house alone, she burst into tears.

“Oh, Mr. Redreeve, I can’t stand it any longer!”

“Who was here, Annette?” He took the sunbonnet from her and held it with numb fingers.

“No one, sir, no one.”

“Where did this come from, then?”

“She bought the gingham in the village this morning, Mr. Redreeve, just after you went over to the club. I saw the package under her arm when she came back. And she sewed it in her room. I didn’t dream, sir--I wouldn’t spy on a lady--but I saw her when I was tidying the dressing-room. Look at it, sir--how gobbled the stitches are. It don’t hardly hold together. And an hour after, I found it on this chair, with the pillows all throwed round. She made it herself, Mr. Redreeve, so as you’d think somebody left it here. Do you understand it, sir?”

Harry Redreeve was very white.

“No, Annette, I don’t. But you had better throw it away, as she told you. And, for heaven’s sake, stop crying!”

He went into the house to dress, but before he went up-stairs, he entered the telephone-closet and shut the door. Watch in hand, he telephoned the telegram. He had to spell “Delano” three times.

East of Eden

I was with Twining when it happened. Nothing but that--actual presence on the spot--could give me the right to tell the tale; for, untypical as it is, irrelevant, unique, unexpected, to sit at home and imagine it would be merely morbid. Some people may think it morbid to relate it, in any case. To such I can only say that facts need no apology. The thing occurred. What is morbid is the comment of the people very far away who never understood. I was there; day by day, by his side, I saw him through it, and I can honorably assert that Twining was sincere to the core, honest to the bitter end. Though why chosen for this peculiar destiny, I have never been able to guess.

Since my day they have set a statue on the Kingsborough campus that is an adequate portrait of Roger Twining's type. I don't know what it calls itself, but it is a young athlete, half in a gown, half out of it, with a football under his arm and hockey shoes on his feet, with a Bible and tennis racquets heaped vaguely against him--a symbolic presentment, I take it, of young Kingsborough going forth to preach the Gospel to every creature. A very nice person, that statue, but too heterogeneously equipped. Twining, to the life: if he could once have got his Polynesians to play basket-ball, he could have gone on, I believe, to expound the Pauline epistles to them with fluent ease. For he was not a fool, and he was the best fellow in the world. Only, you see, by Twining's time at Kingsborough (he graduated a few years after I did) they had completely canalized religion between Y. M. C. A. embankments. No one cared about categorical imperatives any more--not even Tug Lambert when he was drunk. The statue is the expression of the Kingsborough spirit which moulded Twining. For the very special trick life was going to play him, he was a little handicapped by all those implements of sport. They didn't fit his fate. Variety without complication--"muscular," all of it. And Roger Twining was to be an optimist caught by the Furies, a lad by no means Prometheus chained to the Promethean rock. If it weren't for the old Kingsborough clannishness, I should be tempted to say that he was the seat of a terrific tempest--and was himself only teapot size. But, then, I have always stuck to the categorical imperative; and, while it is an open question in my mind whether you can ever really convert a heathen, I am quite sure that you cannot convert him with basket-ball. In that I side with Aunt Miriam.

Twining himself felt something of it in those first discouraged days at his remote, incredible post, where, by mismanagement at home and the inopportune death on the high seas of the man who was to follow him at once, he was for a time in sole charge. (You will have made out, I hope, that he was a missionary.) As he put it to me petulantly one night on his big verandah, "If I could only have worked backward instead of forward, unlearned all the things a Christian child knows, acquired a totem instead of a diploma!" He was coming to realize, and not without regret, that basket-ball can never take the place of good, soul-shaking ritual. Besides, the natives would not play basket-ball. They preferred to spear fish, and get drunk of an evening, and smile as no Christian has ever smiled.

Now let me get to work and abridge for you the preluding weeks.

Pure Kingsborough clannishness led Twining, when he found me existing, tourist-fashion, in the best hotel on the island, to ask me to come up to the Mission and pay him a visit. Pure Kingsborough clannishness made it possible for me to accept; for, though we had plenty of common acquaintance, we had never known each other, and missionaries are not my tipple. They are like ginger-ale, neither intoxicating nor refreshing. I had been in twenty minds about accepting, and finally I went up to see for myself. Having seen, I stayed. The scene got me. I was new to the South Seas.

I shall never forget how I found Twining, that first day, when I went to return his visit. He was sitting on a palm-wreathed eminence, gazing fixedly down a forty-five-degree slant of vegetation, at the huddle of roofs whence I had climbed to his hill. Behind him, the wooden buildings of his new compound gashed the dense, illimitable green of the jungle. In a year or two the compound would be assimilated to the landscape; it would be caressed, covered, crept over, by innumerable vegetable parasites. But now it was a raw wound in the beauty of the forest. The town lay a few hundred feet below. Beyond the roofs were docks of a sort, and enough corrugated iron to prove that this paradise existed commercially. Then the boats, the reef, and the ocean which took up the tale of infinity where the jungle left it off. Twining sat there on his volcanic headland, staring; and as I approached, a little pile of cocoanuts toppled over on his left foot as he jerked it nervously. The Chinese boy who had guided me to his retreat disappeared with the merest grunt of announcement. Twining nodded, then picked up a cocoanut and flung it petulantly down the slant of vegetation, in the direction of the town. It grazed

the green tree-tops for a second or two, then dipped through the branches of a breadfruit and fell, no doubt, to earth somewhere.

"A perfectly good cocoanut wasted," I remarked, as I sat down beside him.

"I'd like to waste a few thousands," he groaned. "It would be a darned good thing for these dwellers in Eden if they had to rustle a little more for a living. On my word, I sometimes envy Sherry Spencer over in China--rice-Christians and all. Sherry groans over the Oriental mind. Heavens! It's something you can get your teeth into, anyhow, even if it bites back. These folk aren't anything. They're a law unto themselves. No, there're not; they're just a set of privileges unto themselves. Nature cockers them as if they were worth it.... Man, you can't teach the Gospel to a bunch of people who don't want anything they haven't got. They don't even regret the good old days of long pig."

"Dying out, aren't they?"

"Oh yes, and they'll be Presbyterians when they're dead, I shouldn't wonder." And he kicked the ruins of the cocoanut-heap with a white-canvas toe.

That was Twining's state of mind when I first envisaged him and his situation. I did not reply; I leaned back and looked, taking my ease; for on this occasion I should have to decide whether or not to accept his invitation. He

did not interrupt my contemplation, even by shying another cocoanut. I filled my eyes with the scene, my lungs with the air, my heart with all that uncomprehended exotic implication. The beauty was overpowering. Nothing that you could reasonably ask for was omitted from the landscape. Mountain, gorge, and valley were assembled in a hundred romantic contours; unseen torrents tinkled softly in my ears; the trees and flowers were those of an emperor's dream. A cool, sweet trade-wind ruffled all that gorgeousness into life. And for the last fillip, the thatched roofs below, constant hint that you were on the threshold of something you could never hope to understand.... Down in the town were officials, commercial travellers, beach-combers, men "from Sydney" (sinister appellation), natives in corduroy trousers--dramatic, full of plot for comic opera or a shilling shocker. But I would eschew drama; I would live for a time on the unspoiled heights.

Had I but known it, I was like a man with weak nerves refusing Stevenson and taking to Sophocles. But I did not know.

"I'll stay, thank you," I said at last, and waved my hand inclusively to suggest that it was to Nature I succumbed.

"Ripping, isn't it? I'm so glad you will," was Twining's rejoinder. His tone told me that he was glad, but the tribute to the scenery was merely conventional.

So I came up and stayed with Twining and his aunt Miriam at the Mission. I have, as well as I can, given you some inkling of Twining. You will know more about him later. I must not, I suppose, take time to expound Aunt Miriam, though I succumbed at once to her peculiarly American charm. It is enough here to define her externally--a woman of sixty-odd, with iron-gray hair, and a vast serenity which veiled her executive type. She was not Roger's aunt; she and her husband had adopted Roger, who was an orphan, and it was her late husband, "Uncle Ephraim" (he, too, in his time, a Kingsborough man), who had destined Roger to the "foreign field." Roger's vocation was not spontaneous, you see; it was a form of gratitude, an earnest of devotion; and that is important. Aunt Miriam was there to see that he did his job; but she was especially and chiefly there to help him through the months of his novitiate, to keep his house until he got a wife ("helpmeet" was often Aunt Miriam's word). Then she would go back to her sisters in Illinois, to whom she wrote long journal-letters. Aunt Miriam never went down the Mission hill to the town. She knitted endlessly, and made calico clothes for those native children whom the grim wolf with privy paw had not yet devoured. And she

would sit for hours, her writing-pad on her lap, gazing at the summit of the volcanic headland where I first found Roger and had made my earth-shaking decision. We had people to dinner now and then, and I explored passes and ravines and caves while Roger was busy below us with dark souls that matched the dark skins.

I stayed with them, as retrospectively it seems to me, an unconscionably long time. I was a loafer, with my hands in my pockets, and I had never seen anything I liked so much as this. I sketched a little; I dipped into Twining's folk-lore books; I bathed in cold mountain pools; I held Aunt Miriam's wool for her to wind. The place enchanted me in no metaphorical sense. I can never hope to reproduce for you the unreality of that island and its beauty. It was out of the world as I conceived and knew the world; I hung, suspended in time, over the landscape of a dream. There was no past or future; no relation, no claim, no human plot. I might (as in childhood one dreams of doing) have been floating on cirrhus clouds or treading the Milky Way. That is why this story will never seem to me morbid.

From this fourth-dimensional world in which I moved and breathed I was awakened, after many weeks, by the entrance of the heroine. Even then I did not wake all at once, for the manner of her entrance was in keeping with the scene. We were dining that night, Roger and I, with the British consul, and we took a short cut through the jungle, instead of going round by road. The trail was well marked and well used, but even so, the wild guava clipped us close, and we tripped over the offspring of the patriarchal bamboos. As we tore down the last slant, she rose--materialized you might say--before our eyes: a white figure, rounding a huge palm-trunk and standing suddenly before us. She was laughing, under her wreath of orchids, and the juice of a half-eaten mango rippled lusciously over her right hand.

She made no pretence of not knowing us, or of introducing herself. She did not even say, "You are Mr. Twining and Mr. Malcolm, and I am Letitia Quayle, whom you are to meet at dinner." She merely greeted and joined us. Nor did she apologize for the mango (which is a fruit without social virtues), though she threw it away.

I did not know, just at first, how it affected Twining, for I was busy feeling the pleasant shock of it to the full. She was artless and exquisite as a dryad or as Virginia on the sands of Mauritius. She came forward as if she belonged to us, as if we all belonged together in some naïf legend. She did not break the dream. She was natural as the mango that she flung away to rot beneath the

bamboos. Perhaps I can describe better the effect of her apparition if I say that my mind suddenly became a reminiscent welter of Atala, Typee, and the like--though she was fair as a lily.

It was I who made foolish talk until we turned into the consular garden. Twining was dumb. Only as we climbed the steps of the verandah he turned to her and asked, "Do you ever wear blue?"

"Constantly." And the least shade of formality, of Europeanism, crept over her face.

"I thought so." He turned away and walked up to the consul.

My thoughts veered sharply to Aunt Miriam, above. Perhaps the "helpmeet" was nearer than she thought. Roger was pale, his dark eyes had recaptured their lost fervor, and an immortal curiosity sharpened his fine features. Mentally, I withdrew on the spot. I devoted myself to that eminent scientist, Professor Quayle, fellow of every society that exists for the purpose of discovering the skeleton in the racial closet. It was worth while. He was eclectic, as the great scientists are; he knew a lot about anthropology, and could see the humor of a dinosaur. His talk was delightful; negligently challenged by our host, he became the Scheherazade of the Stone Age. Also he had been everywhere--scientists are the pampered children of our generation--and his metaphors were as good as his facts. If this be "shop," I thought, let me never hear anything else. Letitia had accompanied him to many places far from trade centres, and joined in with eager anecdotes. A curious education, I reflected, as I listened to her. She had never been to Paris or Rome, but she was intimate with sharks and fruit-eating bats, and the Falls of the Zambesi were to her a more familiar name than Niagara. Fair, very fair, her blond hair growing in a widow's peak; young with the very essence of youth; a child, not of cosmopolis, but of the planet. I let my eyes dwell on her in sheer pleasure, this girl of strictly Saxon featuring, whose familiar allusions were to places, people, food, and customs that I had never heard of. The only drawback to my irresponsible delight (for, remember, I had withdrawn while yet there was time--had taken a great backward leap before I reached the threshold) was Roger's silence. Though I had never witnessed the phenomenon before, I knew what it was and what it meant: the stored experience of the race had taught me this thing which I had never seen--as you would recognize an earthquake the first time you felt it. Love at first sight was its name; even before we reached the consular garden Roger had handed over the key. So much beauty lies buried for me in that South Sea isle to which I

shall never return, and the most beautiful of all things in that isolated dream, I now feel, was the suddenness and completeness of Roger Twining's surrender to the miracle. They step through the pages of the great fairy-tales--the Dantes, the Romeos, the Siegfrieds--and we watch and listen, and are moved to tears, and go away disbelieving. But once in a thousand moons Life makes the incomparable gesture for herself; and I shall always thank God, in spite of everything, that I have seen love burst into complete flower in a single instant.

Letitia? Well, she was a woman; she had her little part to play; and, that evening, after his hoarse question ("Do you ever wear blue?" How it rings, sinister in my ears, but sweet!) she played it. But he saw her first stepping out of the forest as Virginia. Letitia Quayle was complicated, yes. But what is more complicated than a flower? We prate of the simplicity of Nature by way of disparaging the poor little nursery subtleties of civilization. We are great fools. Letitia Quayle was simple as a rose; and let the botanists say how simple that is. Now you see what I mean. She was idyllically natural--and very complex. She bloomed and glowed with perfect fitness at the heart of that tropic jungle; she surprised us no more than a butterfly. But--simple? I stick to my own theory.

In spite of her initial playing of the part, Letitia came to Roger Twining very naturally. Professor Quayle was due to stay for a month, investigating coral formations. Aunt Miriam lifted Letitia bodily from the hospitalities below and carried her up to the Mission headland. I do not know how else to put it, though of course Mrs. Twining never stirred from the compound. There seemed to be no formal invitations; simply, Aunt Miriam expected her, and she came. Roger and I would take her back, late in the evening, after dinner. Mrs. Twining had seen, as I had seen, and she wanted to be sure. I do not think it occurred to her that Miss Quayle would refuse Roger. Nor did it occur to me, though never was courtship less like courtships at home. Roger showed less ardor than absorption; he went about the business of life as though Letitia were the air he breathed. He took her, you would say, calmly; but she was the basis of existence. When she was not there, he seemed to suffer dumbly, like an animal. I could swear that for a fortnight he spoke no word to her; yet if he had been visibly on his knees, his attitude could not have been clearer. His Polynesians got drunk in peace, those days.

And Letitia? No girl in my world has ever treated a lover, declared or undeclared, as she treated Roger. She turned to him for everything. We picnicked in deep, vine-hung ravines above frigid and shadowed pools; and I

have seen her, without coquetry, without affectation, bend her head forward to drink from a cup he held, or feed him a rose apple with her own fingers. They clambered down exotic trails hand in hand, and stood together like children to gaze at a waterfall. Not a hint of passion; only that beautiful and calm clinging to each other. My constant presence did not embarrass them; if it was Arden, I was their faithful fool. Do you wonder that my dream was so long undisturbed, or that, in spite of all that came after, I look back upon it as the most beautiful thing in life--a thing (sometimes I desperately feel) that fate should never have dared to touch?

The wonder of it is, of course, that that fortnight could ever have been. Even I, completely obsessed with the notion that we were existing outside of history, knew that it could not last like this. A breath suffices to destroy so delicate a beauty. I knew the breath would come. Even in tales, it always does. We pay tribute forever to the Eumenides.

All those enchanted days, Aunt Miriam said nothing. She left Letitia to Roger and to me--though Letitia spent many an hour by Aunt Miriam's side, and God knows what they talked of. That Aunt Miriam's was not the first disturbing breath, I know. Sixty years of self-control had made Aunt Miriam a marvel of a woman. She was, in this case, the more of a marvel that she had no romance in her. I have been bitter, very bitter, about it all; but, strangely enough, never, in my most sky-defying moods, bitter against Aunt Miriam.

The disturbing breath came, as I knew it would and must; came when Roger Twining's cup spilled over and his passion declared itself. Disturbing, at first, only in the sense that the manner of perfection changed; that the tenderness quickened and flashed and kindled into a romance so poignant that my eyes smarted in beholding it. By what slow gradations or what swift transmutation, known only to their inmost selves, it came, I cannot say. Though two people were never more meetly chaperoned, they were sometimes alone; and I fancy that change could have become conscious only when they were together in solitude. They came back hand in hand from the volcanic headland where I had first found Roger petulantly staring, and ranged themselves like decorous children before Aunt Miriam and me. The flaming sunset was behind them; the sudden twilight was already darkening the remoter corners of the verandah. Hand in hand, with soft, awe-struck voices, they told us that they were going to be married. It was the gentlest climax I have ever known, yet I felt as if something perfect had passed away. The marvel, as I have said before, was that the previous fortnight could ever have

been. Roger Twining fell manfully in love at sight; nothing but the perfect concord of the two creatures could have kept him like a child with her just so long as she wanted to be a child. You pay for concord like that between man and woman--pay with sacrifices laid on the immemorial altar of sex. Love itself is a fever; and, as if that were not enough, the irrelevant world steps in to point out that marriage is a practical matter. With love announced, the world, the flesh, and the devil troop in. Small wonder that priests bolster marriage up with sacraments!

As luck would have it, Professor Quayle had gone, in a motor-boat, to cruise for a few days among outlying uninhabited islands and far reefs whence he could gather polypi at will. Letitia was under the nominal chaperonage of the British consul's wife, but it had been arranged that she should spend a night or two at the Mission. To this Aunt Miriam now objected. Letitia must not be her guest, she told Roger, until Professor Quayle had sanctioned the betrothal. The flesh had come in, you see, already, and here was the world. The devil got his innings later. Roger affected to be shocked by the conventions--what true lover is not shocked by them?--but Aunt Miriam was adamant. Letitia succumbed dumbly, like a hurt child. It seemed wanton cruelty to part them. That Professor Quayle should refuse Roger was incredible. It was mere superstition, vain as any tabu. I took it upon myself to tell Mrs. Twining this; but she did not move a hair's breadth from her position. Until Letitia's father could give his consent, she would not have Letitia under her roof as Roger's betrothed. She owed it to Professor Quayle. So we took Letitia down to the town again, instead of keeping her with us on the heights.

The prohibition was purely formal, as even Aunt Miriam admitted, and Letitia was at liberty to come each morning and "spend the day." So few of those days of prohibition there were--only three, all told, between the engagement and Professor Quayle's return. Yet, with their atmosphere of trial, of waiting, we seemed to be taking something indefinite, equivocal, painful, into our lungs with each breath we drew. Gone was the happy oxygen of the idyllic fortnight. Sometimes I gazed up at the low-hung stars and clenched my fists and vowed it shouldn't pass; that one instant should suffice for Quayle's consent, and that then Letitia and Roger should wander back hand in hand, for a time, to their Eden. I, their faithful fool, would stand guard between them and the world. Curiously, you see, I did not crave an immediate marriage for them; I craved, rather, a return of the uncapturable days. Nothing had ever

been so beautiful as the fortnight of their idyll. Nothing--I set it down with an unflinching pen--ever has been. I stand committed to that.

They stuck--the dears!--more closely to Aunt Miriam during those days. The world and the flesh, as I was saying, had got in their work. They were not so happy as they had been, though love was in every sweet and modest gesture. I knew--don't ask me how--that they themselves (even as I, the spectator) were looking back rather than forward. Better, infinitely, marriage than this; but, oh, best of all, the unreal days forever past. Their ardor was the tenderest thing imaginable. Even Roger seemed only to want Letitia's hand to hold--quietly, peacefully, in our presence. It was not mawkish, for there was no ulterior suggestion in that simple, mutual caress. Friends, you would have said, if friends ever had just that hunger. But I knew better than that, for my room was next to Roger's, and I knew how he paced his wide porch, sleepless, through the night, and how he was never himself again until the morning when Letitia came stepping through the garden, bringing calm with her. They were bad, those three days of the professor's absence, but so cunningly arranged that each hour was tolerable, almost desirable, compared with the one that followed it. In all that stillness and sweetness, events progressed with catastrophic speed. It seemed as though an unseen hurricane drove us on, though the Trade never ceased its gentle rhythm.

It was the second evening, and the last savored hour before Letitia must descend to the hospitality of the consul's wife. Mrs. Twining stirred the scented air with some faint rebuke of Roger for neglect of duty. He answered, defending himself. Then Aunt Miriam turned to Letitia to make her peace.

"I don't see why you shouldn't go down to the school to-morrow, my dear. You can't know too soon about the work that you will share if you marry Roger."

"Oh, but I couldn't." The girl stopped, as if to find a tone even gentler than that first murmur of hers. "You see, I don't believe any of it."

Aunt Miriam gave no sign of what must have been to her a terrible shock. A strong woman, very. "You mean that you are not a Christian, Letitia?"

"A Christian? Oh no. I've never been to any church. Father has no religion, and of course I think as he does."

"You poor child!"

It must have been Letitia Quayle's beauty that wrung this groan from Mrs. Twining, for on matters of faith she was uncompromising. I felt sick.

"Did you know this, Roger?" His aunt turned to him.

"It never occurred to me to tell him." Letitia threw in. "Does it matter, Roger?"

Twining answered, slowly, heavily, "Not the least bit in the world, my dear."

"You see." The girl turned to Mrs. Twining. "He says it doesn't matter."

"But, Letitia"--Aunt Miriam faltered for an instant, then went on--"how could you, an atheist, marry a Christian missionary? A wife must be a helpmeet."

I breathed more easily now that the fatal word was out; it had not been pronounced before, and it was inevitable that some time it should be.

"I was brought up on all those books Roger has in there. I couldn't believe the Christian religion--though of course it is a very nice religion. I didn't know I should have to teach it. I knew Roger would have to, but I supposed I should just stay at home and love him." Then, with a stifled desperation (but all so gentle--pianissimo): "I haven't thought about marriage much. I've only thought about Roger. And--forgive me, Mrs. Twining--if Roger doesn't mind, need you? He is a missionary himself, you see. He must know best." Then she tried for mirth. "If Roger throws me over--why, then, we shan't have to bother with asking father, shall we? It will all be out of the way before he gets back."

Roger leaned over and grasped Letitia's hand. Mrs. Twining rose from her deep chair and paced the wide verandah once, twice, three times the length of it. Then she stopped before the pair and spoke, and I knew she was trying not to sound harsh:

"Roger will convert you."

The two young things started. They had already had time to forget.

"Oh no, I shan't, Aunt Miriam. I don't want her different in any way."

I, of course, said nothing. The idyll was spoiling slowly before my eyes, attacked first here, then there, by insidious, destructive agents. But the hero and heroine were perfect still. How long would it be before the poison ate in--reached the heart of the idyll, and them?

That night I had two sleepless housemates, I knew; I could hear Aunt Miriam walking about her room. Mrs. Twining was a strong woman. She said nothing to me; she bade Roger good-bye when he went off to the school as naturally as if his religious integrity were not threatened. She greeted Letitia with a serenity that was almost sweetness. Only I, perhaps, knew how deep was her disturbance, for I caught her replacing Primitive Paternity on Roger's shelves with a little disgusted push. I did not know but that she might call on

me to be devil's advocate; to expound to her how one might be non-Christian and yet not heathen. But apparently she was waiting for Quayle's return before making any move. Twining himself, that day, seemed untroubled. He had not yet awakened from his dream. Letitia, too, seemed unconscious. It was only Aunt Miriam and I who, under a sunny sky, put up helpless hands against the coming storm. I was not shocked, as she was, by Letitia's non-religiousness. It hit me in quite another place. Roger Twining was not any too enamoured of his profession, as I well knew; it might be that Letitia would ruin it utterly in his eyes. And if Uncle Ephraim (stout old son of Kingsborough) was a portentous ghost to me, who had never seen him, what must he be to Roger, bowed down under his burden of gratitude--and to Aunt Miriam, who had been flesh of his flesh and soul of his sturdy soul? Only three days before, I had walked in Eden with the untroubled pair. And already my fourth-dimensional world was receding into the original myth. The slow sun gave no sign; but the moon, past the full and rising later each evening, seemed to be marking off the stages of the legend. That very night we should sit in darkness, and we should escort Letitia home, each of us with a lantern in his hand.... Believe me, the moon is the real timekeeper; it is she who marks our human intervals.

It came very suddenly, that night, as we sat looking at the stars. By "it" I mean--oh, it is very hard to tell--the real irruption of the devil, perhaps. The world and the flesh, with their simultaneous utterance of the word "marriage," had had their turn, and they had not been able to shatter the dream. The devil came in, I suppose, with Letitia's paganism (if you can call it that); but that was only his formal entrance, his conventional cue. We were all breathing a little hard, but we were not without hope. There was a deep plot among us--the only time we four conspired together--to put off consideration of the problem, to pretend that there was no problem. Even Aunt Miriam, with a quiet hand on Letitia's knee, seemed to be waiting for it to solve--or dissolve--itself. But the devil had made a good entrance. He was in fine form, I may say. None of us helped him, but he did not need our help.

Letitia, as if with a half-thought of explaining herself, of showing the decency of her impious up-bringing, had given us a wandering narrative of her youth. Mrs. Quayle had died when Letitia was ten. Since then, her life had been the interesting and curious thing I have earlier hinted at. Her stress was not, as it had first been, on the exotic side of that wandering life; rather, I thought, on the important things Professor Quayle had done, and the

distinguished friends they had had in every part of the globe. But Letitia was not herself interested--she was incapable of "side"--and Aunt Miriam asked no eager questions. She had clasped Letitia's hand in hers firmly, as if she would hold her bodily back from Heathenesse. Roger had Letitia's other hand, and so they sat.

Then I was startled by Roger's voice, seeming to come from very far away, from the inmost recesses of the dream in which he walked:

"Do you ever wear blue, Letitia?"

It was the first question he had ever asked her. It brought back to me all the savor of that woodland miracle when we had met her, garlanded, in the forest, and Virginia had flung away her dripping mango unashamed.

"Often. Do you want me in a blue frock?"

"Yes."

"I'll put one on to-morrow. White is what I like best. But why?"

Her tone had changed, as it always changed when she spoke to Roger, and his when he spoke to her. They seemed to strike the same note; their voices mingled; it had nothing to do with the gamut they kept for the rest of the world.

"It's your widow's peak, I think. I used to play with a little girl who wore blue and had yellow hair in a widow's peak. I was very fond of her. What was her name, Aunty?"

Letitia laughed. "Yes, what was her name?"

Mrs. Twining seemed to rouse herself from deafness. "What is it, my dear?"

"The girl I used to play with, who had yellow hair and a widow's peak, and always wore blue?"

Aunt Miriam answered, slowly, "It must have been Mabel Cheyne, Roger."

"I remember Minnie Cheyne. She wasn't like that."

"Mabel was her little sister who died. You played with her in the very beginning. I am surprised that you remember her."

"I don't, very well. It must have been very far back, when I was tiny. I can't say I really remember Mabel, but I do remember the widow's peak and the blue dress. Did I go to her funeral?"

"Of course not!" Mrs. Twining's voice was sharp. "You were far too young to go to funerals. We went, of course. She was a pretty child, and, in your baby way, you were very fond of her. You soon got over it, of course."

"It is odd that I should remember. But you know I've always liked widow's peaks, uncannily, since Mabel--if that was her name. And she must have had blue dresses."

"And you want me to wear blue in memory of her?" Letitia was totally without coquetry, I knew, but I thought she would be amused. There was no amusement in her tone, however--only a blank meekness.

"I don't really care a bit. Only, somehow, blue fits with your hair. I seem to see it that way."

Mrs. Twining turned to her. "He used to play with Mabel every day--such babies they were. In some queer way, it made an impression." It was almost as if she were apologizing for Roger's vagaries.

"As if I cared a hang, dear!" His tone was the Letitia tone again, pure and full--the tone he kept for her. Then I heard it sunk to a whisper. "For me, you are forever and forever in white." I don't think Mrs. Twining heard. She had turned her head away from them.

Though we longed for the moon, she did not rise, and Letitia bravely made ready to go. A little breeze had sprung up from the forest, and the scent of ginger struggled with the frangipani in our nostrils. The stars were very clear. We were all loath, in our own way, I think, to let the moment go. Far down the tree-smothered slope to the east, a native voice rose through our silence, piercing it with melancholy song--some late farer from a feast, winding up a green trail to his village.

"Your father comes back to-morrow?" It was Aunt Miriam who asked it, her hands on the girl's shoulders.

"By ten in the morning, he said."

Aunt Miriam kissed her good-night. "I'll go down and see him, and fetch you back with me, if he'll let me."

"You? And why not I?" Roger broke in.

"You'll be busy, my dear, in the morning. Your work--your calling--your sacred task--must come first of all. Your people mustn't think you put even Letitia"--she kissed the girl--"before them. Of course you will see Professor Quayle--but I must see him, too. Your uncle would have wished it done in that way." There was no gainsaying her tone.

"Can't I bring father up to you?" Even Letitia knew that Mrs. Twining never left the Mission.

"My dear, I stand in my husband's place. I must go to him for Roger. And you children must start at once. It is late, I'm afraid. Good-night." She clasped the girl to her, then kissed Roger and went into the house.

I was privately amused that Mrs. Twining's conservatism should choose to take, in this instance, so European a form. The gesture didn't "go" with her, but her firmness did, and I saw afresh how Roger was both supported and handicapped. Wonderful Aunt Miriam!

We stood, the three of us, looking at the stars for a moment before starting down the trail. A faint radiance in the east showed that the moon was on her way to us. How I wish we had waited for her--defied the world, the flesh, and the devil; prolonged that moment, and seen her rise! But we did not. We plunged into the forest on our downward path--I in front, like a link-boy; Letitia and Roger (the darlings!), hand in hand, behind me. My heart was very light over the little matter of creeds; they were so beautiful, those two, together. That, of course, was the devil getting well down to his part--my lightness of heart, I mean.

The next day was, as it were, the last; and I hardly know how to chronicle it for you. I will at least leave out every irrelevant thing, though it was packed, wilfully, with irrelevancies. The native boy who came running to Roger at dawn, because his father was dying; the snake I killed after breakfast in the garden; the sudden shower that came drenchingly down and delayed Mrs. Twining's expedition to the town--all those things were irrelevant, though they figured in the general irritation of our hearts. Personally, I could hardly wait for the old ex-chief to die, leaving Roger free, or until Aunt Miriam should return, leading Letitia as a bride. I could not read; it was too wet to stroll; I was of no use to any human being. The time seemed very long before Mrs. Twining came back from her unusual journey--gray as wood-ash, and without Letitia. Roger had not yet returned.

She faced me as I met her at the steps, then flung up her hands above her noble head, and passed by me without speaking. Inside the house I heard one low groan. I rushed to her, for I was frightened. "Take care of Roger. Keep him away from me," she said, in a voice that sounded rusty with age, and passed on to her own room. I heard the key turn.

When Roger did come back, an hour later, exhausted and eager, I could not help him. Letitia had not come. His aunt was locked in her own room, and a terrible silence brooded over the scene. Even Loo seemed to be performing his tasks in a vacuum, for I had neither seen nor heard him.

Roger got admittance to Mrs. Twining's room, and I spent the longest half-hour I have ever lived, while I waited for him on the headland amid the cocoa-palms, looking out to sea. I say "waited." I had no knowledge of whether he would come to me; but there I could be either reached or avoided, and even a madman would know that I was discreetly out of earshot of the house.

Finally Roger stood before me, white from head to foot--even his face and his hands were white as the linen he wore. I held out my hand; he took it, and with sudden violence pulled me to my feet. The devil had got in his work.

"Has she told you?"

"Nothing." I was trembling--physically, I mean. But the young athlete before me stood like a rock.

"Will you go down at once and see Letitia?"

"For God's sake, go yourself!" I did not know what was the matter, but I felt sure that neither man nor woman, neither science nor creed, could withstand Roger Twining when he looked like that.

"She lied to me last night."

"Who? What?"

"Aunt Miriam. About Mabel Cheyne."

"Mabel Cheyne?" I had forgotten the name. I tried to pull my hand from his, to get far enough away from him to focus him, to define his aberration. But his hand was a trap for mine.

"There was no Mabel Cheyne."

"What of it?"

"Letitia is my sister."

I sank back so suddenly that, involuntarily, he let me go. There was nothing to add to that statement; no need to trace its birth and growth from Aunt Miriam's sudden fear, the night before, to the corroboration she had received that morning from Professor Quayle. No need to assemble the evidence; it had been assembled, put together, with tense accuracy, by two suffering, gray-haired people that morning.

Roger Twining had no great desire for speech, I could see. But a few more words were wrung from him: "Letitia never knew until to-day that she was an orphan, that she had been adopted. I'm older. I remembered her, you see, without realizing. You must go to her and talk to her, I am going off to be alone." And he turned from me toward the forest. Just once he looked back: "Don't be afraid; I'll be back in a few hours. Not to lunch. I don't want any." He disappeared among the huge breadfruit-trees.

I didn't go to Letitia. I would in time, I thought, if Roger insisted; but not now, not until I had some notion of what to say. I felt, too, that I must not leave at once. I did not wish to go farther away from Roger, or farther away from Mrs. Twining. Each pulled me with invisible cords, as though I were their defender. When I could think of ten words I could say to Letitia Quayle without touching on a raw wound, I would go. Just now I could not stir.

All sense of time left me. In my retreat I was blind to the sun that might have told me how the hours were passing. Forward and back, forward and back, I went in my dreary mind, from one impossible course of action to another. All through those hours I grew at once more inert and more ashamed of my inertia. My will rose with great gasps to lift me from where I sat; then fell back paralyzed before this or that clear perception of my helplessness. It was the heat of early afternoon, penetrating my high palm roof, that drove me back at last to the house.

Luncheon lay on the table, untasted and undisturbed, hardened into a disgusting effigy of food. Mrs. Twining met me in another room. Her face was drawn and twisted, as though she had had a "stroke," but she spoke clearly:

"Where is Roger?"

I shrugged my shoulders vaguely. "Safe--off there, somewhere--alone."

"Go and find him."

This seemed to be just the urge I needed. I started off obediently. She must have divined that I knew, for as I left the porch she said, in a very low voice:

"I knew there was a little sister, though until to-day I never knew who took her. But when Roger remembered, last night, I suddenly grew afraid. Just for an instant they looked alike. So I lied."

I walked slowly, hardly directing my footsteps, except that of course I went the way I had seen Roger go. My feet dragged; but by this time my brain was blessedly numb, and I was no longer afraid to present myself with my errand undone. I had lost the sense of faithlessness to duty.

I found him at last beside the musical waterfall, in the deep-shaded, vine-hung ravine. He had wandered back to that scene of passionate innocence, and now sat by the pool where, a few days before, I had seen her drink from the cup he held. He did not question me as I sat down beside him; in silence, in our respective ways, we pieced together the rent fragments of that most beautiful dream. We must both have been very tired, for Twining did not speak at all and I found my eyes drowsily closing to match that blessed anæsthesia of the spirit. The only sounds I heard were the unchanging sounds

of Nature, and the remembered voices of my two friends at play in Eden. I saw the green dazzle of leaves, the tender vividness of blossoms, and, now and then, moving as by right among those natural sweetnesses, the white figure of Letitia. I must almost have dreamed in earnest, for during a little space of time I recaptured the unrecapturable. It was as it had been, and we were happy, out of the world.

Finally Roger stirred violently, and I shook myself awake to see him standing, with that face of rock, beside me, staring. Just for a moment I thought it was a dream come true, for, though the things about me were sharp with reality, Letitia stood there before us in the flesh, and spoke--the same white Letitia who had come to us laughing from behind a palm-tree.

"I ran away," she said, very quietly. "Father doesn't know. I thought you would be here. So I came, straight."

She smiled at me--wonderful child!--and held out her hand to Roger. The blood came back into his face, but he did not take her hand. He folded his arms instead, and bent his dark eyes on the ground.

The girl shook her head very sadly, and smiled more sadly still. "May I sit down?" And she went to the rock where she had sat drinking from the cup he held.

If I had not been able to obey Roger's earlier command to go and talk to Letitia Quayle, I could still less talk to her there, before him. I turned, in silence, to go up the trail down which the white figure had just come.

"Don't go." She stopped me. "Roger and I don't mind. And I'd rather you would hear what I have to say. It's better so. Come, Roger, sit down."

She placed me, by her tone, where they had always tacitly placed me in the days now so diabolically reproduced. I was again their faithful fool. She did not touch him, but she beckoned him to sit near her. To my surprise, he sank down in the exact spot she pointed to. I drew off to a little distance, my heart near to breaking.

"Father means to take me away on the Rarotonga to-morrow," she said, "and of course he didn't think I'd want to see you again. But I had to say good-bye, didn't I?"

She tucked her feet up under her like a little girl, and, like a little girl, began plaiting the fronds of a fern. Roger still had not spoken. I did not wonder. How could he speak to a child like that of the dark things that lay between them? What words could he use? And as I looked once more, stealthily, at him, my pity gushed out afresh; for he, too, seemed unready for

life, a beautiful young body with soul scarce budded. Yet if he had been the unformed lad I felt him, he would have stretched out his hand and taken hers--as of old.

"It is good-bye, Roger, dear, I suppose." She had thrown off her hat, and now she bent her head so low over her frond-weaving that I could not see the little peak of hair. "And never again, until we are very old...." Oh, how softly her words came, scarce audible above the waterfall! "I didn't know anything could hurt so. But we're hurt together. That's one thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's one thing." It was the first time he had spoken, but his voice struck the very note of hers. I turned my head away.

"You won't even take my hand, will you?" she went on, in her gentle, wondering tone.

He shook his head.

I got up softly, meaning to leave them--to lose myself, at least, just beyond in the trail. I could not endure to be there. A terrible altar was slowly being raised by that secret waterfall; terrible as the altar that legend said had once abided in that spot. It was not meant for me to see the rearing of that sacrificial stone.

But Letitia held me with a gesture of her little hand. "No, you must not go. We must not be alone. I ran away.... It wouldn't be fair."

"Then you must come with me." I knew only that this poignancy must not be prolonged.

"I will." And she got up, flinging her fronds away. "Good-bye, Roger." She did not hold out her hand. He stood five paces away from her, his leaden eyes still seeking the ground.

"Not just my hand--once?" she pleaded with him.

And again he shook his head.

"Because it is good-bye."

Nothing broke the silence.

Then suddenly she moved to his side--close to him, although she did not touch him. I heard her voice change utterly. I saw her face flush, and her eyes draw his unwilling eyes to her. "Because--listen, Roger--if you choose, I'll stay forever. I don't understand anything; I don't believe anything; and nothing they say makes any difference. I love you better than the whole world, or what you call God, or anything. No one is real but you--the rest is just what people get out of books!"

She had flung her head back as she spoke, and I saw her face unforgettably there before me--changed as her voice was changed, the face of a woman hard beset, tragic with passion, beautiful with utter unconsciousness of self. The rite was being accomplished before me. I stood, rooted.

Then Roger Twining did a strange thing. He leaned to her and passed his shaking hand over her beautiful, ageless face as you would pass your hand over a mask. She closed her eyes to his touch, bending forward in complete docility. When he took his hand away, she opened her eyes and smiled up at him as she had smiled of old. The face that had leaped out at us as from an immemorial dark myth was gone, and there again stood the fresh apparition of the forest.

"Good-bye, Letitia. Malcolm will take you back. Good-bye, dear." And Roger grew young again before my eyes, a boy, biting his lips not to cry.

"Good-bye!" Her voice chimed in with his, and I led her away from the storied spot. Before the bushes closed over us I looked back once. Roger was lying face down on the ground, his shoulders heaving. Letitia's eyes inquired of mine.

"He's all right, dear," I soothed her. "I'll take care of him. It's just hell for a little. Don't look back. Don't do anything that would be cruel to him."

I spoke as to a child, and like a child she followed me, unquestioningly, up the trail.

Sea-Green

The first night, I remember, was not so bad. One braces oneself, I suppose, for a first encounter with people who have power over one. I was a free man, according to any legal fiction that may prevail; but I was young, and poor, and ambitious. Youth, poverty, and ambition put you in the clutch of the older, richer, and devilishly detached people who dally with the notion of giving you a living wage in return for services rendered. If I had refused to be in the Fenbys' power, I should presently have been in the clutch of a bony allegorical figure you might call Destitution. So I use the phrase advisedly. Poor Ralph had taken my last cent--my last ten-dollar bill, anyhow--so that it was important for me to get on with these Fenbys. Old Crowninshield had recommended me to them as tutor for their grandson. It was the first and last thing old Crowninshield ever did for me; and I have never known whether to be grateful or not.

My drive from the station was accomplished in the leisurely twilight of late May; but there was afterglow enough to show me that the region had neither physical charms nor social resources. The mansion seemed to have been left high and dry by the retreating human wave. We passed one darkened factory and a bunch of gaunt wooden tenements--stuck in the fields a mile beyond the station, with the casual gesture industry sometimes makes in our older Eastern states. There was not a hill, not a lake, not a brook, even, for all it was such open country. The man who drove me had a kind of taciturn humor. I placed him at once: an old Irish dependent who had by this time forgotten all about Ireland. His type was so familiar to me (I had been brought up in the next state) that I could almost foretell the drawing-room furniture. It would not, of course, be called the "drawing-room." The carriage was comfortable and had once had style. After three-quarters of an hour I alighted at the steps of an ugly stone house, built evidently in the 'fifties. The figure on the threshold was obviously my employer. A lantern swinging from the porch roof enabled me to decide that at once. He leaned on a gold-headed stick--of course. Any man to whom Old Crowninshield confidently recommended you would lean on a gold-headed stick.

Mr. and Mrs. Fenby had waited supper for me; and I came down from my neat, faded, comfortable room, as soon as possible, to sit with them. The little boy had gone to bed, I was told. A gaunt maid served us with excellent

food--things that, belonging peculiarly to supper, make you wonder why we are ever such fools as to dine at night. I can scarcely say that our talk was lively, but I had a vivid sense that they meant it to be so. Whether they were bent on proving that they were not out of the current, or merely anxious to set me at my ease, I could not tell. Old Mr. Fenby was both pompous and nervous; evidently accustomed to be deferred to, yet suspicious of the world's having gone beyond him. His wife seemed--but of course I knew my imagination might be playing me tricks--to be secretly deriding, in some polished corner of her mind, both his pretensions and his fears. She was a small woman, white-haired and very wrinkled, and her mouth twisted a little to one side. She scarcely spoke, except to ask me a question or to agree very positively with her husband. Probably it was the unnatural twist of her lips that gave at once a sardonic effect to her stilted, harmless talk. The first night, as I said, was not so bad. The Fenbys seemed, if not precisely eager to please me, at least unwilling that I should think ill of them. Old Mr. Fenby, I remember, mentioned explicitly various privileges that would be mine--the run of his library for my own purposes, complete control over Carol's mind and morals, a horse to ride if I cared for one, and (this from him surprised me exceedingly) breakfast in my own room. Of course, nothing of any sort could be settled off-hand; I should have to grow into the house and its ways. I merely expressed myself politely with reference to his kind suggestions. As the clock struck, I saw by certain mechanical gestures, some little involuntary stir on their part, that something usually happened at that hour.

"We retire very early," began Mr. Fenby.

"And always have prayers at nine," his wife concluded for him.

Four women entered the room. My coachman was evidently exempt. Three of them--the maid who had served us and two others--might have been (forgive the undignified word) triplets. I had not noticed the waitress particularly; but their joint effect was very grim. They were like the Græ. The fourth was younger and of a different mould and race. The three who had not yet seen me--the young one and two of the Græ--gave me one respectful, curious stare. I was puzzled by the respectfulness of the youngest one. She did not have the air, as she came in, of respecting any one in the room except me. Prayers over, Mrs. Fenby mentioned to me the names of the maids, as they filed out: "Hannah" (the waitress) "you know; Martha--the cook; Rachel--the chambermaid."

"And--?" I pointed to the back of the younger woman.

Mrs. Fenby looked at her husband and busied herself with extinguishing one of the lamps.

"Miss Susan." Mr. Fenby answered me. "She would prefer to be called Miss Susan. She is accustomed to it. Her position is a little anomalous, perhaps, but we are used to her. She has no employment, yet we keep her busy. She sews for my wife, puts up preserves, orders the meals. She"--he smiled a little--"she does not consider herself precisely a servant. Nor do we. She has been with us a great many years."

"I see," and I was turning away.

"No, perhaps you do not see. We have spoiled her, I admit, but she is not of the servant class. We treat her more or less as one of the family. She is a dependent, but of good birth. I only mention all this to explain to you why perhaps it would be better for you not to ask any service of her. She makes herself indispensable to us, but she has never lived with any one in a menial capacity. Indeed, she has never lived in any house but this."

"Except, of course, her parents'." Again Mrs. Fenby concluded her husband's sentence for him.

"Of course, except her parents'. Mr. Sladen understood me. I meant 'lived' as one says it of servants. I really need not have gone into it so extensively, but I wished to warn Mr. Sladen not to treat her like the others. Miss Susan is so quiet that her own manner might not have made it clear."

"Quite so. Good-night, Mr. Sladen." Mrs. Fenby offered me an exquisite claw. "You will not see much of Miss Susan, in any case. She sits with me a good deal; and Carol is not fond of her. He is delighted that you have come. I could hardly get him to go to sleep to-night. Hannah will leave a tray outside your door at eight."

Mr. Fenby saw me to my room.

It did not take me long to get acquainted with my pupil. He did indeed seem glad to see me; and who could blame him? The Fenbys were obviously respectable and rich; and I gathered vaguely that they intended to send Carol to a good preparatory school (if I could get him ready) and then to the oldest college in the country. Their moral attitude seemed to have been transmitted to them intact from worthy ancestors. But they were not cheerful people for a child to consort with, especially as all future benefits to Carol were explicitly contingent on his good behavior. I did not believe for a moment that his grandparents, if he turned out badly at school, would send him to work in the gaunt factory beyond their gates, but if Carol had said that he believed it, I

should not necessarily have thought him stupid. The Fifth Commandment was all over the place, and there was, besides, a tang of Isaac Watts in the air. The old people seemed fond of the boy, yet anxious to conceal their fondness both from him and from all the other inmates of the household. That twist of attitude I had seen before: they were simply marching with their own generation, in the rut of their racial tradition.

I grew fond of him, of course. He was an attractive child, with something mutinous and elfin in him that occasionally gave me pause. He would grow up into either a charmer or a beast, was my conclusion at the end of a few weeks. He had good parts, but loathed coercion; was willing to learn like lightning at certain hours, or to have adorable manners when he happened to be in a ruffled and powdered mood. He was very fond of me, I may say, so far as I could tell; and I kept him with me as much as possible. After all, it didn't matter what he said before me, and I jealously didn't want him making temperamental breaks before his grandparents, who might not like them. We worked in the morning, and walked or did other outdoor things in the afternoon. After supper Carol went to bed; and the big library--really a fine collection in a rather magnificent old room--stood open to me during the evening hours. Mr. Fenby always sat with his wife after supper; and they went to bed after nine-o'clock prayers. Many enchanted midnights found me beneath a mild old lamp in the Fenbys' library. That was real freedom; they asked of me only to remain in the room five minutes after extinguishing the lamp, and to go up-stairs without a candle. Old Mrs. Fenby was mortally afraid of fire; as well she may have been, for no help could have come to us except from the coachman and gardener. By the time anything arrived from the town, the place would have been in ruins.

It was a curious household--so much bodily comfort and so little amenity. The Gray Sisters cooked, cleaned, and waited with a grim and noiseless perfection; but I never saw one of them smile, even at Carol. They were, of course, not really sisters--could not have been, I mean; for I never knew the facts. Nature does not provide three such in one hour of labor. But they might easily have been kin in the spiritual sense--lay sisters of some harsh and secret order, fruit of some strange Protestant aberration. Their silent co-operation seemed more than habit: they seemed to be bound by a like vow; their minds, like their faces, were all in one mould. I inwardly congratulated Mrs. Fenby; no triumph of perfectly matched footmen could equal the psychologic indistinguishability of Hannah, Martha, and Rachel. Miss Susan was another

matter. Perhaps, I thought, you have to pay for three such maids with a discord like Miss Susan. She was as quiet as Mrs. Fenby had said; and I hardly ever had occasion to speak to her. I gathered from Carol that she sometimes came to meals with them when they were alone; but she never did while I was there. “Doesn’t want to, I suppose,” he suggested in his charming treble. “Does what she pleases, I guess. I don’t like her.” I could not discover the ground of his dislike. Certainly she never, so far as I could see, interfered with him in any way. I didn’t like to probe Carol; but I wondered whether he, with his sensitive precocity, had noticed, as I had, the strange barometric effect of her changing expression. There were times when, scarce seen, she lowered over the house like a dull and thunderous sky; and once, coming upon her at the turn of a winding corridor, I seemed to be face to face with a wandering flame. For the most part, however, she effaced herself into oblivion; and it has often happened to me to be startled, on passing Mrs. Fenby’s open door, to see Miss Susan sitting beside the old lady’s couch. I did not mean, a moment since, to hint that Miss Susan was beautiful. Usually you passed her by without looking or wishing to look. She wore habitually a black frock with a white apron; her eyes were always lowered; her thick chestnut hair was done precisely like Hannah’s or Rachel’s. She spoke, if at all, so briefly that one scarcely knew if her voice or her diction were good. Carol’s remarks surprised me. I should have said that she was terribly afraid of both her employers; afraid, in true servile fashion, of endangering her position, losing her asylum. I did not hear her subjected to verbal harshness, but Mrs. Fenby had a way of watching her that was scarcely short of insult.

I am recording all this because I feel that it is important: it clears up a little for me that turbid interlude to recall, back to the very beginning, any detail I can of the Fenby household. These scattered notes of memory may be insignificant, considering the shape events presently took, yet I like to clarify my recollections to that extent.

One night in early July, I was sitting late in the library. The day had been hot; the evening was blessedly cool. With a kind of wonder I had heard the family and servants depart to their rooms. How could one refuse to await Nature’s apology for the heat of noon? A west wind wandered in through the screened windows, carrying with it the close-blended sweetness of flowering shrubs outside on the lawn. Even the oil-lamp beside me did not oppress. I found no end of things, first and last, in old Mr. Fenby’s library--books that I had always meant to read and never had read. There was time in those

peaceful evening periods for works in many volumes. There was nothing to hurry me: it would take me a year at least to get Carol ready for any school.

I was turning a page of Sir Charles Grandison, somewhere midway of the work, where he is practising his steps among Clementina's relatives. You can imagine that, if I had time for eight volumes of punctilio and smelling-salts, I was wrapped thick in leisure. It must have been near midnight; and that I was not weary of Harriet Byron shows, I think, that I was not sleepy.

It was not a noise that reft me from Harriet Byron; it was a vague visual sense of a companion in the room. Slowly I looked up, wondering; for it was three hours since every one else in the house had gone to bed. It is difficult to trace the history of a sense-impression on its path to the brain, but I must have thought that it was Mrs. Fenby, for I remember rising, alarmed that such a frail old creature should be wandering about at night without a candle. The woman shut the door, very slowly and softly--as slowly and softly as she must have opened it--and I saw, completely at a loss to know why, that it was Miss Susan.

She glided--only thus can I express her noiseless progress--across to the window, and closed that, with infinite precaution, and still without speaking. We were now shut into the library together. Apparently then she felt safe,

though she breathed heavily and her hand went to her heart in the typical feminine gesture. She came and stood very close to me before she spoke. Her chestnut hair was loosened about her face, and was drawn forward over her shoulders in two magnificent braids. Her face was very white, with two beautiful feverish spots of color on the cheek-bones. She was swathed from neck to foot in some sort of dressing-gown--a wadded, brocaded, sea-green garment, shapeless and rich and ancient like a cere-cloth; something, I judged automatically, that Mrs. Fenby must have pulled out of a cedar chest and given to her in a fit of irony. It became her well; which is simply to say, I suppose, that, clad in a rich stuff, the whole texture of her seemed immediately to have changed. Her skin, I saw, was fine; one imagined a supple sleekness of body beneath those sea-green folds. I remembered Cinderella and the ball.

I had time for this impression before she spoke--bending very close to me and almost whispering the first words:

"May I ask you a question? Will you excuse my intruding?"

The tone and words did not go with the vision. She spoke as humbly as if Mrs. Fenby had sent her.

"Surely, surely--" I stammered out. "Won't you sit down?"

She shook her head, and we remained standing.

"It is only that--I don't quite know how to explain." Miss Susan twisted one lustrous braid of hair in her hand nervously.

"Why not?" I smiled a little to put her at her ease.

"It is only this." She tossed her head, shaking her braids back. Her voice grew stronger. She was now speaking in almost a normal tone. "I am very ignorant. I have never had the chance to learn as much as I wanted. Could you sometimes let me have one of Carol's old lesson-books? History, geography, arithmetic, Latin--anything. I have a good deal of time to myself."

"Do you, indeed, Miss Susan? I should not have thought it."

"Oh yes." Her affirmation had a sharp edge--whether of bitterness or boredom I could not say; but certainly of some very un-Cinderella-like emotion. "Evenings, for example. I go to sleep very late, and I really am anxious to learn. Of course I want only the books that Carol has finished with."

"You don't use the library, then?"

"Mr. Fenby would not like that. But how could he object to my using old school-books? And I thought you would know which ones Carol did not need."

"He needs very few."

"Is he clever?" Again there was an edge--was it of hostility?--in her tone.

"Rather!"

"Then he will be through with his books all the sooner. May I have them?"

"Of course, there is no conceivable objection on my part," I began. "They aren't my books, even, you know."

"No, they're theirs. Or Carol's, perhaps. I don't know about those things." She paused a moment, then looked up at me sharply from under the thick brown ridge of her eyebrows. "Are you afraid to give them to me for fear Mr. and Mrs. Fenby will mind?"

"No. Why should I be? I suppose I thought it odd that you didn't speak to them instead of to me." My honest thought came out thus. Then I wondered.... "If there is anything in the world that I can do, I shall be glad to--if you really want to begin Latin, for example. I am just starting Carol."

She appeared to consider. "But he would be using the book himself, wouldn't he?"

"Not at any hour when you would be using it." I laughed. "Especially not in the evening."

"I wouldn't ask you many questions, and I could always return the books here in the early morning."

"Done, then. What do you most want? I will get them for you to-morrow."

"Oh, almost anything. What Carol has had will do for me to begin on." She smiled gratefully, but not at me. She looked away as she smiled. Apparently her errand was quite finished, for she moved towards the door.

"Miss Susan!" I could not help it. I felt I must ask her. "Why should the Fenbys mind your teaching yourself out of the boy's books? Why do you think they would? Do you fancy they would be afraid--"

"That I might better myself if I had more education?" She took the words out of my mouth--though I may say I shouldn't have uttered just those. "Yes, I think they would be afraid of that. That's why I don't like to ask them."

"But why haven't you bought text-books long since?"

"Oh, if I had had money to buy text-books with--" She shrugged her shoulders and turned her back on me, moving again towards the door. But I had seen the sudden crimson in her cheeks before she turned; and I did not pursue her with more words. She opened the library door and shut it again behind her, as quietly as she had done it before.

In a few moments I blew out the lamp; and I sat loyally in the dark for five minutes, keeping my promise to Mrs. Fenby. The elegant Harriet Byron no

longer intrigued me, whereas poor Miss Susan did. I was forced to infer that she served my employers for food and shelter rather than for wages. It seemed rather niggardly of them, for there was evidently plenty of money. I wondered a little why she had never married. For under the lamplight the truth had come out--Miss Susan, give her half a chance, was handsome. Not only that: she was handsome in no forbidding way. There was, in her presence, a potential--mind, I don't say actual--invitation to woo. She wasn't a bit like the Græ. There was enough reticence there to banish the thought of intrigue; but that she shouldn't have married in her lustrous youth seemed odd--a pretty little problem in fatalities. After all, though (it came to me as I mounted the dark stairs), any suitor would have had to walk many miles to reach her in that mansion; and an anomalous position like hers is not the predestined setting for a bride. She had ambition, evidently, still; but a worn and warped ambition that asked only for Carol's old school-books. Hang the Fenbys! She should have them. I would teach her the Greek verb at midnight if she thought it would please her. Her hair had been magnificent against that sea-green stuff.

The encounter which I have just related was the first of three. I saw Miss Susan daily, as I saw the Gray Sisters; but my casual meetings with her about the house--when, as of old, she slipped by me, eyes lowered, in her black dress--were empty of personal savor. I did not even, for many days, have a chance to hand over the school-books I had sifted out for her. Mrs. Fenby's régime for her was iron. Sometimes I even wondered if Miss Susan had really visited me--if, rather, she had done anything save "appear" as a ghost does. Was it perhaps some eidolon of her, some unconscious projection of a stifled desire, that had met me face to face in the library? Had she walked in her sleep? Or, more precisely, had some aspect, some fragment, of her personality visited me while the familiar part of her lay sleeping? In such reflections--when Carol left me time for reflection--I spent the next ten days. Most of all in the library at night, alone with my eighteenth-century books, did I wonder; and more than once I lifted my eyes to see if the door would open on a sea-green shape.

They were to be three, my genuine encounters with Miss Susan under that roof--each one violently and strangely different from the others. They deepened--those three scenes--to the climax, as cunningly as if they had been staged. I do not think she ever knew that, or thought for one instant what must be the dramatic history of my attitude to her. The first chute de rideau

she might have planned; the others, in essence, she was innocent of. I do not believe she ever once calculated her effect on me.

Ten days after her request for school-books--a request that, as I explained, she had never given me the chance to fulfil (for, after all, she had to seek me out; I could not mount to her attic), I sat again late in the library. July was heavy upon us, and there was no cool west wind. For very heat, I could not go to bed, and I marvelled that others could. Mrs. Fenby had the immunity to heat of her fragility. She was one of those thin old creatures who wear a shawl in the hottest weather, as if their veins stored ice that was in perpetual need of thawing. Her husband, however, was of a sanguine constitution, full-fleshed and flushing easily. I should have expected him to share my vigils, though I was always grateful to hear his heavy footsteps following his wife's up-stairs. Night by night they ascended together, like an aging mastiff and a decrepit parrot. Hannah, Martha, and Rachel would follow presently, dogging each other closely, the three making a single indistinguishable smudge on the twilit staircase. Miss Susan usually preceded them all.

The night was hotter than any other even in that hot July. I could not read with comfort, and while I got over a good many pages, it was by dint of changing my position constantly and drinking ice-water in great gulps. Some time after eleven I went out through the French window to the porch. The covered porch was as hot as the room; I stepped down on the lawn. At least the ceiling of the lawn was high! I strolled up and down, wondering if I shouldn't simply fling myself down on cool turf to spend the night under the stars. Of course, though, if I did, I should have to go in first and put out that wretched lamp. Instinctively, with the thought, I looked toward the house. Framed in the French window of the library was a sea-green figure.

"Oh!" That ejaculation was wrenched from me. Why, on such a hot night? Well, I would give her the books and then come out and throw myself on the grass. I walked across to the long window. She stepped aside for me to enter.

I found the books for her and handed them over with a few curt words. It was, for some reason, annoying to have waited vainly all those days, and now, at this torrid moment, to be called to account. My enthusiasm for this spinster's schooling had ebbed. Yet, as she stood beside me, asking eager questions, the second self of Miss Susan--call it what you will--wrought upon me again. My second impression was more vivid than my first had been, probably because it had the first, for past, to go upon. Suspicions resolved themselves into conclusions. I did not need to note again details I had already

noted. The whiteness of her skin, the sheen of her hair, the suppleness of her form beneath its rich shroud, I took for granted now; and I proceeded to take in other details: a vague scent about her sea-green draperies, a small foot pushed out in its slipper beneath the swirling hem of her gown, the excellent shape of her slightly roughened hands. But most of all, as we faced each other across the marble chimney-piece (having withdrawn by common impulse from the tropic radius of the lamp-ray), were her eyes revealed to me. I met them, glowing in the dimness, with a kind of shock. In point of fact, as I realized, I had never seen Miss Susan's eyes before. She seemed quite unconscious of the kind of figure she cut: I dare say she was. No intention was revealed to me, at all events; only an unsuspected capacity--for what? Well, for being like other women; that was all. Imagine how little like other women she must have seemed, day by day, going about the Fenbys' business! And a sea-green gown, of no fashion and unquestioned age, had done it. The only malice you could record against Miss Susan was her wearing it at all--her thinking it worth while, for the sake of some starved sense in her, to masquerade to herself in a bit of cast-off finery. I did not even then believe that she had "dressed up" for me. If it had occurred to me, I could have felt only pity for an instinct that had to satisfy itself with a dressing-gown that came from Mrs. Fenby's grandmother.

So we stood, exchanging a few words about the Latin grammar. "You are very kind," was the most personal thing said between us, and she said it as humbly as if I had tipped her.

"If you have any questions, I should be glad to answer them. And surely you don't need to sit up to all hours to ask them. Almost any time in the day when I see you--"

"I don't dare in the day-time. Really, it is better not." Her acknowledged fear sat oddly on her magnificence. So, too, did her desire for book-learning. You could have imagined her--in sea-green--wanting a personal success; I couldn't readily imagine her--in sea-green--caring to spell correctly. That creature ought to have despised the technique of respectability--though she looked, too, as innocent as gunpowder that has never heard of a gun. I felt all this a little thickly and incoherently. I can't give you her effect so logically as I should like. I was very young when I encountered Miss Susan.

She was starting to go away, I think--at all events, she had removed her vague, burning glance from me--when I heard a voice in the hall. Immediately

the door was thrown open--quietly; but no other human being could quite achieve the soundlessness of Miss Susan's performance.

Mr. Fenby, candle in hand, confronted us. The books--she was just taking them from my hand--dropped to the floor with a little crash. The noise woke me to a daylight reality. I almost expected the sea-green wrapper to change in a twinkling to black stuff, and the braids of hair to arrange themselves in compact Cinderella fashion on Miss Susan's head. But she did not change in any respect. She was evidently too much surprised to adventure even into another manner all at once.

"What is this?" He stormed impartially at us both.

"Miss Susan asked me for some text-books. I found them and gave them to her. She was just taking them up-stairs."

"Carol's text-books?"

"Yes," I answered, "Carol's text-books. He is quite through with them. Have you any objection, Mr. Fenby?"

Miss Susan had not crumpled yet. She was quite self-possessed.

"Of course I have." Mr. Fenby didn't precisely shout, but his voice sounded to my nervous ear like summer thunder. "What right have you to Carol's books? They belong to my dead son's boy. Pick them up."

I stooped and gathered up the books. I was not going to see any woman obeying orders issued in that tone.

"Your dead son's boy." She spoke musingly. "No, I never did care for your dead son."

"And you come here, at night, in that costume"--he pointed a scornful finger at her--"to get up an intrigue with this young man!"

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Fenby," I said, roundly. "I don't know why Miss Susan wants text-books, but neither could I be supposed to see why she shouldn't have them. She has been here only five minutes, and I have been explaining to her how she had better begin. We have had no conversation whatever on any other subject, so you will kindly reverse your opinion."

"I'm not accusing you of anything, young man. I don't suppose you'd look at her. But you"--he turned to Miss Susan--"traipsing around my house at midnight--not even in a decent dress--your hair down--It's disreputable, you--"

I won't repeat the word he used. It's sufficiently well known to be guessed.

Before I could reply, either for myself or for Miss Susan, a tottering figure stood in the doorway. Mrs. Fenby had crept down after her husband, and was

now making her way to his side. She stood there, hunched and rounded and frail in dressing-gown and shawl, facing her husband and the other woman.

"That is no word for you to use to Susan, Horace." Her voice was very thin and piping, but she got an effective emphasis all the same.

He did not answer at once, but his rage against Miss Susan appeared to abate. Or, at least, rage seemed to pass out of him, like air from a deflated balloon. His wife's eyes and his fixed each other during this shrinking process; to my imagination, dark accusations passed silently between them. When those few instants had passed, Mrs. Fenby turned to Miss Susan. Her words came shrill and sudden.

"Go, woman! My husband is right. I have no doubt of your intentions. But it shall not happen again. What deceptions you have practised on this misguided young man it is not for me to say or to know. But they shall not be practised any further. My household is safe from you. Do you understand? Safe! I will see to that. Carol's tutor should have been sacred even to you."

"Mrs. Fenby!" I, in my turn, almost shouted. "I have already told your husband that Miss Susan came to me with a request for some paltry school-books. She said she wished to study by herself. I gave them to her. I don't know the meaning of all your abominable talk, but it has nothing to do with any facts I know anything about. If you choose to insult her privately, I can't control it, I suppose; but you shall not insult her in my presence with lies. I did not see at first why she had to conceal so innocent a request from you and Mr. Fenby, but I do see now, and I shouldn't have believed it possible!"

Miss Susan came forward and offered her hand to me. "Thank you," she said. "I didn't know men ever spoke the truth. Apparently they do. You're good for that, whether you are good for anything else or not." She smiled straight into my face, maliciously--as if she had, after all, in many ways found me wanting. Then she turned to Mr. and Mrs. Fenby. "As for you two"--some word seemed to stick in her throat--"I apologize. It shall not happen again. Your grandson's books shall be sacred."

And, lifting the little pile from the chimney-piece, she flung them on the floor. Apparently the gesture relieved her pent emotion, for with it all passion--and likewise all lustre--seemed to ebb from her. In spite of her costume, she looked like her daily self once more. "I apologize," she repeated. "I wouldn't have done it if I had known."

The words were spoken to Mrs. Fenby alone. She turned her back on the husband.

Miss Susan's movements had brought her very near the mistress of the house; and at this point Mrs. Fenby, with a myopic start, caught at the sea-green sleeve and held it to her eyes. "Wretched girl!" she piped. "You wore this--down here--at midnight!"

"Yes, I did. But I never will again," and the sea-green figure passed out into the hall.

"I am cold, Horace--cold!" All Mrs. Fenby's shrillness had gone. She cowered against her husband in a shivering revulsion. Apparently she was crying.

"Of course you are cold. You must go back to bed," he said, vaguely, while with one hand he mopped the sweat from his own brow. "Take my arm. Or--if Mr. Sladen will go up-stairs ahead of us, I will give you my dressing-gown to put round you."

Mrs. Fenby's teeth were chattering. There was nothing for it but to put out the lamp and precede them, letting Mr. Fenby give his wife that extra covering. This I did. After all, I wanted an interval of solitude before the inevitable explanations came.

But the inevitable explanations, paradoxically, did not come. Mr. Fenby, in his wife's presence, the next day, apologized to me for anything that might incidentally have offended me the evening before. His words were as vague and inclusive as that. There was nothing for me to take up, I saw by daylight, unless Miss Susan chose to appeal to me. Whatever dark stuff of hatred they had woven between them was not for me to lift unchallenged. Miss Susan was not visible to me for some days; but by the end of the week she appeared again about the house. She seemed to take pride in not altering her accustomed demeanor--in neither lifting her eyes to mine nor quickening her pace when she had occasion to pass me. I gave her chances; for, though I did not like her, I thought her oppressed. She took none of them; and as I had now no reason to think her either stupid or simple, I ceased to occupy myself with her.

That last statement is of course not quite true. I ceased to put myself, however unobtrusively, in her way; but my hours of solitude were full of wild surmises. I tried to keep away from the subject; for a time, I went to my own room after prayers, eschewing the library. These people were my employers; I needed their money; I was fond of Carol; I almost respected them for not explaining to me things that most people--if they did not turn me out of the

house at once--would have bitten their tongues in their haste to explain. Their power over Miss Susan was certainly a moral power; for she had had chances to give me a sign, and did not take them. The decent thing to do--since I wasn't prepared to chuck my position--was to forget. And yet, how could I?

There is scarcely a thinkable solution that my brain did not work out to its passionate, illogical end. I sailed with the wind straight into Sophoclean tragedy; I tacked--into Dumas fils. What had there been between Miss Susan and Horace Fenby that stirred the crackling ire of his wife? Or, had she embittered the son's brief marriage? Carol's mother had died in childbirth, I had learned; his father, of typhoid, not long after her. Or did it all go further back, and was Miss Susan herself a result, not a cause, of scandal? Above all, had there been any reason, any precedent, for their implication that she had sought me out with no holy emotion? I could not think it; though I remembered the malice of her final glance at me. What hold had she on people who hated her so? Why did she stay with people she so detested? What strange situation kept the balance between them--a claim they acknowledged so meanly; a hatred that she could not keep from being humble? I made nothing of it; and, as I say, I was not sure that I had the right to wonder too cleverly, had I been able. They were paying for the full bloom of my mental powers. I could not cheat Carol of that.

Yet, even so, my curious fever would not abate at once. It waxed with the waxing heat of July. By August the heat was even greater, and other symptoms began to possess me. A strange inward coolness took the place of my brief delirium; my chill mind seemed to react against the physical torridity and save me. I longed only for autumn to reconcile once more the temperatures of body and brain. Perhaps the massive fixity of the household hypnotized me. I took to sitting in the library again at night; and after the first few evenings I ceased to expect a sea-green shape to rise upon the threshold. Perhaps we had all been mad together; crazed by the highest temperature in years.

In any case, it was upon a state of mind from which all expectancy had been wrung that my third encounter with Miss Susan fell. I had gone back to Richardson--not to Sir Charles Grandison, which indeed I have never finished; but to Pamela. I was wondering idly what it would feel like to be "Mr. B."; I was even wondering, with equal idleness, what "Mr. B." would have made of the Fenby household. My brain was scarcely working, as you can see, and it took me some moments to authenticate the smell of smoke in my own nostrils. I was slow about investigating; it was a nuisance to get up, and

probably the kerosene-lamp beside me was guilty. But the odor was too strong and significant. I suddenly realized that, and my limbs as suddenly ceased to be lazy. I walked quickly across the library and opened the door. A great acrid gust choked me, and I dashed up-stairs, where, in the darkness, I already heard a mild commotion. The Gray Sisters rushed by me in weird nightgear. Two of them went to Mrs. Fenby's room, where I heard Mr. Fenby shouting encouragement to her. The other fled before me down the corridor that led to Carol's room in the wing. That was the path I took instinctively, myself; and I called through the smoke to the maid--Martha, the cook--to go to the stables and wake the coachman and gardener. She turned and shuffled away through the smoke.

That moment was such a chaos of sensations that even memory cannot straighten it out. I know that I had a purpose at the back of my mind--to get every living creature out of the house, and then, with the other men, to see what could be done. The Fenbys and the servants were awake and aware; but no sound had come from Carol. I intended, I know, to carry the child outside, myself, in my own arms, before that terrible air grew hotter. I could not yet see flames anywhere, but I heard cracklings and rumblings. Mrs. Fenby's fear had materialized. I heard her excited moaning somewhere behind me as I rushed down to Carol's room; I heard the others pleading with her; but I did not stop. The smoke grew greasier, hotter, thicker, with each step I took towards Carol. I judged it--as far as in that dash I could judge anything--to have started in the floor or walls above that wing; I hoped, beyond Carol's own room.

The child was sleeping, but woke, choking and spluttering, as I felt for him roughly in the dark. He was frightened, but surrendered himself to me without too much kicking. Common sense came to my rescue in a single flash. I flung a blanket round him, picked up his slippers and put them on his feet. His weight was more than I had bargained for, though; I could not be sure of stumbling ahead fast enough with him in my arms. I felt for the washstand, dipped a towel in the pitcher against emergencies, and bade him walk quickly by my side, holding my hand. The sleep was jolted out of him by this time, and he obeyed, whispering and asking absurd questions. It seemed an age before I got him down the hall to the main staircase; but the flames did not reach us, though they were creeping stealthily down towards us now from the end of the wing.

Mrs. Fenby was calling in her piping shriek for Carol. I shouted that I had him safe, and I heard them bumping down the stairs. Evidently they had to

carry her, among them. I told them we were following close behind, and by this time they could hear Carol's own voice still asking angry questions. Their rickety progress was resumed. Martha had not yet brought the men back from the stables. The whole group got, finally, into the outer air, and Mr. Fenby and I rushed back for wraps. There could be no question of trying to save anything on the upper floors. Just as we came out of Mrs. Fenby's room, staggering laden through the smoke, feeling for the hand-rail of the staircase, something turned me sick and nearly knocked me over. Not one of us had thought of Miss Susan! I flung my load over the banisters into the hall below and turned to the third-story staircase. Old Mr. Fenby started down, and I let him go without speaking to him. It was too hideous to mention, that we should not have thought of her. There was light now--the awful apocalyptic light of flame where flame should not be. And as I approached the attic stairs--no speech is quick enough to tell all this, nor yet confused enough--a sea-green figure came half falling, half running down them. I tried to stop Miss Susan, but could not. Her face and hair were singed, and one blackened hand was bleeding. She tore past me to the wing, straight into the beginning conflagration. "Carol! Carol!" I heard her cry, as she dashed past me through the smoke.

"He is safe! He's outdoors!" I shouted to her, but she did not hear me. She tore her way into the fire, beating a passage through the smoke with her wounded hand.

"Carol! Carol! I'm coming!"

"Miss Susan!" I screamed it in her ear. "I took him down. He's safe. Every one is safe."

She heard me then and gripped my arm. "You swear it?"

"I swear it. I went for the boy first of all, of course. For God's sake, come! The ceiling is falling in."

She turned. "It started in the attic next my room, I think. My door got jammed. I had to fight my way out. It's all burning up there. The windows are all open. Where is he? Where is he?"

I led her down, almost at a run, my arm around her waist; for the second floor was already doomed.

"Carol!" she called in the hall below. But there was no answer. The family had gone, I realized afterward, to the far end of the lawn. "Carol!" she called again in the doorway. And when no answer came, she struck at me and ran back to the staircase. I clutched her, willing to be brutal if necessary, for she was far gone in hysteria. By God's providence, at that moment Carol's own cry

came authentically from outside. He ran across the lawn, wrapped in his blanket, elfin and comic in the lurid glow.

"My son! my son! my own little son!" Neither Hannah nor Rachel could get him, for a moment, out of Miss Susan's clutch, though the boy, frightened, no doubt, writhed to get free from her blackened face and arms. At last, for sheer physical weakness, she let him go. But I had heard the cry, and so had the maids and Mr. Fenby, who now stood beside them.

"Take the boy to his grandmother," he commanded. "You have frightened him sick, Susan."

He ran to meet the two men who had just reached the house, and tried to pull me along with him. I half gave to his pull, but before I actually moved from the spot I spoke to Miss Susan. "They have taken chairs off the porch. Go over there and rest. You can't do anything now. We must try to save some of the books."

"Rest?" She looked about her wildly. "Where should I rest? With my mother over there, who has taken my boy away from me? I'll stay here."

And, wrapping her green garment about her, she flung herself face downward on the turf.

"Get a blanket, Martha!" I called. Even in that instant I remembered it was Martha who had tried first to save Carol. I managed finally to get Miss Susan up from the ground and lead her to a wicker couch under a tree. We had got wraps from the lower floor, and the women, at the far end of the lawn, were protected from chill. Miss Susan would not have her couch placed near the others when she saw that Carol's sleepy head was on his grandmother's lap. Mrs. Fenby called to her peevishly, but Miss Susan gave her only a curt reply as she passed.

"God has cursed me in my daughter, and now he has taken my home. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That solemn whimper of Mrs. Fenby's in sight of her blazing house haunts me still.

Then Susan Fenby turned on her. "You have frightened me with God long enough, mother. You will never do it again. I see now that you are only a fool."

"Grace is not in you, Susan." It was hardly more than a whisper, for all its shrillness. The old woman's chin dropped wearily on her breast, and she was silent in her coil of wrappings. Miss Susan flung herself upon her couch and gazed, unwinking and speechless, at the burning house.

After this bitter little interlude I ran back to help Mr. Fenby and the men with the books. The silver, carefully carried up-stairs every night to Mrs.

Fenby's room, we could not go for. We saved a few volumes--more or less at random, I am afraid, for it was impossible either to turn Mr. Fenby out or to disobey him, and he had completely lost his head. The house was doomed from the start, and when, an hour later, the engines came from the town, there was little they could do save fling some water on what seemed the very spirit of fire.

The morrows of such nights are strange. By dawn we persuaded the women to go down to the stables. Before dawn not one of them would stir. It was eight o'clock before I went down myself; and when I got there I found that Mr. Fenby, Carol, and all the women had been driven to the hotel in the town. The gardener's wife gave me breakfast, and I ate it hungrily. The morning I spent in groping about among the ruins, estimating the usefulness of the walls that were left, picking up charred objects from the débris, waiting for Mr. Fenby's return. I could hardly divine what my next move would be until I had seen him.

It must have been noon when I was suddenly confronted, in the middle of what had been the library, by a strange figure. Susan Fenby, in cheap gingham, stood before me under the August sun.

"I walked back," she said, simply. "They are all sleeping except Mr. Fenby, who is seeing the insurance people. He will be here pretty soon. I shan't see you again."

"Do you know what they are going to do?"

"No." She shook her head. "Go somewhere, probably, until the house can be rebuilt."

"How is Mrs. Fenby?" I dared not be the first to mention Carol.

"Asleep, I told you."

"And you think they won't need my services any more?"

"They'll never keep you on." She shook her head. "They will have to keep me. That will be bad enough--after last night. They'll be very nice to you; you won't suffer. But you can be sure they will never want to see you again."

"Probably not," I mused. "And you will still stay on--after last night?" I was deeply embarrassed. But, leaning against the cracked marble of the fireplace, in that roofless room, under the crude August sun, it seemed to me that nothing was too strange to be said.

"I shall stay. It's in the bargain. I have done everything they made me--standing up, sitting down, and on my knees--for the sake of being near Carol. If you are out of the way, it will all go on as before. If it hadn't been for

the fire, I should never have broken out again. And I shan't now, as long as Carol is still at home. I'm not afraid of God any more, as I used to be--nor of them. But I have learned how to hold my tongue. Only, of course, you'll have to go. They couldn't stand it with any one who knew--except the maids, and they have always known. They've been with us since I was born."

"But what about Carol?"

"They're already hoping he's forgotten, in the excitement. I dare say he has." She passed her handkerchief nervously over her lips with her bandaged hand, then broke out, passionately: "I did keep my word. I should never have told him if I hadn't been mad with fear for him."

She closed her eyes convulsively. Her whole face twitched.

"What I really came for," she said, dully, "was to advise you to ask your own price. I mean, for going away like a gentleman and holding your tongue. Probably you would do it, anyhow, but they might as well pay."

"Miss Susan!" I exclaimed. "What do you take me for?"

"I don't know anything about you, but if any one can get anything out of them, it's all to the good."

"Besides," I went on--for she laid no leash on curiosity--"what is there for me to tell?"

"I should think that it was clear enough," she said, indifferently. "My name is Susan Fenby, and Carol is my son. That is more than enough for them, anyhow. I was their only child, remember."

"How they have had to lie!" I murmured.

"Of course they've had to. And they don't like it, either; so that shows you how they feel about it--if they can lie like that when they think it's a sin to lie. They had to come here to this God-forsaken place to live, too. I'm not defending myself, you understand. I used to think I was as bad as my mother said I was. I never took much stock in what my father said. He was no saint himself, I guess, in the beginning. I don't think anything much, now--and I guess it's 'pull Dick, pull devil,' between us. He has a temper, and she is as cold as ice. I'm like both of them. That's all." She began to pick her way out of the débris. "I only came to tell you to ask, in reason, what you like. They'll give it to you. They can afford to. I must go now, or he'll find me when he comes."

"Miss Susan--" I stopped her--"why do you give me this advice?"

"Because you were kind about the school-books. I did want to keep up with Carol. And I liked having his books in my hands. But--" Suddenly she turned wholly round to me, her deep blush making her almost handsome again. In

that most unbecoming scene and light she had been like the Miss Susan I used to see slip through the corridors slavishly intent on Mrs. Fenby's business. "They were quite wrong, that night. It was only the school-books. Though"--she raised her eyes to mine with one desperate grip on honesty--"I don't blame them. They had no reason to trust me. Good-bye!" She would not take my hand; would not even let me help her, in spite of her crippled arm; and I watched her pick her way out of the ruined house. Five minutes later Mr. Fenby had returned.

I did not follow up Miss Susan's suggestion of putting a price on my silence. But I fell in with Mr. Fenby's idea of an immediate departure, and I accepted his own offer of paying me six months' salary the more readily because I knew how grateful he was for the chance to give it. I agreed with him very gravely that we had all gone off our heads the night before. He trusted me to the point of letting me spend one long morning alone with Carol. Carol talked to me, as freely as a running brook, of all that had happened; but he mentioned Miss Susan only casually. I honestly believe that, in the drugged sleep which followed close on such excitement, he had forgotten.

The Penalties of Artemis

Persis Lambert was asleep in her berth when the catastrophe came. The boat was not crowded--she was not an Atlantic liner nor yet a P. & O. in the season--and Miss Lambert's aunt, with whom she was travelling, had, with her maid, a separate stateroom. The niece was the solitary occupant of her own. The alarm was sudden, and the ship's discipline none of the best. Mrs. Lambert's maid, having an eye to a legacy long promised, and the utter futility of the legacy if she did not survive, clothed her bulky invalidish asset as well as she could, and put her whole soul into dragging herself and the asset on deck. There were valuables, too, to collect in that hurried moment, for the chief asset would not stir without them.

The maid was sent to wake the young girl--so much, the second wife of Persis Lambert's uncle demanded of her--but it is a question whether her excited rattling of the stateroom door and her single cry did more than start Persis Lambert on a dallying path towards waking. It was, in any case, the hurrying feet on the deck above and the shouting of stewards in the corridor that made her sit up in her berth and decide to dress as quickly as ever she could. Not once throughout the whole experience did she set eyes on Mrs. Lambert or Mrs. Lambert's maid.

By the time Persis Lambert got on deck, all the other women and children in the cabin had been thrust into the boats that were now dotting the moon-lit sea at sparse and helpless intervals. Those of the under-officers and crew who were left on board were coping as best they could with a swirling, shrieking crowd of third-class passengers--men, chiefly. The officers in command had done their best to sift out women and children from the malodorous throng that beset the narrow exits from the steerage. Stewards had been sent down to search for any left behind; but several of the stewards had gone overboard on their own account with life-belts, swimming for the boats as they pulled off. The ship was sinking in a heavy, businesslike fashion by the stern--the captain on her bridge like a statue. He had lost his head, and the first mate was virtually in charge. The only thing that stuck, out of some twenty lucky years at sea, was the conviction that he must go down with his ship. His silence was extraordinary; he posed there for death; and Persis Lambert herself, crawling and climbing up the companion-way to the outer air, saw the last gesticulations of appeal made to him by his second officer--who, even as she

found support in a brass rail, and clung, trying to arrange her mazed thoughts, flung up his arms with a despairing oath and slid aft into the babel. He did not see her clinging to her rail.

Persis Lambert had put on a life-belt before leaving her stateroom, but she felt it impossible now to test its value. She was in that condition where the mind seems at once omniscient and useless. She perceived the alternatives before her, with no power to act in any way--a paralysis not so much of the motor nerves as of the will itself. She stood there, cramped and waiting, in a great lucid dream of indecision. To be sure, neither of the alternatives was tempting--to try her luck with the screaming mongrels aft, or to climb to the deck rail and leap into the glittering black waste of sea. If it came to that, why not face the stern of the boat and wait until the ocean took her? She could not swim; it was folly for a non-swimming female to betake herself to the biggest ocean in the world before she had to. The only thing she felt like doing was climbing up on the bridge and standing beside the captain, at parade. That, too, was foolish. Yet she would move as soon as she was sure of not doing something silly.

All this, instead of being told as a sequence, should be placed before you, if that were possible, in one synthetic glimpse. These thoughts co-existed in her mind: it was a pigeon-holed instant, clear to perception as a small, slightly complicated picture. Her past life, contrary to precedent (for she was virtually drowning), did not, in any detail, occur to her.

Long before the thing could have been put into words, a man stood before her. He had somehow, between moonshine and crazy lantern-ray, made her out, clutching her rail close to the companion-way whence she had emerged.

“Come along.” There was nothing excited in his tone. He was as stolid as the Owara at her business of sinking, as the captain at his business of going down with the ship.

Persis Lambert scarcely recognized the man at her side, though she knew his name--Angier. She had seen him on deck and in the dining-saloon, but they had never spoken. Mrs. Lambert--now tossing in one of those distant cockle-shells--had given her niece little or no time for new acquaintances.

“Where to?”

Angier took her arm in his to steady her. “Anywhere out of this.”

“What was it?”

“Reef, I guess. Stove in in the wrong place. Oh, quick!” He pulled her towards the side of the ship. “Not much time. There’ll be an explosion any second, probably.”

“But where? I can’t swim. Do you want me to jump overboard?”

“You’ll have to. No chance of those boats.” He jerked a shoulder aft. “It’s hell down there. Discipline all gone to pot. Not room for everybody. Pity about the captain.” He turned for an instant and lifted his cap bridgeward with his free arm.

“Can you get into that?” Angier pointed over the side to a small boat. “It’s not such a jump as it would have been an hour ago.”

“Yes. But what’s the use? It must leak--or something--or they wouldn’t have left it.”

The man paused an instant and looked at her. “I’m not making you. I don’t know a thing about the blamed tub. But my guess is that after the very first, in the rush for the bigger ones, they forgot this. They got it ready, you see. I don’t insist. If you want to chance it down there.... But you must do something--quick.”

Persis Lambert looked aft. She saw men, brown and white, struggling in a confused mass. It was like a pit of snakes. She heard a pistol-shot or two, and indescribable cries--inarticulate, indecent. Then she turned back to Angier. “Shall I jump?”

“I’ll go first, thanks. Then jump at--for--me, as far as the moon will let you.” He felt his pockets quickly, then buttoned his coat. “Wait a second!” he called, and actually disappeared across the deck. Before she could wonder very hard, he had returned with a shapeless bundle that looked like a heap of blankets. “No good to the Owara,” he muttered, as he flung them into the rocking boat overside. Then he jumped. There was silence for an instant, but presently in the moonlight, Miss Lambert saw him holding up his arms.

“For God’s sake, fall as straight and as limp as you can.”

The deck was uncannily near the water. Miss Lambert heard his scarcely raised voice without difficulty. She brought him to his knees as she fell into his arms, but they soon righted themselves. After stooping for an instant, groping on the bottom of the boat, he stood up with a quick motion of his whole body.

“It doesn’t leak, I think. They just forgot. Lord, what a rotten bunch!”

Angier loosed the falls, then unshipped the oars and bent to them. “Can’t stop to make you comfortable now. We must get out of this party. Just look

and see if there is water in that keg, please. Yes? I know there's food. I saw the tins."

"Are you going to try to follow the other boats?"

"Might as well try to follow a firefly. I'm going to get us out of this--er--place, if I can. I am sure you're like me--you'd rather die in the open."

He rowed steadily away from the Owara, out to sea--a phrase that ill suggests their infinitesimal progress. Still, one wave shoved them idly on to another, and in a few moments they were perceptibly farther away from the sinking Owara. The cries grew less horrid to the ear; they sounded more like a queer, shrill snarling across the water. At last, louder than the death-throes behind them, sounded in Persis Lambert's ear the cracking of the man's muscles as he rowed.

"We're the only people, I believe, on this side of the ship," she ventured, finally. She had not moved from her uncomfortable position on the big bundle Angier had thrown into the boat.

"You bet we are." That was all his reply.

"But why?"

Angier pulled for five minutes before replying. "Can you get one of those extra oars?" he asked, finally.

The girl reached for one and pulled it towards her. "Well? Do you want me to row, too?"

"Hardly. Though you'll probably have to learn to steer. But if any damned Lascar comes swimming along and trying to catch hold, chop him over the arm with it. I told you I wanted to get out of the party. And I don't make for a reef if I think there is one there. We may tie up on one before morning, but at least I'm not trying to run us on the shore. Don't forget about the Lascar." And his muscles cracked again.

Miss Lambert laid down the oar. "I don't think I could do that, thanks. There's plenty of room, and if there weren't, I wouldn't try to keep any one out."

"No, I dare say you wouldn't. But I prefer to die decently. So I'll trouble you to leave that oar where I can get at it myself without disengaging one of these. Better make yourself as comfortable as you can--though I don't advise you to lie down.... Ah!"

The explosion had come. Both mechanically ducked their heads, then lifted them. The crazy lights of the Owara were quenched by the sea. They could see, by the moon's glimmer, the quick final rush of her settling. The

captain's interminable wait on the bridge, they knew, was over. But by common instinct they did not speak of the catastrophe. Angier was rowing hard, and the girl tried to limber her cramped limbs and get herself into a more competent condition and posture. Carefully, deftly, she arranged the things that lay pell-mell in the bottom of the boat, selected her seat, and composed herself.

While the moon lasted, the excitement of the situation kept Persis Lambert's mind strictly at home in the foreshortened world of the little boat. She peered about her, taking stock of her physical context. There were blankets--she had wrapped herself in one of them--a water-keg, tins that must hold food. There were also a few irregularly shaped objects here and there which she could not identify in the faint light.

They talked very little after the moon had set. Angier stopped rowing now and then for a moment, letting his body relax. Once, he pulled a flask from his pocket, removed the silver cup and passed it to her, asking her to fill it from the water-keg. He offered her whisky, but she refused it. Excited, warmly wrapped, as yet she felt no chill. The stars paled gradually, seeming to sink deeper into a lightening sky--as if they were withdrawing, backwards, out of the presence of earth and sea. The tropic dawn was coming upon them.

Around was the constant complex noise of the ocean, running through a watery gamut, from the distant boom to the swishing of the waves round the boat itself.

On the Owara, Persis Lambert had seen little or nothing of her companion; but she remembered him as tall and dark, and given to inhabiting the smoking-room. Occasionally, since they had crossed the equator, she had seen him walking the deck at a tremendous pace. She had never seen him talking to any one, though of course she had not known how he might spend his time in the smoking-room. Mrs. Lambert had made friends with no one, and her niece had, perforce, followed her example. But she was sure that she had never seen Angier in any of the groups who chattered away the tedious leagues. She felt she must settle a few things before the day was upon them. So strange a day it was bound to be!

"How did it happen you weren't with the first boats?" she asked.

"How did it happen you weren't?" He stopped rowing for a moment.

"I must have slept through a good deal. My aunt's maid waked me, but I didn't realize until I heard the confusion.... I was pretty slow in dressing, I fancy. And I was trying to decide what to do when you came and told me. I'm very grateful to you."

"Um--yes. I dare say I'm grateful to you. I hadn't made up my mind, either. You're sure your aunt got off on one of the first boats?"

"I think she must have. They wouldn't overlook her. Let's not talk about it. Every one loses his wits at such a time. Think of the poor captain."

"I've no time to waste thinking of anything. Do you realize what we're in for?"

"No, I don't." Persis Lambert answered in a matter-of-fact way. "I'm no heroine, by the way. I'm never seasick, but that's all you can say for me. I hope I shan't fail you or be a nuisance, but I can't imagine that I shall be any good."

"Humph! Well, I'm no Swiss Family Robinson myself. I'm fairly strong in the arms, legs, and back, but I am not what you call a resourceful person. I've never had any experience of this kind. So if we do strike land, you needn't expect any of the comforts of camp life. I haven't even a pistol, if worse should come to worst. What did you manage to save?"

"I've got some money, which is of no use--and a flask--and my warmest clothes on--and, I think, a toothbrush in my pocket, and a cake of soap. I didn't see any sense in weighting myself down."

"I did better than you, then. At least, I hope there's some loot worth having in that blanket you have your feet on. I stepped into the smoking-room for a moment, you remember. Matches, anyhow. Ah, there's the sun. Suppose we eat. It might give us courage to look around. We must be in a mess of islands about here, you know; and there's a great choice in islands, in these parts--especially when you haven't a pistol.... I hope you won't let me get on your nerves," he added, suddenly. "It's a queer hole to be in, and you must be sensible. If you played the fool, I'd chuck you overboard."

"I don't think you would." Miss Lambert's head was bent over a biscuit-tin. "You chucked me on board, you remember."

"Oh, it was no place to die--that disreputable old tub with all her virtue oozing out of her."

"You seem to be very fastidious about your place of dying."

"Well!"--he jerked his head back and faced the sun--"you can't say it isn't decent here. You didn't want to go down strangling with a lot of dirty Chinks biting you in the back, did you? When I'm through breakfast, I'll look over that loot. I hope I was inspired last night in the smoking-room. I pawed about like lightning for ten seconds. By the way, what is your name? Mine is Angier."

"Persis Lambert. I should like a drink of water, please. Thank you. And what are we going to do about the sun?"

"Rig up something if we can. And, for heaven's sake, go slow on the water. I've got a map in my pocket, but it's rather small. The boat's not much bigger, and you'll kindly remember that we may be dead before night. If a storm came up like the one two days ago, you certainly would be. You can't swim, remember."

"Why should I go slow on the water then?"

"Because we have a fighting chance."

"Even if I can't swim?"

"Oh, I'd keep you up as long as I could, if you didn't clutch me."

"You said you'd throw me overboard if necessary." Persis Lambert raised her hand. "Kindly understand me. I'm not asking for anything. Only it would be much more convenient if you would explain to me briefly what I can expect from you. What sort of man are you, anyhow? I don't care, one way or the other. I simply should like to know. Are you going to leave me to shift for myself, or are you going to be conventional?"

Angier laughed--a strange, impotent sound in that waste of sunny waters. "You can bet I'm going to be conventional. That is, I'll play the game if you

will. If you're a good girl, I'll be a good boy--if only because being chivalrous at a time like this, edging along towards the tropic of Capricorn, is so ridiculous. I'll let you have the last mouthful, just because it would be so sensible not to."

"You don't mean that."

"Well, just to prove that I am a free man. I'm not going to chuck a helpless thing like the moral law, just because a big brute like the Pacific Ocean comes along and tells me to. I let it pretty much alone when I'm at home, but damned if it isn't worth wasting time on in a place like this, just as a spectacle. Don't you worry. It'll probably be a shark or a native that does for you. It won't be I--unless you take to acting in a way no man could stand. There's such a thing as being too conventional, you know." He looked her squarely in the eyes.

"I'll be as sensible as I can. But I'm a free woman, too."

"Not if you can't swim."

"Oh, if you think you can swim across the Pacific, I don't wonder you boast about being free." Then, for the first time since the accident, a drawing-room manner returned to her. She spoke very sweetly. "But let's not quarrel. What are we going to do about sleeping? You must be absolutely exhausted. Couldn't I do something with the oars while you took a nap?"

"You might decorate them if you've got a box of colors about you. Thanks, I'm not sleepy. But you're quite right. You'd better curl up for a while. I'll try to rig up something with an oar and one of the blankets. I'll wake you when I want you. You don't look very strong, by the way."

"I'm not, but I'm perfectly well. I'm at my normal weight. It isn't much. But--" She looked around.

"I'll be sleeping, myself, later. Then you can comb your hair."

Miss Lambert curled herself up obediently and uncomfortably under the improvised tent. She fell asleep sooner than she had hoped, and the man, taking up the oars, with a pocket compass before him on the water-keg, rowed steadily on. The first boats had gone north, making, he suspected, for a port. The other lot, what with bad discipline and savage endeavors defeating themselves, must have gone down, taken by the sharks or that mid-sea level which buoys up the drowned. Many of them had probably been killed outright by huge splinters of the exploding Owara. No relic, no fragment, since the dawn, had drifted their way. He kept his course, as well as he could, due south. "A great get-away," he murmured to himself. He did not once look at the girl.

When, a few hours later, Persis Lambert crawled out of her improvised tepee, her sleep-soaked eyes saw, thanks to the glare of the sun on multiplied

leagues of water, only the vague litter of objects about her. Her eyes clung to the blessedly dark surfaces of little things--a blanket, the handle of an old hatchet, her own skirt. Then they traveled to Angier's figure at the bow. By lifting and lowering her eyelids in quick rhythm, to shake the sleep out, she managed finally to focus her gaze, to discount to some extent the rude blaze of the ocean. Angier had not spoken to her, and she now saw why. Oblivious of Persis Lambert, his back half turned to her, he was looking steadily out to sea through a small pair of binoculars. Perfectly motionless, he seemed to be studying some fixed point in the distance. He must have heard the stir of her waking and moving forward in the boat, but he paid no more attention to her than if she had been the ship's cat stretching itself. She did not know to what point of the compass his gaze was directed--all directions were alike to her, with the sun overhead. She limbered her cramped limbs as best she could in that tiny rocking space, smoothed her hair, and wiped her face with her handkerchief. Finally she turned to parallel with her own eyes the path of his long, steady gaze through the glass. Then she exclaimed, for land, no less, was what she saw. She was incapable of judging distances, but the peculiar outline of palms was distinguishable to her, lifted above a tiny colorless strip that must be shore. At the girl's exclamation, Angier turned and put the glass down carefully.

"These aren't much good--tourist things--but you can see for yourself what I'm looking at." He did not offer her the glass; and she did not ask for it.

"How far away?"

"I don't know. Distances are deceptive, of course. But you will notice that there is a favoring wind, and a current too, I'm pretty sure. I don't know that I like the current; but I can't say that I like being boiled alive, either. We shall get there soon enough, I think. You didn't sleep more than an hour or two. I think I'll turn in myself, after you've got some notion of steering. No point in using up muscle to keep out of this wind-and-current combination. There must be a current, you know--" He knotted his brows, as if in displeasure.

"Why do you mind the current so?"

Angier grinned. "I'm no navigator, please remember. Nobody ever taught me what to do with a current in a coral area! But you can wake me up before we get anywhere near."

"May I see the map?"

"Sure! But I am afraid it was made only for European consumption. There must be several hundred islands in the immediate neighborhood"--he waved

his arm impartially in a circular sweep round the horizon. “I do know about where the Owara went down. I looked at the ship’s chart last evening. But it doesn’t help us much, does it? Now let me show you what to do back here.”

Persis Lambert took her instructions in steering as intelligently as she could. They were, for that matter, haltingly given. Angier had to confess, with grim laughter, that he knew very little about the business. “I’ve had a lot of things happen to me, but they’ve never been in boats. Perhaps it’s a pity we didn’t ship a Lascar while we were about it. But what would have been the good of a Lascar without a pistol to shoot him with? Wake me up any minute you want me. I don’t think there’s much you can do, as a matter of fact, except try to keep her from slewing entirely out of her course. And if it is wind-and-current combination, she couldn’t do that if she tried. Au revoir!”

He stuck his head out of the tepee after he had burrowed his way in. “You didn’t bring a pistol, did you?”

“Of course not. I never had a pistol in my life.”

“All right, all right. Only it is just as well to be sure.”

“Did you think I would shoot you?”

A deal of pent-up sarcasm went into her tone. There was no reply. Persis Lambert looked about for the binoculars, but they had gone, slung over Angier’s shoulder, into the tepee. She sat for a long time clutching the steering-rope as he had directed, gazing at the line of palms on the horizon. It was a great relief to be alone. Occasionally she closed her eyes for a moment to shut out the glare that stabbed like a million arrows; but whenever she opened them again, she stared always at that fixed point as if there were no other fact abroad upon the sea.

It was late afternoon when Angier and Persis Lambert landed on their island. Angier confessed that he had feared a hundred easy ways of destruction, but in point of fact the low, sandy coast seemed positively to welcome them. A tiny recess in the shore-line embraced their little boat, harbor-fashion--though the Owara would have filled its curving arms to overflowing. Angier had trained his glass on the land many times before landing, but at last he slung it back over his shoulder, and eventually they heard the soft crunch of sand under the keel as they beached the boat--the first land-noise either had heard for many a day. They seemed to have stepped out of a moving nightmare of great waters, a vast, aqueous vision, into a firm, terrestrial reality. Persis Lambert hummed to herself as she carried things from the boat to the shade of a palm-grove.

“Stop that, will you, please?” The man’s harassed voice sounded close behind her.

“Why? I hated the boat.”

“You don’t yet know whether we have this bit of hell to ourselves or not. And as soon as I can decide what to do with you, I’ve got to find out.”

She stopped where she was, with her load. “And leave me?”

“Someone’s got to stay with the stores. They aren’t much, but they may be all we’ll have for some time.”

“Do you really think”--it was her sweet tone, brought back into use for the occasion--“that I should be very effective if any one did turn up who wanted them?”

Angier laughed shortly. “Right you are. You wouldn’t--unless it were an animal.”

“There are very few animals”--she turned again toward the palm-grove--“that wouldn’t soon be in possession, for all me. My relations with our dumb brothers don’t extend beyond dogs--small ones, with collars.”

He looked at her curiously. “I should think you would like to get rid of me for a little while.”

“I’d love to.” Her tone was still very sweet. “But I prefer you to a quadruped. And until I’m better acquainted with the natives, I think I prefer you to them. Of course, they may turn out very nice. In that case, we’ll see.”

Angier shrugged his shoulders. “All right. Only, if you can spare me for five minutes, I’ll go into that next bunch of palms and look through the glass. There’ll be a lagoon, or I miss my guess. Keep down by the boat, please, and, if you want me, shout. I shall be close by.” In his promised five minutes, he returned. “It’s a smallish place, after all. There is a lagoon. We’d better walk around it, I fancy. It would be something of a relief to know that we are the sole inhabitants, though what we shall live on--Oh, well, hang it! no use borrowing trouble.”

Both man and girl were silent on their strange pilgrimage. Persis Lambert, indeed, was all but exhausted; and as soon as Angier delivered himself grudgingly of the opinion that they were indeed the only human occupants of the island, she begged to return to the landing-place. The circumference of the atoll Angier judged to be a scant two miles. It was the classic coral island; baldly described, a ring of palms inclosing a lagoon. Vegetation was scanty, and there seemed to be little or no animal life: many birds and insects, and a few lizards. The blue lagoon teemed with parti-colored fish, and the palms in

their due time would drop cocoanuts; so much they could count on. They might, with good luck, snare some pigeons. Beyond that, the less thought about it the better.

Angier worked hard, before dark came upon them, to rig up a shelter for the girl. In time he hoped to do wonders with thatch, he told her, dryly; just now she must stick to an oar-and-blanket device. At least, thanks to his plunder of matches, they could have a fire. They ate their supper beside the little blaze of brush. Not since dawn had either one mentioned the Owara. They took the catastrophe for granted, as the warp on which they must weave their strange and painful pattern. They assumed it callously, as one assumes the basic conditions of life--the climate, or one's Caucasian blood. Slowly, in their spasmodic talk, they staked out the little dominion of their present--expedients for netting fish, for catching rain-water, for rigging up a signal. With the air of a chancellor of the exchequer, Miss Lambert promised a petticoat for the common weal. As they planned and Angier smoked, full-length by the fire, Persis Lambert drew a ribbon from her pocket, and measuring it carefully, she knotted it about a ring she took from her finger, then hung the ring round her neck.

"Why is that?" The man's voice seemed to rise up from beneath the sand.

"It's a pearl. I mustn't get it wet."

"Wouldn't it be safer in one of my pockets?"

"I think not. See--I put it under everything."

"Why not wrap it up and bury it? It's no protected life you're going to live."

"Thanks, no. It's my engagement ring."

"Oh--" This time the voice seemed to sink into the sand hollow where the man's head rested.

"I'm going to bed," said Persis Lambert at last. "What are you going to do? You've given me all the blankets."

"What of it?" Angier sprang to a sitting position. There are only three, two for your shelter and one to cover you with. I have my overcoat. And sand isn't hard. Better than the boat, anyhow."

"Aren't the nights cool in the tropics?"

"I'm not a class in geography! It was devilishly hot last night, rowing. That's all I know. Anything I can do for you?"

"No." She disappeared into the shelter. It had been braced as well as possible against the strong sea-breeze.

Half an hour later Miss Lambert came out. Angier, who had been dozing by the dying fire, was now sitting up and drinking from his flask. His teeth chattered against the cup. She looked at him gravely. “Have you any medicines?”

“No.”

“Nor I. So I think you’d better not get a chill first off. Why don’t you build up the fire?”

“I don’t precisely feel like starting out for more firewood. Besides, it’s going to rain. Do get along in there and don’t bother me--unless you’re cold. Are you?” He pulled himself up to his feet slowly and stood before her.

“No, I’m not.” She paused an instant, then went on in her coldest tone: “What good there is in the shelter I think you have as much right to as I. When we achieve thatch houses, it will be different. I should be much obliged if you would get out of the sea-wind, too.”

“If you would take a little of that damned hostility out of your voice, I would!”

Miss Lambert looked surprised. “Didn’t we decide all that sort of thing in the boat? I don’t suppose this is pleasant for either of us.” Great drops fell on her forehead. “Is this likely to be a hard storm?” she asked hastily.

“How do I know? I’m no meteorologist.” There was enough in his own tone of the “damned hostility” of which he had complained.

Miss Lambert laughed--a very tired tinkle of a laugh. “No; neither one of us is exactly the person the other would have chosen to be cast away with. We’re both tenderfeet. I rather wonder what you used to do for a living. Listen”--the drops came faster and faster, and the swish of the palm-leaves high above their heads grew shriller and wilder--“I don’t know you at all. So far as I do know you, I certainly don’t like you.” Even the beat of her words grew quicker, like all the audible rhythms of the world about them, whipped up, accelerated by the wind. “You create in me a positive aversion. But your strength is the only thing either of us has to depend on. So you will come into the shelter. It’s sufficiently open to the sky, as it is. I intend to sleep, and I probably shouldn’t if I knew you were rotting in the rain outside. If you wish me to take the space nearest the blanket”--she pointed at the seaward screen--“I will.”

“I think that may turn out to be the wettest spot of all--since the wind is that way and we don’t have much to weight the rug with,” he answered. “I think I’ll take it myself. If I find I’m keeping at all dry, I’ll ask you to change.”

He followed her and flung himself down in the indicated spot, on the carpet of leaves and brush he had earlier in the evening strewn hastily over the sandy soil. Presently both slept.

Six weeks to a day was the duration of Angier's and Persis Lambert's stay on their island. But six actual weeks, with a possible future of years, means a lifetime as complete as many that consider themselves rounded to the full sum of human experience. The intensity of an existence that is limited to itself is something few of us can conceive--we who are free to brood on the past and hope for the future, whose days are mere portals looking two ways. Neither one discussed a past life in which the other had no share; and their talk of the future stopped at a possible rescue. By some common instinct, mutually reinforced, they refrained from narrative. At the end of their exile Persis Lambert was still ignorant of Angier's business in life, as he was ignorant of the name of her fiancé. The girl's frankly stated aversion to the man doubtless dried up the springs of confidential talk in her--and, by natural result, in him. Anecdote sometimes drifted their way: an analogy out of past experience or an allusion to a book the one or the other had read. But they played a game of which should reveal the less. They bounded their world, as rigidly as children, by the fringe of the sand beneath the circle of palms.

And all the while, precisely as if they were children, whose intimate confidences are all objective, immediate, and innocent of moral import, their intimacy grew. By a curious inversion of experience they came to speak naturally of things that, in years of conventional acquaintance, would never have been mentioned. What the merest friend at home might have known about either was jealously concealed, while the little details, which scarcely anything but the closest relation would have brought to free discussion, came vividly and frequently into their talk. It was as if the outer walls were defended while the enemy chaffered quietly in the market-place. Necessity, which drove them to be "sensible," could not drive them to be friends. They seemed to vent their private rage at their plight by being squeamish over things Mrs. Grundy could never have objected to--as if the last resort of dignity lay in being squeamish over something, no matter what. If they had to speak of their digestions, they would never divulge their home addresses! They should have been Adam and Eve at their housekeeping; instead, they were still Miss Lambert and Mr. Angier in Eden. Eden is used metaphorically, to be sure; for the resources of their island were scantier than those of the Seventh Day. They struggled experimentally for food and shelter, working out, with bent brows,

the evolution of early periods, achieving in a hard day what neolithic centuries had gone to discovering. When they laughed, it was the grim laughter of the Stone Age--at the fish clumsily speared, or the ripe cocoanut floating out to sea. But if Persis Lambert wept in secret, the tears she shed had taken all history to produce. A strange working of inhibitions, in a place that had never heard the word or seen the thing.

Needless to say, it was the girl who set their psychic pace. More than once Angier bit off in the very utterance some speech that had tried for freedom--his silence following hard upon the chill tightening of her lips. Yet she was not ungracious or taciturn; only clinging desperately, one would have said, to some privacy of the mind. Of the physical privacy which every woman takes for granted, she had next to none, "sensible" as she had promised to be. She could not have accused Angier, had she wished, of limiting it voluntarily; but circumstances did the job as completely as if he had been a brute. The tropic showers that flung them huddled in their blankets against the same tall palm-trunk; the necessary co-operation in all tasks, since her slender, ignorant hands must ever be guided by his; the night-terror that often made her rise and creep where she could hear his breathing; the sordid talk of a hand-to-mouth existence, where one of the hundred forms of death rises up ever to dwarf any more delicate danger--every fact of every hour seemed to make them more one than wedlock. The man saw to it that she should have her due share of solitude, but her solitude on such terms was scarcely worth the name. It shrieked the bodily fact of him back at her from whatever point of the compass he had betaken himself to.

Once Angier suggested that they should try the boat again, and seek a wider and more fertile exile. "This is too much like rats in a hole. Pretty soon we shall get the stink of those fish we are drying, clear across the lagoon."

"You can go if you like," she said. "I will wait for you."

"Oh!... and if I never came back?"

"I shouldn't be worse off, should I?"

The man's face twitched slightly. "Permit me to believe that you would."

"Of course I should," she said, perfunctorily. "But I won't go. I will never get into that boat again--never."

"You have a lot of grit, but I should say, no sense." With that, Angier dropped the subject.

One night Persis Lambert woke--suddenly, out of a sound, dog-tired sleep. Something was near her, in the dark, an indistinct shape bending over her.

Almost immediately she knew it for Angier, and closed her eyes again, quietly waiting, every muscle and cord tense under her blanket. Soon he rose noiselessly from his kneeling position and walked slowly away. He did not go back to his own sleeping-place, but moved off through the palm-grove towards the lagoon. As soon as she judged him out of earshot, she rose and followed him, tracking him through the moonlight, furtively. She saw him walk down the little shore to the lagoon and lie down full-length, hiding his face on his arms.

She did what he had done a few minutes before--knelt down and bent over him. But though he was awake, he was not aware of her, as a thick sob told her. Careless, therefore, she bent still closer. It did not occur to her that she was eavesdropping--they were as cruelly close as that! But no words came, only the sobs, worse than words. She pressed so near--though still not touching him--that her ring, hanging from its ribbon, swung lightly against his face. She pulled it away, but he had felt it, and sprang to his feet, facing her in the moonlight. The little lagoon rippled softly beside them.

"You devil!" he cried. "Why did you follow me?"

"Why did you wake me?"

"I didn't wake you."

"Then I didn't follow you."

Silently they walked back to their palm-grove. As they separated, she paused an instant and looked at him. Then she dug her wrists into the deep sockets of her eyes. The gesture blurred her vision, and she saw him only dimly.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Oh, damn you...." he murmured, with a curious, meditative inflection, and walked away. She did not watch him further, but went back to her bed and slept.

Neither one alluded, in the days that followed, to the incident of that night. Their eyes were clear of allusion, their talk as sterile as ever. On the fifth day after, deliverance came in the shape of a government patrol-boat doing pacific duty among the islands. The signal, religiously kept afloat, was an easy mark for binoculars that steadily raked the horizon for any sign of trouble.

Their return to the world was as swift and inevitable as their departure from the Owara. Persis Lambert stood on the strip of sand, watching the boat rowed shoreward by vigorous sailors. When it was within a few rods of them, she turned to look for Angier, who had disappeared from her side.

"Is he leaving it to me--the cad?" she whispered to herself. But he returned from the camp in time to greet the under-officer who sprang from the gunwale to the sand, in high excitement. Miss Lambert, after a grave greeting, left all explanations to Angier. He made them very well, then suddenly fell silent, his eyes fixed on the dwindling coronet of palms. Miss Lambert, her back to Angier and the young officer, strained her glance towards the little steamer. Once on it, she went below to quarters hurriedly arranged for her; and when, some hours afterward, she came on deck again, the island of their six weeks' sojourn was lost forever in the dusk and distance.

Angier approached her the next morning. "They seem to think we have a lot to say to each other. As a matter of fact, we haven't. But I might tell you that they are taking us on to a port of call of the Wallaby, going to Singapore. We shall just about make it in time to catch her. We ought to be on board her to-morrow."

Miss Lambert nodded. "Have you any money?" she asked.

"Quite enough to go on with."

"I saved a lot, you know. At least, I suppose a letter of credit is still good."

"I think you'll find it so--in spite of everything."

"I wish you would tell me how much you have."

"Is that the kind of thing I ever have told you? Why should I begin now?"

"As you like." She turned her head away from him.

"I'm sorry, by the way, about your aunt...."

Persis Lambert's eyes filled. "That's all right. I mean, you've said all you need to say. Do you think they really know?"

"It seems to be their business to know everything that happens in this archipelago. I think they pretty well live up to it. I'm afraid there's no doubt. The first two boats were overloaded.... Rotten discipline." He walked away.

The next morning they trans-shipped quickly in a lurid tropic harbor; and Persis Lambert took possession of a stateroom from which, for three days, she did not stir. When, braced to face the world again--a world whose thousand curious eyes she had felt burning through the very decks to reach her as she lay in her berth--she disposed herself nonchalantly in a deck-chair, a steward brought her a note. So oddly had the two inverted the natural course of experience that she felt Angier had taken a liberty in writing to her. The liberty taken was slight, however, and this she freely admitted after a glance. It was a single line to inform her that he was to leave the steamer at the next port. He must have landed the night before. She remembered objecting, as she tried to

drowse, to the noises of landing--the hurrying feet, the unintelligible native babel, the scraping and pounding and shouting before the dinghy went ashore.

Persis Lambert rose and went to the deck rail. The torn bits of the note fluttered over the side. Then she came back to face the congested curiosity of a portly Dutchwoman who had been stalking her for three days.

Summer was heavy on the big town, but Miss Lambert still lingered behind shuttered windows, in a world of brown holland and shadows. Her step-sister, with her own family, had left for the mountains. Miss Lambert would follow, she said, when she could; and the old caretaker and his wife would meanwhile suffice to her service. Mrs. Bayle supposed she knew why Persis stayed on; Tony Wainwright was still in town, working on gigantic plans for some competition or other. After poor Persis's harrowing adventure, it must be good to breathe the metropolitan dust and build up her nerves on Tony's devotion. Persis had not said precisely that; but for all Persis ever said--!

Miss Lambert had seen her betrothed many times in the crowded weeks since her return. She had not particularly sought chances to see him alone. She had taken his and her and every one's engagements as they came. But if Tony Wainwright had had the instinct to complain, he should by rights have stifled it, for, in planning to stay on after the family, Miss Lambert gave him promise of ample time to have her quite to himself.

She had, in point of fact, seen him quite alone several times; yet she prepared for him this afternoon as if it were their first reunion after her long and eventful absence. She began to speak to him at once, indeed, on a new, strange note--a note, had he but known it, tempered under the Southern Cross.

"Tony, it can't be."

"What can't be, my darling?"

"This--any of it. I stayed on to tell you. Nothing makes any difference--not even being quite alone with you. I have waited to see. Now I know."

"But what?" He focussed his eyes on her keenly as she stood near him in the shadows, a frail, pale figure with wavering outlines.

"I can't marry you."

"May I open the shutters?" He moved to the windows. "I'd like a little light on this."

"If you think his Satanic majesty, the sun, is going to help you," she murmured.

"Why shouldn't he?"

"I've seen him at home, remember."

In the rich afternoon light, they faced each other, still standing among the wan masses of the shrouded furniture.

"Look here, Persis, what is all this about? Anything to do with that rotten voyage?"

She did not answer at once.

"Or with that man--Angier?"

"Yes, everything to do with him."

"You're in love with him?" He dropped into a chair, put his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands.

"Try not to be stupid, Tony. To the best of my recollection, I detested him."

"You've praised him highly."

"Yes? I'm glad of that, for I think he deserved it. I should have scarcely expected myself to do my duty in that way, though."

"Well, then.... Have you heard from him?" Tony Wainwright, in the presence of a problem, could not, for the life of him, help behaving like a lawyer. His tones were so familiar that Persis Lambert smiled a little.

"Heard from him? Never. What do you take me for?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't."

"I fancy he sees. But that isn't the point." She sat down, herself, then. "What I have to say, Tony, is very simple--or it would be simple if you weren't likely to think it preposterous. The honest fact is that I can't marry any one. I feel like a widow, if you want to know."

He was silent for a moment. "I see." Then he got up and walked to the chimney-piece.

"I'd be willing to wager a good deal that you don't see." Her voice was hard as porcelain with a wonderful glaze.

"I tell you I detested him. For that matter, I don't know why. He behaved with exceeding consideration throughout. He rose out of a nightmare and went away into a nightmare, and in between he did everything he could for me. I know nothing about him--who he is, or where he came from, or where he has gone. If either one of us can help it, I am quite sure we shall never meet again. That is the whole history of that."

"What is there, then?"

"Quite simply this: that I feel as if I had been married to him, and I'm quite incapable of marrying again."

"But why?"

"Try it yourself, Tony! Six weeks--they tell me it was six weeks, but it was the longest lifetime I've ever lived--of complete isolation on a naked coral island with a man you've never seen before. Nothing between you and him--nothing. As lonely we were as the first man and woman; and for all I knew, it might go on for ever. You've never experienced an intimacy like that. Compared with us, you and I are strangers. I can't describe it.... Night after night, the only thing that stood between me and dying of fear was the sound of his breathing. Time after time his body kept mine from being soaked, flesh and bone, with rain. I mended his clothes with a sharpened thorn, and we huddled under the same thatch to keep off the horrible sun. There has never been anything like it. I never dreamed of living such a life with you. And"--her voice grew thin, disdainful, remote--"I disliked him."

"Do you dislike me?" Wainwright asked curiously.

"I am exceedingly fond of you. But I have a horror of marriage. I have a horror of ever again being intimate with any human creature. I can't do it; and that's the end of it."

"Damn him!" said Wainwright, under his breath.

"You needn't damn him. He did his best. And I did mine. But we were flung on that sand to root for existence like two animals. Every nerve in me has been violated. I never wish to face a single reality of life again. To be a wife would be more than I could bear."

"We'll talk of it again." Tony Wainwright, with almost superhuman composure, started towards the door. "You have always been hypersensitive, and now, my poor darling, you are ill. It has been too much for you. It will take time, and I shan't hurry you. You're right about that. I knew something was up, but I imagined it was just the beastly reaction after such a time. I dare say I'd better leave you now. When may I come again?"

She rested her eyes on him tenderly. "Whenever you like, so long as you understand that we're not engaged."

He took a step towards her. "Persis, I can't go away like this. You snap a thread and blow me down the wind. You must let me have it out with you when you're rested, when you're calmer."

"Am I not calm?"

"Not sanely calm, no."

"Then I never shall be."

"I don't believe that, dear." He bent over her and touched her hair very lightly. "I'll come to-morrow, earlier." She did not look up, but he bent no

nearer. In a moment he straightened himself, drawing a deep breath. “Wasn’t he in love with you, Persis?”

She started slightly as if she had heard something other than words--as if, across half the earth, the faint ripple of a lagoon could sound faintly and die away. “No, Tony, I am quite sure that he wasn’t.”

“Could you have told? He must have been, dear.”

“I could have told. He wasn’t.”

“And I may come to-morrow?” He took her hand.

Gently, Persis Lambert worked her hand free. “Surely, you may come whenever you will--if you understand that it’s over.”

“And you are all to win again? Oh, Persis, Persis! But you’re worth it, darling, and I’ll never say a word too much. I’ll serve seven years if I must.”

“It won’t take you seven years to find out the truth.” She shook her head at him as he turned on the threshold to look back. “You’ll get no more of it from me, ever, than you’ve had this afternoon.”

By old habit, she went to the window to watch him come out. The same habit made him lift his face. She blew him a kiss, and stood there until he was out of sight. “That is the last thing I shall ever do for any man,” she said, aloud, as she turned away from the window.

Louquier's Third Act

Louquier had been crossed in love. The old phrase covers his case. The girl does not matter, the circumstances do not matter; nothing matters except that Louquier had fallen in love, and that the lady had not reciprocated--not at least effectively, to the point of marrying Louquier. She does not come into the story in her own person; only as a cause. She affected Louquier; and his state is responsible for what happened. Of course Louquier's own temperament counts largely; other men might have been affected differently. Louquier, crossed in love, was a very special human formula.

Louquier was cursed with a small patrimony that made it entirely unnecessary for him to work, so long as his tastes remained simple. The lady apart, he had no ambitions; he was, I regret to say, the sort of obsolescent fool who thinks that it is more lovely to be than to do, and that your most serious task in life is to adorn and beautify your personality. If he had been up to it, he would have been a first-class dilettante. He would have loved rejecting (like Walter Pater) exquisite cinerarias of the wrong color, or leaving a concert-hall because Beethoven was too vulgarly romantic. But he could never have done either, for the simple reason that his good, garish taste would never have given him the tip. His way did not lie through Art. He was too easily pleased. He loved Beauty even when it was merely pretty. No, his way did not lie through Art.

Louquier knew something of all this and wisely did not try for instincts that he did not possess. But he had his own way of being a highbrow. He could first isolate and then appreciate an emotion or a sensation--either in himself or in others. He loved the quiet dramas that take place within an individual nature; he could scent psychologic moments from afar. The twist of a mouth or the lift of an eyebrow meant to him unutterable things. He would carry home with him a gesture, a phrase, a twitch of the mask, and before his comfortable fire sit, as in a parquet-box, watching a gorgeous third act of his own creation. It should be said here that Louquier was usually right about his third acts and seldom mistook a curtain-raiser for a play. He had a flair. He rejected, at sight, the kind of human being to whom no spiritual adventures come; and could recognize hysterical imitation a mile away. He despised emotion for emotion's sake. It might be as slight as you liked, but it must be the real thing. He was perfectly sincere in his own amorous misadventure; he

suffered as naïvely as a boy of eighteen. His heart was veritably broken, and when he withdrew from the world it was to nurse a real wound.

Louquier had brown eyes, brown hair, brown skin, the lean figure that best sorts with that general brownness and half presupposes an eye-glass. He did not, however, wear an eye-glass; and he had large, white, tombstone teeth--not the teeth of his type. He was a good fellow, and popular with men. You see, he never told any one about his passion for other people's crises; he kept it very shyly and decently to himself. Moreover, no one ever brought first-aid to the emotionally injured more promptly than Louquier, so people told him things. Yet, as he had no business, and had wandered a good deal (in the most conventional ways), he had no fixed circle of friends. At any given moment, in any given place, he was apt to be rather solitary.

That is enough about Louquier's personality. If you can't "get" him, I can hardly give him to you.

Louquier withdrew, as I say, into himself--retreated to a house that, by accident of a cousin's investment, now, the cousin being dead, belonged to him. He had hitherto rented it, for the few years that he had owned it; but the lease had expired, and it struck Louquier that he had never lived in a house of his own. That in itself might give him a sensation--a conventional one, but worth experiencing. As he couldn't marry, and had no religion, perhaps it was as near as he would ever come to feeling like a pillar of society. It was really that sense of the curious value of living under one's own vine and fig-tree which drew him. His natural instinct would have been to retire to mountain fastnesses, or discover some Ravenswoodish ruin in which to shiver. You can see that he was very hard hit, and that he was not a subtle person.

The villa was at least remote from the scene of his discomfiture. It was a smallish, comfortable, rather ugly mansion on the bank of the Assiniboine, one of the older houses on Wellington Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Girdled by a high wall, its best rooms arranged at the back, facing the river, to which its tangled garden sloped negligently down, "Whitewood" had a wholly English flavor of privacy and comfort. It was at once modest and sturdy; it lived to itself, and asked favors of no one--least of all the favor of looking into its neighbors' premises. That suited Louquier perfectly; he saw at once that a British tradition was there to offset the newness of Winnipeg. Of course, being officially an American, he couldn't well taste the essence of being "colonial," but he thought he could be secluded and guindé and "middle" with the best. It quite suited his present temper, and he established himself. Good servants

sprang miraculously into being on the spot--probably because he was a bachelor. The Assiniboine was a noble stream; the wall round his garden was very high; it was delightfully incongruous of him to be there at all; he was pleased with himself for having had the courage to come. He felt more steeped in foreignness than if he had done something more exotic. He saw no one, except for necessary business. He did not wish to force the note. He rather liked subjecting his dramatic sense to local color. Still, he never forgot the girl, for he had been very hard hit. At this stage of Louquier's life he even shrank a little from encountering a woman.

Then--it was hard to say just when, for his experience was very gradual--he began to be uncomfortable; he could not precisely say how or why. He had mapped out for himself a course of reading that included some notorious modern Frenchmen. (This was all before the war.) He hoped, I fancy, to get a sensation out of reading Huysmans on the banks of the Assiniboine. Certainly any effect that Huysmans and Catulle Mendès could succeed in producing, in Winnipeg, would be a real effect, not meretriciously aided. The long evenings were a good time to read. During the day, he wandered about out of doors or went about the slow business of regenerating the interior of the house. One of his concessions had been to buy furniture in bulk, on the spot; but there were still gaps to be filled and rearranging to be done. His library was disfigured by a hideous stained-glass window. He was always planning to have it replaced; but in the end he kept it because he thought the Indians would have liked it. You can see how unworthily Louquier amused himself. The fact is that he was very tired of it all--"it all" being life. He was bored with his own depression; but he simply could not bestir himself for an antidote. For a long time he felt, peevishly, that it was up to Wellington Crescent to be the antidote.

The spring came early that year, and, as I said, Louquier spent a good deal of time out of doors. Once, driven forth by his curious mental discomfort which had begun in the late winter, he took a train to Calgary. He returned almost immediately, and while he found that he was glad to get back, still, Calgary had not done for him what he hoped. Calgary was nauseous in retrospect without making him feel that Winnipeg was heaven. The fact is, Winnipeg was no place for Louquier. But his discomfort was of that peculiar kind which one does not run away from. At first it showed itself in mere inability to keep his mind on his book or on anything else. Louquier took a blue-pill and hired a horse to ride. But still he could not, in the evenings, keep his mind on anything. Then he wondered if the stained-glass window were not

responsible: he hated it so. Even with the curtain drawn across it at night, he was conscious of it behind his back. The stained glass was not a picture, and was a design only by courtesy. It looked like what one used to see through an old-fashioned kaleidoscope; or, rather, it looked like circumstantial evidence of a lunatic's having been turned loose in a kindergarten. Yet the weeks went by, and he did not replace it. A morbid indolence was gaining the secret channels of his soul. His mind seemed as complicated an organism as the body, and it felt as your body feels when you have a bad case of grippe--he seemed to have mental hands and feet and vital organs, all of which ached and were tired. Yet he was still perfectly capable of admiring the technique of En Ménage--when he could pay attention to it. That was the trouble: he could not concentrate. Each thing refused to hold him and passed him on to another. He was a shuttle-cock among a thousand battledores. He was not consciously averse to any of the physical facts of his life, except the stained-glass window. Finally he took to keeping the curtain drawn across it all day; but when the sun struck it, it spotted and dashed and figured the pale silk curtain. That was dreadful--to think that it had power to make over something else in its own indecent likeness. Louquier did rouse himself to get a heavy drapery of red rep hung over it. He felt that life would be better after that; but then the almond-smell began.

Louquier was never able positively to account for the odor of bitter almonds that beset him in the late spring. It had nothing to do with the vegetation at "Whitewood." He sniffed every flower, shrub, and tree to find out. It was not merely in Louquier's mind, for when he went in to town or rode about the environs of Winnipeg he escaped it utterly. Nor was it the natural effluvium of the Assiniboine River. Besides, it was noticeable only in the house. He remarked it at first without suspicion, with a languid curiosity. He was almost happy, the one or two days that he spent sniffing. It gave him something to think about, for a few hours; something to do for its own sake. When he had proved the innocence of nature, he investigated the house. He crept down into the kitchen one afternoon when both the servants were safe elsewhere, opened canisters, and peeped into cupboards. He could find no source for the odor. The almond-smell surrounded him faintly in the kitchen as it did everywhere else, but there was no sharp increase of it in any corner to guide him. So he eliminated the kitchen from his conjectures, but he did not get rid of the smell. It was not unpleasant in itself, but it was too constant. To

sit in the library, day after day, beside the red rep curtain and smell bitter almonds was too much--just too much.

Louquier had, of course, questioned the cook in the beginning; but she had disavowed completely all culinary use of almonds. At last, however--he had sniffed all the furniture by this time, and he was convinced that no upholstery or varnish was responsible--he decided to get rid of the cook. The odor had not been there when he settled in the villa, and that he did not carry the scent upon himself was proved by the fact that only in his own house were his nostrils oppressed by it. Of course he had sniffed through his whole wardrobe. It might be that his cook was an almond-carrier, as some people are typhoid-carriers. Getting rid of her meant getting rid also of his capable man-servant, for the two were united in the bonds of matrimony. It was a great nuisance, for they served him well; but in the end he did it. Louquier could not bring himself to put to the woman a straight question as to whether any of her toilet accessories were almond-scented. He had attested the fact of the pervasive odor and shown that he objected to it; if she used almond soap or anything of the kind, it was up to her, on that hint, to change her cosmetic habit. But there was no sign of her making any such concession to his prejudices. He shrank from active discussion of so personal a matter. He had given hints enough, and his hints were disregarded. Either the woman wasn't responsible, or, being responsible, she chose not to reform. There was only one way out: he sacked them both.

The almond episode had no real sequel, but it had two important results. In the first place, the servants were not easily replaced. They left their "situation," undoubtedly spreading tales. Louquier was probably the victim of a servile boycott. At all events, he could not find their equivalents, and he had no friend among the Winnipeg ladies to turn to for counsel. It reduced itself to his getting on with a charwoman who came to get his breakfast and departed after cooking him an early and unspeakably English dinner. An old Scotchman pottered about the garden for a few hours each day. This domestic discomfort was one result of the almond nuisance. The other was a serious impairment of Louquier's nervous condition. The mental discomfort became acute. That he was not the easy prey of obsessions is shown by the fact that he really did, within a week or so after the servants' departure, cease to notice the almond-smell. Had he been a nervous wreck, it would have been only too easy for him to invent the odor for himself; and that he did not do. It was really gone, and his nostrils bore unimpeachable witness to the fact. I do not offer

Louquier's refusal to shut up the villa and leave Winnipeg as an evidence of sanity. To leave would have been the most sensible thing he could do. But there his mortal indolence came in. He could go about sniffing, but he could not go about packing. He simply stuck on, the worse for wear. Louquier also, of course, had the universal male illusion: namely, that he was a practical person. It was much more sensible to stay on a few months more and rent, if he could, in the autumn; no one would rent in the spring, anyhow; it would be a bad advertisement to leave so soon; and, besides, he was saving money. Everything, you see, combined to keep him there. Early in May he heard from a kind friend that the lady had announced her engagement. That disposed of any wandering notions he might have had of departure. It would be to insult his own heart to pretend it was a casino when it was really a tomb. Meanwhile the mental discomfort grew and grew like a secret malady. It is only fair to say that Louquier did not in the least enjoy his own drama. He would have given the world and all to be happy.

By mid-May, Huysmans, Catulle Mendès et C□□ were flung aside. Louquier simply could not stand literature. He took to American fiction, which again shows his sanity. The novels disgusted him, but for a time they worked; even the love-making did not depress him, for it was very badly done. But after a fortnight the charm failed. He found himself idly inverting all the situations--making the characters (when there were any) sardonically and plausibly do something quite different. His running marginal gloss turned the most ridiculous and optimistic plots into the most logical and depressing horrors. The hero ceased, for Louquier, to rescue the heroine; the heroine walked not unscathed through her vicious context; the villains flourished like the green bay-tree, refusing either to reform or to perish. He stopped reading our serious contemporaries and took to the humorists. But he soon found that one cannot laugh indefinitely alone.

By June, Louquier was really in a bad way. If he had not tried to be sensible, he would have done much better; but he was busy adorning his personality with an iron will. At that stage of the game an iron will was about as useful to him as the red curtain over the stained-glass window. He ought, in the interests of health and happiness, to have wobbled a little; to have seized on Falstaffian wisdom and run away. His brown face was growing white with his effort. But Louquier was perfectly sincere in not seeing it that way. Remember, too, that his chosen diversion was failing him. A recluse on the banks of the Assiniboine, he had no third acts to divine. His flair, disused,

became temporarily lost to him, and he found the Winnipeg streets barren of drama. He could not even reconstruct the tragedy of his own charwoman, though obviously every charwoman must have had one. The Scotch gardener was as impenetrable as a Scotch mist. Louquier gave up riding; he gave up his blue-pills; he stuck to his own vine and upas-tree. If he had not always expected to leave Winnipeg in the autumn, I think he would have gone under. But he did not--quite.

Louquier was now afraid. Up to that time he had not experienced fear; his condition had stopped at acute discomfort. It was very like a bodily ailment, not serious, for which people try home remedies. The home remedies had not worked, but he was not going to a specialist for a malady that seemed to attack him in one spot as much as, and no more than, in another. He would, you might say, hardly know whether to choose an aurist or an orthopedist. His broken heart, his indolence, and his iron will combined to keep him passive; and he called it being sensible. Thanks to the girl, flavor had gone out of life like the taste out of honey; it was a thick, insipid glue. It was wearing; it was disagreeable; but it could be borne, since other men had borne it. Then, as I say, fear came.

Louquier was sitting alone in his library, trying to read. The charwoman had left a few hours since; the gardener, of course, long before that. Quite suddenly he realized that he had a new fact to reckon with. He laid his book down very softly on the table, rose, by the aid of his iron will, from his chair, and walked slowly across to the corner of the room between the fireplace and the built-in book-shelves. A light chair that stood in his way he moved, first passing his hand across its satin seat. Then he took his stand in the exact corner of the room, facing outward, arms truculently folded. He stood there for about five minutes, his eyes glancing hither and yon. Then he walked back, lugged his easy-chair over by the fireplace and set it with its back to the wall. Before leaving it, he passed his hand carefully down the wall behind it. Then he moved the table, with the lamp, over beside the arm-chair. Thus the chair was hemmed in between the square table on one side and the jutting chimney-breast on the other. Behind it was a windowless wall. Louquier then sat down and took up his book again. He knew as well as if he had seen it with his eyes or heard it with his ears, where the thing was that disturbed him, but he refused to treat it as anything more than a manifestation of impudence. He trusted that by putting it, as it were, in its place, he could teach it manners--perhaps discourage it finally. The presence was perceptible to no

sense; it flowed from spot to spot as quietly as air; but Louquier knew at any given moment where it was. He knew, too, whether it faced him or turned away; and he was more comfortable when it turned away. He kept his eyes on his book; he turned over pages; he even lighted and smoked a cigarette. He put up a brave front to the beastly thing. All the same, he knew that if it did not go away, he should have to sit there all night. He was not going to turn his back to it, to pass through the door; and he would not, positively would not (here was the iron will), back out of the room. Besides, if the thing followed him up-stairs, it would be worse. He could not switch on the up-stairs lights from below. It was very curious, how much he seemed to know about the thing--its size, for example, and the measure of its gait as it moved. He had even a vague impression of its shape, though his eye could not detect the faintest alteration in the look of the spot where it so definitely stood. He had as yet no means of knowing whether it was malevolent or not, but he loathed it. Occasionally he looked up from his book, oriented the presence, and looked directly at it with bored and scornful eyes. That was all he could do--get up again, he would not. Nor would he speak to it. He had a curious conviction that that way lay madness. No; he would meet it on its own ground. It moved, and he might move; it directed itself in some unnamable way towards him, and he would stare at it insolently; it occupied its place, and he would definitely occupy his own. But he would not speak; he would not probe the laws of its being further than itself announced them. The merest visual sign would have been an immense relief to him--a devil with cloven hoof, a ghost draped in white, would have been child's play. Then he could have trusted his eye or his ear; as it was, he had to depend wholly on this nameless sense which placed his enemy for him. That nameless sense must not get blunted. He must keep very wide awake lest his enemy steal a march on him. Above all, he must not pretend to be unaware, and at the same time must pretend not to be frightened. How much intelligence the thing had, of course he did not know. It might be laughing at his bluff, but at least he would keep it up. He hoped he should not grow sleepy. He had long since given up coffee and other stimulants. Louquier had become a man for whom there is absolutely no sense in keeping awake.

After an hour, during which Louquier turned over just forty pages--he kept careful track of his intervals--the thing departed by the door open into the hall. Louquier felt it go. He had a very pretty problem to face, then: whether to follow it or not. If he did not, it meant sitting all night in his library--a great nuisance and a craven act. It would prove to the thing that he was afraid of it, and that would be exceedingly unfortunate. He ought, of course, to pretend that he was tired and wanted to go to bed--and to go. On the other hand, it was going to be a difficult business to blow out the lamp, walk into a dark hall, and mount the dark stairs to his bedroom. True, he could not see the thing, even in the lighted room; but he doubted if, in the dark, he could place it at all. It could be lived with only if it could be placed--delimited, as it were. He would not answer for his perfect conduct if the thing turned out to be lurking in the hall. He had no clue whatever to the intelligence of this besetting presence; but he felt, somehow, that it gauged him by the visual signs he gave. It might, if he stayed there, know that he was afraid of it; still, it might not be clever enough to make that inference. Whereas if he rushed out into the darkness, he could not answer for what he should do--something, very likely, that would show beyond question how terrified he was. He might even blunder into the thing itself, in the dark. He was by no means sure that it was perceptible even to the touch, yet he dreaded the thought of such an impact as though it had

been certain death. There was nothing for him to do but stay--though, for all he knew, the thing might already have wandered out into the night. He would not even get up and shut the door. How did he know whether doors were an obstacle to it? And if it should elect to come back, through the closed door, he would be more mocked than ever--to say nothing of the sense he would have of being shut in with it, without redress. No, there was nothing for it but for him to stay--and to fend off sleep somehow. If he should drowse and it should return, he would be left to its unclean mercy. Louquier was angry. First, the girl; then the stained-glass and the bitter almonds; then the recognized but unadmitted stupidity of his whole Winnipeg idea; the acute discomfort--and now this.

Louquier got through the night without mischance. Towards dawn he grew so sleepy that nothing but sleep seemed to matter; his stupor blunted all his nerves. He fell asleep in his chair, indeed, and woke up with the streaming light of morning. The room was clear and free; you would never have guessed that anything save the commonplace had inhabited it. Naturally, Louquier took the line of wondering if he had not eaten something that oppressed him; though why boiled lettuce should introduce you to the supernatural! The memory was vivid, however, and he saw a man about installing electric switches below-stairs--one inside the library door, and one in the hall outside. The business took a day or two, and until it was done Louquier went straight from his dining-room to his bedroom, locked the door, and read there. He did not sleep very well on these nights. For one thing, he was acutely ashamed of being up-stairs behind a locked door; for another, he had a very definite conception--though he had no corroborative "sense" of it--of the thing's ranging about below in unholy and unlawful occupation of his, Louquier's, premises. No man really likes to pull the bedclothes over his head while the burglar is frankly stealing the plate below, even though he may wisely choose to do so; and that is precisely what it seemed to Louquier that he was doing. Still he was not going, for any consideration of mere dignity, to risk another encounter until he had guarded his exit with electricity. With the lights properly installed, electric switches marking his natural line of progress from after-dinner coffee to bed, he returned to his habit of spending the evening in the library. The fact that there was nothing he really wanted to read--ergo, no joy to be had in sitting there, anyhow--tipped all his plans and precautions with irony. Still, a man has to assume that his routine--whatever it may be--has an unimpeachable reason for being, or he has given up the game

completely. Louquier was not ready to destroy his convention and let life depart.

The next fortnight, to Louquier, was a long, cumulative agony. There would be no point in making a diary of it; given the initial facts, psychic and physical, which I have tried to make clear, one has only to let logic deal with the situation. Each day became, in its turn, a new irritation as well as a fresh irritant. Night after night he faced the thing in his library. Its hours of appearing and disappearing differed slightly, from evening to evening; it chose apparently, not to work like an automaton or a mechanism, but to create to the end its impression of individuality, of volition. It kept its appointment irregularly, as though it had other engagements; but it always kept it.

Of course, in the long, irrelevant, sunlit hours, he balanced in his mind the possibilities of the thing's getting at his sanity. But he took his sanity objectively, too. If his body was the citadel that must not crumble, his healthy mind was the garrison within that must, if possible, live on, and live on without surrendering. He did not want to crawl out by any subterranean passage, and then make a hopeless running fight of it. Not he! He stood on his rights; but he stood even more, soldier-fashion, on his counted ammunition and the state of his supplies. You could not truthfully say, however, that the wall was unbreached. There were some nasty little breaks in it here and there--as if the girl, the stained-glass, and the almond-smell, the unaccountable discomfort of all the months, had been spies doing effective work within, while awaiting the real coup. Louquier was not, nervously, all that he might have been. Already, after a fortnight, he felt less able to combat the thing. If it had appeared irregularly, so that Louquier could have held it, to any extent, dependent on outside causes--the weather, his digestion, anything--it would have been easier. But whatever else might come or go, and though it chose its precise hour to suit itself, it never failed him. "Old Faithful," he jeered silently to himself once. Sometime between dusk and dawn he could be sure of it. In the third week of his siege he began definitely to fear that he could not keep up his bluff much longer. He had a horrid vision of some surrendering gesture--of his speaking to it, or going on his knees to it. He loathed it almost more than he feared it. It seemed a dishonorable enemy for a man to be up against. He would not be treated like a soldier and a gentleman, if he did surrender.

Then came a night when Louquier walked from dining-room to library, preternaturally grave. He felt so sapped and shrunken that he wasted no gestures in bravado. He let himself walk like a tired man--which he was. He put his tobacco beside him; he piled up his books; he passed his hand over the hollow of the chair before seating himself; he shook the lamp a little to see if there was oil enough to last out the night, if need be. All that was mere ritual--and how tired he was of it! If the thing would only let up on him for once--give him a rest, a chance to revictual himself and bury his dead! This inevitable vigilance was like a cancer, eating daily further into his vital tissue. Should he never again be able to live carelessly, as other men do? In an hour, or two hours, or three, he would look up from his book and be aware of its entrance; would diagnose its actual mood and select his mask accordingly; would go through the same difficult and wearisome ordeal. When its whim was spent, and it took leave of him, he would go up-stairs to bed. Towards morning he would sleep. He had never shut the door against it, judging that his state of mind would be worse if, to his knowledge, it came through a closed door. He left the portal hospitably open, and it entered like any human through the passage provided. Good God! how bored he was!

He did not have to wait long to-night. It came as early as if it had rushed straight from dinner. Immediately he knew how it placed itself--in a Morris-chair opposite him, beside a French window that led into the garden. There was something jaunty and flippant in its manner. Absurd though it may sound to speak of the thing's manner, it is quite within the facts as Louquier's mind registered them. He was aware, as I have said, of its gait; some stir of the displaced air where it moved informed him. He perceived, though by none of the five senses, mass and coherence in this creature, just as some hitherto useless convolution of his brain registered its temper. It breathed its humor to him to-night in some exact, unnamable way. Louquier leaned his head back and waited. Perhaps it would go early; perhaps it had merely looked in to remind him, and would presently be off, having other Stygian fish to fry. He hoped so, for he was very tired. He even felt drowsiness coming on before its time, and Louquier had no spur to prick him awake. None but fear; and its sharp edge was blunted with much rowelling of his own flesh. He closed his eyes occasionally for an instant, as one does to push sleep out with the firm, sudden gesture of opening the eyelids. And at last, in one of those lightning-brief intervals, the thing moved towards him. The event was all too quick for Louquier to think, to diagnose afresh its mood. He knew only, as he

had never known before, that he must have done with it. He had reached the point known to all of us--though, thank heaven, in other contexts--when ennui becomes a passion like hatred or blood-lust, when weariness turns from a sigh to a shriek. And with that sense he knew that the enemy was at last in the citadel. His sanity was threatened. He dared wait no longer for its moment. Louquier caught up a light chair that stood near and brought it heavily down on the spot where the thing stood. The slim chair rocked on its broken legs, and sank down in a mass of splinters. For the first time, Louquier turned his back on the presence and fled from the room. He did not care; he was not afraid any more as he rushed up the stairs; he was only passionately excited and conscious of relief at having at last acted, in however mad a way. All his sanity had gone into the blow; it was Louquier's protest, the protest of the whole of him, of the integral man, against the sly and foul attack on his integrity. That was what the thing had desired--to resolve his integrity, to riddle his ego, and shred up his very soul; to leave him incapable of saying "I" with conviction. It had wanted to disintegrate Louquier, to smash his singleness into bits, to turn him to a loose agglomeration of mental dust--so that no man again should be able to say, "This is Louquier." Louquier knew as well as any of us that you do not combat the psychic fact with physical weapons, yet the violent gesture had seemed his only way out. Though he could not hope to destroy the thing, he could perhaps prove to it that he was not a mere puddle of fear. Practically, it was as silly as trying to stab a ghost; yet it had counted, to Louquier himself. He had no notion that he had hurt the thing, but he had shown that his muscles were still at the service of his hatreds. Just before he rose, he had felt himself going; the very marrow of his nature oozing away through unguessed channels. By that one gesture the faithful flesh had saved him.

Or, at least, so he thought, standing in his bedroom, erect and panting, facing the door with clenched hands. A trickle of blood across one knuckle elated him; it showed that he had put forth strength, that the chair had really crashed and splintered under his hands. Within him, the blood pumped through his heart; he felt its healthy, impatient motions through his body. Would the thing rush up the stairs to avenge itself? He did not care. Let it come. It might kill him, but not, now, before he had made his gesture; not before he had let it know how he loathed it, and how little it had mesmerized his spirit. He could at least die a free man, overmatched, but not cowed. For the first time in months Louquier felt genial, like a man playing an honest part

in a world of other men. All the last weeks he had seemed to himself isolated, shamefully, as a criminal is isolated, because he is not worthy to associate with others. All the things that had happened to him had seemed chosen and selected for the purpose of showing him that he was small game of a very dirty sort.

Louquier, standing there, triumphant over the unreal, with blood on his knuckles from a smashed and splintered chair, is an absurd figure to the inward eye. He was more like a silly and complacent drunken gentleman than a hero who has fought with the powers of darkness. I am aware of that. But Louquier, to whom, aforetime, a lifted hand or a révérence de la cour could seem, for reasons, an epic gesture, did not see himself in that light. He was conscious only that for the first time since he had said good-bye to the girl, he had expressed himself. Hanging the red rep curtain, for example, had been the mere pout of the æsthete. Sacking the cook was a weak artificial gesture. But now he walked into his dressing-room and washed the blood--it was only a drop or two--off his knuckle with the beautiful physical simplicity of a navvy. It was an honorable wound; and honorable wounds got in the day's work you stanch as quickly as you can.

Louquier's sense of the presence had never worked, away from it. He did not know whether it remained below or had departed from his house. It had not followed him, and after half an hour he realized that it did not mean to leap to its revenge. He mused a little, strategically. It seemed possible that his enemy, insulted by a mere thing of flesh, might bide its time--wait for him to sleep and then pursue him. He fancied it very angry; so angry, perhaps, that it would not leave his roof before it had struck back. Note that Louquier, on reaffirming his independence, in defying his terror, had no sense whatever of stepping out from under an obsession. The thing was not an obsession; it was real, and it had been--perhaps still was--there. His conception of facts had not been false; his attitude to them, only, had been wrong. He realized, for example, that he must watch until morning, for he still did not wish to be helpless in sleep before his enemy. So far as he knew, the only power that could prevail against it was the sovereign sun. Still the practical man, he made with alert and vivid gestures his preparations for the night: drew an easy-chair under the light, put on a comfortable dressing-gown, set a pitcher of cold water on the table beside him, and took up one of the humorists. Tobacco was not forgotten. It was an hour or more, though, before he either smoked or read; for quite that length of time he waited for a sign. The silence of night

ebbed and flowed around him. External sounds--a voice, carriage-wheels, the stir of an animal in the shrubbery--fell across it occasionally; but every now and then he would seem to reach some central pool of stillness, and then that sense in him which perceived the presence would be strainingly on its guard. No sign came, however--none at all; and after an hour he relaxed a little and lighted a pipe.

The hours that followed were singularly monotonous. Suspicion, reassurance, false alarms and quick reactions followed one another interminably. Louquier was perfectly sure that something would happen before morning; that his enemy, having perfected its plan, would mount in search of him. Thence resulted a curious ignorance of how time was passing. He had covered his watch with a cushion so as not to hear its ticking, for though the straining of that sense was not listening, it was more like listening than anything else. The dawn, when it came, was incredible to him; it seemed impossible that the thing should not have struck before fleeing, though the dim light on the waters of the Assiniboine proved to him that he was safe. Louquier, still half-dressed, threw himself on his bed and slept. He dreamed, a chain of dreams, about the girl, and woke jaded.

The disapproving charwoman had set out his breakfast in response to his ring from above-stairs. Louquier went straight to the dining-room and ate. His first cigarette he took outside in the garden; there was time enough, in all conscience, to revisit the battle-field. To him, among the flower-beds, appeared the charwoman, twisting her apron in red, wet hands. She had found the heap of broken wood, and all the selfrighteousness of her clan was in arms. She had not touched nothing, so help her; she had looked in with her mop and all, before breakfast, and--she had seen what she had seen. She had not gone in; she had left things as they was for the master to see with his own eyes. Louquier, standing on the threshold of the garden door, his back to the light, realized swiftly that there were three possibilities--to affect not to believe her, to admit that he had done it himself, or to say that it was very curious and perfectly incomprehensible. It does not matter which one he chose, for it is plain to see that with charring easy come by, to say nothing of plenty of places nearer 'ome, and her with three children to leave all day by theirselves--it is plain to see that all three must inevitably have led to the same conclusion. Either she had been called a liar, or Louquier drank, or he couldn't keep other people from playing the monkey with his property. The charwoman, of course, gave notice, to take effect after dinner that evening. Louquier thought for a

moment of asking the gardener if he could cook; but whatever the gardener could have cooked, Louquier knew certainly he could not have eaten. Nor would he for the twentieth time consult an employment agency in vain. It was a dog's life, and he wouldn't live it. He would go to a hotel.

You are not to think that Louquier intended even then to run away. He formed, during the day, a somewhat complicated plan. Mingled with the relief of his decision to sleep and eat elsewhere--the charwoman, showing a proper pride to the last, burned everything she cooked for him that day--was the annoyance of realizing that he must also stick by. He must not really leave the house; he must spend much of his day there. Also--and this was most important of all--he must be at his post during the long evening. If the thing returned, it must find him on the spot. His relation to it had become to Louquier the most important present fact of life, the fact he could least ignore. If it did not come--well, after, say, three nights, he might honorably assume that it did not intend to return. Then he could shut up the villa and leave Winnipeg, if he liked. The practical man could no longer insist that he was saving money by living in his own house if he was sleeping and eating at an inn. He could tell the agent that he found it hard to get satisfactory servants; that wouldn't give the house a black eye. The practical man, absolved and justified, could go anywhere he liked, having done, in perfect dignity, with his Winnipeg adventure. You may infer from all this that Louquier was a different man after dealing, in however absurd a way, with his enemy. But he was not precisely different; he had merely, as it were, rearranged the furniture; a number of things had gone into the attic. His mind was in no sense a new house, or even a refurnished one.

To prove this, I have only to tell you that Louquier felt his enemy, if anything, more actual, more dangerous, than during the long vigil in his bedroom the night before. It had not perished. Was a mock-Sheraton chair ever known to destroy an elemental being? The fact that it had delayed its revenge seemed to Louquier significant and appalling, and reinforced his conception of it as a creature of complicated intelligence. It was not a mere evil impulse, to spend itself in windy, ungoverned ways. It could control itself, hold off, plan--achieve, probably. It is no exaggeration to say that Louquier looked forward to the evening as being very probably fatal to him. If his will had not already been made, he would, I fancy, have made it that day. You are to realize that Louquier did not feel himself strong; he only felt himself decent. He had hit back and proved himself normal. What gesture he should find to

meet it with again, he did not know--perhaps none. For that matter, it might bring seven other devils with it when it came again. Louquier was very tired, and his domestic arrangements and disarrangements did not make him less so. At the end of the afternoon he flung himself down in his hotel bedroom and slept, waking only in time for a late and hasty dinner. He dressed for dinner, too, which cut his margin down. As he got into a cab and gave his own address to the driver, he had all the sense of being late for an important engagement. He distinctly wanted to be first on the ground. Besides, he had to light up the house and fling open the windows--to say nothing of arranging the library, as usual, for the encounter.

First on the ground he was. He had plenty of time to make his preparations to the last detail. He was more tired than he remembered having been at all; but he had taken coffee and did not fear sleep. He thought with irritation of the tourist crowd he had left in the hotel--a mob with suit-cases, ready to go on to Banff and Lake Louise. They had been very irrelevant to his own situation--or was he merely irrelevant to theirs? Sitting in his library, he recalled their fantastic hats and voices. Suppose he had kidnapped one or two of them, and chucked them into his library there above the Assiniboine! He felt injured; he almost wished he could have.

The evening lengthened; and still Louquier sat there, back against the wall, flimsily barricaded as usual. The thing was late, very late. Ten o'clock, and still it had not come. He read a little, or pretended to, then at last lit a cigarette. And as if the striking of the match had been a signal, his enemy entered. Louquier's heart sank; he knew then that all day, beneath his certainty, he had nursed a frail hope that it would not return; that it had had enough of him. Just as always, his sense placed it for him, showed him where it moved and how it felt. It moved haltingly, jerking from corner to corner, as if the anger in his famous gesture had maimed it. But it did not sit down. It moved about the room in odd curves and tangents, limping ever a little nearer to Louquier. Louquier could not stir; he could not even, this time, rise. Never had the thing so concentrated its emotion on him; it focussed him as with straight glances from its invisible eyes. He had not dreamed that he, that any man, could be hated like that. The thing was hate, as God is love. It came swerving towards him like a drunken doom. Louquier sat braced in his chair, his right hand, with the lighted cigarette, shaking. There was no redress for this; the thing had stripped itself of manner and of all hypocrisy. It was coming; it was on him. Intenser than a physical touch, it covered him, pushing him back against

the cushions until the chair strained and creaked. His head bent backward over the rim of the chair--his neck felt like to break. Had it been human, its breath would have suffocated him, so close was its invisible countenance to his. He could not move his legs or feet, or his left arm, but his right elbow, pushed out across the wideish arm of the chair, had a little margin still. He drove his elbow out farther, then strained up a tense forearm and dug the lighted cigarette into the air directly in front of his own face. So complete was his consciousness of this terrible imponderable thing that he expected it to feel pain. He held the cigarette there implacably, not three inches from his own nose. In about ten seconds the lighted end went out. Yet he held it there, as if the dead cigarette could still brand his enemy. Slowly, very slowly, he got the sense of the thing's slipping from him, of its weakly pulling away. It seemed to withdraw, a loose and diminished being, out into the room. He could lift his head again; he could lean forward, could stir his legs and feet. It was still there, but its hatred seemed weaker, like the hatred of a sick man. Louquier's eyes never left it, but he threw away the cigarette stub and reached out to the box at his left for another, which he lighted and began to smoke. His neck ached shockingly, and he was limp from the pressure of his antagonist--that curious, weightless pressure on his body, as of air on the lungs. As he smoked, he watched it. It drew farther and farther away, proceeding now with indecision, different indeed from the angry lurches by which it had approached him. It seemed vaguer, weaker, almost helpless. For an instant it seemed to Louquier that the thing was groping for the door and could not find it--as if he had blinded it. Then it disappeared utterly, flowing aimlessly, feebly, across the threshold. He was aware of it to the last--knowing even the moment of its crossing the threshold and the instant when there was no vestige left of it.

For a half-hour Louquier sat on in his library, smoking, but not pretending to read. The thing would not come back that night, he knew; it had gone with all the gestures of defeat. He left the house then, though he took the precaution of leaving the light in the hall to burn on until daylight. He wanted no ambushes. Walking through the garden to the street was perhaps the worst moment Louquier had ever had, for the night was at his back. Safe in his bed at the hotel, he fell instantly asleep, and did not wake until the sun was high.

Louquier had been tired many times in Winnipeg--during the last month almost continuously so. But his weariness on this day was such a weariness of the body as he had not hitherto known. He felt sick, as if he had drunk deep

the night before; he had all the sensations of recovering from orgy. His face in the mirror frightened him. Positively, it was a marvel that he had stood out against his enemy as he had. He had a desperate desire to send the keys to his agent and to fling himself into a train; but after a day of conflict, during which all his food tasted fever-soaked, and his feet seemed cunningly wrapped in lead, he decided that he must go back once more to Wellington Crescent. After that, he would be free. Louquier's ardor had ebbed; the magnificent physical rage that had enabled him to smash the chair down upon his enemy, and then rush past it up the stairs, even the tense and quiet determination with which he had pushed the lighted cigarette into its face, were gone. He was very clear as to what had happened. The thing had nearly had him; his mind was just on the point of surrendering before its advance, and the stupid, loyal flesh had stepped in and saved him. Twice his arm had been lifted, by no conscious volition of his own, when his brain had accepted defeat. What he had feared the first time was madness; the second time he had feared only death. Still, even from that lesser catastrophe, it was his body that had defended him, and with no orders from him. The body had done enough; he ought to give it rest, let its noble instincts relax and recuperate. Suppose he went again: would it not be too much to ask of the taxed flesh? He had no reason to suppose that if he spent another evening in his unloved library, anything whatever would "happen." He fancied the thing was tired of the game. Yet he could not promise that; and he knew that, should it reappear, he could not combat it with mind alone. Never, for example, could he focus his weary emotions sufficiently to meet its hatred with like hatred--if, indeed, anything human could. This thing carried no useless baggage; it could give itself entirely to its business of hating; and its capacity was one of the well-kept secrets of the universe. No; if he met it again, he would have simply to hope that his body would make another effort. He had done nothing, really, except register his attitude to the presence; but that, only his body had been capable of doing. He had expressed himself to it only in two wild, instinctive gestures. Would there be strength enough there for another, if another were needed? How could he go?

Yet, in the end, Louquier went. He could never have done with the enemy until he had passed an evening in his library unvisited by it. He longed passionately to ask some one to go with him. A bell-boy from the hotel would do. But he knew such an evening would be no test. He ordered a cab to come for him at eleven, and told the driver not to ring the bell, but to whistle

outside. When he reached the gate, it seemed to him that he could not enter; but something--the rusted remnant of his iron will, perhaps--carried him in. In his pocket he had a loaded pistol--a quaint notion, which none the less gave him some comfort. Completely uncorporeal as the thing was, it seemed to understand his motions. He could not speak to it; his silent spirit could not communicate with its silence; he could make it know what he felt about it, apparently, only by the gestures of some low fellow in a rage. Oh, it was a vulgar beast!

Pistol cocked in his hand, Louquier sat through his first half-hour, waiting. There was no sign of its approach. Then, little by little, he became aware that it was not going to come. So slowly did this assurance gain on him that he knew it only as a deepening peace, gradual as the long northern twilight. The room was splendidly empty of the presence--empty of it to all eternity. He could fling his keys at the agent, and take a train to-morrow. He had the definite sense of having crossed something; of being on the other side of a gulf; of having emerged from a region of horror and having left a big neutral space between it and him. It even came over him as he sat there, healthily lulled, that he had, without knowing it, experienced a third act of his own. Louquier's enemy was at last, for him, behind footlights. He had got his grip, and could now deal with the episode as drama. It "composed" for him: clear proof that he was blessedly outside it; and that he was again (as it had intended he never should be) Louquier. His weariness became pleasant, turned to a velvet drowsiness. Not once, since the girl had rejected him, had he known such peace. He could almost, with half-shut eyes, envisage a future--a happy future that he could build with patience and delight. Louquier drowsed, sunk in his chair. He knew now that it would not come, and he felt safe as a child in its cradle. He was too dog-tired to mind the discomfort of his position. Presently he slept profoundly, his head on his curled arm.

The cabman's whistle sounded in the late evening, and Louquier came up through layers of sleep to greet it. In that waking instant before the pattern of life is wholly clear, he jumped, startled. His cramped, unconscious fingers closed tight on the trigger of the pistol, and he fired, as neatly as if he had meant to. Louquier was even spared the knowledge of what he had done, for the bullet, knowing what it was made for and knowing nothing else, went straight. For he had won his moral victory; and there was nothing left his baffled enemy but to stoop to physical accident. At last the impatient cabman's ring pealed through the house, but no one answered it.

The Toad and the Jewel

I didn't exactly want to go; but there are cowardices for which there is no excuse. If I had come back to America, I must face America; and Joan Delabere was the thing in America supremely to be faced. I should have been showing my heels to the whole adventure if I had turned my back on her. I hadn't seen her since the accident and the two--or was it three?--operations that followed. I had been away for four years, and not from one person had I had one vital fact about Joan. There were letters from the whole group--letters that skimmed the subject and took everything for granted. If I asked them plainly and directly for news of Joan Delabere, I got no answer; my question was flung silently back on my hands. And yet there must be news, I had always reasoned. A hideous thing like that didn't happen to a creature like that, without results. If she had been completely done for, stricken into nullity, why did they mention her at all? If she had managed to be exquisite among the ruins of her life, why didn't they sound the tabret in her honor? There was a conspiracy among them all not to answer the great, inevitable query: How, on the whole, has she made it out with life? Beautiful; adoring her husband and adored by him; waiting, almost like the slim girl in an old Annunciation, for her child--that blow could not have found a prettier mark than Joan Delabere. More than once, before I finally took my way to Joan's own house, I recalled the fabulous toad with a jewel in its forehead; the toad that may, if one will, symbolize disaster. In what guise would disaster have come to her? Would it bear the jewel in its forehead, or should I see, on Joan Delabere's threshold, only the squat batrachian figure unadorned?

The house was large and cool and empty; full of light, with pale vistas stretching everywhere. It was airy and soundless, like a palace kept in order but uninhabited. Joan had arranged it originally, I suspected, for a background to her own ambient vividness. The high walls and the polished floors called, like a stage, for moving human color. Joan would have been color enough; but now, in their purposeless state, they seemed more uncannily irrelevant than the shrouded and darkened chambers of a house before a funeral. The master, too, was absent--abroad, as I had learned in New York--and there was nothing anywhere that suggested male ownership or habitation. The rooms had evidently once been Joan's; and since then had been no one's.

It was half an hour before I was led up-stairs by a pale, cheerful nurse, and shown into a sunny sitting-room; panelled, floored, and ceiled in pale, polished woods, adorned with carved Eastern furniture. It was like Joan, I thought as I stood on the threshold, to change her æsthetic mood so completely on the second floor: down-stairs, the French perfections; here, this carved casket of a room. Then I saw her.

She lay on a broad chaise-longue, propped into a strange position with white silk cushions of every size and shape. She wore--if the word does not belie the shapelessness of her wrappings--a thin gown of apricot-colored stuff, frilled and pleated, ruffled and tucked into exceeding elaboration; and over her whole form--face, feet, and body--was thrown a sheer veil of white tulle. Through it, very vaguely, I could see her moving eyes; and at one side a white hand crumpled the soft folds. The eyes and the hand were all I could see of Joan Delabere; for the shapeless shape, in its yards of apricot chiffon, might have been anybody--or anything.

The hand disengaged itself and met mine--neither limply nor feverishly; a mere conventional clasp. For very awkwardness, I could not kiss her.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting. It takes them a long time to move me; and if I am moved beforehand, I have just so much less time to stay here. I wanted a good talk--I want to hear all about Europe."

I sighed a little with relief. The voice, at least, was all right; fresh and healthy, though Joan's old musical modulations seemed to have gone. I was soothed by it; it was recognizable, it made a frail bridge to the past. But it was hard to know what to say. I had intended to begin with something banal about her looking well. The veil somehow made it very difficult to say anything.

"Oh, Europe is always the same." Joan Delabere and I, for talk, had come to this!

"Nonsense! Europe's never the same two days running. That's why I keep Tony over there so much." There was a touch of the old imperiousness in her impatience.

I was tongue-tied. The vision must be worse than I had dreamed, since it could affect me so: that was the curious inverted path my reasoning took. The form on the chaise-longue stirred ever so slightly; there was the faintest perceptible movement in my direction of that mass of chiffon and lace; the head was turned to me beneath the veil. I felt the hand tighten on mine, and I looked down at it, fastening my corporeal gaze on that one member of familiar flesh.

"I have very little pain, you know, Garda. I'm just rather useless." Her voice struck one or two of the crisp, sweet notes one had always stopped to listen to.

"Thank heaven for that, my dear! You see--oh, Joan, you see no one has ever told me anything I wanted to know! And until now, I couldn't come."

I felt the eyes roving over my lustreless crêpe dress, my long black veil.

"Your poor brother has died?"

"Yes, only two months since. I was with him to the last."

"Lucky you--to be able to do things for him. Was it a bad illness?"

"Very bad, Joan. Day and night, for--well, you may call it years."

"Oh, you lucky thing!"

It was the very tone with which, of old, she would have congratulated me on a heap of cotillion favors. I did not, just at once, see why. But I would give her no inkling of poor Philip's bodily and mental decay--pile horrors on that veiled creature. If she thought me lucky, whether for Phil's having lived or for his having died, let her think me so. It was luck enough for any human creature not to be Joan Delabere. Perhaps that was all she meant.

"No one is wholly lucky, Joan. But I do feel lucky, in spite of everything, just to see you again and hear your voice. It has been so long."

"Ye-es. We'll let it go at the voice for a little while, Garda, if you don't mind. I'll unveil before you go. I'm what you call--disfigured, you know."

Joan was not making it easy for me; but the mere fact that she was not trying to helped me a little. I had known that she would not be lachrymose--imagine Joan lachrymose!--but I had been afraid that she would try to spare me things, and that I should break down under her futile efforts. It is a terrible thing when the weak and luckless play at ministering to one--worse when they seem to succeed. Joan had been very dear to me ever since we climbed the trees of the old orchard below the fish-pond ... and the staircase was near, and the car waiting. We would be magnificent together--or I would run. There need be no miserable compromise. I grew stronger moment by moment.

"Do as you like--you Eastern lady in an Eastern room. But I'm not afraid of anything--of anything, you understand." I forced myself to seek the brilliant brown eyes beneath the veil.

Joan patted my hand. "Dear old Garda! I really believe you aren't. But I'll lead you down from giro to giro neatly, Virgil-fashion, if you don't mind. I

know a little better than you all about it. I've never shrunk from mirrors." She drew her hand under the veil.

"It's a charming hand, Joan. You needn't pull it away."

Immediately she laid it on the cushion beside her. "Yes, it's a good hand. But useless--oh, how useless!... So you like my room?"

"Yes. It's odd, and, decoratively speaking, has no place in the house; but I like it. It's a wonder the architect let you do it. Of course it swears absolutely at the rest."

"It's lucky I got my way. I had it done last year. Imagine me down-stairs among the various French periods! Every chair in the drawing-rooms would know that I belonged in a convent. But this is Eastern and timeless. 'Eastern and timeless'," she repeated; "it just suits me. For any sense of company, I have to go to the zenana. If I'm like anything human, I'm like the first wife of a Rajput. I just might be that, you know. And it is excellent to feel oneself human, on any terms--to fall in with some type, no matter what. One comes to seem so outside of it all."

She crossed her arms above her head--so familiar a gesture!--and the wide veil rippled like a wave and fell into new folds.

"This is what I have been waiting for, all this time: some one I could really talk to. Except when Tony is at home, there is no one; and there are so many things I can't say to Tony--God bless him!--that it's rather a relief to have him on the other side. We must have a long gossip, you and I. I can say anything to you, because you're not involved."

"How do you manage to get rid of Tony so much?" True, cataclysmic things had happened since I had seen Joan and Tony Delabere plight their troth before the dim high altar of Saint Jude's; but it had been a real love, I fancied.

"I make Miss Stanley write and engage his passage. I make his man pack his things. I hold out the ticket to him; and then I give him a commission--something I am languishing for, that can't be got this side of Paris or Rome or Constantinople. It takes a deal of thinking, for there's not much you can't get in New York, as we all know. But I am hoping to discover something yet that he'll have to fetch in person from New Zealand--unless by that time his philosophy is as ripe as mine. He takes managing, Tony does."

"Isn't it a little unkind, Joan?"

"Well, of course"--her tones were growing more and more familiar--"it's a pretty weak bluff to chuck; but Tony is too well-bred to question me. He sees I want him to go; and we play the game out, every time, very prettily. It's a great

strain on us both--there's the truth. And Tony goes; and one of my sisters comes to stay with me, and I pack her off as soon as he has sailed. Miss Stanley's worth all my family to me, and more. Imagine them, Garda, snuffling in their lace handkerchiefs! They do it by the hour--and whisper outside the door, and then come in with a smile that apparently aches. They don't ask me to take off my veil. I do it in spite of them. Oh yes, I pack them off as soon as I get Tony's first wireless. Tony used to come back always on the next steamer--'sick for the leash,' he would say; but now his excuses are nearly as transparent as mine. One day there'll be no more excuses--naked truth between us, and then my blessed brain can go to sleep, as all my senses have done." She broke off suddenly, and reached for the enamelled bell-handle beside. "Please, Miss Stanley, tell Myra we are ready for tea." The cheerful nurse rearranged half a dozen cushions deftly, in accordance with some mysterious law, and went out, smiling. "A nice woman, that," murmured Joan. "Treats me as if I had a mild case of grippe; has been doing it for four years. Treats me also as if all normal beings had atrophy of the emotions. A very nice woman."

I laughed. Joan was so like herself that I had only to turn my eyes away from her to forget. But as I poised the teapot, my hand trembled a little. I realized that, to eat or drink, Joan would have to strip her face of the concealing veil. "None for me," she said; and, looking down again, I saw that there was only one cup. My strength returned to me in a shamefaced flood. I would rather have broken something than have been so relieved.

"I eat queer nursery things at queer nursery times, and, I'm afraid, in queer nursery fashion." She spoke quite simply. Nothing that she had said before had focussed light on so many elements of her frustration as did, by sheer trickery of phrase, that little speech. Poor Joan! It was not only one life, not even only two, but three that fate had reached by that "accident." But her voice had not faltered; it had not even been carefully controlled; it had been colorless.

I drank some tea in silence. I ate one after the other, three infinitesimal cakes. In such trivial fashion I braced myself. Joan watched me, and waited--but not, I felt sure, to brace herself. She was giving me time. Joan Delabere was wonderful. In her place--I suddenly felt it as I watched the mockery of good cheer, the Sèvres and silver, carried out of the door--I would have opened my lips to taste only one thing....

"Yes; but you see, Garda, I can't get it." It was Joan's voice, sounding very clear, as the footsteps of the maid, beyond the closed door, went down the hall.

I started. Witchlike, to an unloving eye, in all that formless drapery, she would from the first have seemed; now, in that bit of divination, she seemed witchlike to me. But Joan laughed.

"It's what you all think of, sooner or later. You were bound to think of it sooner than some--and later than others. You thought of it, my dear Garda, at just about the right time. Sooner would have proved you hard; later would have proved you dull. I'm glad you're neither; I'm still more glad you're here."

I bit my lip. The situation was, as always, Joan's very own. Her luck could be maimed in every way but that.

"I was much too canny to ask for it explicitly, ever; but I've tried every indirect way that I could think of. No use: they have me utterly in their power; and they'll give me every gift but poison. I've stopped thinking about it, even--that way lies madness. But you couldn't help thinking of it--once. I used to hope the ether would play me tricks; but you have thought it was 'my sister, Water,' it was so loyal to my poor old heart. No, Garda; there is no discharge in this war. And that is the whole point. It is just there that Tony comes in to complicate a situation that without him would have the simplicity of hell."

There was a long pause. She went on, half dreamily, yet always with that crispness in her voice which of old had given her lightest speech factitious weight.

"Did it ever occur to you that the only argument against purgatory is the complexity of it--that to keep purgatory going for all those millions would tax even the wits of Omniscience? Prison is organized, at least; but imagine being probation officer for all the sons of Adam! No, I'm not irreverent; but, as I said, I've only a brain left, and sometimes it whirls."

Well, I had wanted to have, at any cost, vital talk with Joan Delabere, and I was to get it. It was clear to me, from the rapidity with which we had come to the core of the matter, that Joan had not intended, from the first, to waste time.

Again, as if in answer to the unspoken, she took up the thread of my thought.

"You see, they don't allow me in here too long at a time. Miss Stanley will come at any minute to say I must be moved back. I don't let any one see me in my bedroom except Tony--and for days together not even him. There are

sickening paraphernalia there--I have to be propped in all sorts of queer ways. Not that they hope for anything better, but I will say they work like nailers to make me as comfortable as they can. And I am comfortable, you know, most of the time; only it takes queer things to make me so. Now, I rather fancy myself here. I feel like Madame Récamier--but much more like that faded Rajput queen. Smell the sandalwood, Garda! I love it. It's my 'ounce of civet, to sweeten my imagination.' I tremble to think what Tony's ounce of civet may be."

I laid my hand on her arm gently, almost fearfully. "Don't run on like that, Joan. It's humiliating to have you trying to distract me. There's nothing I can't stand. Out with it!"

She clasped her hands on her breast. "I could go on 'like that' endlessly with no effort, I assure you. But I'm glad you're game, for I haven't overmuch time, as I said, and you may not come back."

"Indeed I shall come back!" I cried.

"Well--I hope so; but you may not, all the same. I shan't be hurt, because nothing hurts me any more. If things hurt me, I should be dead. There isn't a thing in the world that could shock or wound me. Inaction has brought its anodyne. You can't lie like a log for four years, with a veil between you and the world, and still care, you know. There's only one thing I want; and I sometimes think it's only for the honor of my five wits that I want that. See if you can help me."

"What is it you want, Joan?"

"I want a way out for Tony." She was silent for a moment, and we faced each other--lucidly and intimately, for all the veil between. I did not want to enter the labyrinth, but I could not step back and still be loyal.

"'A way out for Tony.'" I repeated it mechanically while I searched the phrase for all its implications.

"Yes." She clasped her hands. Her wedding-ring gleamed through the tulle. "You may not know what a sordid and useless tangle our divorce laws are," she went on. "There's no decent way, apparently, for him to be quit of me. I'm divorceable enough, one would think, but the law doesn't see it in that light. Or, at least, the law sees nothing that Tony and I can bring ourselves to see. Besides, Tony won't divorce me. I don't know that you could expect him to. It's in his tradition to fling himself in the path of the unfortunate and let poor crippled feet stamp on him.... Never marry a gentleman, Garda, unless you can be perfectly sure of giving him more than he gives you. Otherwise, he'll

make your life a hell of humility. It must have taken nerve to marry Cophetua. Certainly I never planned to do it; yet here I am."

She stopped a minute; then, still with clasped hands, went on in her didactic tone, so like the occasional Joan of old.

"You can, as an impartial witness, consider that possibility eliminated. Tony will not divorce me. There remains only the possibility of my divorcing him. That, again, isn't easy. If I could go out west, as the others do--but even then, what judge wouldn't rock with laughter at the notion of a fragment like me wanting a divorce? I should be a by-word, nothing more. I ought to be glad and grateful--the whole world would say--to get any man to stick to me, even in the empty legal sense.... And here--Well, how, lying here, in the effete East, can I get a divorce? Especially as Tony won't help."

"If Tony won't help, I should think it clear enough that Tony doesn't want it. And really, Joan"--I tried to be very quiet and convincing--"if Tony doesn't want it, I don't see that you've anything to complain of. It's unimaginable that you should care about being legally free. What would you get out of that?"

"Nothing of any importance--only my self-respect." She spoke with concentrated bitterness.

"My dear Joan, if any human creature has a right to self-respect, I think it's you." I said it honestly, brooding for a moment on all the things that white hand of hers had gallantly rejected: hysteria, melancholy, egotistic evasions, vanity. I spoke my thought: "A platonic devotion to truth is enough for self-respect, I imagine. And that you've got; you've saved it out of whatever wreck there may have been."

"Trust you to strike home, Garda!" she cried, softly. "Now that is the best thing that has been said to me for many a day, though Herbert Melcham has written a sonnet to me as I am--poor young decadent! 'To hold the mirror up to nature'--and not let your hand shake. That's it.... When the senses are dead, you must satisfy the brain. It clamors in the night--one's brain. Why should I have a brain at all? I don't know. But it will not release me until it has saved Tony. It will keep on working until it does."

There was a long silence. I determined to let Joan herself break it. She stirred at last and spoke again.

"Probably you can't imagine, Garda, what an odd thing it is to lie outside of time and space, as I do--discarnate, except for this accidental burden of flesh that I carry like a pack. I suppose it's what happened to the saints. Perhaps I should be a saint if I could get rid of Tony. It's worse than having passions of

your own, to lie there like a dead thing and see other people's passions hard at work. Usually one has something at stake, oneself. There's the blindness and the beauty of the game to carry one on. I'm out of the game, but I mustn't forget that Tony isn't. That's what my brain beats in on me. That's why Tony drives me mad; why I have to send him off."

"My dear child, you must remember that Tony has inhibitions, too. You're not the only civilized person in the world."

"'Inhibitions!'" She mocked me. "We've all had them, always. That's not the name of my malady. But don't you suppose that I remember what life was before I was stricken? Do you suppose I imagine for a moment that Tony is in my case? I may have, as it were, no lips to kiss with; but Tony is still the magnificent young pagan god he always was."

"It's a very curious thing, Joan"--I bent forward to her--"that the great love has always been able to do anything it liked with the body; but so it is."

She was very patient with me. "I don't know whether or not you've ever been in love, Garda; but I do know that you've never been married to the man you loved. And I am forced to tell you that there is a part of the philosophy of life that can't be resolved in the cloister."

"One has eyes in one's head, my dear, and life's an open common. Why talk like an old wife by the fire?"

"Simply because you will babble like a child in arms."

It was very like old times. As before, I had only to turn my head away to forget.

"What you perhaps don't know, my dear girl," she went on, crisply, "is that there's love--and love. Tony will care for me always, in one way, more than anything else. But through these last years I've become a different creature. I'm not precisely the woman he loved. 'Strange eyes, new limbs'--and 'no lips to kiss.' It's not mere loss of any looks I had. If I were maimed as I am, and still cared, we could subsist, perhaps, on mere caring. It's the lack of longing, the coldness of the grave between us, the absolute deadness of desire. I've sifted that tenderness of his to the last grain, and there's not a whit of passion in it. How should there be? It would be morbid if there were."

"How can you speak for Tony?"

"I speak for him by the letter of the law. It's not that, by accident, I can no longer be Tony's wife--your 'inhibitions' might manage that. It's that I am wooden to his touch. In that sense, there is no life left in me. If I were a ghost, I couldn't be more fleshless. When Tony kisses me--sometimes he does--I wonder why any two people have ever kissed. At that rate, he won't want to kiss me very long. For coldness breeds coldness. Take that back to your cloister for a new addition to the sum of knowledge."

"It's not as if you didn't love him." I was perplexed, but I clung to that.

"That is where you are wrong. It is precisely as if I didn't love him. Oh, if I longed for him, however vainly, it would be a very different problem, my dear Garda--and one I probably shouldn't trouble you with. All I can get from Tony I do get. From me Tony gets nothing. He's simply my kind Providence. Oh, I wouldn't stick at alimony, you know--if that were all. I'd take it in a minute."

"But there is something beyond all this, Joan; something that you are, unalterably, to each other."

"Nothing"--and her voice sounded very clear and very cold--"that makes a man and a woman find it imperative to live under the same roof. One can be Beatrice at a distance. In fact, one usually is. And I never was precisely Beatrice, you know, Garda."

"But Tony loves you." I clung to it doggedly.

"He's happier away from me--perhaps because he loves me."

"Aren't you quibbling?"

With a sudden movement she flung off her veil and stared fixedly at me. I did not flinch outwardly--one could not, for very shame, be weak with Joan Delabere--but within me it was as if every bone in my body had turned to arctic ice.

"That was brutal of you, Joan." My voice, I suspect, was as cold as the rest of me. But what an argument to let fly at me, with a turn of the hand!

"I thought you needed strong drink. You looked it. I have it on tap for people who are fools enough to ask for it." She flung the veil negligently by, and rested her head comfortably on the pillow. "We'll face the rest of it in the light of this." She stared past me out of the window. "Oh, Garda, Garda, if I were playing for sympathy, it would be a low trick; but I am playing only for Tony. I have to show you his side."

I stole a look at her, while she was not facing me. Her argument was perfectly good; it covered all points. I turned my eyes away.

"What does Tony say? You must have had it out with him."

"Often. The last time I had it out with him, I didn't have to make Miss Stanley write for his ticket. He rushed to town and bought it himself."

"Poor Tony!"

"That's what I wanted you to say. Oh, I know you don't mean it quite as I mean it. But you will, before the end."

I thought very carefully before I spoke. "He has had hard luck with his bargain, but so have you. Your contract was the same. I suppose you'll both have to abide by the results."

"Ah, but I haven't had such hard luck as Tony!"

The tears came to my eyes. "My dear, I think you have--if that's any comfort."

"You mean that he can get away from this thing that lies here, and that I can't? True; and that is what Tony himself for a long time felt, I fancy. But I think he has come to see now how much more fortunate I am; for he has learned that I don't feel. The days go by like long shimmering stretches of the desert. They shift and reshape themselves; but in the end they're all the same. I don't know by what law the physical catastrophe has managed to get at the very springs of the soul and dry them up; but I know that it has. The brain is left, but the heart is dried. And, accordingly, I see the terms of that contract more clearly than any one else, perhaps, ever has. For it's not simply over for me with Tony; it's over for me with everything. So long as you're human, you may have a future--though sometimes you have to stoop pretty low to get it.

I'm not human, and there's no future at all for me. I can no more 'care' than I can walk. And therefore I'm a negligible quantity. It's monstrous that I should interfere with any normal creature's life."

"My dear Joan"--I put it to her--"would you be so insistent on Tony's marrying again if you died?"

"I shouldn't have to be," she flashed back at me. "Time and Tony would look out for that. But as it is, though I'm quite dead, I lie here and haunt Tony. And that's not decent."

"I wonder if you really hate him," I mused. It was always best to say to Joan Delabere whatever crossed one's mind. She herself would never keep the buttons off the foils.

Her eyes filled. "I'm excessively fond of Tony. I even feel about him--as sometimes one insanely feels it about a stranger--as if in some other life we had had a past together. I am always thinking, 'How odd that I seem to know him so well.' There was a long interval, you see, when only my body and the things they did to it in hospitals seemed to count; and just a few little feeble memories come across the interval to account for his being here. Indeed, indeed, I am fond of him, Garda; but not as I used to be. It's as if, one of those times when they had me unconscious, they had cunningly removed my heart--as if there were a seat of the soul that a knife could find. And I think, if I could see Tony provided for--if I could arrange for him like a French mamma--I should be a curiously happy creature because of this anæsthetic state. There's the case complete."

"What do you really want? That he should fall in love with another woman?"

"Ultimately that, I suppose. But--don't you see?--I want him in a position to love and woo any woman he pleases. The women who would take him as he is aren't the women that would make him happy. I want him free to carry his heart, his hand, and all his young magnificence to some piece of loveliness who'll have better luck than I did."

"There are plenty of girls who wouldn't marry a man, however 'free,' so long as his first wife lived."

Joan tossed her head. "I'd like to see any girl tell him she wouldn't marry him on my account! Send such a little fool to me. I'd soon have her at the nearest parson's in an agony of impatience."

Then and there, at the very heart of the tangle, I laughed.

"Joan, Joan, how could any man forego living with you?"

She turned her face to me again. I came back to the situation.

"What I want, please, Garda," she went on crisply, "is a new law: divorce on demand, as they have it in France. Have you any political pull, anywhere? I should be willing to pay. Tony, that is, ought to be willing to run to a fat sum in his own interests."

Her irony hurt like a rusty knife. It didn't leave a clean wound. "I'm afraid if you want a divorce, there will have to be collusion. Tony will have to help you out."

"Precisely what he won't do. And when you come to think of it, it's a grim and sordid thing to ask any man to go in for. So you think we shall have to wait?"

"I can see nothing else."

"You lack imagination, Garda. But I have liked to talk to you. It's a little hard to talk to Tony. He aches so with the strain of not giving himself away! But it's odd, isn't it, that there should be no divorce for decent people in our easy-going land? Somebody simply has to be a horror, somewhere. Why don't you write a book about it, Garda? You used always to be scribbling."

"Stop girding at me, Joan, and say what you really have to say."

She beat her hands softly together, and moaned. "Oh, don't you see? There's bound to be another woman some time. Tony can't live forever tied to a cold caricature of a wife. And I want her to be the right woman; and my brain tells me that, as things are, there's little or no chance of that. It isn't fair, it isn't fair, that we should be damned in the end just because in the beginning we were a shade too decent to do the things that damn other people!"

"Time is up, I'm afraid, Mrs. Delabere." It was the pale Miss Stanley who said it, cheerfully, after her light tap at the door had been answered. Having given her warning, she closed the door again and walked softly away.

Slowly Joan Delabere drew her veil over her face again, and arranged it in careful folds about her. It was like a corpse enshrouding itself with its own hands.

I rose and stood beside her. "I haven't a way out for you, Joan. But don't you see that it's just the chance of such bad luck as yours that makes the magnificence of the whole contract? I don't think I ever realized before"--I used my words deliberately--"what a splendid sporting proposition marriage is. I shall never blame either you or Tony for anything you do. But if you don't do anything, I shall consider you the best losers I've ever known."

She lay with shut eyes, and I put my hand on her forehead. I could not kiss that terrible veil. Finally she spoke, very quietly. “You were the last cartridge I had left, and you missed fire. I’ll never believe--never--in anything men do needlessly for other men’s pain. I’ll mock at us forever for being squeamish--only to come heaven knows what cropper in the end. Perhaps the only way out my brain will succeed in devising is for it deliberately to run itself off the track. I fancy that would make it easier for Tony. But it’s a little rough of you to tell me I’m not a sport. Who would let me in on any game, now? Is it my fault that I’m disqualified?”

“Joan, Joan!” I cried, bending to her, “didn’t I say you were magnificent?”

She took my hand in hers, and stroked it gently for good-bye. “You said so many things I was glad to hear! I have liked talking to you, my dear. I hoped you could help, but I might have known there was no help. I’ve spent a long time on it, myself.” She raised my hand to her lips. “Good-bye, dear. Thank you a hundred times for coming.” Her voice was very low and sweet. “You always were a bit of a prig, Garda.” She turned her face from me as the nurse and two servants entered the room.

Before I drove off I gave a long look at the stately lines of the façade. My mind recurred to the symbol of disaster. In the thickening twilight I seemed to perceive the squat form seated on the threshold; but the shadows were too heavy along the eastern front of Tony Delabere’s house for me to make out the jewel.

Belshazzar's Letter

"'Belshazzar had a letter; he never had but one,'" murmured Fenwick.

I should never have suspected Fenwick of having read, much less having memorized, the works of Emily Dickinson. Fenwick does not read--much; and how should he have got hold of Emily, anyhow? It appeared presently--for of course he was questioned--that he had picked up her poems in the home of a foreign missionary, where he had once perforce been marooned during a cholera epidemic. Fenwick himself is, I fancy, outside all creeds; but he can't help--given his life--running into missionaries, and he usually speaks well of them. He takes them, at all events, as all in the day's work, as he reports, from very strange places, to the "interests" that employ him. They have an eye out, those "interests," for a good many different commodities, though I incline to believe that rubber is the chief. Adventure has never seemed to pry Fenwick loose from his very American moorings, though he told me on a certain occasion, with a dropped jaw (in a kind of wry whisper) that he had lost his religion once--just like that--in a typhoon.

I mention these facts concerning Fenwick for reasons that will appear later. He was leaving for San Francisco and the East the next week, by the way, and this was a scratch gathering of friends and acquaintances more or less to do Fenwick honor. Ben Allis and Mrs. Allis were giving the "party." Nora Pate, Mrs. Allis's niece, was spending with them an enforced holiday from school. She was at the dinner-table on sufferance merely. It was Nora, with her giggling flapper-ish reference to a ouija-board occurrence at school that had elicited Fenwick's humorous quotation.

Now you must also know that we were a fairly intimate but more than fairly eclectic group at the Allises' table. Most of us were bred to one or another form of the Christian religion, went to church spasmodically (except Nora, who of course had to go every Sunday), and comfortably or uncomfortably, according to temperament, let the whole thing slide--took it for granted, or permitted it euthanasia, as it and our souls chose. But Mrs. Conway was a Catholic--"just the ordinary kind," as she had once said herself, with a sidelong glance at Mrs. Medford, who was waveringly "High;" Allis was a scientific skeptic, and Fenwick a reverent free-thinker. Or so I had gathered. The typhoon had made him a free-thinker, and his inheritance and

temperament had apparently kept him reverent. My personal convictions do not matter, but when it comes to ouija-boards, I am all with Allis.

Young Nora had been rather stumped by Fenwick's quotation. She had probably heard of Belshazzar, but she had never heard of Miss Dickinson, and she certainly did not see what it had to do with the ouija-board revelations at midnight in Betty Dane's room.

After we had found out just where Fenwick had read Emily Dickinson, the talk swung back to the occult. Mrs. Medford's pearl-powdered face and naturally red lips were eager. She even wanted the complete account of what had happened in Betty Dane's room. Nora needed no more encouragement than that.

"Why, Betty was desperate because she couldn't be at home when her cousin had his leave; and she asked ouija if there wasn't any chance of his leave being changed. And ouija said, 'Measles will make you free,' and of course we all laughed. Then we thought probably her cousin would have measles, so he couldn't come, and Betty would be free of disappointment. And the next week Pauline Case came down with them--and Betty is at home with her cousin, and she's going to bring back a book that tells all about everything depending on the way the breath circulates in your body."

The flushed Nora, at a glance from her aunt, sank out of sight below the conversational tide. But Mrs. Medford had smiled comfortingly at her.

"Prophesying is one thing they won't usually engage to do, you know," some one threw in. "I believe even Doyle and Lodge say that."

"Naturally--since they have to get it out of your subconscious." This was Mrs. Conway.

Mrs. Medford turned upon her, a little acrid. You may have noticed that the two kinds of "Catholic" don't mix very well. "Has the Church decided that it's all your subconscious?"

Mrs. Conway's smile was all that she herself could have wished it to be. "Why, I believe so. Where else could they get it?"

"Whom do you mean by 'they'?" the other woman challenged.

"Why, the evil spirits." Mrs. Conway reached for a mint drop. "You see, the Church had all this to settle so many centuries ago. It's hardly a new phenomenon."

If there was irony in Mrs. Conway's tone, it was not sharp enough to wound Fanny Medford. She looked rather pleadingly at the other woman's clever, gentle face. "Always evil spirits?" she murmured. "Never good ones?"

Mrs. Conway murmured back, and the two seemed for a moment to be isolated together. “Never good ones; and never the real dead. That is forbidden, you know.”

I had hoped that our moving from the dining-room would break the current, but I had reckoned without Fenwick. We had our coffee all together in Allis’s big library--so much the nicest room in the house that I didn’t much wonder at Maud Allis’s refusing, except under great pressure, to drag the women away elsewhere. Nora Pate was sent upstairs to study, and we were freer. As soon as she had gone, Fenwick led us back to the subject. Mrs. Conway sat apart in the shadows, moving a fan slowly. Mrs. Medford fixed her eyes hungrily on Fenwick. The rest of us listened. After all, it was Fenwick’s party.

“Of course you see all kinds of trances, and miracles, and levitation, and tricks, out in the East,” he began. “I confess I’m not much interested in what Hindus and such do. They’re so different, anyhow. But it does interest me to come back to America for the first time since the war, and find everybody going it this way. The Americans and English out there do it, too. But there’s an epidemic here, as far as I can make out. Look at your niece and her ouija-board. And all of us ready to argue about it. Honestly, I’m interested. I’m perfectly open-minded about it, myself. I’m not psychic, or whatever you call it.”

“You don’t have to be ‘psychic.’ There’s no such thing.” This came out of the shadows where Mrs. Conway’s fan waved.

Mrs. Medford turned and gazed at her, as if trying to penetrate even deeper shadows that lay between them.

“Oh, well, I mean--I sat in on table-tipping once or twice, but I don’t think I added much. I never saw any ghosts, or had anything queer happen to me. I know a man out in Singapore who does automatic writing, though--gets stuff through from his mother. At least, he says he doesn’t believe it’s his mother, but he keeps right on, all the same. He says she has told him things that no one else could have known about.”

“He knew about them, didn’t he?” asked Allis, with heavy matter-of-factness.

“Why, yes--he and she.”

“Well, it all came out of his subconscious.”

“I dare say.” Fenwick set down his coffee-cup and took a cigarette proffered him by Mrs. Allis. “Only I’m sick of you people all wagging your

heads and saying 'the subconscious' every time you're up against it. Why don't you get busy and explain how the thing works?"

"Ah yes, why don't you?" Mrs. Medford seized on Fenwick's challenge as if it were her own.

Allis pulled his moustache and spoke judicially. "I'm not a psychologist myself, as you very well know--not even a biologist. I don't know that science has explained the technique of it yet, though they are working on this sort of thing all the time. Hysteria, secondary personality, dreams--all these things are being put under the microscope, and they're finding out."

"I'd rather believe in spooks than in Freud, any day." This was Carter, a gay soul.

Allis ignored him. "I dare say you do know, though, that alienists are using automatic writing in their treatment of patients now. They find that some traumas, too deep-laid for hypnotism to probe to, can be brought to the surface by getting the patient to write automatically. That is one for the subconscious, anyhow."

"But--" this was Fanny Medford, brave on her own account--"what about the things that never were in your subconscious; couldn't have been there? They get those too--indeed they do."

"I agree with Fanny and Mr. Fenwick," said Maud Allis. "I don't believe it's the spirits of the dead; but neither do I believe that the psychologists have explained it yet. I'm open-minded."

"I'm open-minded, too," laughed young Carter. "Ready to try anything. Except Nora's ouija-board. That's too darned easy."

A slim form in white came out of the shadows--Mrs. Conway, gray-eyed, ivory-cheeked, like a warm ghost. "Can't you see," she said, "that an open mind is the most dangerous thing there is? Because if your mind is really open, any evil thing can get in."

She put her arm round Fanny Medford's waist, with a soft, sidelong gesture, though she faced our host, directly questioning him. Mrs. Medford stirred a little against the light encircling arm--barely noticing it, it seemed. Her face was flushed beneath her pearl powder. She addressed Allis and Carter, now standing abreast before the fireplace.

"Have you ever tried automatic writing?"

"No."

"Nor I," cut in Mrs. Allis, "but I'm going to try sometime. Has any one here tried it?" Maud Allis went on, looking round at her group.

I shook my head, Fenwick and Carter theirs. Mrs. Conway merely said, "You forget I'm a Catholic."

"How about Mrs. Medford herself?" Young Carter marked us off on his fingers.

"Oh, I--I've tried it, yes. But I can't do it!" She bit her lip and turned away, and before we quite realized that she was crying she had made a soft plunge through the wide doorway into the next room. Maud Allis followed her, but returned in a few moments.

"She'll be all right presently. She'll come back. It's just that she is so interested. Ever since her brother, Jack Hilles, was killed, she's been trying to 'get through' to him; and she can't do it herself. She began going to a medium, and the woman had no sooner established communication for her than she died. Now, Fanny's rather up against it. She's not the kind that likes to go to mediums, you know. I'm awfully sorry you started the subject."

"Why didn't you stop us, if you knew all that?" Ben queried.

"I didn't. She just told me about the medium now. Oh, she'll pull herself together all right. It may do her good to have it out with a sensible crowd like this. We didn't put it into her head. It's there all the time--has been, ever since Jack Hilles was killed in the Argonne."

"Well, we'll drop it right here," Allis replied.

But Mrs. Medford was back among us and heard him.

"You won't drop anything on my account, I hope. Maud may have told you it's the one thing I'm interested in. It's just awfully hard luck that I can't do anything myself. If you people really feel like trying anything, don't let me stop you. I dare say the rest of you are as bad as I am, anyway. Not 'psychic'--though Mrs. Conway says there's nothing in that."

"There isn't," Mrs. Conway averred again.

"Let's try it, anyhow," cried young Carter. "Not table-tipping. Let's sit about and turn the lights out and each take a pencil, and see if we can do automatic writing."

Fanny Medford clapped her hands. "Oh, do! Only, of course I can't. But perhaps"--she looked us over hungrily--"some of you can, and I might get a tip as to the right way to manage. And, anyway, it's so interesting." Certainly she had recovered.

"I'm not going to sit with the lights out all the evening," grumbled Allis. "This was supposed to be, in its humble way, a dinner-party."

"Well, of course, not all the evening," Maud conceded. "A quarter of an hour. And then we'll stop and play bridge."

"It would be rather fun." This was Genevieve Ford. I have not mentioned Miss Ford before, simply because she had taken no part in the conversation that I have detailed. She happened to you, once in so often, in somebody's house, and you didn't much care, one way or the other. She was just a nice girl, a little more restful than some, perhaps. I think the Allises hoped against hope that some day she and Carter.... I don't know why.

Somehow Miss Ford's quiet speech clinched it. Perhaps because she had been an outsider through the talk.

"Good for you. Let's!" Carter dashed to Ben's table and swept some pencils off it. "Paper, Allis? And more pencils. We'll scatter about through the rooms so that everyone can have a table-edge or a chair-arm."

Allis found us pads of paper, and pencils--all except Mrs. Conway, who refused to join us and went off to fetch her knitting. We all looked at each other rather helplessly.

"How do you begin?" I asked.

"I suppose you douse the glim." Carter snapped off the light nearest to him.

"That's perfectly unnecessary," Fenwick commented. "The man I know in Singapore does it any time--in broad daylight, between courses at tiffin, if he feels like it. All you do is to let your hand go slack, and think about something quite different."

Mrs. Conway, who had returned with her knitting, intervened. "I wouldn't think too hard about something quite different, if I were you. That is, not if you want results."

"But we want to play fair," Maud Allis protested. "There's no sense in trying this kind of thing unless you do your best."

"I only meant," Mrs. Conway explained, "that if you really want to let them in, you must make your mind as blank as possible. Don't make an effort to think of anything. Just open the door and wait. You make me feel like an accessory before the fact"--she smiled a little--"except that I really don't believe anything will happen."

She withdrew to a sofa and began to knit.

"You just have to be quiet." Fenwick gave his last explanations. "And let your right arm be comfortably slack, and don't look at the paper if you do

begin to write. And if nothing happens in twenty minutes"--he looked interrogatively at Maud Allis--"then we play bridge, do we?"

Mrs. Allis nodded. "And I'm going to put out some of the lights, whether it's necessary or not. We'd be rather ridiculous in a glare, and we'd probably all be looking at each other to see if anyone's else arm was moving." So she reduced the room to a demi-obscurity, very soothing and non-committal.

Fenwick sat at the other end of Mrs. Conway's sofa, resting his pad on his knee. "Won't your knitting spoil it?" he murmured.

"Dear, no," she whispered back. "I'll stop, if you like. But knitting-needles won't keep them away."

"No fooling, Ben." Mrs. Allis's admonishing words were the last spoken. After that, silence.

I did my best to play the game, but my hand did not move. I became, somehow, perfectly sure that it never would move, and that conviction edged my voluntary slackness of spirit. The corners of the room were too dark for me to see how each fellow-guest was faring; but I noted idly the little stir of Mrs. Conway's needles, the faint fire-glow on Mrs. Medford's bent blond head, Ben Allis's comfortably hunched position, Miss Ford's graceful, pensive attitude. After fifteen minutes, I constituted myself time-keeper, moving my left hand so that the radium dial of my wrist-watch showed. I stared at it until I began to feel prickly all over. If my arm didn't move then, I thought, I was surely no good at the business; for I was half hypnotized by my concentrated stare at the dial, and my left hand certainly had no physical knowledge of what my right hand, off in space, was doing.

When twenty minutes were up, no one stirred. I decided to give them a little more time, for good measure. The minute-hand crawled as it does when you are taking a pulse or a temperature. Before the half hour was quite reached, Ben Allis leaped to his feet.

"I'm tired of this. There's nothing in it. Switch on the lights, you people."

But the others were stretching cramped limbs, rising slowly from their fixed positions, tottering in the half gloom. I had not risen, myself, and I watched them. They looked drugged, unsure, wan and ungraceful in the dim light--purgatorial poor souls. Only for a second; but just for a second the only normal thing in the scene was the implacable motion of Mrs. Conway's fingers. Then Carter turned on the light at my elbow, and I saw my own pad of paper. The page, ten inches by eight, was covered with the huge scrawl of two

words: “Ask Fenwick.” And I had not known, staring at the dial of my watch, that my arm had moved.

The other lights went on, then. People held their sheets of paper up before them like shields, and moved to the nearest lamp. All except Fenwick, who still held to his corner of the sofa.

“Nothing--of course.” Mrs. Medford spoke first, then flung her pad down on the table.

“Nothing here.” Ben Allis grinned over his.

“Mine says something!” Maud Allis cried, as she bent over it under a lamp. “But I can hardly read it, it’s so queer.”

Miss Ford and Carter pressed towards her.

“Oh, I see now,” she said. “It’s ‘Ask Fenwick.’”

I bit my lip and delayed my contribution to knowledge. But while Carter and Genevieve Ford were examining the unsoiled whiteness of their sheets of paper, I looked at Fenwick. He sat in his corner, open-eyed now but tired, surrounded by white things. Mrs. Conway had stopped knitting, and was looking at him with concentrated interest. Her hand fluttered over the sheets of paper that lay between them on the sofa, but never once quite touched them.

The group at the table turned to me. “Did you get anything?” they chorused. Their backs were all more or less turned to Fenwick and Mrs. Conway, you understand.

I came forward. “Just like Maud’s. ‘Ask Fenwick.’ Pick up your manuscript, Fenwick,” I called, “and let us see it.”

They all turned, then.

“Why, he’s written heaps!” Mrs. Medford rushed to the sofa, but Mrs. Conway’s lifted hand fended her off from the papers. “Give him time,” she murmured; “he doesn’t realize yet what he’s done.”

Mrs. Medford stopped, but Carter was not so easily dealt with. He strode over and began picking up the sheets of paper.

Fenwick yawned. “Can I have a cigarette? By gum! I think I must have pulled something off, my arm is so tired.” He flexed it as he rose.

“You did, my boy, you did! Well, who says we aren’t psychic?” This was Carter, arranging the sheets in the order in which presumably they had fallen from Fenwick’s busy hand.

An odd look passed between Mrs. Conway and her host. Both started to speak together. Then she yielded to him, nodding acquiescence as Ben said:

“They are Fenwick’s property. It’s up to him whether or not he gratifies our curiosity.”

But Fenwick, jaunty now, uncramped, waved his cigarette. “It belongs to the company. I’m delighted to have been successful. But isn’t it extraordinary that I shouldn’t once have realized that I was writing or that I was tearing those sheets off?”

“You did it very quietly. There was no noise,” Mrs. Conway volunteered.

“Can’t we read the stuff, right off?” Carter inquired anxiously.

Allis leaned over and took the papers from him. There must have been four or five sheets. Neither he nor Carter had examined them.

“Fenwick’s property. It’s up to Fenwick.”

“I don’t want the stuff. Let’s read it aloud if it makes any sense.”

Mrs. Conway rose with determination. “Why not hand it over to me? I won’t read it.”

But Mrs. Medford cried out. “Mr. Gregory wrote ‘Ask Fenwick.’ So did Maud Allis. We must ask Fenwick.”

“Yes. What’s the use of spending all this time in an experiment if we can’t see what we’ve accomplished?” Miss Ford voiced her own and Carter’s grievance.

“Well, Fenwick”--Allis’s bantering voice threw in--“if you are ready to vouch for the absolute purity of your subconscious, shall we oblige the ladies?”

Fenwick looked sheepish. “Oh, I say! You don’t mean to load that stuff, whatever it is, off on me. Why, it may be a résumé of the last French novel I read--or anything.”

Mrs. Conway spoke, for the first time, with some sharpness. “You don’t, any of you, know what may be there. It may be utter nonsense, or it may be a sermon. But whatever is there comes from no good place.”

Some of us laughed. “You’re very hard on Fenwick’s subconscious,” Allis said.

“It’s the first time you’ve ever done it?” Mrs. Conway asked.

“Absolutely the first.” Fenwick nodded.

“Well, then”--she sighed--“it’s probably all right. They’re usually careful how they begin.” She shrugged her shoulders.

We moved in a body to the big lamp on Allis’s writing table. “Thank goodness, Nora’s upstairs,” Maud Allis giggled in my ear.

Fenwick now had let himself go in the spirit of Carter and Genevieve Ford, as they chaffed him. “All right,” he said; “I may be done for, but who wrote ‘Ask Fenwick’? Seems to me we’re all tarred with the same brush, anyhow.”

He held up the first page, getting the light over his shoulder, and began to read.

“‘Jack Hilles speaking’.” The manuscript opened like a telephone call.

Fenwick broke off. “Oh, I say, you don’t want me to read this. There can’t be anything in it, and we’d all be sorry to go any further----”

But Mrs. Medford came close to him, her eyes almost glaring with the intensity of her feeling--a queer, soft, mad glare. I saw, like a shot, that she wasn’t going to be easy to manage.

“Mr. Fenwick, you’ve no right to stop,” she panted.

Ben Allis had gone completely white under his pink-and-tan. Later, I knew why, but then I was merely surprised. Ben was not the man to be upset by preposterous hints of the supernatural.

Fenwick tried to temporize. “But, Mrs. Medford, we can’t play with serious matters. We must respect the dead.” Fenwick had not looked ahead; it was obvious that he simply did not wish to be responsible for anything that purported to be a message.

“He’s my brother! And if he gets through to you while I’m here, it’s for me. That is my property.”

Allis came up and looked shamelessly over Fenwick’s shoulder at the writing. “No, it isn’t, Fanny. It’s Fenwick’s. He shall do absolutely what he pleases with it in my house. I’m responsible.”

There was a curious morbid note of confession in his voice. But no one paid any attention to tones of voice, because a very undignified scene followed immediately on his words.

Mrs. Medford clutched the papers that Fenwick held. She got away with the first page, too, and turned her back on us--heading for the drawing-room beyond. “Don’t you dare, as you believe in a God, to destroy any of it,” she threw back over her shoulder.

She had to fight for even her one page--not very hard, for of course Fenwick couldn’t struggle with her physically. The two men, Allis and Fenwick, looked ridiculous as they faced each other in the tacit admission that they couldn’t help themselves. Ben pulled himself together quickly. “Get that away from her, Maud--by force, if necessary.”

“But, Ben----”

"I said 'by force, if necessary,' Maud," he repeated sternly.

She flew ahead after Mrs. Medford, obedient, but sowing her path with protesting murmurs.

Genevieve Ford giggled, nervously. Carter raised his eyebrows to the ceiling. "What is up, you fellows?" he asked weakly.

I heard Allis whisper to Fenwick. "Did you ever know him--Hilles?"

"No. Never heard his name till to-night."

"Then what the devil----"

"I thought you'd come to the devil in time." This was Mrs. Conway on the outskirts.

An indignant cry came back from Maud Allis. "Really, Ben, I can't. You'd better come yourself. She won't give it to me. Fanny, be sensible!" Then the sound trailed away.

We followed--Allis, Fenwick, Miss Ford, and I. We passed through the drawing-room where they had been a few seconds before, and out into the hall. Maud Allis stood there furious, a little dishevelled, sucking a hurt finger. "She's locked herself into the telephone closet. I don't know what you expect me to do."

"Not anything more. We can't help it now. We'll go away and leave her. She'll come out."

But Maud was shaking with anger and nervousness. "How do you know she will? If it's anything so bad that she oughtn't to see it, she may never come out. She may just die there."

Allis smiled, in spite of himself. "People don't just die in telephone closets. And she'll come out, if for nothing else, because she wants to see the rest of it."

"But if it should be so dreadful----"

"It doesn't make any difference how dreadful it may be. She'll feel she's got to see it. Oh, damn!"

Then he moved over to the door of the closet. "Fanny," he shouted, "we're going back to the library. If you don't come out inside of five minutes, we'll break down the door. Now what a fool thing that was to say," he murmured, precisely as if we were to blame for his words.

A slender figure in white Spanish lace became suddenly manifest among us. "Mrs. Allis, can I telephone?" Mrs. Conway asked softly.

"No, I'm afraid you can't." Maud's answer was grim. "Fanny Medford has locked herself into the telephone closet with the first sheet of that wretched stuff."

"Then will some one go out and telephone for me"--she gave the number--"and ask them to send my car at once?"

"Ben can telephone from the extension upstairs," Maud suggested sullenly.

"Oh, thank you. I wish he would."

Allis turned suddenly upon Mrs. Conway. "I can't pretend that, as a host, I'm proud of my hospitality. But don't you think it would be kinder all round if we didn't break up? We might be able to get that poor thing out of her hysteria if we all stuck about and did our best?"

"I have no intention of going before Mrs. Medford does, Mr. Allis," was the very quiet reply. "I thought it might be a good thing to have the car waiting. Mayn't I go up and telephone, myself? I think Mr. Allis ought to stay here."

Maud nodded. "It's in my room." And Mrs. Conway moved up-stairs. She leaned over the stair-rail on the first landing and spoke to Fenwick. "Don't destroy those other pages. If she still wants to see them, she'd better--much better."

"You don't know what's in them," Fenwick answered. Nor did he, but he evidently considered they were not to be lightly treated.

"It doesn't make any difference what's in them. Not even if were the Black Mass." She went on, up.

We went back into the library then, and Allis stood, watch in hand, waiting. He was beginning to mean it, about breaking down the door, I could see. Allis had had a good glimpse of the first page. Fenwick had seen a little. None of the rest of us knew anything but those three first words like a telephone call: "Jack Hilles speaking."

Before Allis moved, Mrs. Medford came slowly through the drawing-room, holding the sheet of paper very carefully in her hand. A little behind, Mrs. Conway's white form gently stalked her.

Fanny Medford's poor little head was held very high. "I suppose you people have read the rest--and doubtless Mr. Fenwick has told you what is in this." She tapped the paper.

"Not one of us knows anything or has read a word," Maud Allis declared.

Allis frowned. "That's not quite true, Maud. I saw a little--a few sentences--of what Mrs. Medford took with her. I dare say Fenwick saw as much. But no one has seen all of it except Mrs. Medford, and no one has seen any of the other sheets. That is the exact state of the case."

"You will kindly give me the rest of the writing," Mrs. Medford went on, to Fenwick.

But Mrs. Conway stepped forward and slipped the sheets from Fenwick's grasp. He let her take them, though he looked at Allis anxiously. The situation was becoming Mrs. Conway's.

"I have them, you see." She turned to Mrs. Medford. "And if you insist, you shall have them. Of course I wish you would let me destroy them all, here and now. It isn't true, you know, that the dead communicate. They don't."

Mrs. Medford was shaking, but her voice was still her own. "They do. I know they do. Jack talked to me through Mrs. Weale, who's dead now. But not this kind of thing. It's wicked, it's beastly, what you've done!" she cried to Fenwick.

"But, Mrs. Medford, I don't even know what's there--except the first sentences. I never knew your brother. I don't believe this stuff, of course."

"Nobody believes anything, Fanny." Allis corroborated him. "This sort of thing has been shown up, time and again, for the most arrant trash. It's just our bad luck that something got written that was upsetting for you."

"You believe it--you know you do." Her voice was half a choke in her throat.

To my consternation, Allis did not deny it, at once and with passion. "Fanny, don't be absurd. You know perfectly well what my attitude to these matters is. Purely scientific skepticism."

"I say that you believe those things of Jack. As for Mr. Fenwick"--she disposed of him then and there with a look of loathing--"I leave him to the rest of you."

Maud Allis followed her out of the room.

Allis took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Any one of you men feel like seeing her home?" he asked. "Fenwick and I would seem to be out of the running."

Mrs. Conway put out her hand. "Good-night, Mr. Allis. Of course I'm going to take her home. What did you suppose I ordered my car for?" She did not bid the rest of us good-night, but she seemed to address us all in parting. "Naturally, I don't know what's in these papers. But I take it, it is something pretty bad--about her brother. Mrs. Medford may have to see them, since I promised her; but I guarantee you they shall be destroyed without my, or anyone's else, reading them. It's all nonsense, of course, but you see she half believes. Truly, I'm the best person to see her through, because I can explain it."

"It's just some foolish trick of muscles--and rearranging all the words in the dictionary," burst in Fenwick, hotly.

"Yes." She smiled. "But what foolish trick? That's what you can't explain to her. And I can. You may not think my explanation is correct, but at least it begins at the beginning and sees you through to the end. That is why I shall try to convince her. You open-minded people can't."

"Even so," Allis said, "I don't see how you're going to manage it."

She had turned to go, but she stopped and answered him. "I've this advantage, you see. You can't tell her why it happened. I can. Malice accounts for everything."

"There's not an ounce of malice in this crowd," Carter remarked.

"No, not among us. But the things you let into your foolish minds are all malice. Believe me, they've had a ripping time to-night. They have to take what they can find--yes. It's the way they use it that counts."

"But suppose whatever it is were true," Miss Ford murmured. "Suppose it was her brother, after all, getting through."

"I've told you the dead can't get through--not the real dead. It's only spirits pretending."

"You'll never get her to believe that," Allis said ruefully. "None of us could believe that."

"Pardon me, I could," Mrs. Conway threw back. "And if I can make Mrs. Medford believe it, too, it will be the best way out of the mess you've made."

"Good luck go with you," he called after her. But he seemed dazed.

When Maud Allis came back, Miss Ford made her adieux, and Carter left with her. They had been, from first to last, outsiders, and perhaps it was the most tactful thing they could have done. I prepared to follow them, and Maud Allis, saying good-night to them, bade me good-night, too.

"I've got to see Nora," she said. "I promised her I would before she went to bed. I meant to cut out from bridge. Probably I shall see you again, Mr. Fenwick. Sorry you have to go, Mr. Gregory." There was certainly no urge to stay, in her voice. She was more done up than she owned. Yet she had not seen those sheets that Fenwick had written--any more than I had, or Mrs. Conway, or Genevieve Ford, or Carter.

I let Carter and Miss Ford get away a little in front of me, thinking that they were best by themselves, in the fellowship of their detachment from it all. Whatever had happened to the rest of us had left them unscathed. They had not been touched, apparently, by the episode, except to see that Mrs.

Medford's exit was a cue for them to break up the party. I lighted a cigarette in the vestibule, and craned my neck to see them turn the corner. I was jerked back by a clutch on my collar, and I dropped the cigarette.

"Come back in here, you idiot!" said Allis in my ear. "Did you really think you were going?"

Yes, I really had thought so; but I went in again.

I found, when I reached the library (Allis locked the door behind us) that he had furnished Fenwick with a precious drink. He offered me none, and was taking nothing himself. Whiskey is medicine, in these days.

"Fenwick and I need someone else to sit in with us," Allis declared. "I may have to tell Maud later. That's neither here nor there. I'm glad those two young people had the sense to go. If they hadn't, I'd have kicked them out."

"Well, of course, I'm eaten alive with curiosity," I admitted. "Only it all sounded like the sort of thing that wouldn't be mentioned again unless necessary. I never saw a word of the stuff, remember."

"I saw precious little of it, and Fenwick here saw no more than I did." Allis began to walk about with his hands in his pockets. "You can see the effect it has had on Fenwick."

Fenwick's head was buried in his hands. "I wrote the damned stuff. That's what gets me." I saw why Allis had fetched whiskey for him.

"We aren't going to quote it for your benefit--even if we could," went on Allis. "But you can take it from us that it was unmitigated filth. We judge by sample."

"Then why did you give the rest of it to those women?" I shouted. "Why didn't you burn up what you had your hands on, at least?"

"Easy, now, easy." But Allis was troubled. He made an eloquent gesture over Fenwick's bowed head. "We practically had to do what Mrs. Conway said. I believe she is the person to deal with Fanny Medford. Evil spirits are the best way out--if she can take it. And Mrs. Conway is a clever woman. But we three have got to sift the matter. It seemed to be autobiographical, by the way--statement of things done in the past. Buck up, Fenwick. It's more my fault than yours."

"Your fault? You didn't even write 'Ask Fenwick,'" our friend retorted. The whiskey was strengthening him a little.

Allis paid no attention. "I take it for granted that none of us now present subscribes to Mrs. Conway's theory. Very well. That's that. Fenwick wrote automatically a lot of stuff of which he and I have seen a little. It all purported

to be Jack Hilles speaking, and on that basis it was Jack Hilles very much giving himself away. Of course, it wasn't Jack Hilles any more than it was the Secretary of State. Mrs. Conway is right, at least, when she says the dead don't communicate."

"Then this kind of thing just flowers naturally out of the rich soil of my mind, I suppose?" Fenwick asked sarcastically.

Allis smiled faintly. "I wouldn't say that. But you've knocked about the world more than most of us, and you've seen more than your share of exotic rottenness. Gregory and I would have had to go out and hunt for it. You've had it thrust upon your notice. If your subconscious stores it up, it isn't your fault."

"But what on earth should make me drag out horrors and attribute them to a man I never laid eyes on, who died fighting for his country in the Argonne?"

"That," said Allis deliberately, "is where I come in."

"You?" We both exclaimed.

Allis leaned against the chimney-piece, his hands still in his pockets. "Well, yes. Of course Jack Hilles' name was bound to appear if any name appeared--after the way Fanny had gone on. But if that sort of thing was dragged out of you, about Hilles, instead of nice, sweet, comforting things, it was probably because my mind was stronger than Fanny Medford's."

"Do you mean that you were thinking that kind of thing about Hilles all the time?" Fenwick queried.

"No, I wasn't thinking those things about him," Allis answered slowly. "I merely knew those things about him. That is--I never knew he did anything so bad as what was written there, but I knew he was a bad lot."

"Then why didn't you write the stuff?"

"Like Mrs. Conway, I'm not open-minded. I disbelieve it too utterly. I'm prejudiced. But I don't doubt my knowledge acted telepathically on your more sensitive--what shall I say?--mental mechanism. It's all suggestion. Mrs. Medford involuntarily suggests Jack Hilles to you, and I involuntarily suggest the kind of person I knew him to be."

We were silent a moment.

"It's hideous, all the same," I said finally. "He's dead, after all--in the Argonne."

"But not fighting for his country," Allis remarked quietly. "He was shot--for other reasons. I've no particular business to know that for a fact, but I do. Fanny Medford never knew the worst of Jack Hilles, but she had no illusions about him until he went into the war. Then he became a hero. When

he was 'killed in the Argonne'--which is all she knows about it--he was a fortiori a hero: a super-hero, if you like. You may have noticed that Fanny isn't exactly impersonal in her attitude to life."

He went on, after a pause. "I hope no one saw anything in my expression.... I was rather shaken by the glimpse I got. I never thought even Jack Hilles went so far as that. I wonder if Fanny saw. She accused me of believing it all. She must have meant she thought I believed it on the score of Fenwick's automatic writing. I believe it on the score of knowing that Hilles was capable of anything. That, I perhaps didn't conceal sufficiently. And all of it, I'm banking heavily on Mrs. Conway to explain."

"I still don't see why I had to write the miserable stuff," argued Fenwick--though he seemed a little more at ease than he had been.

"Well, I can't tell you that," Allis replied. "I'm inclined to believe that Mrs. Conway is wrong about people's not being, more or less, 'psychic.' Certainly even she would have to admit that some are more sensitive, readier vehicles, than others. It looks to me as though you were a corker, Fenwick!"

Fenwick brooded for a time in silence, while Allis and I smoked. At last he spoke. "No, it's too queer. Evil spirits would explain everything, but I haven't gone back to the Middle Ages yet. You try to explain it, Allis, by arranging an intricate system of mental telephone wires--installed in an instant, ready for the emergency. That may be accurate, but it's extremely complicated. Too complicated, I'd say. I'm not contradicting you, you understand. But for myself, I usually take the line of least resistance." He rose and faced us. His fingers twitched a little as he, in turn, lighted a cigarette.

"Meaning--?" Allis queried.

"Meaning that if Jack Hilles was the kind of person you say he was, the easiest place for that sort of screed to have come from is--Jack Hilles."

Allis's lips folded themselves firmly. "If you choose to admit the supernatural hypothesis, I suppose it is easy. I was ruling out impossibilities."

"The fact that you haven't proved a thing possible doesn't mean that you've proved it impossible, does it? How about you, Gregory?" Fenwick turned to me.

I threw up my hands. "Oh, I'm with Allis. It sounds queer and far-fetched and all, but anything is more reasonable than believing the dead communicate in that way. Even Mrs. Conway is more reasonable."

"Well, I wish to God they had rigged up their wireless on Allis's roof instead of mine!" Fenwick exploded. He turned his back on us and walked over to a dark window.

I tried to be judicial. "If Allis was thinking about the sort of creature Jack Hilles really was, that in itself accounts for the telepathy business."

Allis glared at me. "I wasn't thinking of Jack Hilles. I knew he was a very bad lot, but I wasn't thinking about it--not at all. I was wondering if Carter and Genevieve Ford would pull it off. And, anyhow, I couldn't have thought that kind of thing about Hilles. It just wouldn't naturally have occurred to me. Whereas, it might have, to Fenwick, with his background."

Ben Allis stopped, suddenly, and I felt the blood in my body, for an instant, back up in its channels. For just as Allis finished speaking, Fenwick drew back from his window and crumpled up against the sofa. No, he did not faint. He was, rather, at bay there, against the world; against Allis and me, who rushed to him at once. I did not try to read that face, though it shouted at me silently. I turned my head away. "Damn you all, damn you all!" Fenwick's white lips were saying. "And I thought I'd got rid of it forever. Oh, damn you both!" Yet he did not seem to be standing outside his own curse.

Fenwick roused himself at the sound of a knock on the library door, and we faced about. The knock saved us three from something pretty awful.

It was Maud Allis, and in her hand she carried a ouija-board. "I found Nora playing with this thing," she said; "and after to-night it was more than I could bear. Will you please burn it up now--so I can see it burn?"

"You bet I will!" Allis broke it over his knee, and went to the fire, which had almost died out.

With one eye on Fenwick, slowly, very slowly, composing himself to a normal posture and a normal expression, with a sense that I must keep Maud off him, I drew her away in the direction of the door. “I hope”--and I laid my hand on her wrist--“the thing hasn’t been worrying Nora. She didn’t get any echoes, did she?”

“Oh dear, no. It had just been writing foolishness--probably the kind of foolishness you would expect to come out of Nora’s subconscious.”

“Nothing about Jack Hilles?” I tried to laugh.

“I should hope not! Betty Dane’s cousin, they’re all in love with; and their matinée heroes; and their school commencement. But I’ve put her to bed and taken it away. I will not have my niece ouija-ing.”

Ouija was now burning brightly above the Cape Cod lighter. Ben Allis called to his wife. “Maud, do get a taxi round at once for Fenwick. He’s tired and doesn’t want to walk.”

“Certainly, I will. Did you people come to any conclusion?”

“Ben has the right of it, I’m sure. Telepathy.” I spoke quite loud. “He’ll tell you all about it. We’re going.”

Maud went off to the telephone.

Fenwick’s voice cut in. “Thanks for thinking of the taxi, Allis. I believe I do want one. Good-night.”

"Shall I come along with you?" I asked, thinking of Mrs. Conway's brave support of Fanny Medford.

Allis frowned, and Fenwick, though he had got himself in hand, seemed to cringe a little before the frown. "No, thanks. I'm going straight to bed. It's needless to say, I suppose, that this thing shall go no further, as far as I am concerned. I can't say it has been a pleasant evening, but it has been interesting. It's funny, isn't it"--he spoke rapidly, but carefully--"that a party of friends can react so differently? Mrs. Conway thinks it's evil spirits; I think Hilles did get through; and you and Allis think it was all communicated from Allis's subconscious to mine. But we all hope that Mrs. Conway will convince Mrs. Medford."

No; he could evidently take care of himself now. Mrs. Allis, returning, rallied him as she said good-night.

"Your taxi is there already, I think, Mr. Fenwick. What do you think of Belshazzar's letter now? I'm sorry you had to get the letter."

It was all right for Maud to carry things off lightly--probably she felt it was her duty--but it didn't help Allis and me so much as she doubtless hoped.

"I think I can promise never to meddle with this sort of thing again," he said gravely. "I'm convinced it was the real thing. Your husband thinks he was responsible. He'll explain to you."

Allis answered the plea that sounded faintly in Fenwick's voice. "Yes, Maud shall have my telepathy theory. I think she'll agree. Maud, do go to the door with Fenwick. There's no fender here, and I don't like to leave ouija."

Maud Allis, as you may have made out, was a good wife who never argued an absurdity if her husband perpetrated it. She preceded Fenwick to the hall.

Allis gripped my hand. "I shall tell Maud exactly what I said. You'll tell nobody anything."

"Of course not. For Mrs. Medford's sake, if nothing else."

Allis relaxed his grip. "Yes--and Fenwick's, too. I've been fond of him for a long time. Perhaps he'll never give himself away again."

"Perhaps not," I agreed. "Asia is a large continent. He may come to believe it was Hilles communicating, you know."

"Well, I rather hope he does. Fenwick's got to live. But you and I don't believe it."

"No, we don't.

"It's queer," Allis mused; "you and I are the only ones of the crowd who know what happened; and the one thing we are most anxious for is that

everyone concerned--even Fenwick himself--should be convinced of some explanation we know is wrong. We want Mrs. Medford to believe Mrs. Conway; I want Maud to believe what I said here a while ago; and I even want Fenwick to believe that the dead communicate. We're a scientific lot, aren't we?"

"I'm not sure I wouldn't rather believe any of those things than believe what I do," I said grimly. I remembered Fenwick's face.

"Exactly. Poor science!"

Mrs. Allis returned, and I bade my host and hostess good-night. This time I did not go back again.