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# AN ALLEY OF FLASHING SPEARS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

DONN BYRNE

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## CONTENTS

- I. [AN ALLEY OF FLASHING SPEARS](#)
- II. [TREACHERY](#)
- III. [THE MASTER OF RAYMOND LULLY](#)
- IV. [EXECUTIVE SESSION](#)
- V. [TOWERS OF SILENCE](#)
- VI. [THE HAPPY TOWNLAND](#)
- VII. [HAIL AND FAREWELL](#)
- VIII. [GREEN ISLE](#)
- IX. [A SISTER OF SHINING SWORDS](#)

# AN ALLEY OF FLASHING SPEARS

## AND OTHER STORIES

### I

#### AN ALLEY OF FLASHING SPEARS

You will read about it all in The Book of the Old Man, which is Tu Fu's; of Ming Huang, greatest of the T'ang emperors—wise, strong, a marvellous polo player, the idol of his people; and you will read there of Tai Chen of the Thousand Songs. You will read how, under him, the land grew and prospered; how heavy kine and fatted oxen and stout ponies trampled the grassy plains; how the fruit trees flourished and the hibiscus dotted the gardens with stars; how the rivers were heavy with fish. The suns rose golden and the moons were silver, and the people sang beneath the city walls.

And then Ming Huang, the Son of Heaven, met Tai Chen, the lute girl—"a rose aflame," a T'ang poet calls her, "tall as and swaying like a reed; her hair a dim cloud and her face a flower"—and loved her. In Chang-an, the triple-walled, they dwelt together, oblivious of time and season, of imperial polity, of sedition without the gates. Drums and bells rolled musically from the marble towers. In the house boats on the river tragedies were played and great epics recited. In the royal park jasmine flowers scented the air. Poppies flamed scarlet against the blue of the water. And beside them Li Po, the Wine Drinker, great among T'ang poets, sang of their love and beauty in oblique immortal rhymes.

And all this time An Lu-shan, the swart, ambitious Tartar general, plotted fast and successfully. To Chang-an came suddenly the news that ten thousand battle chariots were whipping over the plain toward them, led by the Tartar traitor, intent on Ming Huang's death. They gathered about them the royal guard and fled southward in panic, the Tartar horde gaining with every mile.

The guard grew sullen and looked at Tai Chen with hostile, bloodshot eyes. They stopped in their flight and gathered about the emperor's tent. Stormily the leaders entered and stormily they reproached Ming Huang. The empire lay wasted and war covered the land like a cloud. A usurper claimed the throne while the Son of Heaven passed the time in revelry and love-making. Not one step farther would they flee; not one weapon would they draw for the Dynasty of T'ang until the Lute Girl had been sent out to die. It was for Ming Huang to choose between his millions of groaning people and Her of the Thousand Songs.

"Go outside, Tai Chen!" said Ming Huang.

*"The young willows and the rushes renew with the year," writes Li Po in his old age; "the peach blooms open on the eastern wall and green parrots chatter in the branches. No longer lowering soldiery strike through the black clouds of war. The convent on the hill draws the western merchants. Wealth and happiness bud again; knowing Peace is here!*

*"The young willows and the rushes renew with the year; the peach blooms open on the eastern wall—ah! but the Little Beautiful One who crept moaning down an alley of flashing spears!"*

Li Po, the Drinker of Wine, has been dead these dozen centuries, and nothing remains of him but the memory of his drinking bouts and his immortal songs. And Ming Huang, the great polo player and the Son of Heaven! Death has called his last game and his crown is as dust. The jade lute of Tai Chen of the Thousand Songs is silent in the dim bowers of death. But ever and again through the centuries their tragedy reappears, blossoms for an hour of happiness, and agony.

Men are born again, people say, and walk the earth with the same habiliments and features, doing the same deeds with their weak or purposeful characters. Empires are reborn. Another Rome has risen, and another Carthage, which must be deleted; and out of the sea has sprung a new Atlantis, lush and golden. And great events have their ghosts, too, like dead empires and dead men, though we see them not. Beside us a Cleopatra of the tenements may re-enact the ancient intrigue of the Nile. And the pale apothecary next door may work for science with the flame that sped through Roger Bacon's veins. Even so.

## I

The speaker's voice ceased for an instant; and as he stood motionless on the edge of the platform, under the great incandescent street lamp, he suggested a dim crayon drawing—a tall, vibrant young man, with hair as blond as a woman's, and a face that seemed ruggedly hewn out of rock, and black eyes that blazed with the intense inner fire of opals. He was poised lightly on his feet, as though he were about to spring into the clear air.

"To every man the earth was given," he continued—"the earth and the fullness of it. It belongs to every man—to the poor man as well as to the rich man—to the rich man as well as to the poor!"

The stillness after his voice ceased showed how intently the crowd was listening to him. They stood north and south along West Street, in close, serried ranks. They flowed into the piers and side streets. The darkness of their bodies in the shadows suggested a strong tide rising, and their pale white faces above their massed bulk were like bubbles on a river.

"To every man," the speaker went on, "as much money as he can make, in honesty, by the use of his body and brains.

"But, apart from this, the sustenance of the earth is for every man—cripple and athlete, rich and poor. That is an inalienable right."

Very calm, but very vibrant, like a note on a violoncello, his voice rang down the street. It crept round corners into the alleyways and the docks. It swung across the reach of river on the left of him. It smote the bridges of the ships moored alongside.

"This year," the voice went on, "there has been the biggest wheat crop in a decade. This year has been a year of prosperity. And this year the price of bread has gone steadily up!"

He swung round and faced the men on the platform behind him—a gaunt old clergyman, with his hands folded and his eyes lowered to the ground; a great official of a labour federation, of stocky workman type, but with the shrewdness of a big statesman in his face; a couple of minor labour leaders, with sincerity stamped in their thinking eyes; a group of public men and women, well dressed, a trifle uncomfortable before the grimed, muscular crowd.

"They have given reasons to account for this—the men at the bottom of the deal. Shallow, inadequate reasons. False, lying reasons. And when they were caught in the wrong they have shrugged their shoulders, saying a cent or two doesn't matter." His tones took on a savage emphasis, like the roll of a drum. "It matters to you, the men with the tired backs and the sweat in your eyes. It matters to the thousands with no one to provide for them. It matters to me."

He looked at the vanguard of the crowd at his feet—longshoremen, stevedores, garment workers, draymen. They looked back at him with expectant eyes, with silent, gaping mouths.

"I have given away"—his tones were more even—"on bigger things than this—on things where ten times as much was at stake. But on this I shall not give away. Not if it were a quarter of a cent! Not if it were the smallest shaving of the smallest copper coin!"

His voice became suddenly more serious than passionate. A look of tenderness came into his eyes.

"My people," he said, "for three years I have worked for you, and for three years I have served you well. And I

have served well and honestly this city. When you wanted to strike I have got for you reasonable terms and agreements. There are no more bomb outrages. No more marching with red flags through the city streets. No more irresponsible attacks on men or property. When you were right I have fought for you. When you were wrong I have chidden you. All this has been done in peace and amity."

He stood before them for a few moments bowed a little. A little ripple of comment came from the crowd in a low rumble, like the roar of a muffled furnace or the distant rolling of thunder. It died away in long, shuddering sound waves. The speaker suddenly galvanized into passion. His right arm shot out like a piston. His face blazed:

"Sharpen your pencils, you reporters, and take down what I shall say to my people. And you, policemen, open your ears that you may hear it! Before I shall allow the bread for these men's mouths to be juggled against them; before I shall allow the fruits of God's earth to be peculated for revelry, for the debts of a profligate son, for a woman's gewgaw—I shall lead my people, five hundred thousand strong, to the homes of these men in this city. And I shall tear them from their pleasant firesides and from the arms of their wives. And I shall crucify them to their own doors!"

A shudder passed along the crowd about the platform, wavered down the streets and ebbed into the alleys. And then immediately following it came a dull, ominous roar, like the roar of a caged animal. The speaker raised his hand.

He was shaking and livid now. His voice sank to nearly a whisper; but it cut into every corner of the crowd, sharp and clean, like a knife:

"And in three days I will do this thing—even though I die!"

## II

I should have been proud to know Nils Riordan's father, if any portion of what I hear of him is true. I hear it along the piers of New York, where stevedores load and unload great liners under green, crackling lights. I hear it on pilot boats, lurching and pitching in Ambrose Channel. I hear it in queer tobacconists' shops with faded Indians, and in forgotten groceries along the quays. A great poet they tell me he was, and a man with a brain as keen as a razor. I discount this, for these people are no judges of metre and rhyme and no great critics of mentality. But of this I am sure—he was a good man and a true one.

I can see him plainly before me—a tall, lean, black and curly-headed man, with slight, irregular features and shining black eyes; a twisted mouth, with a smile on it always, and a song. "A wonderful singer he was," the blind piper of Eighty-third Street told me, "with a voice so sweet that it would coax the birds from the tree! And he would give the last penny in his pocket to you—the heart of corn!" A great Irish gentleman I judge him to have been, for all his grimy overalls. It is about men like this that legends grow, as they have grown about that laughing Jewish writer of the East Side—on whom be peace!

And his mother, too, they remember there—even after five-and-twenty years!—the beautiful young Danish girl who loved Connor Riordan and married him. And they will tell you with wistful smiles how, when Connor Riordan was killed by a falling derrick on Pier Thirteen, his wife Gloria crept into Calvary to die on his grave.

Nils Riordan is a great man now. His name is spoken in Cabinet circles with great admiration and a little fear; it is revered wherever in New York men work with their naked hands. Professors of political economy mention him with respect to their students when commenting on the solution of problems of labour. But on the piers and along the shore of New York he is Connor Riordan's son; and that explains everything.

"No wonder he should be clever!" they say emphatically. "His father could have downed the greatest professor of any college. And good looks! You should have seen his mother!"

And here enters another factor in the equation that made Nils Riordan royalty by birth and by deed among the workers of New York—the Reverend Malachi Bowen, of the Church of All Saints, on Hudson Street, a gnarled old

clergyman of no denomination in particular, who abhorred dogma as he abhorred the devil, and who preached a lesson of kindness from the Sermon on the Mount to Jew and Catholic, Protestant and Chinaman. He still preaches, and he still walks the streets, visiting, with his kindly smile and with the pockets of his coat filled with pennies for the children and lumps of sugar for the horses. Williams College remembers him as a great Greek scholar. But he is a thorn in the flesh of the younger clergymen of the city, superb dialecticians, well-groomed men, who see religion as a walled city. Sometimes they protest to the bishop about Father Malachi and his sermons.

"Gentlemen," the bishop invariably replies, "if I had the courage of my convictions I should preach, think and do exactly as he does."

It was Father Malachi who stepped in when Connor Riordan and his wife died, and took charge of two-year-old Nils. No one protested his right to take the boy, though every woman for three miles of blocks would willingly have added the orphan to her own numerous brood. Quaintly the old clergyman took care of the child in his ramshackle bachelor quarters, feeding and nursing and clothing him; teaching him righteousness, mixed with the luxury of Greek. But the people of the neighbourhood were not to be robbed of their share in the responsibility. The light collection bag of the Church of All Saints grew heavy and remained so. The lad grew up fair and straight-featured, like his mother, but with his father's black, flashing eyes. He had the cold, judicial brain of the Northern people, and through it ran his father's Gaelic blood, setting all afire.

Father Malachi sent the boy to Harvard. Nils protested, saying he wanted to go to work; but the old clergyman would not have it so.

"We can afford it," he said. "The people have been good to me. And what do I want with money, who am simple and old?"

At Harvard, Nils was not a spectacular figure or even a well-known one, for his work lay in the stodgy, serious realm of economics. He did not appear on the athletic fields, though strong as any man there. In students' societies and activities he took no part, for already there hung over him the shadow of great and weighty things to come—so big, so powerful, that their mere looming in the distance blotted out these minor things, as an ocean makes infinitesimal a purling stream.

He returned to Hudson Street, with his degree crackling and important in his valise. That night Father Malachi took him up into the belfry of the little church. An early summer moon hung heavily in the sky, full and bloated and saffron. The first heat wave had struck the city, and the tang of it was in the atmosphere, heavy and ominous. Outside the tenements men and women sat gasping for air, like fishes out of water. Children played listlessly in the streets. Across the North River the ferries plied to the Jersey shore, blazing with light and hurtful to the eye with their suggestion of fire. Through the streets tram cars crawled clanging, mean shacks pulled by jaded horses. Along the quays the incandescent arc lamps shone in violet hazes. On the piers cranes rumbled and creaked, and men shouted in hoarse, guttural voices. A sense of terror struck Nils as he looked downward. So much work and so much life, and so little comfort!

"There is a man's body—and a man's soul," the old clergyman said suddenly in the darkness. His voice was slow and halting. He paused for a minute. "And a man's soul! I have lived for sixty-two years and I don't know whether that soul is immortal."

He stopped again, thinking hard and choosing words in which to phrase his thoughts. Nils stopped breathing, nearly, so intent he was on listening. In twenty years he had often heard the old clergyman speak solemnly, reproving wrong and urging right; but to-night he felt he would speak most solemnly of all, bringing out the fruit of all his living for his threescore-and-two.

"A man can work for his body," Father Malachi went on. "He can accumulate wealth and comfort. He can build fine houses and live in them. He can have ease in old age." He paused again, and by some queer accident the noises in the street became hushed; the sound of the chattering cranes faltered and died, as though even the mute metal and stone were listening. "I don't like to speak of souls, Nils, for I don't know what a soul is. But a man can live in this world and gather nothing. And a man can leave this world, having nothing, and that thing which we call his soul may be strong and healthy and satisfied."

He raised his head in the darkness and looked at Nils. And Nils, though he couldn't see them, knew that there was in his eyes the light of stars.

"I can die to-morrow, Nils, and if there is a Great Living Power behind everything I can meet It unafraid, knowing I have done Its work; and if there is none I can lay myself to rest easily, knowing that I have done mine." The halting accents ceased and his voice took on a firm, decided tone. "And this is the work that I have done, Nils: I have worked for the good of others, for the good of everybody all my life. I have forgotten myself and worried nothing about myself; and now, at the end of my days, I am satisfied. And when the time comes I am ready to quit."

A bank of cloud crept over the face of the moon and obscured it quickly. Beneath the belfry of the church the streets became darkened suddenly and the electric lamps seemed inadequate after the mellow light. And high and shrill came the voices of children, unable to sleep for the heat and still querulous at play.

"We are all little children, son, groping in the dark and hoping that the night will lift, and that at some hour we shall see the face of the sun. And it is the duty of the strong to care for the weak, and of the whole child to protect the crippled one. That is how I feel it after my two-and-sixty years."

The bank of cloud in the sky took on the form of a rough triangle and suddenly from the apex of it the moon shone forth as before, and the light of it, after the obscurity, seemed to flood the streets like a mist. Beneath them they could see clearly the life of the streets limned in faint whites and inky shadows—the men and women on the tenement steps, immobile, terribly patient; the listless children, with their pretence of play; the sweating gangs on the docks, standing out in harsh chiaroscuro under the blazing light of arc lamps; the jaded horses with the street cars and the tired men at the reins. The old preacher moved forward and caught the edge of the belfry in his gnarled hands.

"These are the little children of the world, Nils," he said—"unwise, improvident, obstinate, ill. There they are. Your people, Nils. These are the people who love you and who loved your father. These are the people whose generosity to the church here made it possible for me to keep you and to educate you."

Father Malachi turned to Nils and looked at him closely and nervously as he stood there in the moonlight, strangely pallid, very strong, like a die cut in metal. His voice became shaky.

"But though it was their money, son, freely and without thought of return it was given, and that is no bond on you. To every man there is his choice in this world, whether he shall work for himself or whether he shall, forgetting himself, work for others. Choose either way, Nils. Whatever you choose, we shall always love you—these people and I."

He waited, with his hands on the belfry, for what he felt was a great space of time, but what he knew was only a few seconds. Every moment seemed to be clicked off for him with infinite slowness by the clock of eternity, and all sounds were dulled to him. He seemed to feel through his body the flow of blood in each particular vein, and to hear the minute mechanism of his body pulse and quiver with the slowing movement of his life. Suddenly the answer came to him, high and full and clear:

"I have chosen, Father Malachi."

The old clergyman turned and looked at him closely. Little by little the tenseness of his expectancy relaxed. His hands unclasped from the belfry and there was again in his eyes the light of stars.

"You have chosen well, Nils," was all he said; but he said it very softly, and silently together they went down the stairs.

### III

The drawing-room had been nearly emptied of all furniture, and there remained very little in it except the huge piano at one end and the pictures on the walls, Cézannes and Hiroshiges; but there hung about it still the atmosphere of

great wealth and comfort. It was in every cubic millimetre of the air. It was even in the hard, bare floor. It hung about everything, like the odour of sanctity, so that the ten rows of chairs, of ten chairs each, and the lectern and desk in front of them, which converted the place into a lecture room, seemed as much of a desecration as would a Punchinello show in a cathedral.

And as Nils Riordan swung toward the desk it all smelt hostile to him, as the air of a foreign country might seem hostile to an invading enemy. He passed through the hundred people, who were scrutinizing him closely, without any evidence of his feeling of hostility and discomfort. He reached the desk and looked over the assembly with a calm and cold eye. Only two or three of his hearers he knew by sight. The rest were known to him, or nearly all of them, through the society columns and the supplements of Sunday papers.

"As most of my hearers are women," he began gently—but there was a hint of savagery in his voice as there might be a hint of claws beneath the soft paws of a leopard—"I am going to speak of something that will interest them. I am going to talk about some children."

He had come at the request of a shallow matron, whose hobby was affecting an interest in art and social problems, to address an audience of society men and women on some question of labour. This afternoon function was a fad of hers, taking the place of tea and modelled on a French experiment she had seen described in a book of Marcel Prevost's. Nils had been preceded the foregoing week by a Russian male dancer, and for the week afterward a cubist sculptor was booked to perform. The labour leader would probably be rewarded by a cheque for a hundred dollars for a workers' charity. He grinned to himself up his sleeve with grim humour. Ordinarily he would have refused curtly, resenting her dilettante meddling in matters that were so close to his heart. It seemed raw and cruel to him, this assembly to hear him speak. He loathed slumming parties with a wholesome resentment; but he was going to make them pay for this—and pay very dearly.

"Families of fifteen children are not uncommon down in that district," he was going on in the course of his talk. "I have one in particular in mind. The entire earning capacity of this family is twenty-eight dollars a week. Four dollars a day for seventeen human beings. Less, if it will bring it home to you any closer, than a quarter a day for each living and human being!"

They were looking at him a little disappointed, a little baffled; and he smiled sardonically to himself as he guessed what they were thinking about. They had all heard of him as Nils Riordan, president of several labour organizations and director of a weekly paper called *The Worker*. They all knew of spectacular things he had done—of how he had broken up a dynamiting gang by walking into their resort and cuffing the leader about the ears; of how he had saved a great coal magnate's home from destruction and turned viciously on him when the man had expressed his gratitude; of how he had broken up an agrarian conspiracy by threatening to crucify the leaders. They knew him as the man who had refused a seat in Congress because he wanted to be near his people. They had heard that to utter the least criticism of him among the workers of New York would be tantamount to suicide.

They had expected somehow—God knows why!—that he would appear before them like a wild man from a circus show; an apparition in a flannel shirt and a red tie, unkempt, probably unshaved, and ranting like a demagogue; with the truculent jowl and battered ears of a prize fighter and the look in his eyes of one of Morgan's buccaneers. And, instead of that, here was a young man, lean, wiry, with a fair, regular, strong Northern face, and eyes cold, like some black stone; and, instead of overalls, wearing a well-cut serge suit, a spotless collar and mellowly browned shoes; and, instead of mouthing blood and thunder, speaking in the calm, measured tones of a professor addressing a class.

As a show it was a flivver, they each voted silently, and inexpressibly below the standard of Madeleine's others. Nils again felt sardonically amused. They had come for thrills and were disappointed. Before they were out of the room he would give them a thrill they would remember for many bitter days!

"Remember always," he went on emphatically, "that these conditions I am telling you of are not accounts of starving Belgium or stricken Poland. They obtain right in this city. They are within four miles of this house. You can enter one of these tenements and see things for yourselves in twelve minutes in your automobiles."

As he went on speaking his eye swept the audience calmly and firmly, resting here and there on people of special



interest to him. There was Mrs. Howard Van Zile in the front row, a haughty, patrician woman, who was examining him intently to see what was in him. And Richard Hammerling's wife, plump, a little dowdy, with cross-grained skin and bored eyes. He wanted suddenly to turn on her and tell her that her great-grandfather had been no richer than any of these he was speaking about. A little farther back Lady Alice Fitz-Patrick leaned back fuming. She had come to America to collect for a British charity and the thought of any possible opposition made her furious. A thin, acidulous old maid she seemed to him, for all her Geraldine blood. And back of it all was Mrs. Mifflin Bentley Swan, eager, watching her hostess' face—a swarthy, greasy-looking dowager who had earned her right to sit in this august assembly by subsidizing a dozen pet hospitals. And beside her was the Countess Flannigan, whose grandfather had started an immense fortune with the money taken from quay workers in his saloon.

A few men were here—nearly all of them of stern metal. Senator Booth, a shrewd, tense man, an implacable enemy of the labour leaders, but, for all that, Nils admitted, a statesman and a follower of high ideals from his own point of view. And, no less inimical, beside him sat Justice Thomas, a shrivelled, caustic old figure, with a grey face hewed into innumerable lines, with colourless eyes and great pouches under them; a stern judge, Nils knew, and no friend of the people, but an open, two-handed fighter, who asked for no quarter and gave none. They, too, and a few others, had come here to see what metal was in him and what power. And the sight of them was a relief to Nils after a glance at John Zabriskie Reid, tame cat and hired guest, and Richard Payne Schieren, who touted for tailors and wine merchants on the sly.

"The land that does not take care of its children"—he paused, and enunciated each word with the solemnity of a prophecy—"that land will surely die!"

A figure caught his eye as it flashed about the room—the figure of a woman, a demure, motionless woman, whose eyes seemed frightened. She seemed to sink into the mass of people about her, to be blotted out, to merge into her surroundings, as a chameleon fades against a wall.

And suddenly, as he looked at her, he was struck with a sense of shock to find how beautiful she was. Her pose, as she sat there with her hands on her lap, was that of a country girl modestly seated in a church; but when she raised her eyes to look at him, as she did infrequently, he saw in them the suffering look of a dumb animal. Her face was perfectly oval, like a face on a valentine, and her mouth was perfect, and her teeth and her nose and brow.

But the striking thing about her was the seeming transparency of her. Her skin was clear and had the false opacity of porcelain. Her eyes were amber-coloured; they were nothing more than a liquid tint against the skin. The hair of her eyebrows and lashes seemed laid on in delicate brown by a faint-pointed brush. Her hair was a mass of russet shimmer. There was something frightfully unreal about her. She was, it appeared to him, nothing but an iridescent liquid. She might have been a painter's conception of a supernatural creature homing in mist, had it not been for her belted, flaring gown, with the white fox collar, like a priest's stole, about her neck, and her mannish tall silk hat. These things—and the agonized look in her eyes, like the look in the eyes of a spaniel that has been kicked and kicked and kicked until its spirit screams dumbly.

His glance stole toward her many times during the course of the lecture, until he was under the hypnosis of her face as a patient might be charmed by a flashing metal disk. His voice went on, strong and resonant, painting his subject in wide swathes of black and white, holding his audience, impressing some, irritating others; and as he spoke he suddenly identified the girl before him, and his heart jumped with pity. So this was the wife of De Courcy Delavan, the grass widow of that satanic rake who was the devil incarnate, if ever he walked up and down the world and to and fro in it!

And, with a hot surge of resentment, Nils remembered the explosive story of that strange marriage. He remembered how the multi-millionaire, as savage as a criminal boy, crazed with money and seething with hatred of everything and everybody, had married the daughter of a Long Island squatter; had brought her to New York to insult the Fifth Avenue debutantes, flaunting her beauty in their faces. And when he had done that he left her as dramatically as he had married her, striking her viciously in the face in a box at the opera, and fleeing away in his yacht to Cairo and Port Said. He left her in possession of the great house on Madison Avenue and a sufficient bank account, because it amused him to see a squatter's daughter mistress of a mansion where his mother, a descendant of a Norman prince, had reigned, and which his father, a fine old gentleman and great philanthropist, had planned to be the home of his best friend's daughter.

The women of New York had taken her up as much, uncharitably be it said, for a rebuke to Delavan as out of pity for herself. Here was that strange flotsam of a woman, beautiful as few women have been beautiful, patronized by everybody, jeered at by servants, alone in the world, living in a great mansion, and dying a slow, horrible, golden death—as horrible as the fate of Midas the King! Here was Myrtle De Courcy Delavan, who had been Myrtle Squires!

"I want to give you a few cases in point," he proceeded, "with facts, dates and amounts. I will tell you the case of the family of Gian Battista Repetti."

And as he went on, with merciless detail, into epic fights of human children against poverty and disease, he noticed the eyes of Myrtle Delavan grow moist and swimming with tears. And suddenly his heart went out to her in a quick, generous flow.

He ended his lecture quickly and cuffed his notes together on the desk. He gazed about the room with a firm, calm eye. His glance caught the glances of Judge Thomas and Senator Booth as one steel blade might ring on others. It caught the rising hostess and dropped her back into her seat as a blow might. He leaned forward on the desk and his voice purred.

"You, this afternoon," he said, "are all here, I take it, because of a sincere desire to hear of conditions in these destitute districts. And you all, having heard of them, and sincere as you are, are naturally actuated by an eager desire to better things for these children."

His tones took on suddenly a keen, acrid fighting edge—an edge that braced the room like the shock of cold water:

"Sympathy is a queer thing. From the poor to the poor it is the dearest commodity on earth, for it means forgetting their own worries to shoulder vicariously the troubles of others. But from the rich to the poor it is an empty thing, as empty as air, and good only for their own souls."

He took up a sheaf of lists from the table and his eyes grew hard and cold:

"I have here in my hand a list of the people in this room—one hundred and two of them. Nearly all come of millionaire families. And the few who do not reach that height of wealth are wealthy enough to accede to my request. I spoke to you of the big seaside resort we are trying to buy for the children, to send them to in summer. From each person in this room I want one thousand dollars."

He paused for an instant and a sort of concerted gasp went through the audience. The eyes of the senator looked at him with puzzled wonder. About the judge's impassive mask a wry smile dawned.

"There are many among you," Nils went on, "who will do this thing without a second thought. And those who won't"—he swung back and drew himself up to his full height, and his voice cut the air like a whip—"I shall make their names a byword in this land."

He looked at them for a moment, his face tense, his eyes blazing. His voice rang through the drawing-room like the concerted volley of a thousand voices, reverberating from the mellow walls, buffeting from ceiling to floor, swirling about the chairs like the threatening swirl of waves:

"The people will remember those who heard their cry and never answered. For to-day I have cried to you for them. And the memory of the people is bitter and long. And hate will be about you always as you roll past them in your cars or walk by them in the streets. And hate is a bitter and a terrible thing. It makes the day fearful and robs the night of sleep. And hate will be yours. That I promise you."

The hostess stood up, with a scared protest forming on her lips. The look in Nils' eyes made her falter and wince.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he flashed at her coldly, and the words seemed to drive her back in her chair like a shot from a gun.

His eye crossed the glance of the shrewd old judge. There was a cold, reminiscent smile on the jurist's face, a wise,

cynical smile, as of a man who sees inexperienced game fall into a trap. And suddenly Nils knew that he was thinking of the twenty-year sentence that had been passed on a daring hold-up man that morning. He threw his head back and faced him calmly.

"Yes; I know what you're thinking of, Judge Thomas," he said, "and it doesn't cause me one tremor. No, not one!"

The jurist grinned—an unbelievable, boyish thing for so hard and wizened a face; he pulled a cheque book and fountain pen from his pockets. The senator did the same with a bellow of laughter. And then all at once Nils was flooded with a torrent of cheques and promises, and the incident was over in a minute of laughter and smiles.

He turned to make his way out of the room and met, face to face, the amber-eyed wife of Delavan. He stopped unconsciously, for he felt somehow that there was something she wanted to say to him, and there was something for him to say to her. For a moment they looked at each other—she with an unspoken, understood question in her scared eyes.

"Is it all so?" she asked timidly.

"Is it all so?" Nils repeated indignantly. "Will you come and see it with your own eyes? For years I have been wanting somebody to come down sincerely and have it brought home to him or her at first hand. Will anyone do it? Will you?"

Her eyes dropped and she said nothing, and bitterly Nils turned to go away. Once more he had made a plea in vain; but faith had never lost its savour for him, and he was as disappointed now as the first time he had pleaded for an emissary to accompany him.

"I will," she said timidly, stung by the bitterness in his face; but there was in her eyes the look of a startled hare.

#### IV

Because she had been all her life at the beck of somebody—and the habit of obedience was as natural to her as the flow and reflux of her blood—and because she had all her life been contemned by somebody, she sat in that big house on Madison Avenue, obeying a husband to whom she owed no allegiance and eyed with pitying contempt by all with whom she came in contact. Idly and dully she sat and watched the days go by, with no thought of anything good that day, with no expectancy for the morrow.

Behind her chair at table the butler stood, a reverend, pompous man, who was always imagining to himself the father of his mistress, the ragged-shirted, straggling-bearded beach squatter. In the silver-and-blue dressing room her maid pictured the hovel out of which this millionaire's wife had sprung. Indignant surreptitiously, the footmen stood by the door or mounted the driving seat of her car. The women of her new world told her what to do, what to attend, what to read. Patiently she submitted to the titled sempstress who clothed her in marvellous gowns, and on those slim, fairy's feet of hers were put shoes that were like gloves.

No man dared speak to her of love or affection, for a man's life to De Courcy Delavan was as negligible as the life of a fly on the wall, and he would be glad of an excuse to kill a man. A terrible and ghastly prisoner she was, without the spirit to throw everything aside and walk away fearlessly, and without the strength of will to kill herself, had either of those things occurred to her.

As a drowning person might grasp at a floating windrow she had taken up Nils Riordan's invitation in the dull hope that here was something which might help her pass the terrible, lagging days; that might take her out of herself, as the phrase is. With the first flush of excitement she had known for four years—for the four incredibly long years that she had been married to Delavan—she started out now with the labour leader to investigate the submerged quarters. Aflame with a cold, white heat of accusation, Nils had sat with her in her limousine. Coldly he had taken her through sweatshops along lower Broadway, and shown her the girls pushing the flicking treadles and holding the stuff beneath the needles with scarred, nervous fingers.

"These are the live exercises in the problem of the living wage," he told her. "Oh—that fuss at the end of the room? That's nothing!" he commented bitterly. "Just one of them who has fainted from overwork."

"Oh!" she gasped scaredly, the air hissing inwardly through her teeth.

He took her into labourers' tenements at meal-time, and insisted on her taking in every poor and tragic detail. He spared her nothing. The women of the homes regarded her with angry suspicion. Nils quieted their resentment soothingly.

"I'm not trying to make an exhibition of you, Annie," he told one of them. "I'm as jealous of your feelings as you yourself are. But this is for the good of everybody. I think it will help us all."

"God bless you!" he was answered. "If you think so——"

He took her to the East Side, to where the children swarmed like ants about the peddlers' pushcarts, babbling in liquid Italian and in slurred Slav and in singsong Yiddish. He ticked off the names of the streets on his finger tips.

"In summer, in this neighbourhood," he told her, "you will never see one of those small white hearses off the streets. And every third tenement you pass has a white crepe knot on the door." He was sorry suddenly he had told her that when he saw her eyes brimming with tears.

He showed her the grey-headed, broken women who creep through the doors of office-buildings when the day's work is past to scrub the floors. He showed her little shopkeepers who clung to their miniature stores, fighting hopelessly while life and commerce swept past them, leaving them high and dry, as on a sand bar, with no hope of a range of tide to take them off again. And men he showed her, too, the white-jacketed scavengers crouched over gutters; the sweating, cursing stevedores at the piers; the pale, anæmic clerks bolting their food at the lunch hour, compelled to steal nickels' worths in honour restaurants.

"It's ghastly!" she said. "It frightens me!" She pressed closer to his side, as though afraid these people might set upon and rend her.

He thought about her all the time now; and the more he thought about her, the less of her he understood. It was a puzzle to him how she, who had been born in squalor and had lived in poverty until four short years before, could be so moved and frightened by the conditions she saw. How she was changed now—the squatter's daughter! How she had merged in luxury, who had once known only rags and tatters! Wealth was not unknown to him—at Harvard and in New York he had many wealthy friends. And comfort he was accustomed to himself. But it was a shock to him how luxurious a woman could be, how well cared for, how sleek.

She would have been beautiful anywhere in fluttering rags; but now, groomed as she was, she was super-beautiful. Her hands had been tended until they were as soft as a snowflake, and as white. Her face had been massaged until it resembled nothing less in texture and colour than an opening rose. Her teeth were like pearls leaving the chamois of a lapidary, and her hair had been treated until it was like gossamer ruddying in a rosy dawn. These things were the results of her maid's care—a matter of which he never thought, as he never thought that the four years had been as slow in passing as four decades, and that it seemed to her she had been living in this ease and luxury all her life.

This thought passed, and for days he thought only of the pain she had been and was in. Those tragic amber eyes haunted him. Pain was a thing he understood, for he had seen much of it about him, and the agony in her face called to him every moment. At times he would find himself starting up, with hot, angry curses on his tongue, when he reviewed the story, and at times he would sit brooding over it long and silently. And then subconsciously, filling the background of the tragic eyes, would come the details of the delicately cut, infinitesimally moving nostrils; the ruddy mouth with its curving under lip and beautifully bowed upper one; the sweet contour of her face. He remembered vividly the white, slender hands.

There had been too many interests in his life before now to admit of his thinking of and knowing women; and, now that for the first time he had been thrown in contact with one, he was appalled by the mystery and beauty of her. But the other things, the agony and the fear—his heart cried to do something to ease them. If he had seen these things in the eyes of a child he would have taken it up and petted and soothed it confidently. If he had seen it in the eyes of a man he would

have known what to say and do. But before her, who had said nothing, who suffered mutely, he was powerless.

"It's damnable!" was all he could say. And he thought of the absentee husband; and his hands caught and moved sinisterly, with the imaginary action of encircling a neck and thrusting thumbs into a larynx.

To her, who had known only one man—and he an emanation from hell, like the spirit that possessed itself of the Gadarene swine—Nils Riordan was a revelation. If her husband had been as Lucifer fallen from heaven, the labour leader was as Michael with the Flaming Sword. The man's personality enveloped her; it swept her along like a whirlwind. She understood little of what he was saying. She understood nothing at all of what was in him. She was thrilled by him. Everything he said or did she accepted as right.

She had once seen in a paper, in a magazine—in a book, perhaps—an allegory of Labour: a young man rising among clouds, mysterious as to face, heavily muscled as to body, with glory shining in a halo about his head, and thunderbolts flying from his arms and shoulders and chest. She remembered it now, and to her it typified Nils Riordan. The idea of seeing him, of being with him, became fixed in her, as an alienist might put it. Silently she sat and waited for to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, when she would be in his company for an hour.

So these two came together now and again—she clinging to him in spirit, with a maddened desperation, though in action motionless and dumb; and he yearning toward her, aching to do something for her, and as mute and inactive as she. They rode and visited tenements and workshops, settlement houses and prisons, charity bureaux and homes.

He had relented toward her of late, so manifest was her distress at the things she was seeing. He felt he should offset his campaign with something that would please. He wanted to show her, he told her, that, in spite of poverty and distress and the uncertainty of work, there were happy homes and happy people in these districts. He brought her to places where young married lovers were setting out to brave life cheerfully together; to flats where grandfathers, veterans of war often, spent their last days in dangling grandsons on their knees and chuckling in unashamed delight; to mean streets where swarms of children hung about hard-worked mothers like garlands of glory.

They were returning from the tour, walking across a little park at Tenth Street and Avenue A. She had left her car on Broadway at his request, for he wished the visits to be made with as little ostentation as possible, lest the feelings of the visited should be wounded. The dry crackle of frost was in the air and, though it was only late in the afternoon, the violet arc lights were lighting wanly. A gaunt band-stand rose beside them and their feet struck the cemented way in little clicks. Across the avenue from them hove a line of delicatessen stores, kept by great blond men with purring Slovak tongues. There was little traffic, and the few pedestrians on the sidewalks pattered along swiftly through the cold. Suddenly, as he walked alongside her, he knew she was crying.

"What is it?" he asked affrightedly. "What is the matter?"

As he looked at her she brought out her handkerchief and covered her eyes, still walking. Her knees seemed to bend under her. She held the handkerchief with a grotesque gesture of arm and elbow that hurt him like a blow.

"You must tell me!" he nearly shouted in panic. "What is wrong?"

He stood before her and stopped her in her walk. She began sobbing in little gusts of breath that came through her teeth in pants, hard-driven. Suddenly she burst out wildly:

"I can't help it," she cried. "They are all so happy. They have no money. They have nothing to live on. But they have all got somebody. And somebody loves them. And I have got everything in the world. And I have got nobody—nobody—nobody!" The words came out as if something within her were being torn apart.

He was shaking as badly as she was. He caught her by the shoulders, with his hands trembling.

"Listen! Listen!" he cried to her.

"I've got nobody!" she cried on. "Nobody to be with me! Nobody to love me! Nobody! Nobody! Nobody! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

His grasp tightened on her shoulders. He shook her as he might shake a man in anger.

"You are wrong!" he shouted in sudden revelation. "I love you! I do! I do! Do you hear me? I love you! I do!"

She stiffened suddenly under his hands and the handkerchief fell from her eyes. Her throat was heaving terribly. Her grasp tightened on his arm and she looked up at him with a terrible question in her eyes, as if she had heard miraculously the one thing she had least hoped for and most wanted in the world, and as if she were not sure she had heard aright.

He could not bear to see that look, and, regardless of time and place, he swept her to him with a clasp so fierce that it might have been a wrestling hold; and as he did that he discovered suddenly that he was sobbing too.

## V

Every emotion, every thought Nils Riordan had had until now—exultation in the pride of leadership; his great, wide love for his own people; his affection closely wound about the old pastor who had reared him; his deep, mystical reverence for the father and the mother who were dead; the clear, supernal voice that called to him at times and pointed out the road he was to follow, and the great bound of heart that came to him on hearing it—all these seemed minor, edgeless, lifeless, compared to the flame that burned in him now that he knew he loved Myrtle Delavan.

At moments great tenderness suffused him when he thought what she had suffered, and iron fingers constricted his heart and sweat broke out on him as he went vicariously through her agony. And then passion would shake him until his throat was as dry as dust, and his face was livid with rage as he thought of the smiling, cynic villain who had been the cause of it. These would pass and the great resolution would simmer within him.

"If ever," he would stop and say to himself, wherever it was, at whatever time it might be—"if ever she suffers one pang more, one unhappy moment more, may God desert me, both living and dead!"

But, apart from these moments, life passed for him in a single golden minute. A queer madness swept about him, so that he might have been walking on air, so buoyantly did his feet go; and the atmosphere he breathed might have been the very winds of Paradise. His heart seemed to inflate to the breaking point, to tug at his body as a balloon might tug at the ground. He wished to stop everybody in the street and give them everything he had. And, when he thought of her at times, the brilliancy of it seemed to knock him aghast, as the light of the vision felled Saul of Tarsus; and it would appear cruelly impossible to him that he was pledged to marry the most beautiful woman in the world.

"You will marry me?" he had asked her the evening after that sobbing discovery in the mean park.

"How can I?" she had wailed to him. "I am married already."

"You will get your freedom," he told her. "You will begin action immediately. There is not a jury of men in the world—not a judge—who would withhold it for an instant."

"I am afraid," she quavered. "Afraid for you and for me. Afraid of him!"

"There is no need for you to be afraid of him," he said, so savagely that his voice dropped to a hoarse, throaty whisper, "so long as I am here. And as for me, I am afraid of no man while I am doing what is right and have these two hands."

He wanted her, in the first flush of decision, to walk out of the house on Madison Avenue that night and take refuge with some of the people on the East Side until the decree was granted. But this was too much for her.

She had promised enough already, and she was shaken through and thoroughly frightened. It would be best to leave her as she was.

"The moment that decree is given," he directed her, "you will put on the clothes I shall buy for you. You will walk

over the threshold of that house, with nothing from it—not the value of a straw. You will come direct to my arms and you will marry me."

"I will!" she answered.

"And you will be my girl, and my wife? And you will follow me always and love me always?"

"Always!" she answered him, sobbing. "Always! Always! Always!"

He would not go near her house ever, or sit down with her in that luxurious limousine. But every day he saw her, walked with her, had lunch or dinner; and so passed these days. She would walk out of the house trippingly, trying to come with calm and dignity, and ignorant and careless of the prying, gossiping eyes that spied on her. They would meet at the corner and go for their long walks and explorations. November had come in, all white frost and cold sunshine, and New York had entered on its two wonderful months. Rapturously they walked up Fifth Avenue, with its eternal carnival of people and cars, stopping every moment to look in at a shop window, admiring a tropical display in a florist's store; or a Bokhara rug stretched to entice the purchaser, a wonderful symphony in tone colours, like a hashish eater's dream; or a vase of translucent pottery rescued from the China of Han and Ming.

She did not understand these things and did not care for them, though she tried to—poor girl! But she was content to stand and watch him admire them, and to hear him enthuse, treasuring up every word and every occasion, collecting them with the avidity of a beggar collecting coins, to gloat over them afterward in the hours of his absence. Together they walked in Central Park, the frost-stiffened grass crunching beneath their feet harmoniously; or they wandered along the quays, remarking the battered oversea boats standing contentedly in their docks, like horses in stalls. So passed these days!

Occasionally he talked to her about his mission in life; about the men who toiled with their hands and who bunched their muscles to receive the naked burdens of the world. He told her what he wanted to make of them—a strong, cohesive unit, pulling together, each for the good of all; not a truculent force, proud in its strength and demanding excesses under the guise of rights, but a great movement that, gathering force and rapidity, would sweep every atom in it forward to the prosperity and comfort fitted to their station. She didn't grasp a tithe of it all, and sadly he saw that she was not destined to be a strong help-mate in his work; but he passed it over lightly.

"It is too much to ask," he told himself. "Here is the most beautiful woman in the world, and the best-hearted, and the most loving. I can do the work myself. She will sympathize with it, even if she doesn't understand. And the people will love her, because of her kindness and beauty, as they loved my mother."

Four years before, De Courcy Delavan, who knew the beauty of women with the same thorough knowledge he had of the richness of wine and the hazard of cards, picked her from her Long Island swamp, considering her looks to surpass those of any woman in New York. She had then an intense, vivid beauty, like the beauty of a wild flower opening to the sun. And after those four years, until she met Nils Riordan, she had a cultivated, calm human beauty, a thing that conformed to standard and tint, like a valuable bloom in a greenhouse. But after she met Nils Riordan she became transformed. Light glimmered from her eyes and shone from her face and was haloed in her hair, as it might be about the features of a soul beatified.

It was startling how she, that pale chrysalis, became suddenly a butterfly of happiness. She went singing about the house; and though she knew Nils hated to think of her in the clothes that Delavan's money bought she could not help arraying herself in the best and most beautiful she had or could buy, weighing in her intimate, woman's brain, the pleasure he had in seeing her in all her glory, arrayed royally as she ought to be, against the pain of knowing that the rake's wealth provided it. And besides, she guessed shrewdly it was seldom he thought of that—other things engrossed him.

Carefully she prepared for each day, using every artifice at her command, spending hours before dressing table and mirror, counting no detail too laborious, because she loved him so. And each day she was rewarded by the gasp of incredulous wonder that came from his lips when he saw her, like the choking wonder an ancient Greek might have had on seeing a vision of supernatural beauty. That she lived for and that she gloried in, because it told her she meant

something to the wonderful man she loved.

He had little time for work now; the wooing of her kept him busy all the day and at night he liked to be alone, in an ecstasy of thought about her. At times a fit of panic seized him, there was so much to be done—articles to be written; investigations to be taken up; speeches to be made in favour of candidates for Congress standing on the Labour ticket; commissions the sittings of which should be attended. But he would pass them over guiltily, promising that one week or one month from now he would attack everything with renewed vigour.

"Merkle can attend to that," he would say cheerfully to subordinates when they brought work to him; and Jim Merkle would be pleased and willing to undertake the task.

I think it was in Birmingham that Merkle had been born, right in the heart of manufacturing England, and his people had known hard days. He would tell unbelievably terrible stories of conditions in the cotton-spinning mills and in the cutlery factories. And as he told them his eyes would glimmer balefully; and he would denounce all capitalists with terrible oaths and threaten vaguely that a day would come with the people's revenge, as a red day had come in France about one hundred and twenty years ago. An uncouth, ungainly figure of a man he was, tall and lanky, with colourless grey eyes and a mouth creased from bitterness and shouting. He looked like a rough plaster cast in a sculptor's studio, but the moment he began speaking he became nothing but will and flame.

"The Irreconcilable," the members of Parliament had called him in England, speaking in a tone of light contempt. But no man in England had ever swayed the workers as he had done. There was no act of sabotage, no wave of popular fury in Great Britain, that could not be traced back to Jim Merkle. A horrible, defamatory attack on a great personage had sent him flying from England, with the law seeking to clutch him for criminal libel. In America his plea of a political offence had saved him from deportation and extradition.

In New York he had run up against Nils Riordan in his campaign of savagery; and, finding that he could accomplish nothing in a city so completely under the sway of the popular young leader, he had enrolled himself as a lieutenant under Nils, working faithfully for every ideal the organization had in mind, and resorting only to the accepted methods of agitation. He seemed to like Nils.

"If we only had you in England, boy!" he would say with admiration in his eyes; but the eyes would cloud quickly. "But things are different there! We don't get anything with your logic and diplomacy; we've got to bloody well use a club."

Riordan thought the man had taken suddenly the sane and logical view of labour problems and was delighted with the conversion. Merkle had proved valuable in breaking new ground and bringing new forces into the fold. The Englishman had a wonderful gift of wild oratory, and crowds came magically under his sway, while they progressed less quickly under the calm, logical tones of the college man. He had sent Merkle to Syracuse to help in an election, and Merkle had succeeded wonderfully. He had sent Merkle to talk over the leaders of the Waiters' Union to the terms he had made for them. Forcefully and succinctly Merkle had laid the case before them.

"... And them's as fair as you would get an you were to stay out till the Judgment Day. Fair, square and aboveboard!"

A dissatisfied murmur rose from his hearers, an angry whisper and the shaking of heads. Merkle had sprung to his feet, his great hands knotted and his eyes glittering.

"And if any man doesn't think them fair," he roared, "let him step out on this floor with me!"

That had been effective. Riordan would have been firm and decisive, but he would not have accomplished the compromise as quickly as this.

Ordinarily Nils would have kept a tight rein on Merkle, overseeing minutely everything the lieutenant did, and entrusting him not at all with the larger issues at hand; but now, with his new-found happiness, he saw everybody in a different and glorious light. He regarded Merkle as a sincere and able leader, whose faults were negligible and whose loyalty was beyond question; a little rough, but with a heart of gold.



"Turn it over to Merkle" was becoming a formula with him. Other men in the organization protested. Johnson, the tired, disillusioned man who edited *The Worker*, voiced his dislike of the Englishman boldly.

"You're incurable, Johnson," Nils had replied laughingly. "You can see no good in anything or anybody. You're as suspicious as a Central Office man. Don't be an ass! Merkle's as straight as they're made."

"Very well. We'll see!" Johnson had replied grimly.

But morose suspicions and unfounded warnings had no effect on Nils. He passed them over lightly, as a sailor might shake his head after a dash of spray. Eagerly he awaited and met Myrtle Delavan, and planned with her their future life after she had gained her freedom. A little house on one of the quiet squares in the forgotten portions of the city they would have—a place with green shutters and whitewashed walls; with flowers trailing from window boxes; with a door that would be open to everybody on the first tap of the great brass knocker they would attach to it.

Inside everything would be shining, and in winter they would have a great fire in the main room, with licking green flames over the logs. A sort of sublimated workman's house it would be, simple, clean, with here and there beautiful touches that would give it effects not equalled in any mansion in the country. And he thought to himself of her going to and fro in it, in a plain gown of beautiful colours, a sublimated workman's wife. And there would be a cradle, he promised himself secretly, which he would hew out with his own hands....

She listened to his plans, with her mouth and eyes eager, like a child breathless over a fairy tale. She said nothing, except to implore him to continue. And then suddenly they would become silent, each in their own thoughts; his deliciously tender, and hers unutterably poignant, because of the contrast of what he planned with what she had known before. At times like these she would turn to him quickly and grip his wrist with her hands, and her slim, soft fingers would become withes of encircling steel.

"You love me?" she would ask breathlessly; and in her eyes the old agony would come, as though conjured up by a malignant charm.

"I do, my darling," he would reply. "I love you with all my heart and soul."

"Will you always love me?"

"Every moment in this life, dear girl," he would answer her solemnly, seeing the terror she was in; "and afterward—if that is possible."

"You will! Won't you, Nils? Promise me. Promise me, Nils! For if you ever desert me, or if you ever stop loving me, I shall die, Nils. I shall surely die!"

But this was seldom, for he had convinced her somehow that she was all there was in the world for him. And as for him, he would smile tenderly at the absurdity of her question, for that they should always be together and that everything should be as they had planned seemed as certain to him as the rising of the morning sun. And as he thought of that a great wonder seized him that they two in a whirlwind of Fate should be swung together, and exist alongside so long as the least part of spirit should adhere, in this planet and in a future one. He saw in awed, mute wonder that a great mystery had been shown him, greater than the rite at Eleusis, surpassing the inmost secret of black ancient magic. In one moment he had heard the purring shuttle of Life.

Before, the world had seemed to him a grim, stern place; and he had wondered how there could be so much happiness in it, seeing it as baldly as he did. But now he, too, was living in Arcady.... So passed these days!

## VI

Whoever has been in Father Malachi's study in the Hudson Street parsonage will never forget it—that weird

rectangle, with its musty and threadbare green chairs and couch; with its jumble of dog-eared books; Homer the poet and Apuleius the fiction writer joggling against the report of the Forrest Commission on labour problems, and Baker on Housing Conditions; Henry George proudly holding his own beside Sophocles; and Bastable, that sly liar, daring to repose alongside of honest Herodotus. A huge Biblical Concordance was there, too, and a tattered religious encyclopedia, exhumed from a secondhand store.

The ornaments of the room were incongruous—the presents of his parishioners: A gaudy sunset by some artist of the slums, done, most likely, from an Eighth Avenue fire escape; a full-rigged ship carved into an immense green bottle; a plaster cast of Diana unloosing her bow, the gift of an Italian plasterer. An old desk stood in a corner, piled high with letters and notes, and memoranda made out on stray scraps of paper. And over everything was an air of comfort, of being lived in.

Those who have been there will remember, as the mainspring of the room, the fine white head of Father Malachi, cuddled into the hollow made by the back of a green chaise longue. It seemed a corner of a quiet back-water compared to the rushing river of life outside. And the quietest thing in it was Father Malachi, leaning back in his chair, with his hands folded and his spare knees crossed.

But to-day he was not quiet. He fumbled about his desk, with his head averted, while Nils Riordan talked enthusiastically in the corner by the window.

"I could never get her to come down and see you until now, Father Malachi," he went on. "She was always afraid. She was afraid of meeting anybody. But now she wants to meet you and I'm going to bring her down." He paused and his voice became unutterably soft. "It means a lot to me to see together the two people I love most in all the world."

He stopped and leaned forward, his hands clasped together and a little dreaming smile upon his lips. The old clergyman still bent over his desk, with nothing of him visible to Nils except the long arc of his back, and his hands, which were trembling.

"You will love her, Father Malachi, for herself just as much as for me; and the people will love her when they know her."

For the first time he noticed the old pastor's preoccupation at his desk, his averted face, his trembling hands.

"Can I help you?" he asked. "Are you looking for anything?"

"No," was the slow reply. "I am not looking for anything."

"Is there something wrong?" Nils asked with a note of alarm. He started to his feet and looked toward the desk anxiously. There was no answer. He pressed forward. "Father!" he called quickly. "Father! Tell me! Am I doing anything wrong? Tell me!"

"You are doing nothing wrong, Nils." The words came slowly and haltingly. "I can see nothing wrong. But——"

"But what?"

The pastor turned round in his creaking swivel chair. His body was limper and more bowed than Nils had ever seen it. His face was haggard and his eyes were full of trouble.

"Laddie Nils," he said gently, "I would do anything to spare you pain. There is nothing on earth so dear to me as you and your happiness. But the people don't like it. They are talking. They are losing faith."

A sort of gasp hissed through Riordan's teeth and the light went out of his face like a quenched candle. His eyes became focused widely on nothing and all his body became tense, like a setter pointing.

"What are they saying," he asked suddenly and colourlessly.

"They are saying," the pastor answered firmly—Nils could feel that he had steeled himself to say it and that every syllable he spoke was hurting him like an intense pain—"that another man with a great career before him has been drawn away from it to follow a woman. They say that Labour was all right for you until you got in touch with Fifth Avenue; that you have forgotten them all for a whiff of talcum powder and the rustle of a silk gown. They say this—and more."

"But—my God!—father, this is all wrong. This——"

"They say," Father Malachi went on inexorably, "that your father and mother would turn in their graves to see their son trailing after the cast-off wife of a profligate millionaire."

"This is damnable!" Riordan all but shouted. "The girl is the squarest and sweetest and most horribly treated woman in all the world. And she is one of themselves, born and bred poor, and willing to come back and live among them."

"They say that you are lazing away your time with her; forgetting your trusts; neglecting your work."

"But I oversaw everything. I put it all into Merkle's hands——"

"Merkle!" The old man's tone was like ice and acid; a terrible light came into his eyes; his frame trembled with rage.

"Merkle?" Nils said, aghast. "Why, Merkle's the squarest man alive! He has sacrificed everything for the cause. He has done wonders——"

The clergyman controlled his rage by a great effort of will. He stood up slowly and looked at Riordan between the eyes. His voice was as solemn as on the night in the belfry, but his tones were firm now, sure of the facts before him, not shaking as when he had been unknotting the gossamer threads of uncertainty.

"Nils, in seven weeks Merkle has done nearly as much harm as you have done good in three years. It is he who has been spreading reports about you. He has been making the unions dissatisfied, urging to them that they would gain twice as much by rebellion and force as by hard work and arbitration. He has been hinting that you were the tool of capitalism, philandering with a woman of the moneyed class. And Nils"—his voice became horror-stricken—"there is dynamite in the air."

Very still Riordan stood, very still and stricken. For a moment, he doubted whether he was hearing right; whether all this was not the figment of some distorted dream. Gradually the familiar surroundings came back to him. The truth was written too patent and bold in the old man's face to be mistaken.

"So that's what's wrong!" he said in a whisper. "That's what's wrong with the mill hands. And that's why that dying crowd of anarchists have burst out again, and why Dolmetsch has begun making speeches. I see it. I see!"

His hands clasped firmly and the startled look went from his eyes; and they lit up again with firmness and determination. He moved a little, turned, and began pacing up and down the room with nervous, rapid strides. A flashing light kindled in his eye and the colour mounted to his temples. Suddenly he turned to the pastor.

"Listen to me, father," he said in vicious, snapping accents, "and mark it! I am neither going to rest nor give in until I have driven Merkle from this country as he has been driven from England; until I have branded him for what he is—a liar and a Judas, a self-seeking demagogue and the enemy of all decent men. I will go down among my people and see whether they trust me or trust him. I will leave him so that no roof will cover him except the filthiest anarchist dive. And if necessary I shall kill him as I would kill a wolf that has strayed among sheep. Mark what I say!"

He took another few turns about the room, savage, untamable, like some wild animal confined by bars.

"And mark this, too!" he shouted. "I shall make the people eat every word they have uttered about the woman I am going to marry; for I shall marry her. And I shall bring her down here to them, and they shall go down on their knees to her as to a crowned queen. And they shall live to repent shamefacedly of the days when they spoke of her lightly. By God! They shall!" And he plunged wildly from the room.

They met at Thirty-ninth Street and Madison Avenue that afternoon and walked southward through a thin layer of snow that was freezing on the sidewalks. A typical December afternoon it was, cold and stinging, with the white snow beneath and everything standing out in strong, vivid colours. Right and left the houses rose like towers of ivory, glistening with hoar-frost and a coating of snow. Above them the sun shone in a great golden blaze, while from the west clouds blew toward it—heavy masses of ochre and saffron, with a background of inky black.

He could not find it in his heart to be gay that afternoon, but he was careful to say nothing to her of what he had heard; and inside him somewhere burned a great smouldering rage against those who had dared to criticize her. She saw he was morose and gloomy, but she attributed it to some worry about the cause he was always speaking of, and she was afraid to ask him to tell her of it, fearing she would not grasp what was wrong, and could not offer proper advice and consolation. So she contented herself with being gay and talking vivaciously, hoping to take his mind away from the difficulties. She filled her lungs with the keen, frosty air and glanced upward to the sun.

"Do you see the sun, Nils?" she prattled. "Do you see the sun? It is so bright to-day it makes me happy."

He listened to her perfunctorily; for, gay as she was, the blow he had received was too severe to be deflected even by her pleasure. But she persisted in speaking to him and making him notice.

"I sometimes think," she went on, "that everything in the world owes its happiness to the sun. I feel alive only when the sun is shining, and when it sets the day is over for me. And I wait patiently until it rises again. Look at it, Nils." She laid her hand gently on his arm. "Look at it, Nils," she said softly. "You are my sun, dear!"

He raised his eyes skyward, half closing them for shade; and as he let the golden shimmer strike the lashes he noticed that the cloud bank from the west was sweeping rapidly toward it in great black fragments, like jinn racing forward on Titanic wings. The foremost cloud broadened in a huge black disk, began to scallop at the edges, and took on suddenly the grotesque outlines of a man's face—hard, forceful, with a great jaw and nose and rugged forehead. Nils watched it in astonishment, and to his mind there leaped the thought that it was the face of Jim Merkle. It blotted out the sun as a hood blots out a candle, and the streets became dark and cold. The woman beside him uttered a little cry of terror.

"The sun is going out, Nils!" she gasped. "Nils, the sun is going out!"

He caught viciously at her arm and held her to him, as he might do in a sudden emergency of danger; but he could say nothing to her, for a moment of terror was paralyzing the cords of his throat and stopping the rhythm of his heart's beating.

## VII

Through the closed windows of the office the sound of the crowd outside came in a faint *susurrus* of sound, now rising to a humming as of innumerable insects and sinking again until it came to a whisper as light as that of a breeze among leaves. From the windows themselves, past the platform of scaffolding that had been erected for the meeting, the great mass of people in the square seemed like a mass of larvas, closely packed and seething, seen through a microscope. Their faces were grim and white, and the lines of policemen keeping them in order were nervous and clung together as tightly as possible. The striking longshoremen they were handling to-day were not to be impressed by night-sticks and whistles. They were a fierce, lawless crowd, who, if they were angered, would massacre the police force in the square with as great ease and as little compunction as they would pitch bags into the hold of a vessel. High overhead sodden rain clouds hung like a gigantic pall, dull and hopelessly grey. A raw air was out, so moist that it glistened, and in it the faces of the strikers were grey with a tinge suggesting want and despair.

Inside the office, with the long deal table and the shabby chairs, tension rose to pain. At one end of the table Bentley sat, secretary of the Labour Federation, a thickset, red-faced man, with big grey eyes and a close-cropped white moustache. His hands were clasped and his elbows on the table, and his mouth was set grimly. On one side of him was Flannagan, of the Longshore Union, a massive red-haired bulk, with anger showing in every line of his face. Beside him

was Johnson, editor of *The Worker*, loose-lipped and bald, chewing an unlighted cigar nervously. Father Malachi had risen from the table and was looking out of the window, with his back turned to them and his head bowed. Opposite Bentley, at the other end, Nils Riordan sat, limp and grey-faced.

"Well, Mr. Riordan?" Bentley asked.

"Why can't you let me go ahead?" Nils asked bitterly. "Why don't you let me fight the thing out? Give me time."

"We have given you time, Mr. Riordan," Bentley replied doggedly. "We have waited and stood by you, and every day we have been losing our hold on the workers, and Merkle has been gaining all the time. In a few weeks more the work of all our lives will be undone. There will be dynamiting right in this city, and there will be as bloody fights as those in Colorado. We can wait no longer."

Again the silence and the tenseness took possession of the room, and the murmur of the crowd outside crept into it in a threatening minor tone.

Bentley looked steadily toward Riordan.

Flannagan shrugged his immense shoulders and scowled furiously. Johnson spat out rags of his cigar and put it back in his mouth.

"Come, Mr. Riordan," Bentley urged. "Give up Mrs. Delavan."

"In God's name," Nils began furiously—"in God's name, leave Mrs. Delavan out of it! That's my private affair."

"A public man has no private affairs," Bentley went on firmly. "And Mrs. Delavan is the whole matter at issue. If you marry her you lose your people. They will not stand for you marrying the divorced wife of a millionaire. They resent everything about her—her servants; her house; her picture in the papers; her summers at Newport; her cars. Everything! It may be all right—I've no doubt it is; but the people believe she is nothing except a be-costumed Fifth Avenue woman who looks on them as dirt. The idea has been seeping into their minds for months and Merkle has made the most of it. Nothing will change that idea. Not a thing!"

"But we'll show them," Nils pleaded. "They must be reasonable."

"They are never reasonable," Johnson uttered bitterly. "They never think. If they did there'd never be any trouble."

"Here's how the matter stands, Mr. Riordan"—Bentley laid his hands flat on the table: "No matter how much influence you had with the people until now, no matter how much you have done for them, at the present moment they distrust you; and they will distrust you so long as you have anything to do with Mrs. Delavan. There are always people who will not believe in her good motives or yours, and those persons will infect the trusting ones. We of the Labour Federations are up against the biggest crisis in many years, and we can't afford to be associated with or support anyone who is in disfavour and unpopular. We shall have to cut loose from you; and the moment we do any power you have is at an end. Come now! Be reasonable. Give up Mrs. Delavan."

"I can't do it," Nils said firmly. He shook his head.

Flannagan jumped to his feet in a sudden passion. His eyes blazed and there was foam at the corners of his mouth. He hammered the table with his huge hands.

"You! You!" he shouted incoherently at Nils. "Damn you and your calf love! Look at the people outside that window. Forty thousand of them. Going to hell, and driven there by Merkle! No use for their leaders. And the Union funds gone. Starving—do you understand? And you are the only man who can stop it. You never think of them. You think only of a powdered hussy who sold herself to a rich man, like a woman of the——"

Nils was on his feet too. His hand swung the heavy chair from the floor.

"Say that," he shouted back—"say that, and I'll crack your skull like an eggshell!"

"Sit down, Flannagan!" Bentley commanded. "Do you hear me? Sit down!"

Again there was silence in the room, and through the brick walls there filtered in the sense of the crowd outside—a faint shuffle of many feet, like the pit-a-pat of dancers, and a hoarse soughing, as of bleak wind through bare branches. Riordan got up again. His eyes were bloodshot.

"Listen, Bentley," he said; "and you, Flannagan, and Johnson! And listen to me, Father Malachi! This girl we are speaking about has had the hardest time of anybody in the world that I know of. She didn't want to be anything, but Fate made her the wife of a scoundrel. He left her and for four years she has been buried alive. It makes no difference that the grave is gold and marble—none at all. And then we met, and for the first time in her life she approximated happiness. I say nothing about myself, gentlemen. Leave me out—except that the fault of it is mine.

"We fell in love with each other—that's the long and short of it. And I urged her to get a divorce and marry me. There is nothing wrong in that. You have a wife, Bentley; and you, Flannagan. You married the women you wanted to and they married you because they chose you. And both of you are happy and contented. That's all we ask, and there is nothing wrong in that.

"Gentlemen, I have worked all my life for this cause. I have worked alongside of you for the past three years and a half since I came out of college; and before that I dreamed of nothing else and planned for nobody else but the people. You needn't reproach me, Flannagan. The plight of the men outside is hurting me as much as it is hurting you. And nobody knows better than I the damage that will be done if Merkle isn't beaten.

"But listen to this, gentlemen: If anything happens now the girl will die. She has taken action against her husband, and by a boat that enters New York Harbour this afternoon her husband returns from France. Nobody except myself can stand between him and her. If I desert her now and let her return to that brute it will kill her, as surely as by a knife. She will die herself before she meets him. Think! Think of it! If I desert her this woman of mine will die!"

They sat very silent for a moment. The crowd without had become curiously still, and in the street at the rear of them a barrel organ struck up a gaudy, jingling melody that forced its way into the room like an intruder; a ghastly, sordid, heartless incident. It intensified the silence of the hearers with its metallic roll and set off the gravity of the conference as a pygmy might set off a giant. Bentley shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Riordan," he said decisively.

For an instant it seemed as if Nils would spring at Bentley. He was poised at the edge of the table like a crouching panther. The veins on his forehead stood out and his neck swelled under his collar.

"To hell with you and your cause!" he blazed. "I'm through with it. I will walk out of this room and shake the dust of it off my feet for ever. I am not dependent on you for anything. I can make my living and hers without you. You have left it to me to choose; and—by God!—I will!"

The old clergyman at the window straightened up as if he had seen something he was expecting. He peered out for a moment and turned round slowly.

"You are right, Nils," he said. "You have the right to choose."

He came forward slowly and his face seemed very grey against the white of his hair. He moistened his lips as he walked and his eyes were strangely sunken. Outside, the noise of the crowd buzzed angrily, like a swarm of hornets, and in contrast with it the street organ jingled merrily away, like a butterfly fluttering about while a hurricane clouds darkly, ready to break.

"You have always the right to choose, Nils," he went on solemnly. Bentley shot an angry glance at him and Johnson seemed surprised. "I told you before that you had. Do you remember when, laddie? It was the night you returned from college. Do you remember that?"

"I do," Nils answered; his voice was a hoarse whisper.

"I took you up into the belfry and I showed you the city beneath us. It was a hot night and the children could not sleep, and they could hardly play. I told you you could choose to work for yourself or to work for the people from whom you were sprung, who had brought you up, who loved you. Do you remember how you chose that night, Nils?"

"I do," Riordan answered him again; his voice was hardly audible.

"You began your work, and every day you saw more how they needed a wise and strong leader. They rallied to you, Nils, as they had never done to anybody before. You worked wonders for them. It is a small thing, perhaps, Nils, but you don't know how many people knelt at their bedsides every night and prayed for you for all you had done. They looked forward to life with hope because you were working for them. You know that, Nils, don't you?"

He could answer nothing. He stood at the end of the table, his face white, his feet teetering beneath him.

"What you have been to these people in New York you might be to twenty million of them in America. You could be the one to lead them to wisdom and strength and comfort. You know that yourself, Nils. We all know that."

Father Malachi stopped to collect his words and his voice grew distressful, so much so that three of his hearers were terrified that they should see the most terrible of all sights, an old man who cried. But he caught himself up and went ahead:

"I know about this, and it is a hard thing, Nils. And I believe you—that if you leave her this woman will die. And I know that you and she are bound to each other in a big, pure love. But the people are inexorable. They clamour now as they clamoured to Pilate. Many people die for others, Nils; but it is always a hard and pitiful thing."

He listened intently, as if he heard something the others did not. He straightened up again and looked at Nils squarely.

"You are a free man, Nils, and you have as much right to your happiness and life as these twenty million have to theirs. You can choose. You can choose between the happiness of these people who need you, and to whom you pledged yourself, and your own. They are in danger, now that Merkle is at large, like a lion in the streets. But your life is your own, Nils, to do with what you like. You can turn your back on them. You can walk out of this room with this girl——"

"Out of this room?" Nils asked quickly and affrightedly. Something in the pastor's voice told him it was not a figure of speech.

"Yes; out of this room," the pastor nodded. "I have sent for her and she is here. So choose now."

They heard for the first time the movement of feet in the adjoining corridor and they were all suddenly hushed. Through the windows the clamour in the square struck them—a speaker of some kind was addressing the men from the middle of the crowd, and his high-pitched hysterical voice was followed by a dull insensate roar, like the raging in animals annoyed by the trainer's iron. And from the next street the barrel organ still rippled faintly a sentimental song of frustrated love, with long-drawn notes swinging into a trill of appoggiaturas—a cheap, shallow thing.

Mrs. Delavan stood in the doorway, a slim, frightened creature. Against the dark furs about her neck and shoulders her beautiful features shone translucently—the melting amber eyes, the wonderfully curved and darkly red mouth, the graceful sweep of chin, the hair like warm, reddish light. Against the bareness of the office she seemed like an orchid springing up suddenly in a back yard, a miracle of beauty.

Unconsciously the men rose to their feet. They looked at her with a startled expression on their faces. She was transfixed with terror.

Nils alone did not turn toward her. His gaze was levelled hypnotically through the window at the seething square. The old clergyman went forward and took her hands. He drew her toward him silently. For long minutes he looked at her.

"My poor little lady!" he said at last. "My poor, bonny little thing!"

She went white at the words and started as if to run to Riordan's side. But he held her gently.

"They want to take Nils away from you—his people. There are twenty million of them and you are only one girl. They want him very badly." He let her hands go and turned away. "My heart is broken for you both!"

She took two steps toward Nils quickly and then all at once stopped. Her hands dropped to her sides limply. Her head went back and her eyes closed.

"I knew it!" She broke into a wail. "I knew it—the day the sun went out!"

She clawed toward him with hands outstretched. She might have gone blind suddenly, so feebly did she grope. Riordan made no sign of having heard her.

"Oh, Nils! I shall die!" she cried with great sobs. "I shall surely die."

Johnson turned a sickening white where he stood, and Bentley's mouth went into a crease of chiselled lines. Flannagan shuffled uneasily. They dared not look at Riordan, but their eyes followed her, unable to move from her face. They saw a wonderful expression of tenderness sweep over it.

"Ah, Nils!" she said slowly; her voice was like some melancholy chord on a flute. "Poor Nils! Poor boy!"

She moved slowly toward him and touched his arm with her finger tips. They could see the cloth of his sleeve quiver.

"I can't stand this," Flannagan said suddenly, and moved forward. Bentley stopped him with a quickly upraised palm. Johnson shook his head hopelessly.

"Aren't you going to say good-bye to me, Nils?" she was pleading; he might have been stone, so motionless did he remain.

She caught at his hand quickly and kissed it and, turning, fled out of the room. She was sobbing terribly; dry, cutting spasms of sound that were horrible to hear; and she struck against the door lintel, so blindly did she rush out.

They heard her go crying down the corridor; and once they heard her fall, pick herself up again, and run on. Without, the crowd began to shout with a rumble that was like thunder.

The men in the room paid no attention to them.

They stood still and shaken. Occasionally they looked at each other and turned away guiltily. Bentley after a time put his hand in his pocket and glanced at his watch mechanically. It was twenty-five minutes to four, and the meeting was to have started at half past three. He made no move to go out.

The barrel organ began again—this time a quick, staccato measure, two short bars and a lilt into a smashing crescendo; a cynical, pseudo-solemn thing, full of mockery. The pastor noticed it unconsciously and, seizing on the trifle, began wondering what it was. He listened again to the laughing blasphemy of it.

"The Funeral March of a Marionette!" he discovered with a creeping horror.

The roar in the streets became more insistent. It thundered like gunnery. Riordan turned round quickly and decisively, and the leaders looked at him with nervous apprehension. His face was whiter than snow and down it sweat was pouring.

"I am ready," he said quietly, "and the people are waiting."

Bentley looked at him shakenly. He tried to protest.



"Mr. Riordan! Nils!" he said. "Don't speak to-day. Don't——"

Riordan shot one savage glance of hatred at him and cut short the words on his lips.

They went out one by one, the music becoming louder as they entered the corridor. The pastor noticed that the men were unconsciously keeping time with the barrel-organ music as they walked.

"The Funeral March of a Marionette!" he repeated to himself, aghast.

They mounted the steps of the platform and took their seats. Beneath them in the square the mob of people was like a seething pot, the blackness of their clothes was like water and their white faces seemed bubbles on its surface. They clawed about the edges of the platform like bees swarming on a tree's branches. Nils stepped out and a great roar greeted him. It swept up Fifth Avenue and weltered toward the rivers, on each side.

"My people!" he began firmly.

The old clergyman looked towards one corner of the square where a limousine was waiting. He saw a grey figure, with dark furs, tottering toward it with uncertain steps. It put out its hands before it and pushed the crowd feebly aside. Even in the distance it seemed to shake with terrible sobs.

"What I am going to advise you to-day," the speaker was saying in cold, firm accents, "I say from my deepest sense of duty toward you. And that duty I have always kept——"

The figure reached the limousine and fell into it rather than stepped. The old clergyman watched it roll away. He turned and looked at the crowd with hostile, accusing eyes.

"God forgive you!" he muttered fiercely.

There came into his head again the echo of the rippling, cynical music he had heard when she had broken from the room, and with which the men had kept time while walking out; and, bending his head, he began to recite, feelingly, brokenly, the prayers he would utter at a hopeless bedside.

## II

### TREACHERY

So it was her husband who had killed Miles Hanlow, him they called "the gombeen man." So it was he who did it! Curiously enough Marge Campbell felt no shock or terror or great shame now. Could she have known it subconsciously all these weeks? Of course not. And yet where was the shock, the pain, the horror? There was none. Only something inside turned to chilled steel.

From the drawing-room of the terraced house she could see from the edge of the Irish coast the dun hills of Scotland across the channel, purple somehow, and naught but one steamer on the broad waters, half way out, slipping northward, from Belfast to America most likely. In the garden outside a maid in white was going here and there among the rose bushes, gathering flowers for a table decoration, her Ulster voice humming a folk song:

"I know where I'm going," she sang,

"I know who's going with me.

I know who I love,

But the de'il knows who I'll marry."

Yes, she had known something was wrong for a few weeks now. There had been a shadow on her husband's very handsome, somewhat common face, and a strange nervousness about him. She had not connected it with the murder of the local money-lender—how could she? She knew he was in debt over card games, horse races and the like, but so he always was, and he never spoke to her of them. Yes, he had been nervous, strange, haunted, as it were, but that he had killed Miles Hanlow, the gombeen man, that she never suspected until the little Catholic priest had come visiting her that morning.

"You are certain of this, Father Gray?"

"As certain as that I'm alive, Miss Marge," he said, calling her by the name the Glens of Antrim knew her by. "Your husband met Hanlow coming late at night from Ballycastle. Where your husband was I don't know. They met on the bridge over Owendarragh. Your husband had his loaded riding crop. Hanlow was found a mile down the river, on the rocks."

"How I knew it I don't choose to say. I am breaking no seal of secrecy," he added.

"I know that, Father Gray," Marge Campbell said quickly. Though her Ulster tradition was inimical to the priest's belief, yet she knew him for a gentleman. Some peasant had witnessed it and told him, fearful of what was to be done under the circumstances. Or perhaps the clergyman had seen the thing himself, returning from some late sick-call.

"But why do you tell me?" she had asked him. "Why don't you tell my husband? Why don't you speak to my brother, Sir Colin Fraser?"

"To tell it to Rory Campbell would do no good. To tell it to Sir Colin would mean that Sir Colin would arrest your husband. There would be nothing else for him to do. I tell it to you because your family should know of it. And for another reason: after this speech, there will never be heard one other word from me. I promise you that."

"You will not communicate with the authorities?"

"I am not an officer of the peace, Mrs. Campbell, I am only a servant of God, needing the inspiration of His infinite wisdom."

So it was her husband who had killed the gombeen man. She should be shocked, numb with terror, white with fear. Her head had become suddenly alert and quick as a whippet, cold and stubborn as the Ulster steel.

\* \* \* \* \*

She had to think now, rapidly, clearly, fully. There was a big issue to be faced, and so little time. Everything about her blotted out for an instant, the solid drawing-room, the great French windows, the garden and the singing girl in it, and she was in a world of cold grey facts.

Did she love her husband? She hardly knew. She was fond of him. That was as far as she could say. But she was intensely sorry for him, the poor fellow, the poor, poor fellow.

She remembered him as she had known him four years ago, before they were married, a great hulk of a man with black curly hair and blue eyes and a rollicking laugh—a figure to make any woman glad. Perhaps he followed horse racing too much, drank too much, gambled more than was good for him, but he had nothing to do beyond draw his income from the Belfast Linen Mill his people had left him, and ride to the hounds, and shoot in the autumn.

"He's a roaring lad, is Campbell of Cairngorm," the countryside spoke of him, "but he'll quiet down when he gets married. They all do."

But, contrary to the rule, Campbell of Cairngorm did anything but calm down on his marriage to her. A good thing for him that marriage had been—Margery Fraser, the belle of the Nine Glens, the star of Antrim, the countryside poets called her; a sister of Sir Colin, Deputy-Lieutenant of the County to His Majesty the King, the National Grand Master of the Orange Badges; and a fortune of her own, which was not little.

"You ought to bless this day," someone had told Rory on his marriage morning, "It's you are lucky."

"Sure the devil's childer have the devil's luck," he laughed back.

That's how he had treated that marriage, as the sheerest piece of luck, and he had wasted his young wife and his heritage, and the friendship of Colin Fraser, as a man is not careful of the money he wins betting on horses, as against money solidly earned. He had never been rude to Marge, never brutal, never even cold. She had just become casual to him. There was no other woman.

"He had changed, too," she thought.

He had always been a regular bull of Bashan of a man, but now he was heavier than ever, a thickness showing about the ankles and wrists. His hands were steady on a rein no more. In the black curls there were grey streaks, that had made them outrageously common, like the coarse hair in a mattress. And his face was bloated a little, the eyes a trifle bloodshot, the mouth relaxed. He was never drunk but he was never sober. And his voice had grown louder and more boisterous.

"Be damned to this!" he would shout. "And be damned to that!" Of course everyone knew that that was only his manner, but nevertheless, none ever provoked him very far. One did not quite know what was behind it now. What was behind it, Marge knew now—it was what had occurred late at night on the bridge over Owendarragh, the dark and bubbling river.

Something of the kind was bound to come. He was drinking too hard. Gambling too much also, for what stakes she was left in ignorance, but she knew he had been playing with Belfast merchants and Englishmen, with officers of the garrison and sporting men of outlying localities. He wasn't careful in his friends any more. He would drink with a pig-jobber just as quickly as with Sir Colin, her brother. And jockeys and minor satellites of the racing world had grown familiar towards him. Poor Rory, the luck was not as good as it had been. Fate was calling in her loans...

"But he wouldn't let me!" she cried out. She had wanted to influence him, to make him see the natural sanity of life—that the bracing sea was better than stray waters, and that there was as much interest in his home as there was at race-courses. Herself, now, without any vanity, there were few women as good-looking as she. Tall and graceful, built for mistress of a house, rich-bosomed, gracious; her glistening auburn hair, like rare Chinese silk; her eyes of a deep blue bordering on the green of the sea; her skin so white and life-ful, there was no defect in her, except perhaps that the nose was a trifle large for a woman, and the chin a little determined, but those made up her wonderful profile. Her little puckered mouth, there was no flaw in that.

"He wanted to be as he was?" She understood now that it was with no idea of settling down he had married her. He had taken her as a god-send, and gone his way.

She had never grown angry or rancorous, as other women might have done, at his manner of living. When she married, she had been aglow with life and love. All the months were June to her, with the cinnamon bees singing in the clover. Full moons, and the little wavelets chanting epithalamia against the moonlit shore. She had given herself freely and magnificently, and to her husband's lips had arisen the facile Celtic love song.

"My Star of Antrim! My Star of Ulster! My Star of all the World! Your hair is red as gold, and your eyes are wonderful and deep as the sea. And your puckered mouth is like some dewy rosebud opening to the dawn." He kissed her slim, soft hands.

"Don't waste them, Rory. Don't waste them," she had laughed, drawing his lips from her fingers.

All that had passed, as a day passes, or a month or a season. It had been, and then, after fading gently, no longer was. A phenomenon that had passed, and that she was glad had occurred. It was unthinkable to her to moan for it, to grow angry, to think that her life was blighted because it was no more. That it had been short was no more wonder than that a certain summer had been short. There was just one thing had bothered her—she had wished to have a child, and thought Providence unkind to her. Now she was glad, and thankful. She blessed God! She blessed His infinite wisdom over and over....

Back of the house, by the stables, one of the boys was raising his voice bitterly over something about "the little mare." A gaunt deerhound went snuffling down one of the garden paths, and the maid gathering roses still sang:

"I have stockings of silk"; her voice rang blithely,  
"Shoes of bright green leather;  
Combs to buckle my hair;  
And a ring for every finger."

No, she analysed, there was no more of it left. Love between Rory and herself had just come and gone; rushed in, abided a while and gone away gently, and all there was left of his visit to her husband and herself was a something—a fondness, one said.

\* \* \* \* \*

But this got her nowhere, she thought impatiently, this thinking about love as a woman will. However—there it was in black and white. Her husband had killed a man. None knew of it but she, counting out the little Catholic priest, who, she felt, would be dumb as a stone. She knew the man he had killed, a grotesque, fat creature, shambling, shallow-eyed—a furtive person, hated by all the neighbourhood. He had made his money in America, God knows how. Yet for his life, the life of her husband Rory was forfeit to the law.

"Wives, be subject unto your husbands," she remembered the instructions of Paul, "as unto the Lord, for Christ is the head of the Church, so the husband is head of the household." Or some such formula. So it was up to Rory to judge for himself what was to be done, and she had no part in it, but to acquiesce. To do otherwise would be to commit treason, as Peter did when he denied his Lord, and Peter wept at every cock crow until his death, and was crucified head downwards, though he was bishop of Rome. So terrible a thing was treason. Paul would have her silent, though silence was criminal. "Back, woman!" the savage Jewish convert would have snarled at her, so hateful to him was her sex. A woman was nothing without her husband. Even Solomon, whom they called the Wise, had defined her position. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her"—he spoke the praise and properties of a good wife—"she will do him good and not evil...." Ruth the Moabitess, exemplar of married women, clung to the mother of her dead husband, saying: "Entreat me not to leave thee... thy people shall be my people." A woman was to her husband as a satellite to a planet, revolving around it, having no independent being.

"Love, honour, and obey," she smiled a little wistfully, remembering her solemn promise.

She had loved a man, and been taken by him in marriage, and unto him now she was bound for better or worse. His fortunes were her fortunes, and his life hers. So went the law and immemorial custom, and so all good stories ran. Were she to ask a hundred women, their answer would be the same. "Say nothing about it. Hush, for God's sake! Are you mad?" They would account it a virtue to defraud the law. "He's your husband, isn't he?" Paul and Ruth and Solomon were of old, but the world over, she felt, the rule was the same to-day. Were she to conceal this evil, though it was as grievous as to merit the hangman's noose, and were it to be revealed later, there was not one but would praise her, not a man, woman or child, not a single one. No, she repeated, not one....

A commotion rose at the back-door of the house. A blind beggar—a dark man of the Glens went the phrase—was begging of Shiela Dhu, the housekeeper, and was asking for the mistress.

"Musha then, 't is to herself I'd like to be speaking, just the wee word."

"Herself you'll no be speaking to. You've got the bite and sup. Off with ye now."

"And where is himself? Himself, the master of this house."

"And where is himself?" Shiela Dhu cackled in savage sneering. "Yerra, where would himself be but where they do be racing horses, and passing the punch bowl, and card playing and dicing until the dawn of day?"

She must stop that, Marge said to herself. Old Shiela had no right to talk of her master in such a manner. But Marge did not rise. She sat listening dully to the blind beggar going down the drive.

"A hard life it is surely," he was complaining, "to be going travelling the Nine Glens of Antrim from the crack of dawn until the dying of the day, and not to be knowing whether it's the sun that's in it, or the moon itself, save by the way the heat does be playing on the ground. A lonely life it is for the three of us—for me and the dog and the stick in my hand."

The maid in the rose garden sang suddenly:

"Feather beds are soft,  
And painted rooms are bonny,  
But I'd leave them all  
To go with my love, Johnny."

"Ah, but that's different!" said Marge Campbell.

But Colin!

\* \* \* \* \*

She saw her brother, older than she, grizzled as a badger, with the hawk-like governing face, the powerful jaw and nose, the searching eye, the head that righteousness and honour held high. "A hard man," his opponents said. "A big man," was the report of the country. "A great one," the Orange brethren claimed. He might be all those things to all the world, but to Marge he was only her brother Colin.

The "black Frasers" the countryside and inimical Ireland call Marge's family. Dour and hard, unbeatable in battle, Ireland has little use for the harsh Scotsmen who came westward to conquer under the English flag. It knows little of that family, and wants to know less. That a Fraser came over with Bruce, and that there were always Frasers after him, is Irish history. There were Frasers at Benburb and the Yellow Ford. At the Fraser house in the Glens of Antrim, black-bearded Highland men prepared for battle, and with pistol and dirk, claymore and oxhide targe, went marching over the Ulster Hills to drive the Irishry to "hell or Connacht." She could see them swinging into line, with the battle shout of the Antrim Frasers—"Cogadh no sith," "Give us war or peace, it's all one to us." The pibrochs splitting the sky with the rallying song of the clan:

"Wi' a hundred pipers, and a', and a'."

Great days! A great name! A great tradition! and of it all there was only left Colin and she!

He might have been a great man, her brother Colin, Grand Master of the terrible Orange Brethren, baronet by a patent of King James, Justice of the Peace for the County of Antrim, and Deputy Lieutenant to His Majesty the King. To her he was only Colin, her brother, bound to her by a thousand ties, child of the same grey, gentle mother who was dead; companion of her earliest days. Ever since she could remember she had known and loved Colin.

"Isn't that strange?" she told herself in awe. Then she laughed. Of course, it wasn't strange. He was her brother Colin.

She remembered with a queer little tug at her heart when Colin swam from Ireland to Scotland on a summer's day—she was only a little "girsha" then, but she remembered the stir. Aye, and she remembered, too, the night they waited for the election returns to see if Colin had got in. The blood tingling at the finger tips, and every minute an hour.

She remembered standing by Colin when his wife died, and he was going about a crazed man, she treating him gently as a child. "There was love," she had thought awesomely. Who could be closer than those two? For though Colin's wife was beauty and passion to him, she was his sister and as natural and as necessary as the day.

How close they had been together. He was twelve years older than she, but that had been no barrier. It had seemed only a reserve strength and experience on which she could draw. She had told Colin of the men who proposed to her, of doubts in her heart; of debts she had accumulated, which had seemed terrible to her, but Colin had helped her with a laugh. All her life she had known Colin and loved Colin, and had been loved and protected by him, and she had never thought of it before.

"Rory, my husband, is a stranger," she said, with a sense of shocked discovery.

"Colin!" She grew very white. There was a strange contraction about her heart. She knew Colin better than any one did—better, she said to herself with a queer note of jealousy, that his dead wife had known him. The thing the world called hard in his character, was that upright, meticulous sense of honour that was as definite and as terrible as a drawn sword. His word was never lightly given, but it was his bond, as fixed as his oath on the Eucharist. Even that office of his, justice of the peace, was as sacred to him as his calling is to a priest. He had been entrusted with it by the government of the realm, and it was honour to administer and uphold the peace. Not a beggar but would receive full justice from him, not the lost ragged beggar in the street. Not a gentleman but would suffer by the law should he transgress it—not a gentleman in the Nine Glens. It was Colin's pride that he administered justice and kept the peace of the district. And this matter of the gombeen man had worried him more than he cared to show.

"He was a ruffian, a good-for-nothing, a scab on the community, Marge," Colin had said. "But I have a trust to that dead man that his murderer shall pay."

"But, Colin dear," she had said, "don't take it to heart. If the police can't find who did it, it's not your fault."

"The police are subordinate officers of mine. The trust is mine. It's bigger than that even. It's—well, it's big to me."

Yes, assuredly she understood him better than anyone else. It was Colin's honour.

"I am betraying Colin," she thought. Were she not to move over to that telephone in the sitting-room, the strange, crooked, black thing in the sitting-room, mouthpiece and receiver in one, very like a doctor's device—and call him and tell him straight away, she would leave a mark on the honour that was more to him than his life—the thing the Frasers had kept unspotted for years and decades and centuries.

"But Rory! My husband! I should be betraying him!"

And if she were to do that thing, the eyes and hands of womankind would be turned from her. What did it matter that Colin was the brother she had known all her life, and whom she loved so? Beside him Rory was a tepid stranger.

"Your brother's honour!" Women would shake their heads. "He's your man!"

All would be against her, women and little children in the street and they would say vile things, suggesting a hidden lover somewhere, and holding her name to be spat at until her dying day. All the preachments would be against her; the preachment of the fanatical, ragged-bearded Paul; the sublime words of Ruth, and Solomon, there was no going past the wisdom of Solomon.

"He is your man," she could hear hypothetical voices say. "The other is only your brother. It is your husband's life. As for your brother—it's only his honour."

It was very simple, after all. She sat with her head in her hands reviewing it, and life swung by her as insignificant as a clock's pendulum. A hornet buzzed angrily on the terrace, and from the highway came the spank-spank of a horse in a dog cart. A stable-boy outside raised his voice discussing the points of the mare between the shafts.

"She may have the heighth and she may have the build, but she can na jump. D'ye mind the right foreleg, I ask you? Do you mind that?"

And the maid in the garden continued her song, in quaint plaintive minor:

"Some say he's black,  
But I say he's bonny,  
O he's the flower of the flock  
My own true love, Johnny!"

"And were all the world to know, none would blame me for hiding it. Not Colin even! Not even he!" A sudden sob came from her. "Least of all Colin. Least of all, he!"

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She arose suddenly. She went to the telephone. She picked it up. She called for her number in a firm voice.

"Is that Garryday Abbey? Is Sir Colin Fraser in. This is his sister."

"He's not in now, Miss Margery."

"Is that you, Rorke? Please tell my brother, when he comes in, to ring me immediately."

"Yes, Miss Margery."

"Tell him it's very important. Tell him—tell him—just tell him—tell him that——"

"Yes, Miss Margery."

"That I know who killed Miles Hanlow, the gombeen man."

It seemed to her as she put the receiver down that the whole world must be changed somehow, rocking to its foundations and the planets crashing together in space, so ill and faint did she feel. But nothing had changed. She was herself. The hornet still buzzed on the terrace, and the deerhound snuffled along the garden walk, and the maid was finishing her song, coming in now with a bunch of roses.

"I know where I'm going,  
I know who's going with me,  
I know who I love,  
But the de'il knows who I'll marry."

### III

#### THE MASTER OF RAYMOND LULLY

You might have taken him, had you seen him from behind, what with the shining slant of his tall hat, the delicate line of morning-coat and his creamy spats,—you might have taken him for an actor. But his walk was not exaggerated, not self-conscious enough for that. If you were looking at him face to face, at his clean-cut, knife-like quality of feature; at the half-closed lids that helped his glasses conceal a pair of grey and not very striking eyes; at his prim mouth and the downward turn at the corners; at the high, ecclesiastical brow that was swallowed up by a bay or an inlet of baldness, as it were, you might have imagined him a clergyman, a younger son of a fine family who had taken up the cure of souls. But his step was not timid enough for a clergyman's. On one occasion a passer-by on Fifth Avenue had mistaken him for the young Duke of Salm-Salm.

"Not that I blame you in the least," he had answered his accoster, in that even, frigid, perfectly courteous and rather

high voice of his. "No, I cannot blame you for your mistake, for if there is any person on earth who looks as a duke should look, it is I. I am Jean Master."

Which was enough to compensate this casual acquaintance for any disappointment he may have felt at not meeting Salm-Salm. For to know Jean Master in New York, or to know him in London or Paris even, was to reach a station higher than that of princes. There are many princes in this world, but there is only one Jean Master.

If you ask about Jean Master on Madison Avenue they will tell you what a great pity it is he has to work for his living and how his relations in Maryland were hurt at the idea of Jean becoming a newspaper man. They will tell you that he might have scraped along somehow. And if you mention his name on Park Row, where the newspaper offices huddle together for protection from the righteous wrath of the city, the eyes of the men will light up with the fire that shows only at the mention of a great man. They will tell you, probably—for it is a favourite story—of how he had a European coronation set ahead two hours, because he wanted to write his article and catch his train at a certain time. They will tell you that Peter the Montenegrin has two rooms set apart in his palace for Master, to be used at any time he cares. They will relate for you with glee how he loaned Edward the Seventh fifteen dollars, and had to dun him to get it back. They will also tell you many amusing stories of him and the Shah of Persia, three-fourths of which I warn you not to believe. They will dilate on the world's mysteries he has solved—the disappearance of John Orth, for example; the tragic puzzle of poor Prince Rudolph's end; the mystery of the ghostly tiara of Pius the Ninth; the riddle of the Wasp's Nest and the Three Precious Stones which the young Burmese king set before him; all these and more. And then they will curse very violently and inhumanely because, now that General Sir Eric Master, head of the family, is dead in the Great War and his sons with him, and his fortune in the hands of Jean of that name, they naturally expect him to use his razor-like brain no more, to let his gifts run to seed, to live the life of an idler.

"All he'll ever think about now," Dixon, city editor of *The Star*, reflected bitterly, "is tennis scores and whether the queen's been out in auction. Oh, money! money!"

And, indeed, if you had seen him swing around from Fifth Avenue into Central Park South one bright May morning—attired for this once in a business suit—you might have been pardoned for agreeing with Dixon. There was a sort of blank look in his eye that would suggest a brain's inactivity. He yawned twice. With elaborate politeness he bowed to a robust lady who waved a cheery, plump hand to him from the blue recesses of a limousine.

It was a warm, golden day with a deep shadow along the side walk. To the right of Master as he strolled, Central Park swirled like a green agitated sea. Motors whipped by like ferrets. A very little breeze was stirring about uncertainly, as if it were not sure whether to blow decently or to go home. The sun peeped northward, with an unmistakable quality of spring in its effervescence—an effervescence that suggested young girls and gambolling lambs. A truckman out of pure joy of heart fed lumps of sugar to his team of three, while a Neapolitan milled out a ripple of chiming melody from a barrel-organ. A six-foot negro passed grinning. Master beamed.

At Sixth Avenue he was joined by a little black-haired man, a man whose mouth was slack and whose dull black eyes looked aimlessly through very round spectacles. He came out of nowhere, so to speak, bobbing up and accompanying Master like a feat of legerdemain. It was surprising how blank and silly the man looked, nearly too much to be so.

"Good morning, Moreau," Master hailed him.

"Good morning, Mr. Master," the little black man answered.

They walked in silence for twenty yards. As they went along all eyes were focused on Master—none on his companion, for this Moreau, seeming to realize how insignificant he must be, had dressed in clothes that sapped the last ounce of personality from him, boots such as everybody wears, a drab suit like which there must be three million others, and a soft hat. His bow tie was black.

They stopped at the great bulk of a studio building with two electric torches on each side. Master turned to enter. "Let me see if I've got it right," he said as his foot touched the step. "I'm to be very careful to see that the door's left unbolted, and I'm to raise my voice when I want you to enter, if I do."



"That's right, Mr. Master," Moreau answered. Even his voice was insignificant.

"Very well," Master said. "Very well. The responsibility's yours if anything happens to me."

A subdued Jamaican in a white livery took him up in the elevator. At the seventeenth floor they stopped.

"Mr. Deering's apartment—Mr. Ossian Deering's?" Master asked.

"Right in front of you, sir."

"How stupid of me," Master smiled. "Of course this is his apartment."

There was no name on the white door, no bell, nothing but a small gold pentacle painted in the middle of the panel with three black Hebrew letters in relief on it.

"Very *chic*; very *chic* indeed," Master nodded. He knocked three times. A small Japanese opened it.

"I am Mr. Master," said he. "I telephoned earlier."

The studio was very large, but there was little light to it. The great window which a painter would have used was covered with purple cloth, and only a small one on the side of the room was uncurtained. For a moment Master blinked and stopped short as if he were suddenly thrust into a dungeon, but as he became more used to the room he began to distinguish objects in it. Toward one end he could see the black lines of an electric furnace and along two sides of the wall ran a bench like a laboratory bench,—a stout, acid-stained thing with queer-shaped phials and tubes scattered about it. At one end of it a small brazier flamed—a high, tripod-like torch such as might have been in some Greek temple. Here and there were retorts on stands, like pipes turned upside down; a line of distorted test-tubes; strange apparatus, and queer misshapen bottles with metals and metal ore in them. Master could distinguish the white, bright glint of mercury; the tawny flecks of pyrites; black, fetid-looking silver ore. Here was a full beaker of golden nitric acid, and in a corner he could see a flask with the strange green tint of hydrochloric. He turned his head away, and in a corner caught a glimpse of a crystal on its velvet pile. On other tables he saw a white skull; a crucifix with a serpent instead of a Christ. About the heavy black draping of the room grotesque markings in green and gold held his attention—the two-bodied, superhuman symbol of the Zohar; the intricate, triangular pentacle of Solomon the King; horrible signs from the manuals of medieval wizards; the peacock with the human face; the seven-pointed star of Rabbi Zechiel; the Golden Calf. Master shivered a little.

"The thing's uncanny," he whispered to himself.

He looked about again, at the laboratory table with the vessels of the wrong shape, at the hideous crucifix, and the brazier that flamed vividly red. It was like the nightmare of some scientist gone mad. A door in the rear of the studio opened suddenly and a figure came forward.

"Mr. Master?" it said, and extended its hand.

He was very tall, Master could see, with a marked stoop and massive shoulders. His face in the dim, half light was a pale, strongly marked face with blotches of black for eyes, hooked nose and thin mouth; black, wiry hair falling dankly over his forehead. He had on a painter's loose smock of green that accentuated his dead pallor. As he greeted Master, the visitor noticed that his hand was a live, firm bunch of pliant muscles and hard bone, but its skin was soft, highly manicured, like silk.

"A queer hand," Master thought.

Deering drew a chair forward, a deep, stately seat like a pontifical throne. "You wanted to see me about getting in touch with your friends over the border, Mr. Master? That is a thing I cannot do for you. I call no spirit but the spirit of the great chemist, Raymond Lully."

"If it is a matter of money——" Master broke in.

"It is not a matter of money. I never do anything for money."

His voice was sharp, snapping, decisive. As he spoke, Master, who was listening keenly and observing him dreamily but also keenly, noticed two things: His voice was the tone of a healthy man, mentally and physically; and again, while he didn't care for money, his eyes were the eyes of a mean man. They closed into angular slits at the corners, with shallow, disappearing wrinkles, and there was a lift to the corners of the mouth and nostrils that Master recognized as the sign-manual of avarice.

"I thought if you could summon Raymond Lully for yourself, you could call a friend for me."

"I'm sorry," the alchemist shook his head. "I presume to summon no one, least of all for a private end. If the great chemist comes to me, it is to collaborate on the work which he left unfinished when he crossed the border."

Master nodded solemnly, but in his eyes there was the least hint of pleasure. He had, by good luck, the game where he wanted it, the pieces arranged to play. Ever since, a year ago, Ossian Deering had come to New York from Paris, and announced himself as an alchemist and a searcher after the Philosopher's Stone, Master had had the feeling that there was something behind him; something more than pose, than belief even. In London, Deering had narrowly escaped jail for a palpable fraud on a credulous woman; in Paris he had been mixed up in an unsavoury gambling scheme—but he still kept his followers. His cleverness had convinced them that the rumours were merely attacks of his enemies. Master had read of his career and, the moment he had entered America, had prophesied his incarceration.

"There is a young man," he said when the ship-news reporter had told him of the spiritualist, "who will be an addition if not an ornament to Sing Sing."

Newspapers and a few minor magazines had printed his poetry, which was bad, obscure, and pointless. They had printed accounts of his new-old religion of diabolism. To the public he was either a malevolent figure or a simple madman who was amusing at times. Master had examined his photograph with care. He marked the wide-set eyes and the firm balance of the head.

"He's too clever a man to believe in that," he had concluded.

He examined the photograph again and saw the wrinkles of meanness and avarice on the features like a fine lace design.

"There's a man who wants your money," he had laughed. "Now for the rush to give it to him."

But the rush of fools had never taken place. He had refused all reward from the clients and followers who had flocked about him. There were no complaints. But with a doggedness that was extraordinary the alchemist continued to get his name, his doctrines, his actions into the periodicals.

"Corking work," Master had applauded. "But what does he get out of it?"

And now, as he stood in front of the alchemist for the first time, Master believed less than ever that the man was sincere. The night before, at a dinner to which the Police Commissioner had been invited, the subject of Ossian Deering had cropped up. Master had hazarded that there was something wrong in that direction. The police head had laughed.

"If you can find anything wrong there I'll buy you a new hat."

"I need a hat," Master had observed plaintively. "I'll take that on."

The alchemist moved toward the door. He wanted to finish the interview. "If you take my advice, Mr. Master, you'll have nothing to do with Black Magic. It's a bad thing for laymen."

Master raised his eyebrows. "I'm not exactly a layman," he said. He waited a moment. "I have opened the Book with the Seven Seals and knocked on the panels of the House of the Dog."

"Did you make the Circle and raise the Rod?"

"I did."

The alchemist walked over to the laboratory bench and leaned against it. He watched Master with sharp, slit eyes. "Did they come?"

"They did not."

"Did you call them by the Name of Names?"

"I was afraid."

The alchemist smiled gravely. Beneath his whole solemn manner Master had the idea that he was laughing; that while the terms of old, ceremonial magic rang sonorously from his tongue, he was using them as a man talks nonsense to a child. He was using this as a vast, gorgeous farce; the hideous setting of the room; the crooked phials of the alchemist; the blasphemies of the devil-worshipper. What was behind it all? He gave no sign of anything. Master was trembling with irritation. He caught sight of the alchemist's hand. In spite of its careful polish and smooth manicured surface, there was the pattern of grime on it.

"You have to be patient, Mr. Master," he was saying, "if you want to attain to the Secret. Hermes, the thrice-greatest Intelligencer, was four score and ten before he understood the Great Secret. Cornelius Agrippa, the magic master, died without solving the pentacle of Solomon. Nicholas Flamel and his wife Pernella were white-haired before they could transmute gold...."

But he must get money from somewhere, Master began thinking again. Could he be fleecing anybody? Hardly possible. Some word of it would come out. Could he be sincere? Could the miracle happen? Was it possible that he was discovering the Philosopher's Stone, aided by a man who had been dead nearly seven hundred years? Master looked about him, at the flaming brazier with its licking, horrible tongue; at the devilish symbols on the tapestries; at the ghastly enigmas in green and gold. He felt his hair quiver at the thought.

".... Here, night after night," the alchemist recounted simply, "I made the circle and spoke the name 'Adonay,' until at last he came. So now we labour together, he and I. I make the mixture and tend the furnace. He stands outside the circle in a monk's black robe, with the cowl drawn high. He nods when I question...."

But the whole thing, Master felt, the careful setting, the eternal loquaciousness, the artistic quality of it, all seemed out of tune. It was like an elaborate scheme to conceal something, a red herring drawn across the trail of a fox. And there were the too-highly polished hands.

"He got them polished because they were rough," Master said to himself. He glanced about the room vacantly. The voice of the alchemist came to him solemnly, like a ritual being read. His eye caught a banner in a corner, draped from ceiling to floor like a Japanese print. In the uncertain light of the studio he could see on it the outline of a great malevolent head—eyes dilated by venomous horror, teeth like dogs' fangs. He walked toward it, repressing a shiver as he went. "It is the Unknown God?" he queried.

"It is He," the alchemist replied.

And Master felt, as everyone else felt who saw it, a sense of terror. As one watched the massive slant of jaw, the great bristling hair, the horror of the eyes, one could hardly be convinced that it was merely a thing of coarse cloth and fine paint. The pentacles about the head, the mystic diagrams, the grotesque Hebrew lettering invested it with a sense of power. It was put there with the object of repelling, Master judged. A shiver of repugnance ran through him. His hat fell from his hand.

"How rottenly careless of me," he murmured.

He groped at the bottom of the tapestry for it and picked it up. As he felt for it, he ran his finger over the coarse

canvas. They touched something like a pipe. He pressed it. There was the resilience of rubber and the feeling of bunched wires beneath. He picked up his hat and rose. "I got it," he said and laughed to himself at the double meaning.

"I feel I can't breathe," he gasped suddenly and walked toward the small window. He opened it as far as it would go and looked out. Below him, one hundred and eighty feet, the thin gully of an air-shaft fell. It dropped away sheer to the concrete surface of the court.

"The air's good," he laughed. He swung himself sitting on the sill with his face toward the room.

"Take care,—don't fall out," the alchemist warned.

"Oh no, I won't," Master smiled. He teetered on the edge like a mischievous child. A touch would have sent him over. "If I did I'd kill myself. Tell me more about Raymond Lully."

"There is little more to tell," the alchemist began. "Perhaps this year—perhaps next—perhaps not for twenty—we shall make the Stone, but one day it will come...."

His voice went on in an even monotone, like the voice of an hypnotic subject. Master's eyes wandered about the room. It was an electric conduit, no doubt, that he had felt, and he looked toward the small furnace—much too large for that. It slipped through an opening in the wall into another room, he was sure.

"Beautiful!" he laughed to himself, "beautiful!" He still watched the alchemist with mouth open, with interest and eyes like a child's. He still teetered on the edge of the air-shaft.

".... We once nearly attained it in the ascendant of the star *Alhaire*, the star of benevolence," Deering went on.

Master glanced at the door. The jambs were slightly apart, as Moreau had instructed him to leave them. He thought he had heard, a few minutes ago, the whisper of his feet on the stairs. He would be there now anyway.

"There is also the star *Athanna*, the little star of great light. It ascends——"

"I say!" Master suddenly shouted. The loudness of his voice struck the quiet of the room like a blasphemy. "I say, tell me, how the devil do you get the twenty-dollar pieces down to the street?"

The alchemist's pleasant, cynical smile dropped off like a falling mask. His muscles set under the green smock. "Ugh!" he grunted, like a startled animal.

"The false money you make in the next room," Master urged gently. His tone was suave. He showed his teeth in a pleasant smile. He balanced himself easily on the sill. "How do you manage to cart away all the heavy stuff without arousing suspicion? Do tell me. I'd love to hear it."

The alchemist seemed to crouch easily against the laboratory bench. His massive shoulders dropped and his legs tensed. He watched Master's form set in the panel of the window like a body in a photograph. He was calculating time and distance. One half-second's rush would send Master hurtling through to the court-yard. He drew himself back to spring. A sudden sense of panic seized Master. Twice he had shouted his signal and Moreau had not appeared. What was wrong? he asked. And then quickly, as he saw the alchemist rise on his toes, Master sprang to the floor in a flash of action, and Deering's rush stopped before it began.

"Well?" Master queried, and he was surprised to hear no shaking throb in his voice.

The alchemist said nothing, but he searched Master with his eyes, held him in the spot where he was as if those eyes were long metal spikes by which Master was transfixed. They were green, it appeared to Master, and fairly luminous, and as he stood there with them boring into him he remembered how once he had looked at an emerald in Tiffany's, held by a malign hypnosis, until he felt he was sinking into a vast infinity of green. The alchemist moved along the laboratory bench, with his easy, noiseless, invisible cat's tread, keeping his green eyes on Master all the time.

"Well?" asked Master again. It was all he could say. But in his own head there ran the question, pounding, reverberating, rolling like a train over sleepers—"Where was Moreau? Where, in heaven's name, was Moreau?"

The alchemist had stolen half-way along the room by now, with his menacing eyes still drilling into Master's, as an African whip-snake's pierce into a flamingo bird's, terrible as a sword, threatening like a thunderstorm. Master felt himself being lulled into a sort of dreaminess. He moved his feet, and as he moved he heard a slight metallic shiver. Some intuition broke the spell of Deering's eyes over him, and he looked downward. He was standing on a parallelogram of zinc, some two and a half feet square, placed precisely where an intruder stealing through the window and jumping on the floor would land as he sprang. Master stepped off it as he saw the alchemist's hand flash toward an ebony and copper switch on the wall. He cleared it by a couple of feet when there was a crash like a gunshot, and the sting of oxidized metal in the air. Behind him the zinc plate billowed upward to the strain. He had escaped electrocution by fifteen inches. The alchemist snapped off the switch with an oath.

"That's a dirty trick," Master said flippantly, but this time his voice sounded hollow. His body was shaking, and the palms of his hands and his forehead were moist and cold, while his tongue seemed a swollen, dry thing that filled up the intolerably arid tube of his throat and mouth. The voice inside him was shrieking hysterically now: "Where was Moreau? Where, in heaven's name, was Moreau?"

The alchemist turned away his eyes from Master's and walked back easily toward the end of the laboratory bench. There was an air of careless purpose about him that terrified Master more than the sinister steadiness of his eyes. For a moment Master thought of making at him, downing him, fighting tooth and nail for life, but it would be useless, he felt. The man was too well prepared, too diabolically clever, to be taken at a disadvantage. The only thing to do was to wait, as a city submits passively to a siege, to wait until Moreau turned up, but where in heaven's name was Moreau?

The alchemist had reached the end of the bench and was taking a hood off something, slowly, imperturbably. Master could see the heavy lines of a smelter's blast-pipe as Deering twirled it about on its pivot like a machine-gun. A sort of hallucination came over Master—it seemed to him, all of a sudden, that he had been delivered over to the unspeakable Power of which the room seemed a shrine. Evil magic, whose symbols were about him, had him in its grip. Through a vague mist he could see the painting of the Unknown God, with its impossibly cruel features and its dog's fangs. Great, forbidden names surged in his mind—Adonay, the Adversary; Astarte, who was Lilith's sister; Baal and Baal-phegor; the serpent that was made of brass. These were all assisting the man who was torturing him—the man who worshipped devils, which is the most accursed sin. In a moment now the blast-pipe would shoot out a blade of green flame that would cut through him like the blade of a knife. He could imagine the thing striking him like a thunderbolt. It might sweep around like a scythe and cut him in two.

"Great heavens!" he gulped.

The alchemist adjusted his gas-cocks. He stooped to strike a match. Over his shoulder he grinned.

"If you move," said a pleasant, apologetic voice at the door, "I shall shoot your head off!"

Deering swung around. The little black man with the dull, spectacled eyes and the drooping mouth was holding a large black revolver in his direction. There was something grotesque in the idea of his using a pistol, but the way he held it was remarkably efficient.

"Confound you, Inspector Moreau," Master blazed. "You said you'd be here in fifteen minutes!"

"I'm here in twelve," the blank-looking man answered.

"Oh," Master laughed. There was a high note and a catch in it. "I thought you were a half hour." He glanced at his watch. "You're right," he laughed again.

The alchemist looked at them with blazing eyes and set jaw. "What's this?" he shouted.

Master waved a slim, deprecating hand. His face was still white but his manner was suave.

"You do yourself injustice, my dear sir," he argued blandly. "Every yegg and second-story man blusters. You're an artist, not a mechanic in crime. Act like one. You haven't made a blunder yet."

The little Inspector looked at Master with his obtruding rabbit's eyes. "What's up, Mr. Master?" he asked.

"If you go into the next room, Moreau, you'll find an electric press and furnace where he makes the most cunning little coins you ever saw—probably twenty-dollar pieces,—he's not a small man. I haven't seen them, but they're there."

"Are they there?" the Inspector asked. "I'll go and see."

"Oh, no, you won't," Master laughed. "This gentleman has tried to kill me already. I'm not going to be left alone with him any longer."

The alchemist looked at Master with rage. The Inspector's huge pistol still pointed toward his body in an unwavering line. "How did you find it out, Mr. Master?" the Inspector asked.

"Must you know?" Master lit a cigarette and collected his hat and gloves. "Well, in the first place, devil-worshippers don't parade their faith,—at least, only the fools do. Mr. Deering is not a fool. He is a very clever man. Therefore he has an object in it. Do you follow me?"

"I do—I do," the Inspector chimed in.

"You've got an extraordinary brain, Moreau. He might have the object of fleecing followers—in founding a sect, a perfectly well-known way of making a prosperous living. You discovered already that he wasn't accepting money. But Mr. Deering likes money. You can see it in his face. You see that, don't you, Moreau?"

"I see it. I see it," the Inspector agreed.

"Very well. Now listen closely: Therefore the thing was used for something else. The only thing it could be used for is a disguise. It is repulsive. There's where its value comes in. Now listen again: Where the disguise is most repulsive—there's the place most important to conceal. The most repulsive thing in the apartment is the horrible tapestry of the Unknown God. Under that I found the electric conduit."

"Yes," the Inspector broke in. His eyes were shining. Master took a long puff of his cigarette.

"The conduit is ostensibly connected with the little furnace in the laboratory. But there is too much power for that—you ought to get the Electric Company to send you any queer-looking bills, Moreau. They do these things better in Paris—therefore it is used for something else. Look at his hands, Moreau. They're too-well manicured."

"I don't follow you there," Moreau apologized.

"Cerebrate, man, cerebrate," Master fumed. "They're too-highly manicured, because they're too hardly used. He's doing the work of a coal-heaver in some way. The calluses have been cut off his hands with a razor. Really, Mr. Deering," he turned to the alchemist, "you ought to have worn gloves. The best criminals wear gloves."

"Don't be a fool," the alchemist snapped. "You can't wear gloves. This isn't burglary. Coining's an exact science."

"How rottenly foolish of me," Master murmured. "I beg your pardon."

"And then——" Moreau said.

"You'd better tell your policeman friend to put away his gun," the alchemist complained peevishly. "It's silly."

"It is silly," Master agreed. "Put it away, Moreau. It spoils the look of the apartment."

"And then——" Moreau asked a second time.

He pocketed the revolver, but he still kept his eyes on the alchemist.

"And then," Master grinned, "I went and sat on the window where a finger could push me off, and accused him. Naturally he tried to kill me. Then you entered, dear Inspector Moreau."

"But I don't see that even that was enough. It was guesswork about the coining, wasn't it?" the police officer queried.

"It wasn't enough," Master smiled, "oh no—I'm coming to that. You don't know anything about the art of lying, Moreau. No. I suppose not. There are some books you should read. There is an axiom in lying that to lie well you must lie like the truth, and disguise is only lying."

"I don't see it," Moreau was stubborn.

"Of course you don't. It isn't there. Mr. Deering was cleverer still. He told the truth and it looked like a lie. He said he was making gold and nobody believed him. The alchemy part and Raymond Lully are details. The principle is intact. I must go now. Good-bye, Mr. Deering. So sorry it had to be. I'm often up around Sing Sing. I'll come in and see you."

The alchemist was game. "Yes. Do come," he smiled.

Master set his hat upon his head. Moreau laid his hand on Deering's arm. "Let's go and see that coining outfit," he said.

"I'm sorry," Master said. "I've got a luncheon engagement. Good-bye."

And as he passed down the street, bowing gravely to the plump lady now returning in her blue limousine, the savage, triumphant note of a police whistle, blowing for aid, told him that the Inspector had discovered the outfit.

## IV

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

He sat and skimmed quickly through the figured pages before him on his desk, a short, thick-set man with the jowl and build of a prizefighter and—if his keen, grey eyes were any evidence—the mind of a great leader. He whipped leaf after leaf aside with the fingers of his stubby, hairy hands. His voice rasped like that of a field marshal.

"I don't see anything wrong here," he shot at the old head clerk.

"Read a little further, Mr. Curran," the head clerk said nervously. The employee was listening intently, his drab, grey head on one side. There was a look of panic in his weakish blue eyes, and the corners of his long, grey moustaches shook a little as though the mouth were quivering beneath them.

"I don't see why you didn't keep it until the morning, Perkins," Curran grumbled. He bored ahead through the papers.

Five o'clock had struck and the big office on Church Street was empty. An August sun still beat unmercifully on the streets, a full, mellow blaze, not like the vicious crackle of midday, and home-going clerks and stenographers were milling through the streets like a swarm of ants. An elevated train screamed shrilly as it negotiated a corner on grinding wheels, and from below came the impatient clanging of street cars. The great office building had suddenly ceased its rattle and hum, and become curiously still, like a man dozing. The head clerk stopped listening and looked intently at the great contractor. He pulled something out of his pocket with shaking stealth. Curran suddenly threw the papers aside.

"Why, there's nothing wrong here!" he snarled. "What the devil's wrong with you?" He stood up impatiently. The frown on his face gave way to an expression of startled wonder, then to a cloud of storming rage. The head clerk was

facing him unsteadily across the desk, a heavy automatic pistol in his shaking right hand.

"What the blazes!" Curran exploded. "What's wrong with you?"

"I want to talk to you, Mr. Curran," the clerk said gulpingly. He backed up against the wall, the pistol shaking.

"Are you mad?" Curran roared at him. There was something booming and full in his voice, like the bellow of an infuriated animal. "Put that thing down!"

"I want you to listen to me, Mr. Curran," the clerk began again.

"Put that pistol down. Do you hear me? Put it down!" The contractor moved around the desk quickly. The clerk raised it until the muzzle covered the employer fully.

"As sure as Heaven's above me, Mr. Curran," he warned, "if you come a step nearer, if you call for help, if you touch that telephone, I'll kill you."

The contractor stopped short in his rush. He looked at Perkins closely. Something in the man's strained eyes and tense figure sounded a danger signal to him. The clerk was afraid—horribly, hysterically afraid, so afraid that he would fire on the slightest pretext. He stood against the wall in a hunched, distorted attitude; his panic-stricken face and goggling eyes; his neat hair and full moustaches; his highly-polished and long-worn shoes, and his well-pressed and long-worn suit; his spare angularity and weak, white hands, all screaming in grotesque contrast to the powerful, deadly, blue-black weapon he held so ridiculously pointed at the contractor's abdomen. Curran decided quickly. He turned back and plumped down in his chair.

"What is it?" he snapped. "Hurry up. I want to get home."

The fury had left his face for the moment and a sort of dozing calm had come over it; eyes half closed, mouth relaxed, brow smooth. But he gave the impression of movement all the same, like a wave that travels in-shore with a slow, lifting, relentless swell, and that will break when it reaches the beach in a passion of boiling surf. The clerk pulled forward a chair and sat down, holding the pistol levelled carefully.

"I've been with you twenty-five years now, Mr. Curran," he said in well-measured tones, as though he had rehearsed it. "I'm drawing forty-five dollars a week and I'm fifty-two years old."

Curran said nothing. His eyes were still half closed. His face was inscrutable.

"You think I'm getting too old," Perkins went on. For an instant a note of pathos came into his voice and it seemed as if it might break into a quaver. "There's others in the office want to be head clerk—young men!"

He looked at Curran with an expression that was compounded of fright and bitterness and pleading. The contractor seemingly dozed on.

"They've played office politics against me; they've shown up my mistakes; they've made me look old and doddering. They've won out, and now you're going to chuck me away."

"Yes. I'm going to let you go, Perkins," Curran said listlessly, as though the thing didn't interest him at all.

"You're not," the clerk flared out in weak, spasmodic fury. "You're not going to let me go—not until you do the right thing by me!"

"What's that?" Curran asked succinctly. He felt in his pocket for a cigar, for a cigar-cutter, for a match. He lit the cigar carefully. There was nothing of bravado in his action. It wasn't a piece of careless indulgence. He did it because it was natural to him. He was listening intently. And never once did he take his eye from the gun.

"You're going to give me"—Perkins said excitedly, he banged his left fist hysterically on the table—"my salary for



the next five years, down. Eleven thousand and seven hundred dollars. That's what you're going to do."

"What's this," Curran asked lazily, "a hold-up?"

"It's not a hold-up," the clerk shook his head quickly. "I want to tell you something——"

"You can save your breath," Curran laughed. "You won't get it."

"If I don't get it," Perkins' voice went suddenly shrill, then quavered into a whisper. His face blanched more than ever. "If I don't get it, I shall kill you here this afternoon."

The contractor never moved. His face was as granite and expressionless as before. Smoke issued from his lips in even, well-timed puffs. Still he watched the clerk's eyes, and the gun.

"Twenty-five years ago, when I came to you first, Mr. Curran," the clerk's tones were even, as though this were one of the parts well rehearsed, "I got fifteen dollars a week. You were younger than I was then, and you were just starting out. You're worth five millions to-day, and I'm where I began—nearly. I get forty-five dollars a week."

He paused for an instant as though he were expecting some observation from the contractor. There was nothing but silence. There was a note of frightened disappointment in his voice when he continued.

"I got married then, and that year was a year of saving. Scraping and saving nickels! Eating cheap lunches all the time! Sweating, going home, boxed up in an elevated train like a negro in a Jim Crow car!" The hysterical note crept into his voice again. "Cold in winter time and the heat in summer! And seven children coming one on the top of another. Four of them dead, and three daughters left! Scrape and save with the devil at my heels all of the time! And still I go up to Harlem in an elevated train and eat a quick lunch and look forward to nothing to-morrow except the same thing. And you've got a great apartment in town for winter, and a place in the country for the summer; four motor cars and a yacht." He raised his left forefinger and shook it at Curran. His face was distorted frightfully. "What's the difference between me and you?" he nearly shouted. "Tell me. What's the difference?"

A fine blue ash was forming on Curran's cigar, and the smoke rose fragrantly in whirling circles, like the powder rings of a miniature gun. His eyes were still focused on the blue-black weapon, and at the question a significant, infinitesimal smile came into his eyes.

"And I had a good education," the clerk said bitterly, "as good as anyone who hasn't been to college. You got nothing but what you picked up in night school. And I came of decent people, and you were born in an Irish slum!"

The contractor took his watch from his pocket. Nineteen minutes past five. A greater throng than ever swarmed through the street, eddying toward the subway and the Jersey tubes. Below him Curran could see from the window, on the elevated train, a huddle of pallid faces jammed together in a grotesque, unsightly mass, like pale, withering flowers. At a dock at the end of Fulton Street his yacht was waiting for him, a faint tendril of smoke weaving upward from the stacks, and white-ducked sailors standing patiently on the deck. It would take him an hour and a half ploughing downward through the Sound to get home. He snapped the case of the timepiece impatiently.

"Well?" he shot at the clerk. Perkins wilted at the tone. His arm was getting cramped from holding the heavy weapon, and he rested his wrist on the desk.

"Mr. Curran," he said pleadingly. He had become again the employee, fearful of the boss. "I've worked for you now for twenty-five years. I've been in the same stuffy home, fighting for life all the time. There has never been a let-up. It's been too hard for one man. I've never had a cent to call my own. It's been fear all the time that I'd lose my job and never get another one. There's been the girls to raise. You don't know how hard it is. It's not fair."

"What's not fair?" Curran blazed suddenly. He sat up in his chair with a clatter, like a soldier coming to quick attention. His eyes flashed like sparks at the terminals of an electric battery. "You've done a clerk's work; you've got a clerk's salary—no more, no less. You worked and you got paid for it. That's fair."

"But to throw me away!" the clerk nearly whimpered.

"There's not any case of throwing away or casting off. You're no longer worth the salary, and there are better men for the place. Why shouldn't I let you go?"

"I've been twenty-five years here," Perkins pleaded.

"I'm sorry," Curran said decisively. "You're hired as a business proposition, not as a charitable trust. You're no longer useful to me. I won't have you in the office. You've been paid scrupulously for all the labour you've done. You have no claim on me."

"I don't care," Perkins said wildly. "I want that money. I want that money for the five years. If I don't get it, I'll shoot. Do you hear me? I'll shoot."

"Attend to me," Curran said coldly. "Do you know what you're doing? You're committing a crime for which you will get twenty years in prison. And if you shoot, you'll get the electric chair."

"I don't care," Perkins repeated doggedly. "If I don't get it, I'll shoot. I want to tell you something else first. Listen to me, Mr. Curran."

The contractor's temper was going. His hands began clenching with a slow, remorseless pressure, like the tightening of a vice. A purplish colour suffused his face, and his nostrils twitched. He shook himself quickly as if to throw it off, and settled himself back in the chair again, but through his half-closed eyes came a light that was like a flame. The cigar, bitten through, fell to the floor. He lit another with curt, staccato movements.

"Go ahead," he ripped through his teeth.

"I've got three daughters, Mr. Curran," the clerk said nervously. "There's Amelia, who's twenty—she's taking her examination to be a school teacher. There's Jane. She's nineteen, and she's keeping company with a young broker, and we think it will come to something. There's Laura, the baby, only fifteen, and she's at school yet. If I lose my job now, Amelia will have to go to work at once in an office, and Jane's young man may drop out—they don't like coming to places where there's want in the house, and Jane can't go to work—she's delicate. And the baby, I don't know what will happen to the baby. One man! With three daughters! That's hard, Mr. Curran."

The contractor swiveled the grey eyes, that were like searchlights, around on the clerk. He saw the expression on the man's face, like the expression of a much kicked dog that is pleading for something. Easily, with that repulsive trick of his that accorded so little with the sensitive, clean-cut mouth, he rolled his cigar from one corner to the other. He watched the street below for an instant before speaking. The street, from the eighth storey of the building, seemed like a rectangular trough filled with minute human beings. Everywhere, against the sombre background of the grey and dark business suits of the men, he could see bedraggled, tired things in white blouses, weakened by the smashing violence of the heat, limping like stricken soldiers retiring from line of battle. He swung back in his chair and looked at Perkins.

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" he asked easily. "Why didn't you come to me instead of staging this hold up farce?"

"You're a hard man, Mr. Curran," the clerk said weakly.

"I see," Curran said slowly and softly. He bent forward and laid his elbows on the desk. "Now put away that fool gun of yours and I'll talk to you."

The clerk blanched again in sudden terror. He moved backward so quickly that the chair nearly toppled beneath him. His hand clenched the stock of the automatic so firmly that the muzzle shook beneath the tension. He looked like a boy with his arm thrown in front of his face to deflect a blow, calling all the time for mercy. A revolting, horrible sight, Curran thought—yet at the first move the man would shoot.

"I won't put it down until you promise, Mr. Curran," Perkins cried at him. "I won't put it down."

"You ask me for help," the contractor said with a hint of disgust in his voice, "and still you insist on pointing that gun at me, and you expect to get it."

"I don't want anything except my rights," Perkins said doggedly. "I want your promise that you'll do the right thing by me."

The contractor threw himself back in his chair with savage impatience. The great vein in the centre of his forehead showed up ugly and blue and pulsing. His jaws set in jambs of iron muscle.

"You'll get no promise from me," he answered viciously. "You'll get nothing from me except jail."

"Then I'll shoot," Perkins repeated. His voice choked like thick liquid attempting to escape from a narrow orifice. His lips became a pallid, hideous grey, like the ash of a cigarette. He thrust out his tongue to moisten them, a shapeless, arid, blue thing. His hand was moist where it held the revolver, and about it, where it lay on the desk, perspiration formed in minute, whitish particles, like inert smoke.

"I got no chance," he began in sudden passion. "I was better raised than you were and better taught. But I got stuck in your office keeping your books, and attending to accounts, and answering and writing letters, until I was no better than a galley slave. I might as well have been in prison, for all the pleasure and profit I got out of it, while the work of me and the like of me made you rich. I might have been out on the road, selling things, making a good salary and ten dollars a day expenses. Or I might have been in a bank, learning how to make money and invest it. But you got me young, and kept me here, and here I am now—old, and you're throwing me out, and me with three daughters! I never got a chance," he went on bitterly, "I never got a chance."

The drone and reiteration of his complaint made Curran take one flashing review of his life and work. He remembered the days—it seemed hardly a year ago, and yet it must have been close on two score—when he was digging mains in New York, and after work, though his whole body was screaming for rest, going off to night school, and working as hard with pen and ink as with pick and shovel. And the days when he had one horse and wagon, that grew magically to three, and then to a dozen, and lastly to an organization of monster engines and giant derricks, and chisels that slit open great rocks with the force of dynamite—forces that could wreck the greatest buildings in New York or raise a second Thebes. And the great game of it all, that he had played with a lone hand, conceiving strategies as cunning as those of Moltke, and effecting triumphs no smaller in their way than the triumphs of Bismarck. Chance! There was no such thing as chance!

Perkins had dropped back to his even, colourless tone. Occasionally he gulped and swallowed a word, as though he were sobbing in a quiet way. The clamour of the street had ceased and there was no longer the electric sense that it was full of people. A leather-bound clock on the desk ticked on evenly, with a gentle, soothing sound, as of some harmless insect. The dial registered twenty-four minutes after five. Everything took on the monotony of a summer evening. The weapon in Perkins' hand seemed meaningless and homely, like a garden tool. The tragic phrases of the head clerk felt banal.

"And surely I deserve something after working so long," he was pleading. "Not to be thrown away, like a worn-out nib. And I wouldn't care so much if I had a little money, but I have none. You couldn't save anything with a life as hard as mine has been. Three daughters! And Amelia has set her heart so on teaching school. And Jane's young man will drop out. I know it. And she's fond of him. It would mean so much to her. A good home, and a maid to do the work. My life insurance too, that will lapse. There was only five years to go, and Amelia would have a splendid job, and Jane would be married to her broker. If anything happened to me in the meanwhile, there would be the insurance. Think of it, Mr. Curran, such a hard life, and three daughters!"

Curran straightened up suddenly. He was like a great animal that had been stung once too often by a gnat, and for the instant lost its temper. With the sound of his voice the monotony left the room and it became tense and pregnant, as though the elements about had been quickened by the passage of a vital spark.

"Can I help that?" he demanded harshly. "Am I God?"

"You're a hard man, Mr. Curran," was the clerk's weak response, "a hard man!"

There was a minute's silence in the office, an even inexplicable minute, like a lull in a tempest, and Curran found himself placidly interested in the situation, as he might be interested in a situation at a play. Here was this sorry pattern of a man opposite him, a windrow of life, without the crashing violence that makes for success or the placid calm that ignores it, sitting and holding the balance of power in his weak hand against one who handled men and metal and earth and air and water with the nonchalance of a demi-god. A weak thing, weak as a rabbit, and yet holding a power in his frail hands that would snuff out the lives of ten powerful men, as a line of candles might be snuffed out. The drama was well set, even though the prologue had slithered aimless and weak through twenty-five years. On the desk the clock ticked slow and inexorably like some allegorical presentation of destiny. The streets were silent, as an audience might be who waited breathlessly for the fall of the curtain. And as Curran, sitting in a theatre, thrilled for the moment, could calculate shrewdly what the outcome would be, so he knew, sitting in front of this man who was ready to deal him death for refusing to utter a monosyllable, what would be the finish of the drama. He, Curran, would win. With death before him, and without uttering the word that would obviate it, he would win. That was an assured thing.

He watched Perkins dreamily for a time, wondering what he would do next, what he would say, and he noticed how the strain of the last half hour had told on the man. His face had fallen in at the cheek bones, and deep worn lines had appeared in it, like scars left by the point of a knife. His eyes had sunk back in their sockets and they were clouded by blood, and a sweat had moistened all his face, making it clammy blue, like the countenance of one who is dying in agony. The neat collar had wilted, and the neat moustaches drooped pitifully. The contractor's eyes wandered over the man's clothes, and he saw how often the tie had been pressed, and here and there in the coat were deft darnings, so well done that none but a hawk's eye like Curran's could see them. And on the vest was a stain that had been erased laboriously. A woman's work, Curran said to himself. He thought of the wife Perkins had, and he conjured up to himself the sort of woman she must be—a tired, pallid woman, who had achieved resignation under the burden of unfortunate years, accepting poverty and spreading her scant measure to the largest surface. The thing affected him, for it made him think of his own wife, who was dead, never knowing the affluence that had come to him with the tide's turning, and who had gone through meagre days loyally and proudly. For Perkins himself he had no pity, for the man had received what he had earned, no more—but no less. Even the agony of terror in which he was now, was of his own making. The case of the three daughters he didn't understand, and it didn't move him. He had four stalwart sons of his own, and he had in his heart a contempt for a man who has only daughters. But the woman who had to darn rents in a coat, and to hang over an ironing board pressing her husband's tie, he could understand that! And Curran hadn't even mentioned her!

He leaned forward on the desk again, and when he spoke his voice had dropped its savage, saw-like quality, and become unaccountably gentle and smooth.

"Perkins," he said, "I want you to put away that gun. I've never given away to anybody yet on a threat, and I won't now. Put it away. There's a good fellow. I'll forget about it."

"Not until you've made your promise, Mr. Curran," the clerk returned doggedly, "not until you promise me."

"If you put that thing away," Curran went on, "and you want just to tell me some facts, and not to make threats, then I'll do something for you."

The clerk shook his head fiercely. His face worked into an attitude of fixed purpose.

"I don't want you to do anything for me," he said in a little outburst of passion. His eyes shone at Curran balefully. "I want my rights, and I'm going to get them. I want my five years' salary right in my hand before I put it down. If I don't get it I'll shoot."

"God damn you!" Curran exploded violently. The words crashed from his mouth as though they had been propelled by gunpowder. He threw himself back in his chair with a thud that nearly smashed it. Everything went out of his mind before a flying tempest of rage—the picture of the woman slaving in a Harlem flat; the whining complaint of the head clerk; the thought of the waiting yacht and the familiar setting of the office. All he knew was that before him sat a man who was threatening to shoot him if he didn't accede to a ridiculous request. Rage tingled in his finger tips and clouded the sight of his eyes. He, John Curran, trapped in a corner and held there impotently at the point of a gun, and by the weakest man he knew. It was maddening.

The head clerk saw the gust of passion in his eyes. He began pleading, but he still held the pistol firmly clenched in his hand.

"Mr. Curran——" he attempted.

"You go to the devil!" Curran roared at him. "By Heaven! I'll make you pay for this. Before to-night's out I'll have you under lock and key, and you'll stay there until they carry you out in a pine box."

The pleading look ebbed from the clerk's eyes, and a dull apathy came into them. He looked at Curran accusingly, as though the contractor were wilfully committing a terrible mistake that he could easily avoid. It was like the look of a man who sees a friend persist in a ruinous resolution against common sense and against advice. Suddenly the clock on the desk struck a single stroke for the half hour, a musical, silvery sound that set off dramatically the contractor's brazen roar.

"In five minutes," Perkins uttered in a hoarse whisper, "in five minutes we shall both be dead."

The contractor caught himself short and quick. He curbed his rage, as a man might throw a brake on a flying vehicle. Something must be done at once. He must get that gun. How? Rush him? No! At the first move the man would shoot, and he could not fail to hit. One ball from that heavy forty-five at such close range would split a man like a wedge. If it had been anything except a forty-five automatic, he might have taken a chance. Throw over the heavy desk, and grapple with Perkins as it caught his legs? No! The man would see too plainly what he intended and he would fire before the thing was tilted an inch. Lean forward and subdue him with those terrible grey eyes, as men a hundred times stronger than he had been subdued by them? No! That would fluster the clerk, and his finger would jerk the trigger in pure nervousness. What, then? Think! He must think!

"In three minutes," Perkins said huskily, "in three minutes I shall fire." And once more he looked at Curran appealingly, and tried to moisten his grey lips with his horrible blue tongue.

Three minutes yet, Curran calculated. His brain worked like a flying shuttle. Plans entered his mind, were examined, and thrown away with the rapidity of chain-links flashing over a flying gear. And while device after device hummed sibilantly through his head, in the background of it, a great disgust with contempt for the man in front of him rose like a banked cloud. The assured thing would happen. Even in the meagre cycle of those three minutes he would manage to get that gun. And then! The clerk would grovel in an epilepsis of terror. He would shriek for mercy, whining like the cowardly thing he was. He would grope on the floor like a beast of the field. The tear ducts would open, and his face, horrible now with sweat, would become a terrible thing that no man should look upon and ever forget. Faugh!

"Only two minutes," the clerk counted, "only two minutes. And then God help us, Mr. Curran! You and me!"

Sound narrowed until there was nothing except the laboured breathing of the two. The rolling of the planets through the universe condensed to the petty ticking of the clock. The problem of life and death hovered in the room for the instant, naked and monstrous. Even Curran's iron nerve began to shake. The cold and narrow circle of the weapon trained at him caught him in a hypnotic net, and he felt himself poised on the edge of a precipice below which was all space, and into which he would eddy in a moment, minuter than a speck of dust. The clerk's lean forefinger crooked around trigger and that faint action broke the spell. Instantly Curran's brain and nerve and body began functioning in rapid harmony. Suddenly, before the clerk's eyes, he seemed to stiffen into stone. He leaned sidewise a little, and his eyes pivoted sidewise, and half closed. Every muscle in his body, every throbbing vein and artery went suddenly still, like a being whom an Eastern necromancer had petrified by a flourish of his wand.

The clerk's finger relaxed on the trigger. A blank look came into his eyes. Curran was paying no attention to him. And yet he was paying attention to something. To something outside. There was something he heard or felt. The contractor's fingers began to drum the desk, nervously, quickly, unrhythmically. His mouth opened in an expression of fearsome doubt. His brows contracted, and his eyes grew wild. On the last minute the second hand of the clock whipped around the dial in quick, staccato jerks. The clerk's finger hovered nervously about the trigger.

"This way!" Curran's voice rose nearly to a scream. "Quick! For God's sake! Break down the door!"

The clerk swung around toward the door indecisively. With the quickness of a panther, and with a panther's sure flick of paw, Curran's hand shot across the desk. It caught the clerk's wrist like a vice. There was a smothered groan from the clerk as his arm was nearly wrenched from the socket. The pistol clattered harmlessly on the desk. Curran picked it up and tossed it into the waste-paper basket. Perkins still looked at the door with fascinated eyes.

"You needn't look at that," Curran said in contemptuous tones. "There's nobody there."

He plucked the receiver from the hook of the telephone savagely. He jaggled the instrument impatiently. "Spring, 3100," he barked into it. "Police Headquarters." His heel stamped the ground in rage. "It's the limit for you, my fellow," he mumbled between his closed teeth, "I'll push this case if it takes every minute I've got. The damned nerve of you! Your rights! And your moving picture melodrama! Threaten me, would you? Hold me up? By Heaven! I'll show you."

He paused for an instant, his heel still tapping the ground, his eyes closed to savage slits.

"Well?" he roared at the clerk. "What have you got to say about it?"

He looked up at Perkins, in a sort of surprise at hearing nothing. The clerk was sitting erect in his chair, white-faced, but his mouth was set in firm, rigid lines. The terror had passed out of his eyes and a sort of calm was in them. The clamminess had gone from his brows, and the agitated muscles of his face had become calm. There was a tragic dignity about the man. His left forearm rested across his knees. His right, which Curran had twisted so savagely, hung limp and powerless by his side.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" Curran shot at him again.

"I've got nothing," the head clerk answered firmly. "I got my chance and I lost it. That's all."

"You're going to get jail for this," Curran went on. "Do you understand that?"

"I understand it," the clerk answered. There was a proud independence in the apathy of his tone. "If I failed, it was that, or the electric chair, or shooting myself. I knew it. I'm ready."

He watched Curran's puzzled face with a sort of dogged contempt. "Oh, yes. I wanted it badly," he commented with a weary smile, to the contractor's unuttered thought.

Curran hung the receiver of the telephone up abruptly. He jumped to his feet.

"Get out of this," he shouted. "Get home out of this." He looked at the man's right arm. "Have that arm seen to," he directed, "and stay away until it's all right." The telephone began jangling.

The clerk stood up with a look of bewilderment on his face,

"You're not sending me away," he stumbled, "and you want me to stay——"

"I don't want you to stay," Curran rasped, "but I suppose I can find you something for the next five years." He picked up the receiver of the ringing instrument. "Police Head—— Oh, go to blazes!" he said impatiently. He turned to Perkins. "Now get out of this," he directed. "No, don't say anything. I don't want to talk to you. Get out."

He stood for a moment listening to the clerk making his way through the outer office. Who would have imagined it all, he began thinking? And then suddenly his eye caught the clock. Twenty-three minutes to six! He crammed his hat on his head and started toward the door. He would miss his tennis, he thought, but he would get home in time for dinner at seven. Twenty-six miles in an hour and a quarter? The yacht ought to make that. The captain ought to get that out of her. If the captain couldn't, he would very soon find one who could....

## TOWERS OF SILENCE

## I

Without, in the grounds of the famous Florida resort, modernity hummed in strident, imperative accents. Eight-cylindereed cars raced along a bevelled speedway. High overhead an airplane buzzed like an angry wasp. Below, from a jazz band in a poinsettia-decorated tearoom, came the epileptic measure of a "shimmy" dance. But in the suite the Chatterjees occupied was Persia.

The sitting room where Sir Rustumji Kama Chatterjee, the great Parsee merchant whom the British Government had honoured with a title, sat with Brereton Ford was hung here and there with intricate, heavy-lined rugs, while on this table and on that great brass jars stood, chased with all the skill of the Benares worker. Blue-and-white tiles, very like Chinese, were scattered hither and thither; and the blinds were drawn to dull the tropic day. That was not much to suggest the Orient, but there was a spirit of the Orient all about it, of the calm, ancient Persia of fire-worshipping days, and it was more probably the figure of the Parsee prince, old Sir Rustumji, very strange, very venerable, and of his daughter, Putlibai, who had just left the room, that gave it that dimness of a perfumed Persian dusk, rather than the turquoise and silver tiles, or rugs of Guzerat.

Brereton Ford was leaning toward the merchant prince, his bronzed hawk's face, with its New England blood, standing forth dramatically against the semi-languor of the Parsee's olive skin and dreamy eyes.

"Shorn of ritual, the religion of Zoroaster comes right down to an active practice of benevolence," Ford was saying. "Its religious observances are a rigidity of personal cleanliness. How simple!"

"And its worship a worship of a Supreme Being, under the manifestation of Fire, which is Light and Great Cleanliness, my son." Very benevolent and meticulously clean did old Sir Rustumji appear, as he leaned back watching the young architect. His loose and flowing white garments, with the rimless maroon turban, sloping backward at an angle from the top of his forehead; his venerable white beard; his kindly black eyes, all gave the air of a priest instructing a neophyte.

Ford leaned toward him more tensely.

"It may seem absurd to you, sir, to hear one say so, but for years I have been searching for—oh, well, let us say truth—a belief, and, as it were, a manner of life, that earnest accord with a belief that is a manifestation of Supremity on earth, and that I should be following Its wishes. It's the sort of thing one seldom mentions aloud—but—

"In the Zend-Avesta," the Parsee baronet began, and for an hour or a little more perhaps, in his perfect English he informed Brereton Ford of the tenets of Zoroastrianism. He told him of the faith which Zoroaster gave, which are *homuté*, purity of thought, and *bookté*, purity of speech, and *virusté*, purity of action. He explained to him the worship of the Manifestation called the Sun. He informed him that all Parsees must be born on the ground floor of a house, as life must be commenced in humility. He mentioned to him how when dead, a dog, man's faithful companion, is brought in to say farewell. He told him then of the disposition of the body.

"It is brought to and laid in the Tower of Silence," said Sir Rustumji, "and the vultures, the scavengers of God, take the corruptible covering from the frame. The Sun receives the vital essence."

Brereton Ford shivered: It was better to lie in the cool earth, where flowers grow.

"From the sun thou camest! To the sun thou goest! Child of the Sun!" quoted the Parsee....

Putlibai, Sir Rustumji's eighteen-year-old daughter was singing in the little morning room on the lake. Her slight,

liquid accents, clear as a bird's, changed the guttural Gujurati to a flexibility like Italian. She was carolling a love song of Narsingh Meta's:

*"O you with large eyes, bright and open as cups,  
"You have two young citrons nestled on your breast.  
"Your teeth are mother of pearl; your lips are honey.  
"Your hair is like a fragrant bush and spread upon your shoulders,  
"The down on your face is like violets under a bed of roses.  
"Whoever comes to gather the flowers, tell him they are thine.  
"Thou art my nightingale and my shrub of roses..."*

"Putlibai," the Parsee called.

Her feet made no sound, so softly did she enter the room. For an instant she paused at the door, an apparition of tropic beauty such as Labid, prince of poets, would have sung, or Firdausi, the Accomplished One, or Omar, who built the tenets of verse. Very small and very slight she stood there, and the clear olive of her beautiful skin seemed only a precious cloth on which her two ruby lips were laid, and the opalescent jewellery of her eyes. Her small and delicate hands, very like flowers, peeped from the folds of her blue *sari*, and under her head-cloth of thin white stuff her hair, black and lustrous, showed like oiled silk.

"There is a translation into English of the Zend-Avesta, Putlibai," her father said, "that I brought with me from Bombay. Bring it here for Mr. Ford."

She smiled as she went out to get it, a frank eager smile, such as an Occidental woman might give, and Brereton Ford, as he watched her go, became more and more convinced that with her his destiny was bound. Life had suddenly become for him a quest in a perfumed Persian forest for a treasure of three hundred lakhs of rupees, which is nigh unto ten million dollars gold, all of it the property of Sir Rustumji Chatterjee, a Parsee merchant. And Putlibai, whom the poets of Bombay had called inaccessible as the dark stars, was to be the necessary but delectable guide. And the treasure was guarded by fortresses, high, implacable, lonely, terrible, called the Towers of Silence, where vultures hovered. And though willingly he would have embraced an alien life for that treasure, the high towers appalled him. He was a great architect, was Brereton Ford—America honours him still—but he was a very great blackguard also, and a coward to boot....

In all the colonies of the Parsees in India and Persia; in Bombay, in Guzerat, in Surat, in Broach, the name of Sir Rustumji Chatterjee is revered, not only as a business man and a great philanthropist, but as an ornament to his religion. The great rest-house in Surat for Parsees, the foundation of the chair of Pehlevi at Oxford—those things are not treasured up as much as the fact that he wrote the "Zarthoshti Sitisbak," which caused many unbelievers to see the light; and that he is meticulous in ritual.

But if Sir Rustumji Chatterjee is religious, it is because of the vision and epic of his worship and that there is great colour to it, great adventure, and that is more to him than mechanical ritual and set prayers. Back to the dimness of ancient days—before Abraham was, much less Moses—Zoroaster was giving his laws to the Medes and Persians. Pliny and Marcellus, and Apuleius, and Strabo, the blind geographer, spoke of them with reverence, and when in Bethlehem of the Jews a Babe was born, Persian magi went to it with reverence. They saw Brahma rise and Isis and Osiris die. The epileptic Mahomet came out of the desert like a whirlwind and their faith-mates drooped under the Moslem steel. And they arose in the night-time, and Persia knew them no more.

"But the Sun cannot be quenched," old Sir Rustumji used to tell himself. "Its glory abides for ever." His sixty years of life had passed like a long, benevolent day. India was the better for him. Its banks prospered. Its cottonfields were more fruitful by reason of him and his associates. He bothered no man and all revered him. Musing over his religion,



coeval with the sun, a bachelor until forty-five, he passed his life going from trading station to trading station.

At forty-five he married—Adnai, daughter of Kaikabod Jhijhiboy, great in Bombay annals, and from her he had Putlibai, daughter of his heart. Adnai his wife, died, and the child was all that was left to him...

Perhaps it was because it was so late that he married, and that he gave at that time all of love his intense, proud nature could summon that the loss of his wife Adnai struck him so harshly. However, it did. But day by day the little Putlibai became more and more like her, until at sixteen and seventeen she was a living image of Jhijhiboy's daughter. He could not seem to part with her. When he went to Fookon or travelled by caravan to the Persia he loved, he brought the child with him. When, toward the end of seeing American machinery, with the view of developing the Indian ore supply, he proposed visiting America, he wished her to come with him.

"Will you come with me across the water, Putlibai?" he asked her. "Farther than Persia, farther than England, to America—the new world?"

"My father, I will," she answered joyously.

And so, to America they came, two strange figures such as might have wandered out of some Oriental classic, *The Book of Wisdom and Lies* for instance, or *The Thousand and One Nights*. Reporters interviewed them in New York, in Pittsburgh, in the Middle West, speaking alternately of the wealth of old Sir Rustumji—a millionaire, incredible to believe, who was not an American; of the winsomeness of Putlibai, whom they with unpardonable ignorance insulted as a Eurasian beauty; of Parsees whom they mixed up recklessly with the Pharisees of Bible days. They were lonely, in a way, these twain. And when winter came they went southward to Florida, where they met Brereton Ford, the architect.

"He is America's foremost artist," Reynolds, the Omaha banker, who knew more of Renaissance architecture than any living man, introduced him to Sir Rustumji.

And Sir Rustumji was glad to know Ford, for he wanted to discuss with him the points of Indian architecture, the Taj Mahal, for example, and notably, the monument he had recently raised to his wife Adnai, a lone, massive Tower of Silence which brooded over the hills of Guzerat.

There are none who ever speak of Brereton Ford but as of a great man.

"But not a good man," many will tell you. "If you remember, he had no friends."

No! He had no friends; that is true. There was no such thing as friendship to him in the world. Everyone to him had a definite value, and that depended on what he could get from them. Not only money, but knowledge, ideas. Born in the gutter, he had fought his way upward by sheer power of will.

"Ford, somehow, makes me afraid," a professor at Princeton once said. "There is something in the man that glitters, that will out, by fair means or force." That was his genius.

He persuaded a Massachusetts family to give him his chance in Paris. He succeeded in getting a *Prix de Rome*. The family he dropped callously when he needed them no more. It was so with his first partnership. Young Briggs he used until he had become acquainted with everyone of value whom Briggs knew. Then Briggs went by the board.

"Well," says Briggs pathetically—bless his heart! There is no rancour in him! "A dub like myself has no license to travel with a genius like Brereton Ford."

Genius he was! He took the dry bones of conventional architectural detail and chucked them to the four winds. "I'll get down to mere building," he said, and of mere building he made simple grandeur. Witness the country house he built for Epstein the sugar king, in Westchester County. "A pig in a king's castle!" Ford characterized his client. Abruptly he

dropped that style, and, falling back on old Romanesque and Byzantine types, he evolved a style so distinctively his own that the veriest layman could recognize it. Those little churches throughout New England, those gem-like little libraries, all are living memories to his head and pencil!

"I'm sick of building houses for tripe-merchants, and churches for hypocrites," he broke out bitterly at his club.

"What do you want to do, then?"

"I want money enough to do anything I like. If I choose to raise a monument to Galileo in Wichita, Kansas, or an obelisk to Booker T. Washington in Atlanta, Georgia, I want to be in a position to devote the time to making such a work of art as will overcome ignorance and all prejudice. I want to justify my genius."

Randall O'Connor, that shrewd trial lawyer who possesses an uncanny knowledge of human nature, has an interesting theory about Brereton Ford. "The old Masons," he will tell you, "were the closest guild in the world—an occult guild, very cruel. They used to sacrifice human lives for the safety of their bridges. To my mind Brereton Ford is a reincarnation of one of the old master-masons, who builded the pyramid of Cheops, perhaps, or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, revisiting the earth. A cruel, unnatural being, brimming with genius." Well, why not?

Now, when a certain city in Florida, which shall be nameless, decided that it would build a magnificent city hall, it did a good thing: it engaged Brereton Ford. The Florida city had made a pretty penny from its trade in citrus fruits; from some very spendthrift government shipyards; and from gold-scattering Northern tourists. The Sons of Noe must have felt extremely like that city council when they decided to build a tower on Shinar plain, in the place which was afterward called Babel.

"We want something worthy of this premier city—of this gateway to America's tropic empire." Colonel Milo Rosenthal acted as spokesman for the city fathers. "Something as high as anything New York has, and at the same time substantial and commodious. Something that can be seen as the ships come up the harbour. Something like the Colosseum at Rhodes; yes, ahem! Rhodes! Make it," he concluded grandiloquently, "make it the eighth wonder of the world!"

At this most architects would have shrugged their shoulders and gone northward, or have gone ahead with the work in a spirit of tolerant humour, giving the Boosted City a replica of a Philadelphia skyscraper. Not so Brereton Ford. He merely blinked.

"How much money have you got?" he asked succinctly.

On the answer to this Ford's comment was brief, brusque and snorting. "Hell!" But he went ahead and achieved a miracle. Little by little at his direction the edifice rose, white, slender, very like a spear. It reared above the drab commercial hive like a standard of battle. There was music to it, and line, and poetry.

"When this thing of mine is finished," Ford told Colonel Milo Rosenthal, emphasizing every word with a vicious jab of his forefinger into the Southern aristocrat's ribs, "you can drop your citrus fruits, your shipyards, your hotels. The people will come to your city to see that thing alone."

"By golly, I believe you," the colonel agreed. He was right to agree about it. For people do.

While the city hall was in process of building Brereton Ford was almost all of the winter at various resorts nearby: St. Augustine; Ormond; Miami. He was no garret genius. He needed the decencies of food and music and evening clothes for his art. He liked acclamation, which he received in good taste. He liked to have people presented to him, and to mix among bankers from Texas; automobile millionaires; wheat and coal magnates, as their equal, and to look down on them as their better. And in due course he met them and impressed them, even the most ignorant of them, such as Gates, the Saint Paul department-store man; even the most reticent of them, as were Sir Rustumji Chatterjee and his daughter Putlibai, the Parsees, who came westward from the strange Asian colony which worshipped fire and practised

benevolence and left their dead for the Sun and the Birds in their lonely and bleak and terrifying Towers of Silence, ...

"And so, sir," Ford told Sir Rustumji, "I have become convinced of the Truth as laid down by Zoroaster, the prophet; and my wish and utmost intention is to embrace the faith of the Parsee."

"Many Europeans," Sir Rustumji said, "become convinced of the truth of Buddhism, and not a few turn to Islam. But to our faith there have been few converts. Nevertheless ... In Bombay you will undergo the ceremony of *nirang*, which is a purification. And about your waist will be laid the cincture of seventy-two threads, which denote the seventy-two chapters of Zend-Avesta...."

He was outwardly calm, was the old Parsee prince, but within a great pride had arisen in him, and a great joy with it. He had come to America to bring back dry facts about machinery, and with it he was returning in company of a convert to the faith he held to with all the power of his fine soul. A man great among his countrymen, an artist, a thinker. He praised God in his manifestation of the Sun....

"And another thing, sir," Ford continued. "I should like to be joined to you by a nearer tie. But—I am poor——"

That weighed little to one who followed the precepts of ancient Persian days. Ford was a great artist, a poet in stone. And were not poets heaven-sent and heaven-directed? Had not a prince loaded the camels of Firdaussi with gold for a single distich; and Labid, was he not called the "Companion of Kings?" Who better for Putlibai than this young architect, without a peer, who was dear to the old man's heart, dearer than a son could be? His convert!

"Putlibai," he told her, "I have found you a husband."

And Putlibai's slender frame trembled and her throat swelled, and her eyes flickered like stars. For Brereton Ford was a prince to her, a prince from an Arabian tale. Great-armed, blazing-eyed, he would stand among the men of her nation like a warrior among helots, two heads higher than they. A poet, or as good as a poet! And about him hung the mystery of the Occident—for if the West finds the East mysterious, the East finds the West equally so. From her lips, as from a flute, there rose the marriage-song of Guzerat:

*"All hail this day!  
I gave thee an order, goldsmith;  
I told thee to make an armlet for my Sorabji's arm,  
And a wine-stringed necklace for me, his beloved.  
I gave thee an order, mercer;  
I told thee to bring a plaid for my Sorabji,  
And a pair of palôris for me, his adorer.  
I gave thee an order, jeweller;  
I told thee bring rings for my Sorabji,  
And a pair of bracelets for me, his bride."*

And as Putlibai sang, old Sir Rustumji stroked his beard, and thought. *Ee-yah!* He was happy. Now he had a son for his family, and a husband for his daughter. Time would flow by in soft and reverential days, and when the end of his life came he would be tended. And more time would slip along, and by his side, happily, would repose his daughter and his new son in the great Tower of Silence he had builded above the hills of Guzerat....

Tregarthen, the young Cornish poet, who had been across to America to represent art and letters on the British High Commission, was much taken with Brereton Ford. But then Tregarthen was taken with anything sinister. In early days he

had sung the poetry of absinthe. Later he had become a Satanist. Now he had developed, in a month of Florida, an admiration for Brereton Ford.

They had wandered from their hotel up toward the shore, where the sea was continually complaining, and back down the soft Florida night to the resort grounds, a developed arid garden of no perfume, where palm-trees in ordered, repulsive rows, and barren poinsettia plants rose shamefully from the sandy soil. They sat down, lighting cigarettes. In a little while the moon would rise, but as yet it was very dark. They had been talking of recent art topics—a book by Ibanez; a new Spanish colourist; the Victory Arch in New York.

"By the way," Tregarthen drawled, "the notice of your engagement is in all the New York papers. You know I never did anything but congratulate you, but, if you'll pardon me, I don't understand——"

"Well, I'll tell you," Ford said brutally. "I need the money. I can't work unless my surroundings are harmonious. To lack anything that money can buy irks me. This Parsee, my young poet, would make a Detroit millionaire seem like a piker. Frankly, I need the money."

"I thought maybe you were in love with the girl?"

"With the girl!" Ford laughed. "My lad, I've told you time and time again what my ideal of a woman is: a *chic* French marquise, or one of our well-groomed white beauties. The girl! Blast it! I think as little of her as of any good-looking coloured girl working in the hotel. In a little while this fat father-in-law of mine will be reposing in one of his disgusting Towers of Silence—my soul! what a savage, vile conception!" and Ford shivered—"and I'll be back in civilization hunting a divorce——"

"And you're not overwhelmed at the truth of Parseeism?"

"Parseeism! Bah!" Ford fairly spat. "It's the same to me as the Holy Rollers, or any voodoo lodge. Damn their coloured religions! Listen, Tregarthen, doesn't it make you laugh? Sun-worship! And Towers of Silence! Blazes! Why not cannibalism? Why not——"

"What was that?" Tregarthen had heard a noise in the garden.

"A mullet jumping in the river perhaps, or some tripe-merchant walking off his heavy dinner." Ford was paying no attention. "I suppose most people would call me a damned scoundrel, but you know, as a poet, that art is unmoral, therefore, the artist, it follows, must necessarily——"

Ford whistled as he dressed by electric lights. It was decent of old Chatterjee, he decided, to ask to see his city hall before leaving for the North. The party had arrived in the town only late the evening before and at seven this morning they would be going north to New York. But the Parsee wanted to see his future son-in-law's masterpiece. Wherefore, Ford arose at five in the morning to bring him to it.

"I will show him what he's getting into the family," the architect boasted.

Below, in the lobby of the hotel, he found old Sir Rustumji alone, dressed in tweeds, a soft deerstalker on his reverend white hair.

"Did you have coffee?" the old man asked.

"No," answered Ford. "I ran across no one, and I didn't say I was coming out."

"Too bad to get you up, my son, so early." Sir Rustumji beamed benevolence.

"It's but a block away," Ford answered. "And I'm only too glad."

They went out through the deserted streets. The morning was heavy, foggy. As yet there was no sign of the sun. All of the town was sleeping, evidently, for they met no man.

"There it is!" Ford stopped on a side street. "I'm going to take you up on the roof just as you asked. Lucky I've got the keys. And the service elevator is running."

Ford made his way across stubble and planks to the elevator cage. He motioned the old man in before him.

"They're going to have an immense job to get this finished by the first of May, when they've announced the opening. My work on it's done, anyway. The carpenters, joiners, plumbers, have their month before them. They can do it, I guess, without me."

"I hope so, my son."

They left the elevator and climbed a short winding stair. With a mighty heave of his shoulder Ford opened the trap-door to the roof. It creaked as it rose. He slipped on to the solid ground alone. Sir Rustumji followed him, with surprising agility.

"There it is," Ford exalted. He looked down into the streets. The Parsee followed his eyes.

Towering like a spear from the ground up, the great white building rose like a spirit of flame. Very slender it was, with a slenderness of a young birch tree, and very white, like silver. It rose above the other buildings as a tall tree rises above shrubs, and the whole city seemed only a pedestal on which Brereton Ford's conception was a monument. And there was great silence—the silence of the sleeping city, and in all the city it was the most silent building of all.

The Parsee was thoughtful for an instant. He turned to the east, where mottled morning clouds were piled massively with here and there a ray of sunlight bursting through.

"It is a great work," Sir Rustumji acknowledged.

Suddenly, with the melodrama of southern climes, the sun seemed to shoot above the horizon—a huge scarlet splash in the east. The old Parsee bent his head.

"God is good," he said. "He gives us this magnificent orb to know Him by."

He turned to Ford calmly.

"I was in the garden of the hotel the night you spoke to your poet friend," he told Ford.

Ford had not been paying much attention to him, but these words seemed to drip into his brain like acid, etching into his intelligence like aqua fortis, and as he turned and looked at the Parsee, he felt his knees shaking suddenly, and a cold wind blowing through his hair. Sir Rustumji had lost his benevolence.

"I did not care about the money so much. If you had needed money you could have had it from me without marrying my daughter. And even what you said about Putlibai that night might have been forgiven and you allowed to go. But you did something else."

Ford could not take his eyes from the Parsee's face. Something he had never seen before stood out in it, mystic, very terrible, the Orient of ancient days, before Moses lived, or Abraham.

"You used God and His symbol and His prophet Zoroaster to get money for your uses. And then, laughing, you blasphemed Them. And for that you are going to die."

Without a hurried movement, Sir Rustumji took a revolver from his pocket.

"Here on your own tower, silently, you will lie with your face to the sun, as you would have lain dead eventually had you come with me to Guzerat, and married my daughter, and embraced our faith." And the old Parsee began shooting him. High in the air above the city, the sound of the explosion seemed negligible, and at the fifth shot Brereton Ford died.

The Parsee descended to the stairway, clanging the iron door behind him. From the street below, some minutes

later, he looked up at Brereton Ford's tower rising with slender, silent majesty into the air. On the white top of it the sun seemed to beat in a kind of fury, white, infinitesimal; and in the blue sky overhead two buzzards were perched.

## VI

### THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

#### I

He smiled in his white moustaches as Kennedy, the over-dressed, sophisticated clerk who played the market on margin came into the office. He was not in the habit of being familiar with Kennedy, for he disliked the man, but this morning there was too much joy bursting in his heart to keep up the habitual aloofness. As yet none knew his secret not even Marian, his wife, nor his daughter, Aileen, and he needed to say something of it to someone, as a kettle must boil over.

"A fine morning; a fine June morning, Kennedy!" he rubbed his hands, "a great morning in the country!"

"Yes," agreed the clerk. His cold, suspicious eye took in his employer appraisingly. "What was the old guy up to now?" he thought.

"Yes," Simpson went on, as if carelessly. "I shall be glad to get away from all this and live in the country. Yes, very glad! yes!"

"You're thinking of going to live in the country, to commute?"

"No, to live in it for good," Simpson bent over his mail as if there were an end to the pronouncement. The clerk grimaced as he went out of the door; the old man might go and live in Gehenna for all he cared.

He lifted his head as the door closed and gazing through the window he seemed to go into a sort of a trance. Below him was the harsh jangle and bustle of Church Street and Dey—the creaking of the lorries: the rhythmic drumming of the elevated train; the barking of motor horns; the subdued cacophonous hum of hurried life. Before his eyes, in the physical sense, was the muddy puddle of the East River; the unbeauty of squalid ferryboats; the ugly, insect-like types that threaded their way hither and thither, the vertebrated line of railroad barges. Beyond that, the dingy wilderness of the Jersey shore front, with its huddle of docks, its hideous advertisements, its smoke-fuddled factories. And over it all, a harsh, unhealthy sunlight rained brazenly. But he saw and heard nothing of these.

"The Happy Townland," he was saying to himself, "Yes, that's it! The Happy Townland."

Past this dun and ugly prospect he was seeing, as by some miracle of second sight, a green and odorous country—long, winding roads bordered by high trees; cool meadows where cows grazed; a mare browsing daintily with a long-legged foal capering by her; a brook somewhere indefinitely placed, fringed by golden rod and bull reeds; the mellow sleepiness of a big house; dogwood rioting in blossom and the delicate mauve of laurel. From everywhere there came to his nostrils the scent of trampled grass and the biting perfume of pine trees. And by a white magic the harsh bustle of the city streets was metamorphosed into the lazy drone of bees and the sound of wind among the reeds; the note of unknown birds and the clamour of indefinite brooks. He drew an agent's brown sheet from the drawer of his desk and perused it for the thousandth time.

"About ten acres of land," he read, "artistically laid out in flower beds and vegetable gardens; one acre of orchard, beautiful shade and fruit trees; lawns tastefully laid, the whole arranged as a delightful private park," and above: "the farmhouse has been remodelled in a thoroughly modern manner, without deteriorating from its old-world charm."

As far back as he could remember, and that was at the age of six, and fifty years ago, the ambition of his life had been to own a house in the country, with ground sufficient to provide for its needs. A sort of haven, it had always seemed to him, into which he could retire in his late days and the prospect of, and hope for which, had supported him through all his life. As far back as he could remember, and even before he could, the shadow of uncertainty and want had hung over his life like a cloud. Very dimly, but with startling streaks of stark realism, he could conjure up pictures of his father's cobbling and shoemaking store in Fall River—a dim, leather-smelling house, with a great wooden Hessian boot swinging over the door as a sign of his Guild. He could dimly remember his father, a wizened, snarling sort of man with spectacles, whose knife cut through the leather with a rasp; his mother, a gaunt, pinched-mouthed shrew, whose sap of humanity poverty had turned into gall.

These personalities were very vague to him now, but the bitter edge of one thing he remembered only too well, and that was the tragic poverty of the house—the rush to finish a piece of work on Saturday night so that the customer might pay in time for Sunday's sustenance; the sorry makeshifts, the utter shame of things. He could remember, in spite of his father's trade, the condition of his own parody of shoes, the holes in the soles, in the toe-caps, the bent and broken hooks on the vamp.

Only one incident of tenderness had relieved that grim childhood. That was when he had left home. An old acquaintance of his father's, a journeyman cobbler, had risen sufficiently in the world to have a small store in New York. By some means the family got in touch with him and young William Simpson was engaged as a sort of errand boy and salesman. On the occasion of his leaving for New York, his father seemed less harsh than was customary and his mother had cried.

Enough of this! "A sorry tale is ever unwelcome," says a Gaelic proverb. Sharp and biting tragedy is stimulating, but a dingy record affects one like some malodorous miasma. The sequence of Simpson's rise to moderate prominence in his business can be imagined. From office boy to salesman; his marriage to Marian, daughter of his employer; a small store; a larger store; a factory; a fair competence. And lastly the chance to shoe a portion of a great army—a war contract that had placed him in comparative luxury. There was no genius in the man, even no marked ability. He followed a painstaking recipe for success and obtained it, moving along timidly, nearly invisible in the current of business, too small to be reckoned with.

"Honesty and hard work," he told himself, "win in the end." He had not brains enough for the dishonesty that makes millions or that obviates hard work by brilliant and daring short cuts.

He could understand his rise in business, but what he could not understand—for his wife never explained it to him—was his progress in dwelling and environment. From a dingy and small apartment on West Twentieth Street to a two-family house in Flatbush; to a small house of his own; to a modest flat on Riverside Drive; to a large and garish one with two baths, neither of them harshly overworked. And again, from the slatternly Polish girl of his early days to the cook, maid and chauffeur of the present ones.

"Marian certainly is a wonder!" he would think in awe. But his wife's method was fairly blatant. She merely took what she wanted and depended on him to furnish the funds. The only credit I can give Marian Simpson is for her discovery that he was dependable.

She had done wonders, had Marian, according to him. But for him the last wonder. He was to perform a prodigy of magic comparable to the palace Aladdin raised, by the aid of the Djinn of the lamp, for the King of China's daughter. He would transplant Marian and his daughter Aileen to the coveted farmhouse in the country, with its acre of orchard, "the whole arranged as a delightful private park." After the din and rush of New York, the fictitious life of it, the pinchbeck splendour, the perilous pinnacle of semi-success, they would rest happy and contented, they would be people not prisoners, inhaling air and sunlight, not the fetid odours and grime of the metropolis.

Because he had been born in the city and had lived all his life in it, going its ways as regularly as a felon on a treadmill, his whole life's desire had been to leave it and live close to the land. In the city, he was timid, negligible, unassertive. The detail of his origin placed him ill at ease amongst the men of well-nurtured youth, of sterling education and happy home ties. That, and a routine of salesmanship, with its necessary deference, made him apologetic towards even his servants. Cook and housemaid paid no attention to him. The chauffeur bullied him. In business he was referred

to contemptuously, if at all. But he had the belief that away from the city's wiles and sophistications, amongst the simple rural people, he would be happy, independent of spirit, obligated to no man. A great portion of his thinking life was passed in the dream of his state and appearance when the happy day would come for him to go there. He imagined himself as a sort of bluff English squire—he a thin, tall, dejected man, with drooping moustaches, and a head going bald, who would have been a humorous figure, if it had not been for the pathos in his eyes! He could see himself in rough tweeds and gaiters, with a dog following him. Occasionally he would stop in front of an athletic outfitter's and look with a sort of shamed awe at the golf clubs in the window, queer-shaped shining sticks with haunting names—mashies and niblicks, jiggers and sammies, brassies and cleeks—and he would look forward with happy embarrassment to the day when he would have courage enough to go on a links and try them. At times, forgetting his years, he could see himself cantering along a lonely by-path on a sturdy black cob.

Some verses of an Irish poet, which he had seen printed at the bottom of the editorial page of his newspaper—to fill up space most likely—had haunted him. His spirit entered chimingly into the man's vision of the "Happy Townland."

*"Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
At all times of the year!"*

He could understand the ecstasy of that vision, the exaggerated fragmentary flashes that were like the tissue of a hashish-eater's dream:

*"An old man plays the bagpipes  
In a golden and silver wood,  
Queens, their eyes blue like ice,  
Are dancing in a wood...."*

The irresponsible swinging refrain began running in his head, as a military march or a sentimental ballad might run in the head of another man. It typified his whole life's desire. It hammered in his veins like a slogan.

*"The little fox he murmured  
O what of the world's bane  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon pulled at my rein,  
The little fox, he murmured,  
O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane."*

At last he had his Happy Townland. He had arrived at the great ambition of his grey days. For the first time in his life he had done something without his wife's knowledge, he had purchased the gentleman's dwelling with its orchard, its flowerbeds and vegetable gardens; its shade and fruit trees, "the whole arranged as a delightful private park."

## II

It is the habit of romantic young men and of cynical young women to say and believe that the great loves and love stories of old days have no counterpart in modern life. There is no longer a Canon Peter Abelard nor a fair Heloise; nor



an Anne of Austria on whose account a Buckingham would plunge into war. The topless towers of Troy are dust, and Helen with them. And the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's, is mute in the land.

But they are wrong in this matter. There is no age as ripe in love as this, and this gaunt stone metropolis is its smiling garden. States and ranks of men change and fashions of loving, but the eternal miracle is there. Men die of love and women with them. The humble huckster of the street may harbour the ambition of a serf for a queen, and the magnate of the stock exchange may extend to the poorest girl in his employ the honourable passion of King Cophetua for the beggar maid.

I cannot think of William Simpson without the complement of Marian, his wife. Little as I care for that woman, and God knows that is little indeed, I believe that without her he would have pined away and died. Without her there would be no reason for his existence. Every penny he made, every hour of toil he spent, was for her sake and not for his own. He translated everything into terms of her pleasure, and even this, the master ambition of his life, he thought of as a surprise and joy to her.

She is forty-five years old now, a thick-set, obese woman, whose shallow ambitions are shown in her shrewd black eyes. Of every new fashion in dress and manner that is created, she is the extreme devotee, whether it be the lacing of shoes up the back, the shortening or lengthening of frocks, the wearing of furs in summer, or the hobby of the moment, skating, riding, bridge. She is addicted to singing snatches of the latest popular songs. She lives to see and be seen. Shallow compliments please her, such as a polite incredulity that Aileen, who is twenty-three, can be her daughter. Surely her younger sister, people say, and she is grateful for that courtesy.

Transparent as she is, painted, over-manicured, over-dressed, selfish, narrow, utterly worthless, in William Simpson's eyes she is beautiful and good. Her degree above him, who was the daughter of an employer, when he was only a ragamuffin of the streets; her cheap coyness; her affectation of fashion, all these attracted him as a young man, and held him, now he was old. He accepted her wishes as decrees and thought her taste the glass of form.

For years now coming back from his office worn with the exertion his small abilities required, he permitted himself to be led to theatres, to supper afterwards, to the society of people for whom he cared nothing and who cared nothing for him, because as she suggested it, it seemed to him there was nothing else to do. "Come on," she would tell him, "hurry up. What a time I've had to dress. I do wish we hadn't to go."

"But if you'd rather stay at home," he would offer, thinking it a pity she should have to go against her inclination.

"Do you think it's any pleasure for me to sit in all night, after being here all day alone," would be her short response, and he would agree in his mind to the justice of it. "God knows, it's so little pleasure I get out of life, I'm glad to get this." And all evening, at the theatre, at the party, at the dance, he would admire, in his simplicity, her consummate tact which concealed her indifference and dislike of the event. Some day, he would say to himself, he would give her a life worth living! And he would sympathise mutely at the pain she underwent to fit herself into the garish boots she wore, or to confine her ample figure in the clothes a tyrant fashion thrust upon her. How happy she would be, he told himself, in the quiet country estate he planned for her, no worthless friendships to compel her, nor trivial pursuits to claim her time. No torture of clothes there, he said, but a fine, free and gracious apparel, such as a lady of the Manor should wear. There she would blossom forth in her natural surroundings as buxom and as hearty as a full blown rose.

His daughter Aileen, a slim young pattern of her mother, morose and discontented, had a diffident, lazy manner.

"Come, dearie," her mother would say, "you've got to go to the rink for your skating lesson. It's eight o'clock now."

"Oh, Ma," she would reply with a pout, rising all the same, "it's such a bother!"

"Hurry up, dearie," her mother would urge sharply. "We've got to be there at eight-thirty. They'll charge us just the same. Your father will call for us in the car, and we'll have a bite to eat afterwards."

When they had gone out, on the rare occasions they permitted him to stay behind, Simpson would be thankful in his heart that his daughter disliked the life as much as her mother did, and sitting there, dozing over a journal which he did not understand, but which uttered the mystic desirable formulae of fertilizers, and the rotation of crops; of glanders and

farcy; of short-horned Devons and belted Dutch; he could imagine her in a print gown caring for a rose garden, or taking an interest in the dairy, or helping him with the swarming bees. And he would think of some sentimental picture he had once seen—a reproduction on a calendar perhaps—of a young girl sitting on a rustic style, dreaming, the strings of a quaker bonnet in her fingers, and he would nod his head approvingly.

At times they would migrate for a week or more to out-of-town resorts—to Palm Beach, though that was infrequent; to Lake Wood; to Bar Harbour, and during their stay there, mother and daughter, and himself too, would sit listlessly in hotel lounges, except at the times it was proper for them to be out—drinking orangeade, or walking in the pine woods, or on the beach. None knew them, save occasional tragic casualties like themselves. And mother and daughter kept up a continual criticism of the guests in the hotel.

"Here's that woman again!" the mother would say. "She's going out riding now. Look at her habit with the tan boots."

"That young riding master is waiting for her again—the same one she was out with yesterday." The daughter would watch through the window.

"And the husband just gone up to town!" the mother would join in.

Or they would pick out an innocuous old gentleman in tweeds and spats.

"He's a general in the army!" the mother would vouchsafe, "Mrs. Mearson told me."

"Look at the young wife he's got," Aileen would notice. And through all this Simpson would sit mute, with the terrible immobility of an Oriental priest, firm in his belief that these things would pass and that at the end of the road green pastures lay.

An advertisement of a new resort outside New York had attracted wife and daughter, and they had dragged him along for a week end. The crisp cold of after Christmas was in the air. The roads glinted with particles of frost that resembled microscopic jewels. Snow hung in the trees, fluffy, like tender wool. And overhead, in the night time, a vast abyss of stars.

The mother and Aileen were in the throes of that two day ecstasy which accompanied every change. They spoke enthusiastically of the country.

"Wouldn't you like to live here all the time?" Simpson hazarded. It was one of the occasions when he came perilously near to unburdening himself of the secret of his heart.

"What, dearie?" his wife asked.

"I was thinking we might come out and live sometime in the country altogether."

"Sure, dearie," she agreed in that lazy manner of hers that avoided discussion. "I and Aileen saw some swell houses in Bronxville this afternoon when we were coming home from the motion pictures."

He smiled to himself contentedly. She was ready and eager he thought; but she dreamed only possibilities where he dreamed miracles. It was to no stucco atrocity in a super suburb he would lead her, along no whirring electric railroad past broad avenues of advertising boards—but he would strike boldly at the rock and lead her to the Happy Townland, the enchanted country—a land as foreign as Bokhara or Cathay, where swallows would twitter in the eaves, and bees build their cells droningly, and a gentle lowing would come over the hills from the kine, and the tender grass show itself, and the herbs of the mountain be gathered.

### III

So there! It was done. He slapped his cheque book to, and gathered up the papers the agent handed him.

"A fine bargain you've got, Mr. Simpson," the fat, bespectacled agent told him, "spacious and commodious, with all modern improvements. Have you decided on a name for it yet?"

"I am going to call it the Happy Townland," Simpson answered, blushing a little, as though he had decided on calling an eldest son Algernon.

"A queer name," the agent admitted. "I should have thought of 'Sans Soucis,' or 'Sunny Farm,' or 'Cosy Nook'..."

It was his at last, that low-lying, thatched farmhouse, with its broad windows and deep doors, lying there like a windrow above the rolling waves of meadow land, and behind it in May the orchard would blossom in white and delicate pink. Everything he had dreamed of he possessed there. Even the brook in the distance, with reeds and golden rod. He had said nothing of it to his wife, waiting to surprise her until the sale was consummated, and he had done nothing towards furnishing or stocking it. To furnish it would be her labour of love, as to stock it would be his. He was glad of all those modern improvements for her sake, though he could have done without them himself. He was glad there was a garage there, too. She would not like to be without a car—and then he could use it also, for a country club was only thirty miles away, and again he thought with a sense of joyful fear, of the outfitter's window and the shining golf clubs with haunting names, drivers and cleeks, jiggers and sammies, mashies and niblicks. From thinking of these his mind turned to the stock he would have, the two Guernsey cows—for some reason unknown to himself he preferred Guernseys—he would churn their rich, warm milk into delicate, pale butter. A horse, too, a docile but sturdy horse, and he would have dogs, two or three of them, one of those shaggy Sealyhams, a collie and perhaps a terrier, and a spaniel would come in handy for shooting in the autumn. The farm part of it would be a bit of a facer at first but he could hire a couple of men for that, and one of those fellows from an agricultural college to supervise it. Those agricultural men were very efficient, they ran things like a science. Of course he didn't want it too efficient. He didn't want money out of it—he had enough of that. He wanted leisure and repose and a free life, like that Roman he had read of somewhere and sometime—what was his name? Cincinnatus, or something like that—who gave up his consulship, or some office or another, to plough his farm by the Tiber's banks....

#### IV

They had passed through the shrill streets an hour ago; passed the mean by-ways on the border land; passed the loathsome shacks that are the barnacles of a city. They had skimmed along the trim suburban villas and through the region of the roadhouses. And still they went on.

"I do wish you'd tell us where you are bringing us," his wife complained peevishly.

"It ain't anything wonderful," the daughter commented. "Just some idea of Pa's to go and have lunch in a roadhouse or something: wake me up when we get to Trenton."

But Simpson gave no word of satisfaction. He sat back silent with the smile on his lips that one has when keeping a secret for a child. He had bundled them into the car that Saturday morning with great ado, and a great show of secrecy. Jansen, the square-headed chauffeur, had looked sullen when he mentioned Farmingdale. Jansen could see no reason why the old man shouldn't have taken a train, and left him free to patronise his favourite pool room, or to organize a joy ride for his friends and their girls to some place worth while, like Coney Island.

"Why in hell can't he take a train when he goes off on these rube hikes? the old stiff," the chauffeur grumbled to himself.

It was a late June, and the sun had had as yet no time to dull the greenness of the grass and hedges. A shower had fallen early that morning and a great clean air was out with a faint smell of clover. Dogwood showed in white starry splashes, and here and there was the delicate colouring of laurel, and all over the meadows were the bubbles of dandelion. They whipped by a piece of wooded country, where a rivulet trickled by the road covered with watercress. A rabbit sat still until they were nearly upon him, and then flashed off like a bullet. A tortoise hissed viciously at them as they flew by.

"This country stuff does make you sleepy," his wife remarked. As she lay back on the cushioned seat, her eyes closed and her mouth opened, her face expanded into a splotch of vacuous obesity. Her motoring bonnet, a horrible thing with a blue veil, fell awry on one side of her head. But Simpson regarded her with an expression of beatitude. His daughter looked about her at the rustic prospect with the bored hauteur of the city bred. To Simpson's lips rose the cryptic marching song of his ambition.

"The sun was laughing sweetly;  
The moon pulled at my rein,  
But the little fox he murmured,  
'Oh do not pull at his rein:  
He is riding to the townland'..."

"What's that, dearie?" his wife murmured sleepily.

"The next turn to the right," Simpson directed. The chauffeur swore a succession of silent damnations as vicious as any of a Finnish necromancer's.

They swung down a side road that grew narrower as they went along. A broad belt of woods extended on either side, and as they passed by there was the sound in the undergrowth of startled wild inhabitation.

They skirted a pool into which turtles dived with a series of pluds, as of falling stones. A stop before a gate, which Simpson opened with a great key, and they swept up the drive to the house.

"Why don't you tell us where we are," his wife said querulously; "what next?"

The car slowed down before the broad black door. Another great key and Simpson swung it open. He stood on the threshold with a faintly theatrical gesture.

"Come in," he said. "Welcome!"

"Of all the things!" his wife grumbled. His daughter followed peevishly.

He disappeared for an instant, and a moment later he was opening shutters, wrestling here and there with refractory latches, fussed, hot, triumphant. He passed from the great parlour to the dining-room, running like a boy. A quick flood of sunlight burst into the rooms. It mounted and bathed the high ceilings; it swept into the great fireplaces; it mellowed into a golden haze in the crevices and corners.

"That's the electric light," Simpson pointed to the chandeliers, as though to an eighth wonder of the world. He moved quickly into the broad hall, and tapped inoffensive wainscotings on both sides.

"Gun lockers!" he whispered. "They open with a secret spring."

His wife and daughter were gazing at each other with a curious surmise. His wife looked troubled, as though at the first symptoms of dementia. His daughter choked back a laugh.

"The kitchens are behind—we'll see them later," he hustled on. "Come upstairs. I want to show you something."

He ran up the stairs before them, and they followed him conversing slowly, the daughter breaking into a little titter. On the landing light broke in successive progression as more shutters were opened.

"Come ahead!" he called triumphantly.

They entered a wide many-windowed room. He was standing looking over the approach to the house.

"Just look at that," he told them, "just look at that."

In front of them was an immensity of gently rolling green, that resolved itself, as they looked, into a stretch of lawn; into a faint belt of woods; into a billowing of meadow land. Far away the high road wound in a broad white riband, with a solitary horse and cart dotting it a quarter mile away. A village dozed peacefully, shaded by great trees, somewhat to their left. Near by, a clear metallic trickle of a brook. In the distance, like a mirage, a train scuttled along, the size of a child's toy.

Over everything hung a faint blue heat haze. Four dappled cows lay easily in a distant field, and sheep and lambs nibbled daintily in the hills westward. Somewhere overhead a rook cawed noisily. From the fields of clover came the insistent humming of bees and the sharper drone of wasps from the invisible orchard. To their ears, in even, sonorous waves from the village came the smashing clang of a sledge on a smithy anvil. Marian Simpson's mouth closed tightly. Her dark eyes took on a vindictive light.

"Do you mean to tell me, William Simpson," she snapped, as a harsh judge might address a prisoner, "that you brought us all this way to look at an old empty house?"

"I did," he answered her smilingly. He stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, and stood with his feet apart. He had the air of a conjurer about to spring a trick upon a hostile and incredulous audience.

"You did," his wife's tones became dangerously cool, "and what did you do that for?"

"Because we are going to live here."

She looked at him for an instant blankly, as if she had not understood what he said; then a little anxiously as if afraid his reason had given away, but by some means she disabused herself of this idea, and a contemptuous anger showed on her face.

"Because we are going to live here?" she repeated after him. She turned to her daughter. "What do you think of that?"

The confident expression on his face wavered to an expression of extreme silliness. The facial muscles retained their pose but the eyes grew blank. There was a feeling within him as if something had gripped him with a giant, implacable force.

"We're going to live here," his wife laughed, "Oh, no! we ain't."

"I thought," he murmured feebly, "I thought you'd like it."

"Like it here," she responded with a vicious parry. "In this rube place; with nothing but rubes around!"

"Oh, Pa," his daughter observed in pained tones, "there's no smart people here."

He didn't answer because he couldn't. With a sort of mechanical blindness he began fastening the shutters again.

"Come on now," his wife was saying. "Us for the nearest town and something to eat."

He followed them down the stairs and listened to their conversation blankly.

"Sure he wouldn't like it," the mother was remarking. "He only thinks he would. Look at Mr. Schumm, for instance. Said good-bye to all of us and bought a bungalow in Arverne. Three months later he was back. What did he say? 'Broadway's good enough for me,' he said. 'Never again.'"

He stood out in the sunlight with them. His wife looked sympathetically at his drawn face.

"Sure, dearie," she said. "I know how it is. Every spring I feel the same. I want to go out and fly like a bird. That Wanderlust, I guess. But I tell you what we'll do. We'll go up. We'll go up to the Adirondacks for a month. I know of a swell hotel there. Mrs. Millish told me about—sun parlours and dances twice a week. We'll give you the country."

As they walked to the car, a sudden thought flashed on her mind. She turned on him thunder-stricken.

"William Simpson!" she demanded agonisedly, "you haven't gone and bought this place, have you?"

"No," he lied bravely. He even managed a wan smile. "No! No! Oh no!"

"I knew you couldn't be such a fool as all that," she uttered in relief.

He stepped into the car, and sitting down, waiting for it to start, he kept his head turned rigidly forward, for he was afraid, somehow, that, were he to look back he would leap out and running towards the doors he would cling to them, cry over them, refuse to be dragged from them, as some evicted emigrant might clutch passionately at the lintels of his ruined home.

## V

Kennedy, saturnine, suspicious, cynical, walked from the inner office. He paused as the door closed behind him. "So he's going to the Adirondacks for a month is he?" he muttered. "Thought he said he was going to live in the country"—a pause—"That's what they all say." He sauntered over to the window, and he smiled grimly as he thought of the old man's worn and haggard look. He had aged inexplicably over the week-end. "Sure he's going to the country," the clerk told himself. "We'll give him a fine party there. And he'll be the only one not coming back."

## VII

### HAIL AND FAREWELL

Imagine a pleasant, rotund man of thirty. Imagine him landing at the Battery with fifty other Italian immigrants. Imagine him dressed in a black velvet coat, a hat that rose like a sugar cone, and baggy corduroy breeches. Imagine a red handkerchief about his neck, a spreading smile upon his face, a fiddle under his arm, and there you have Gian Battista Repetti, a poet of Genoa.

"If," said Gian Battista to his friends in the Gaffe di Nero, "Cristoforo Colombo discovered this America, then I, a Genoese destined to be no less immortal than he, may sing of it. Are we, men of Genoa, to allow this nation discovered by our antique fellow-citizen, to be fought for, sung of, and populated by Neapolitan cut-throats, Sicilian brigands, and Calabrian mule-drivers? Are we, I ask you?"

"No, by no means," said his friends, and they thumped the tables of the Caffè until fifty glasses tinkled in harmony.

"Then I, Gian Battista the troubadour, I will go. Ecco. I go next Tuesday."

They drank several chopines of Chianti to the venture.

The next Tuesday, having sold everything he had and borrowed all he could, behold Gian Battista on the deck of a liner, pulling out into the bay. A score of the patrons of the Caffè di Nero stood on the pier in a semi-circle, exactly as in the distance the towering blue mountains were ranged. As the steamer swirled away from the pier Gian Battista broke into the strains of "Ah, mi Genova," a little thing he had composed for the occasion.

The ten days following, Gian Battista believes, are described in some lost fragment of the Inferno.

It was from Anton Todisco that Gian Battista got his idea of coming to America—Anton, who had worked for years

at a few soldi a day in a macaroni factory, and then emigrated. Anton had come back in burly American clothes, an inconceivably small Derby hat, and buttoned shoes with truculent toes.

Anton had worn a watch and chain that looked like chunks of bullion recovered from a sunken galleon. Anton had mysterious papers, his citizenship papers he explained, that made him the equal of any peer of the Old World and the superior of most, and that formed a bar to molestation at the hands of the powers.

"Let them try to touch me," he would say, "just let them try, you betcha."

At which the patrons of the Caffè di Nero were duly impressed.

The only bar to complete felicity in the new world, Anton admitted, was the presence of Irlandeses,—Irishmen, huge brutal fellows, the evil genii of America, who, Anton hinted, lured Italian boys into their houses and ate them on their national festivals, such as St. Patrick's Day. But then, Anton said with a fine touch of philosophy, perfect happiness does not obtain here below. Life is not all beer and skittles, all Chianti and polenta.

At which the company, a little cast down by the description of these ogres, would nod sagely, clear their throats and drink a little from their glasses.

But all this did not deter Gian Battista. If a part of a poet's work is to cheer the hearts of men, another and no less important function is to fight the world's wars. Wherefore Gian Battista landed at the Battery not in the least afraid of but merely circumspect in the presence of the huge Corkonian who twirled his night-stick belligerently as he lolled in the front of the ferry.

There was no one to meet him. His passport to the country was the fifty dollars a frugal government requires of liberty-lovers as a token of good faith.

He felt a little lost, something like a rabbit that had been set down in a strange field.

In front of him, a hundred yards away, buildings rose like mountains; people swarmed like ants. There was a melody of strange sounds. Automobiles sped onward, their horns grunting raucously. Street cars warned pedestrians of imminent death with imperative brazen clangs. Somewhere there was the loud metallic chatter of a giant drill.

"In the name of God," said Gian Battista, "forward, company!" For he had been in the Carabineers and had fought the Turks in Tripoli.

He stopped when he had gone a hundred yards. A blue plate on a post attracted him. He spelled out the white letters.

"Ah, il Broadway!" he exclaimed delightedly.

Now he was on familiar ground, for Anton had told him of Broadway and Fifth Avenue and the Bronx. Fifty-nine streets north of this, Anton had said, there was a statue of Christopher Columbus and a great plaza named for him. He would go there first of all and pay his respects as Napoleon might have paid his respects to a monument of Caesar. As a Genoese, it was his duty.

The walk along the street was somewhat chilling. There was no caffè outside of which to sit and discuss the ministry, a pleasant occupation with a flask of Chianti. No one even looked at him. Men tore past with their jaws set. Women scurried along with their eyes fixed on points far ahead. There was no cheery "Come sta'." There was no sidelong or backward glance of black velvety eyes to set the heart fluttering and the mind weaving canzoni. Occasionally a man stopped to remove his straw hat and mop his forehead. Then he dashed on again. Gian Battista felt oppressed.

Opposite City Hall a main was being dug. Shovelfuls of brown clay impelled by invisible hands flashed over the edge of the hole. Gian Battista went over to investigate. In the depths he caught glimpses of swarthy Italian faces.

"*Buon giorno, signori,*" he chanted. "*Ohe, buon giorno!*"

Nobody looked up.

"*Buon giorno*," he repeated more slowly.

A tousled head thrust itself up at the end.

"Nuttin' doin'," it said. "Nuttin' doin'."

Gian Battista looked at it dully.

"Nuttin' doin'," it said again, "beat it."

Gian Battista moved off. He didn't understand what was said, but he resented the tone.

At Bleeker street he was hailed loudly.

"Shine?" a voice inquired.

Then it exploded into a laugh.

Gian Battista looked around. A tubby Sicilian bootblack was writhing with amusement. He pointed to the red handkerchief around Gian Battista's neck, then at his fiddle, then at his hat. After that he slapped his fat knees, and doubled up, and shot off chuckles like a machine gun. A sardonic Neapolitan leaned against the bootblack's chair and regarded the poet with a superior and insulting smile.

At last it dawned on Gian Battista that they were laughing at him. He drew himself up to his five feet four, put his hand on his hip and scowled at them.

"Bah!" he spat, and moved on.

Behind him he could hear the loud merriment of the Sicilian. The Neapolitan shouted "*figlio di can*," after him.

Gian Battista was becoming angry. The reverent state of mind he had cultivated for the first sight of the Genoese mariner's monument was passing. But after all, he thought, these are baser folk unable to appreciate a poet, people who never heard anything but a hurdy-gurdy in their sordid lives. Was he, Repetti, to be annoyed by them?

As he passed along an occasional Irish policeman eyed him with morose suspicion.

At Twenty-third Street he paused. He stood still at the bow of the Flatiron. The mid-day rush was on. Stenographers dodged under the bonnets of Fifth Avenue 'buses. Green trolley cars wormed past each other through a maze of rails.

A sudden thought struck him. It was here he would begin his adventure. He put his hat on the ground and made an inviting little well for contributions. He put his fiddle to his shoulder and drew the bow across the strings.

An officer stalked slowly toward him. Gian Battista looked. One of the Irishers? ... Oh, joy, the face was Italian, although unfortunately Neapolitan.

"Eh, oh, Garibaldine!" hailed Gian Battista.

"Don't you know there's no panhandling around here, don't you?"

Gian Battista looked up in amazement.

"Do you want to get pinched, you cock-eyed Dago?" Gian Battista got a jab in the ribs. "Get a move on. Your feet are showing."

But Gian Battista had gone. All that remained of him was a greenish felt hat on the pavement, wrong end up.



An hour later he arrived at the steamship office, and demanded a ticket to Genoa. As the clerk was getting it, he began an inarticulate tirade against Christopher Columbus, which a telegraph messenger silently enjoyed.

"I have spent a great deal of money," thought Gian Battista standing at the bow of a steamer as it pulled away from the pier that afternoon. "But," he added, "it would have taken nearly as much to bury me, and, thank God! I am still alive."

A little ring of returning immigrants stared at him in frank wonder.

He pushed his left foot forward and threw back his shoulders.

"Ai nostri monti," he warbled.

The grey-haired pilot on the bridge looked down. "Mr. Bates," he said to the third officer, a shining exhibit in brass and blue. "Do me a favour?"

"Surely, Mr. Pilot."

"Take a marlinspike and go down and kill that wop."

The third officer laughed.

"His first visit home in fifteen years, I suppose. Seems glad to get back, poor devil."

## VIII

### GREEN ISLE

The squat, grey-bearded chief mate leaned across the table of the hotel sitting-room. There was in his eyes the look of a pleading dog.

"Every stitch of sail in her is as good as the day it came from the loft, and all she wants is a few weeks in dry dock. Get aboard her, sir, and warp her out. Once off Ambrose Light and your troubles will drop from you like a snake's old skin. Look, sir," he pulled out a frayed memorandum-book and thumbed the pages. "I got in touch with most of the old crew, Ryan the boatswain, and John Fay the carpenter, and a lot of others. Reisenberg, the second, is in port, too, and would be only too glad to come. Once off Sandy Hook, sir——"

The young-old, hatchet-faced, scientist-mariner shook his head.

"It's very decent of you, Matthison, but——"

"It's a year since you've been to sea, sir; things are happening every minute. The Prince of Monaco's been making soundings off Cape Verde, following up your work on tidal waves, that's bringing in light on volcanic eruptions every month. Young Jobb has his divers off Yucatan, and swears he has found the lost Atlantis. You could beat them all at their own game." The mate's face ventured a sort of grin. "And there's 'Green Isle' you've never yet found."

Renous rose and went across to the hotel window. Beneath him, fourteen storeys below, he could see Broadway and Forty-second Street, a narrow cañon, swarming, now the Saturday matinee was over, with human beings that looked like ants, and yet, to his disordered imagination, were less than the least vermin that were ever parasites on a body. Things with courage smaller than a jackal's, with souls meaner than the souls of rooting swine. There, from the blind man at the Subway kiosk, they were buying the papers that told every revolting detail of his wife's death in the Long Island roadhouse, gloating over the history of brandy and cocaine and reckless lechery with actors of the meaner sort, while he,

poor fool, was giving his addresses on pelagology before learned institutions! Even now they were reciting his name and honours, Gilbert Renous, Doctor of Science, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Knight Commander of the Bath, Holder of the Elephant of Denmark, of the Alfonso and Isabella of Spain, of France's Legion of Honour. His wife shamefully dead! Even now sob-sisters, as the cynical public called them, were pointing a moral to adorn the tale....

"I heard a Portuguese sailor talk about it, not a week ago, sir, *Ilha Verde* he called it. And he believed in it as firmly as he believed in heaven."

Renous turned from the window to the mate. He wished he could thank the man. The old mariner knew his former commander was in trouble and had come to try and wean him from it. He had said nothing of the death of Renous' wife. He had mentioned only the *Marco Polo*, lying now at Tebo's dockyard, and urged, and urged, and urged.

He ached, as he stood there, for the power to be away from this welter of sordid emotion and detail, but since the dreadful news had reached him through the city room of a newspaper, he had not felt the power to move, to act in any way. He wanted the sea he loved, the mighty green cleanliness of it——

"You remember the evenings on the poop, sir?" the mate followed up what he thought was an advantage. "The trade winds blowing steady and you speaking of 'Green Isle'——"

It seemed to him that all through his life those two words had power to conjure him. He remembered, when at school, reading, in an encyclopedia, of Atlantis, the lost continent sunk by the gods. And in his studies, at the Naval Academy, he had seen an old chart of the thirteenth century, the islands of *Hy Brasil*—in the map Andreas Blanco made. And there was Auroras, of which the whalers told. Long before he had bought and fitted out the *Marco Polo* for deep-sea exploration there was always at the back of his mind the dream of *L'île Verte*, as the French sailors called it—a spacious island of golden sands and sparkling waters, with trees green and thick as grass over it, and a multitude of birds in the branches, melodious, vari-coloured. "There life is easiest unto men," he would quote old Proelus. And in due course the myth which had charmed St. Brendan and Marco Polo became in his existence a sort of haven of thought to which he would retire in time of stress.

He never knew whether he quite disbelieved it, and took it in its rightful sense of the ideal state and country which all hearts covet, for the sea breeds a gentle mania in those whose occasions are on its ripe bosom. They are hard-headed, those sailing men, and will admit nothing, after the manner of a good lawyer, but down in their hearts there is a not faint belief in the existence of the Kraken; in the deadly tenacity of Sargasso Sea. At eventime, on watch, they can imagine the golden-waved horses of Neptune against the sunset, and the dolphins of Amphitrite drawing her silver shell, for the ocean is of great depth and many moods and an infinity of monsters are in it; so who may tell?

"Longitude 63.00 and latitude 50.20, sir, you used to say——"

"A manuscript in Trinity College gives it that," Renous laughed. And at the thought of that exactness there came into his mind the memory of the days—oh, it must be ten years now, and she a girl of sixteen!—when he talked about Green Isle with Inga Laurviak, his young manhood's sweetheart. He could remember her ice-blue Norse eyes light with excitement as he spoke of the Welsh myth of the green meadows in the Irish Sea, whither Merlin and his twelve companions sailed to find the secrets of dead Druids, and returned having found it not.

"But one day," he laughed, "I am going to look for the Green Isle. Perhaps, over the horizon——"

"You mustn't find it without me," he could remember her eager features, splendid as a Scandinavian queen is. "Promise me, Gilbert, that you will not find it without me!"

A pang of conscience smote him, for in his own trouble he had not thought of hers. Only Monday he had seen in the papers the news of the death of her husband, Colin Martin, the mural painter, whom he had never known. The country mourned him, so the obituaries went, and she, poor girl! must be mourning him, too. A great painter and a great man. He must forget his own filthy affair, and write her a letter, condoling with her in the dignity of her grief.

"What shall it be, sir?" Matthison broke in. "Shall we up topsails and down the bay? I've got my eye on a diver or two."

There was important work he could do—he knew that. Work of value to the world—the matter of the re-charting and re-exploration of Sargasso Sea. But that was not what was in his mind, but the queer myth of Green Isle. A craving for ideals brought on, no doubt, by this tragedy. Perhaps, across the horizon, in the wake of the sun——

From the street below, high, tremulous, as in the nave of a cathedral, came the shrill hunting cry of a newsboy:

"Extra! Extra! Hold Two in Renous' Affair! Extra! Extra!"

He shivered and winced. The splendid tropic vision with its golden sands and sparkling waters, with its magnificent forestry, to which singing birds clung like swarming bees, was wiped from his mind as a slate is wiped clean by a wet sponge.

"What's the use?" his heart was crying in dumb agony. Outwardly he smiled. "No, Matthison, old comrade!" he shook his head. "Those days are gone!"

In the newspaper accounts of that ghastly thing known as the Renous' affair, you will read of Renous' birth in Vermont; of his years in the Naval Academy and his resignation of his commission to take up exploring of the deep sea. There is much in them inaccurate, but they are in the main true, as facts go. They lack colour. They describe the *Marco Polo* as a sailing ship, failing to give the queer personality of the barquentine he bought from the Prince of Lichtenstein; a dream of a vessel, with her full-rigged foremast and her two trig schooner sails; hull of steel, and remainder of wood made sacred and mellow by time; decks white and hollowed from holy-stoning. A thing Aylward might have painted; she stood against the sky—wire-rigging and white cloud of sail; the edge of her copper sheathing glistening against the blue water-line; sweeping black line above that, and then grey with shining brass ports, all topped by a scarlet rail. She was a bonnie ship, the *Marco Polo*, so bonnie even that the two great drums for sea-sounding on either side, with their miles of piano wire, could not spoil her. The bonniest thing afloat, Renous used to say, and surely he ought to know, whose home had been the sea for ten long years.

Because the sea was in his blood—his grandfather had built clipper ships in Salem days, and his father had died in a tidal wave at Samoa when the three American cruisers were caught on the treacherous shore—because the sea was in his blood, young Renous had gone to it as a man to his inheritance. It was as natural for him to go to Annapolis as another man to go to Harvard, or Princeton, or Yale.

It was on his holidays in Vermont that he first met Inga Laurviak, summering there with Gustav Laurviak, Ambassador of Sweden—a very fine old man, with whiskers and spectacles, very like the portraits of Henrik Ibsen. To her he told his ambitions of the sea, stammering, as a boy will. Her Norse eyes shone; and her body, firm and full-breasted, strong-haunched, with great braids of hair to her knees, quivered, like a race horse, at a fine ambition.

"But why the Navy?" she asked. "Why patrol up and down the seas; sailing, waiting, eternally awaiting war, and breaking your heart if it doesn't come to justify your profession? You have money enough. Why don't you go out yourself; fit out your own ship, as the Prince of Monaco did, and tell us about the surface of the ocean, and the things that are in it, and the earth that is beneath it?"

And then he told her of Green Isle——

All this was very long ago—ten years' time—and many men were dead since then and many born, and countries had waged battles against each other, and new stars came into the sky and old ones unaccountably disappeared. But since then, up and down the world, Renous had gone on his mission, filled with scientific ardour he thought—and yet at nights in the waist of the ship going southward, when the stars of first magnitude appeared, with the white cloud of sail between him and the stars, he could never cease dreaming of Inga Laurviak—those days, when they had been together and talked of the sea, and of going up and down it as through a dim unknown forest, and of Green Isle. She would come back to his thoughts constantly and he would ponder over the queerness of things, how an enthusiasm of hers had set him on the career that made his name. Where was she now? he would ponder, as he watched the Southern Crosses, the False Cross and the True, rise dimly southward. Married, most likely! Ah, well—women will!

He turned up in capitals time after time, achieving great fame, as, for instance, when he proved there was no difference in level between the Pacific and the Atlantic on either side of the Panama Canal. For that the International Council for the Study of the Sea honoured him, and he was asked to lecture to the common people about the wonders of the ocean.

"Of course," the university faculties apologized, "there isn't much to be said. Only literature can fully tell of the beauties——"

"Isn't there?" grinned Renous. And he impishly began to paint the ocean for the multitude until it was plain as a landscape, and gave them facts which made them gape; telling them, for instance, that the Baltic Sea was as shallow as thirty fathoms and the Persian Gulf as fourteen, while the mean depth of the Pacific was 2,240; he told them smilingly that the sea holds in solution 6,700 times as much silver as was taken from all the world's mines from the time Columbus came to America seeking China until 1902.

"And the way to get it out?" the Rosenheim people approached. "Listen, Commander. We got a proposition to make you——"

"You go to the devil!" Renous roared. "I've got respect for the sea!"

The public crowded to him, listening eagerly, as it would have to *Marco Polo*, coming back myth-laden from Cathay. He told it of the whirlpool of Charybdis, which is now Galoforo. He told it of mysteries he had seen on the waters, as when the sea turned milk-white for days as he sailed between Yokohama and Hongkong. "And that I cannot explain," he added simply.

A newspaper man once indulged in a facetious remark.

"Do you believe in the sea-serpent?"

"I do," Renous told him, "because I've seen it."

"But there isn't such a thing!"

"Oh, Lord! *Eppur si muove*! But the damned earth does move, as Galileo said. Now, look here."

He told them of seeing in shallow water, on a bright day, in the Gulf of Mexico, a reptile on the sea-floor, one hundred and sixty feet long, with the head of a serpent, and a body scaled like a crocodile, ring-striped, with four flappers such as turtles have. With his affidavit went the affidavits of the crew, of Sir John Reading, the geologist, who was with him, and of Priam Beckett, of the Peabody Institute. The world was electrified.

"What you have seen is very interesting," the officials of a certain Technological Institute informed him. "The animal is evidently the *Enaliosaurus*, extinct for over a million years——"

"What I have seen is the sea-serpent," Renous snapped with one of his rare exhibitions of temper. "And hundreds of others have seen it, only they fear being laughed at if they mention it. There is a skipper in Brazil who saw the thing, or one of them, twine itself about a schooner and suck it down...." His hearers were grey with terror.

It was about this time, I think, that he met and wedded Estelle Rogers, that little beauty who made such a sensation the year she came out. He met her at a dinner at Clarke the sugar man's. She seemed such an exotic thing, so small, so dark, so perfect, that he could not keep his eyes from her. As for her, she looked tragically, despairingly at the lank, powerful explorer for whom the mysterious and fearful sea had no terrors. It was as though she were a child in the dark, appealing to a grown-up for aid.

"Who is that little dark beauty?" Renous asked his host.

"A daughter of Judge Rogers," Clarke, the smooth, blond man of the world smiled a little uneasily. "Leave her alone," he laughed.

It must have been to her beauty Clarke alluded, Renous thought, fearful of his guest's heart. But leave her alone he did not. He met her father, the sinister, electrocuting judge. Her mother he did not meet. She was in a sanatorium, Renous was told, hopelessly insane. A great pity arose in him for the lonely child, for though she was twenty-one there was much of the child in her.

"It must have been very lonely for you." His great, gentle way gave him the right somehow to probe to the heart.

"It was," she admitted.

"I know what loneliness is," he said. "On the sea..."

Had he been a man of the world—instead of a simple dweller on the deep, uncomplex-minded and strong and fearless as Triton, he might have understood hints and shrugs and carefully careless remarks dropped to him at Piping Rock and Ormond Beach in the year he wooed her. He might have understood when Grant, the neurologist, explained to him that unscrupulous nurses occasionally gave children opium preparations to quiet them and that the habit sometimes clung through life. That was one explanation, Grant averred. It might also be explained through prenatal influence; but the fact remained that there were many young society women hopeless drug addicts. "Do you see?" added Grant lamely.

"New York, from all you say of it, is a damned rotten place," was all Renous mentioned in his simplicity. A shrewd man would have said, "What exactly do you mean? Why do you tell me that?" But Renous was not shrewd.

Her father looked at him queerly when he asked for her hand; shuffled; hawed; granted the request with a strange heartiness.

"Estelle is a strange girl in many ways," the old unmentionable, who had driven his wife mad, clasped his hands unctuously, "but she is sound at the core, sir; sound at the core!"

"I can't see any strangeness in her," thought Renous. All he could see was that piquant, pleading face; with the mouth a trifle too red, too full; the colour somehow pallid; the eyes like dark grapes; the purple hair. Strange that he, with all the mysticism that the sea gives, could not sense that queer intangible doom that seemed to hang about her.... A woman with disaster in her eyes.

They were married, and a strange dramatic pair they made—he, bronzed from the salt air, nearly white haired, broad and spare in the shoulders, waisted like a woman; she, small, perfectly made, with a face that Zuloaga should have painted. There was a year's lecturing before him, and the *Marco Polo* was at Tebo's yacht-yard; the crew dispersed. For that year she accompanied him, hither and thither, from city to city. He was the great lion of science—she the social magnet, driven to dancing, to excitement, to frenzy nearly, as by some strange fury. At times she would seem near death from exhaustion and again her eyes would sparkle and by some miracle her frame would fill with electric energy.

"You're killing yourself, Estelle," he would tell her gently. "You're all nerves. This dancing will break you." He would think for a while. "When this lecture business is over, I'll get out the *Marco Polo*, and take you on a long trip."

"Listen," she would creep into his arms and lean against him with a fierce intensiveness. "Listen, Gilbert," she would whisper. "Never let me go. Promise me, you will never let me go!"

"Heart, I shall never let you go!" he would tell her, aghast at the sudden tears in her eyes.

He wanted to take her on a couple of voyages with him and then buy a great house in the country, on Staten Island, perhaps, where the ships come home. And the *Marco Polo* would go to sea, hunting down some new mystery of the ocean, to return with a cargo of facts for men of science to assort and examine. The years would slip by peacefully until they were old; he happy in his work; she in her house, with something of the strength of a castle in it, standing in its own wide grounds. And about her would be seven sons, some fair as he was, and some exotically dark like herself. And time and time again they would slip off in the fairy barquentine....

"Listen, Estelle," he would try to tell her, "there's a country which mariners have hoped to discover since men first put to sea in ships. A country which some say is off Africa, and some off Brazil, and some say it appears and disappears

every thousand years...."

But try as he would he could not put words to it. For something had gone awry with his dreams. There was something between his soul and the landfall of Green Isle, a strange opacity; a vague and terrible veil; threatening, ruddy weather, which somehow portended doom....

She would not go with him on his first voyage after they were married. "I would be in the way," she objected; and never met his eye. "It would be so lonely," she pleaded afterward, "and all my life, Gilbert, I've been spoiled. Let me stay." He granted that, for he looked on women, as a simple man will, as creatures too fragile for anything but luxury. So he put her in a suite in a hotel on Fifth Avenue. And the *Marco Polo* sailed away.

"Oh, I wish I were going with you," she said fiercely, as the tugboat waited to take her ashore.

"Come then," he said. "Come as you are."

"I can't. I can't." There was a terror in her voice. And she went into the tugboat lightly, and away from his eyes.

He was savage with himself as he ploughed southward, for into his head there would persist in coming the thought of Inga Laurviak, the blond sea-queen with the eyes that were blue as ice. It was unfaithfulness, he told himself viciously; and yet it would come. As he stood abaft the mizzen shrouds with the water lapping, slapping at the bows, and the deep gurgle at the wake behind, he would sense as though she were beside him, with her strong silence and warm, pulsing spirit, a figure from a Norse mythology, watching the ever-changing colour and mood of the sea, listening to the harsh music of the cordage, and dreaming with him that some day, perhaps, there would arise southward the dim verdure of Green Isle.... He would imagine that of Inga. He could see her, too, in his home by the sea, rearing sons all of whom would one day be seamen. And that he could never dream of Estelle, the little exotic with the purple eyes. Her could he only vision coming from her dressmaker's, or under her maid's hands; having tea at the Ritz or dancing at the Colony Club. She always seemed an expensive photograph in a society periodical, not a man's mate and the mother of men!

"Damn it!" he swore. "What am I thinking about at all? Poor kid!"

There was a change in his wife when he returned. He could not but notice it. She no longer went to her old haunts for amusement. She seemed to have dropped Fifth Avenue and chosen, in its place, Broadway. She was uncomfortable at the activities of her social set.

"They're all such hypocrites and bores!" she told her husband with a note of viciousness.

She seemed also to have acquired a new circle of friends—another whose speciality was the upper under-world; a professional dancer of ballroom steps whose reputation was international; a person reputed to be a black magician, a fat, sinister man; a half-dozen members of dubious foreign nobility, Russian, Roumanian, and the like—a very strange assortment!

"Queer bunch you seem to have collected, Estelle," Renous laughed.

"Don't be so narrow-minded, Gilbert." She was petulant. "They're interesting—not like the bores at the Union League!"

They did not seem comfortable in his presence, that macabre agglomeration. No more did she. There was also, about the hotel, an air of furtiveness, on the part of desk officials, bell-boys and the like, as though some secret were kept from him and shared with her—a leering thing.

He went on a lecture tour from coast to coast, a popular series, intended to make the public love what he loved—the sea. She accompanied him, but was restless every instant. She seemed to want to get away. He was puzzled, hurt....

"The worst thing about this drug habit," Grant, the great neurologist, told him on his return, "is the company it leads its slaves into. There is a tendency among addicts to hold orgies in parties, as it were. And at those parties there are scenes, you understand, under the influence of the drug, of which I spare even men of the world details——"

"Poor Grant!" Renous thought. "He has been treating these unfortunates until he has gone mad on the subject, and can speak of nothing else." A hilarious idea occurred to him. "I wonder if he thinks I can be taking drugs?"

"You exaggerate, man," he told his friend. "Heigho! Getting late. I must be off!"

"You poor fool!" said Grant's eyes.

"Listen, dear girl," Renous told his wife seriously, "I'm going off to Europe to give an account of that monsoon discovery at six universities, and I want you to come with me. You're peaked. You're white. You need a trip. And when we come back I'll put everything aside for years and we'll buy a big house on a green hill——"

She patted his big brown hands.

"Now, peaches, you go off without me, and tell them how deep the sea is, and how wet it is, and come right back. And we'll settle down in the big house on the green hill, away..." She grew hysterical for a moment—"away, away from New York, far away!"

Three months he spent in Europe alone, and then returned on the *Rochambeau*, cancelling without warning his reservation on a smaller, slower boat. He wanted to take her by surprise, to know, by her actions on seeing him, whether she really cared any more—a thing he doubted. He walked into the lobby of his hotel.

"Mrs. Renous is not in," the clerk on duty told him with a white, scared face. "A newspaper has been inquiring about something, too," he told Renous. "I think it's important."

He called up Park Row. "What the devil is it?" he asked savagely.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Renous," the answer came, "but your wife's had an accident ... yes, a bad one. Fatal, I'm sorry to say ... under unusual circumstances ... Evidently been victimized ... Is there anything you would care to say?"

What had happened in those two days he could hardly tell. He remembered his friend Grant hurrying helter-skelter to the hotel; his removal to another place; disillusion, agony, shame, the fear of madness; then Matthison...

He drew a sheet of paper toward him:

"Dear Inga Martin," he wrote. "I want you to know how utterly sorry I am for you in the loss of your husband, and how I wish I could say something that would be of help to you in the grief you are feeling—" not a word through all of it of himself or his own tragedy. "I am leaving on a long exploration trip immediately," he added in a manner of explaining why he would never call on her to offer condolence in person. He hesitated how to sign the set phrase. "Yours truly?" "Yours sincerely?" Those words seem so pointless. "I am dreadfully sorry, Inga!" he ended it, "G. Renous."

He wished he hadn't come to see her, he told himself as he walked up the brownstone steps in Fifty-seventh Street—but what could he have done? Inga's note was such a clear call. "I must see you. I cannot very well go to your hotel to talk. Gilbert, please come."

They stood facing each other across the room, and looking at each other while, seemingly, minutes passed. Everything seemed to drop from them, clothes, bodies, room and all, and they stood looking at each other, soul-naked, as though they were dead.

"You never found Green Isle, Gilbert?" her voice came richly to him.

"No!"

She came toward him and took his hands. As she looked at him great tears coursed down her cheeks, like pearls.

"Poor Gilbert!" There was infinite compassion in her tones.

"I didn't come here, Inga, to talk about my affairs, but to sympathize with you in your loss——"

"Poor Gilbert!" she repeated, but there was a new tone in her voice, and there was a smile of agonized irony on her lips. He thought she was about to be hysterical.

"What is it, Inga?"

"Sit down." She motioned him to a couch and took a chair herself, a little in the shade, so that her face was dim to him. "I know you are going away somewhere heartbroken, with your life wrecked. And you are very simple, Gilbert, always on the sea. You don't know that everyone has tragedy somewhere, gentle and simple, either hidden or known. I want to tell you something. I want it to make you remember that these things are incidents. Everyone you meet, Gilbert, has something." Her tones were very restrained, very even.

"When you were down in the Malay Peninsula I married Colin Martin. I'll not say why. I just married. Just as you did. That's all." For an instant her voice grew staccato, hurried. "He was a very handsome, devilish man, dark as Apollyon—you have seen pictures in his obituaries—and a great genius. He was in love with me for a while, a month perhaps. Contrast, you see. And he wanted my money. He was poor."

She raised her head suddenly and looked at him. He could see her face dimly, her eyes shining at him, impressing him with her history.

"Gilbert," her voice had uncontrolled tears in it, "think of six years, six years of a woman's life, without harmony, without love, without children, life grown hideous strangely, through no fault of hers. Think of living with a person in the same house, who, you know, has done you the most terrible injury in the world, and you can say nothing to him because of your pride. But alone, alone all the time, you think of death, praying for it to come, by accident; by illness; somehow. And your continual temptation is to end it yourself, by an overdose of sleeping draught, by carelessness with a gas-jet,—and you shiver suddenly at the cowardice you were about to commit, and you set your shoulders, and you smile ghastly, and you struggle on."

"God, why didn't I know?" Renous was frantic.

"Gilbert, yours hasn't been the only tragedy in the world. Yours has been short and quick. Mine was six years' Gethsemane. Gilbert, when a peasant girl is betrayed, she can leave the scene of her tragedy, and time will make her forget the man, and will heal her. But what will time do for a woman like me, who cannot leave the scene, and before whose eyes the man always is, loathsome, terrible. A peasant girl, Gilbert, is betrayed for love, but I, Gilbert, Colin Martin betrayed me for money."

"Why didn't you leave him?" Renous' voice was harsh, cracked.

"You see, I couldn't, Gilbert. My father died nearly a year ago, and he was Ambassador of Sweden. For the sake of my nation I could not afford scandal. I had to stay in the road I had hewn for myself—and all the time, Gilbert, God forgive me!—I was thinking of you hunting for Green Isle—" a queer husky note came into her rich voice, as of unshed tears. "You were married, and I could picture you and your wife going up and down the world in the *Marco Polo*, the dolphins playing at the bows, and a strange dream in your eyes. And I had told you, the first, to fit out your boat and go search it." Her words came rapidly now, as though she were about to cry, "and I was jealous, Gilbert, jealous——"

"And after your father died, what then?"

"Then it was bad, Gilbert," there could no longer be kept from her voice the muted sobbing. "I was broken. I could do nothing. I couldn't go away. I couldn't even kill myself. And there was something queer in Colin's eyes, something that terrified me. He was as polite, as cold, as distant, as ever. But there was something in his eyes. I found out when he was dead, Gilbert, what it was—" her head dropped in shame—"he was planning to divorce me. He had hired detectives and an actress who would impersonate me." Her tones were hardly above a whisper now, "She was going with a man, somewhere, and they were going to swear it was I——"



"Why didn't somebody kill him?" Renous was white with rage. "Why, in God's name, didn't somebody kill him?"

"You know how he died, Gilbert," Inga's voice grew hushed with awe. "You know how he died? He was out in his car toward Westchester one day when a storm came up, a storm hardly bigger than a handkerchief. A single bolt of lightning hit him, and took him from the face of the earth. I think that even God's mercy was through with Colin Martin, and He just struck!"

She rose unsteadily to her feet, and gave a laugh that was half a cry.

"So you see there is a great deal of trouble in the world, not only for you, Gilbert, but for all of us...."

He had come on deck unnoticed, and as he stood abaft the mainshrouds, leaning over the handrail, he could see the rim of the sun showing in the east. A few minutes, he knew, and it would shoot up like a pyrotechnic display. A fine breeze was blowing northward, bellying the close hauled sails. He glanced about his boat, noting everything, from the drowsy man at the wheel to the white combing of surf at the bows, where the flying fishes skimmed the waves in sudden terror. Above his head he could hear the mewing of gulls and the gurgle of the wake behind.

"Luff her a bit," he could hear the second mate direct the helmsman. "She'll stand it."

His wife had come on deck unknown to him, and leaning against the mizzen-mast she watched him looking eastward. The six days since they had left New York had put colour into her cheeks, and taken the shadows from about her eyes. There was a smile on her lips as she stood there with the dawn breeze about her, in her white skirt and sweater, with her ruddy hair braided thickly about her head like a helmet of gold. A wave slapped the *Marco Polo* on the bows and shot spray over staysails and jibs.

"Ease her when she pitches!" the navigator growled to the man at the wheel.

She moved toward him from the mizzen-mast to the starboard rail, while he stood looking into the east. There was in her lips and her eyes a great radiance...

"What are you looking for, Gilbert?" she asked. One would have said she was about to tease him. "Green Isle?"

"No!" he answered her. His arm drew her close to the rail as the sun shot high above the water-line. "Not any more!" he told her. "No!"

## IX

### A SISTER OF SHINING SWORDS

She was looking at a piece of plate, fragile as silk, where the symbols of the one-winged birds and the tree with interwoven boughs, the Chinese symbols of love, were painted with the lightness of a butterfly touching a flower. All about her, in the shop that was Li Sin's, the light chatter of Fifth Avenue chirped through the sombre, majestic store like the sleepy chorus of birds at dawn. Down in the front of the curio treasure house a trio of actresses were prattling of the latest play. A rotund judge of the Supreme Court was examining a carpet with a more fixed glance than he ever used at the minutes of a case. A Roman Catholic priest was dreaming over a cross of gold and rubies, treasure from Macao, where the sons of Portugal hold their outposts against the Golden Hordes. A sedate curator of a museum, a thin, white-faced man with a threadbare overcoat and a straggling black beard, was struggling against the temptation to steal a tiny vase. Again Jeannette Baird looked at the plate with its mystic romantic symbols. A queer flush ran over her face and a smile—the smile of brides—hovered in her eyes and lips for an instant.

Li Sin, square-faced, high-cheeked, modest in brown tweeds, was smiling also. She flushed again as she caught his eye. She put the plate down, and looked him squarely in the face.

"I am going to be married," she said.

Li Sin nodded. There was as much happiness in his face as though he had unearthed an unknown lyric of Po-Chin's.

"To Captain Patrick Burgoyne," he suggested.

"Yes, to Patrick Burgoyne," she answered. The Manchu was smiling broader than ever. She caught her breath and regarded him fixedly. She had the air of a mother who had discovered a child in the act of an innocuous prank.

"It was you who introduced Patrick Burgoyne to me."

"It was," Li Sin confessed.

"Li Sin," she said, blushing furiously, half laughing, a soft look in her eyes as though in an instant a veil of tears might come—"Li Sin, I believe you are nothing but a scheming old matchmaker!"

Now, when Peter de Cuyler Baird, through a sense of righteousness and no sense of politics, had supported by his wealth the programmes of three successive party administrations, the party heads, in grateful remembrance, decided that some honour must be shown him.

A tall, spare man, with fair hair and fair moustache, very much on the received conception of an English cavalry officer—nothing missing but the monocle; a minor poet of distinct imagination but of inability of execution, a dreamer, it was difficult to find exactly what to do for him. A place in the Cabinet was impossible. He seemed to fit into no distinct committee of public works.

"I've got it," the shrewd Secretary of State rapped the table. "We'll make him an ambassador." Again commenced the process of elimination. Men of affairs, shrewd, hard-headed men, politicians of the first rank of men raised in the service, were required for the European courts.

"Constantinople?" the President suggested.

"I don't think so." The Secretary of State frowned. "Something might happen."

"Greece," the Secretary suggested to Baird. "Where Byron died, and wrote poems, and—ahem, histories, and—ahem, essays, and things."

"I thank you, but I don't think I should care for Greece," Baird replied to the offer. "I really want no place at all. I was only too glad to help."

"I've got it," the Secretary exploded. "We need a good, capable man in Peking. You've got to go. It's your duty."

"I think I should like China," Baird answered.

So off to China went Peter de Cuyler Baird, taking with him a library of works on the Celestial millions, a desire to see the Porcelain Tower at Nanking, an ambition to write a history of China in verse which he would entitle: "Cathay: An Epic," and lastly his daughter, Jeannette, an orphan of five years old.

His friends pleaded with him to leave her behind. They said it was practically infanticide to drag a child into a country where cholera and yellow fever and leprosy abound.

Old Peter looked about in his vague way. "She is a very healthy child," he said. And then: "I should be very lonely without her." And at the last sentence his friends gave way. He was such a gentle soul.

And healthy Jeannette Baird proved to be. In Peking, surrounded by a host of Mongol servants, she grew up strong and beautiful as she would have in her own healthy New York. She grew up speaking the Pekingese dialect of China much more fluently than English, as British children in India speak Bengali. A queer little figure in embroidered blouse and skirt—though with fair hair and blue eyes like her father's—she might have been one of the girls of Su, the darlings of the King. Everyone loved her. Placid mandarins in horn spectacles smiled with indescribable benevolence toward her. "Chai-Net," as her name was transposed, was adored by her attendants. The only flaw they found in her was that her feet were slim and healthily developed, instead of being bound in the lily form. But that, they agreed, was a custom of the barbarous Americans, something akin to the habit that other savages were said to have of wearing rings in the nose.

And little by little the graceful, poetic tentacles of the Yellow Land fastened themselves on Peter de Cuyler Baird, as they have done on other men—on Homer Lea, if instances are wanted; on Sir Robert Hart, that shrewd Scots-Irisher from canny Belfast, and on a great English general whose name must never be said. He lost himself in the study of Chinese literature and customs. He acquired much wisdom from owl-like Chinese mandarins, learning the futility of swimming furiously in the abysmal sea of time. For those terms the party left him in his peaceful ease, and in those twelve years his daughter grew up like a straight lily, knowing more about the Analects of Confucius than about the Epistles of Paul; more of Tu Fu, who is called the God of Verse, than about her rightful heritage of Longfellow; walking about in a dream about the great wall that Tawak builded, instead of hustling briskly up the Fifth Avenue of which Li Sin spoke.

For Peter de Cuyler Baird made the acquaintance and gained the friendship, which was no small thing, of Li Sin, the greatest merchant of Oriental *objets de vertu* that America has ever known. His place on Fifth Avenue has more treasures than have the silent Greek monks on Mount Athos. It is not a shop. It has more the feeling of a cathedral. From the Oriental tapestries on the walls, from the startling jewels in their cases, from the graven Buddhas, and the fragile vases, from the lutes of gold and lutes of jade, exhales a perfume of valour and romance, of brave deeds done, of fine chivalry, of ineffable wisdom—a dim, holy place which connoisseurs approach with awe, and of which pretty women make a fashion.

And to Peter de Cuyler Baird it was told, because he was a discreet man, that Li Sin was not Li Sin, but Hsieu Po, a great name, a Manchu noble of Tientsin. To Peter de Cuyler Baird it was also told that Li Sin was a great physician, ranking with Li Jo-Hu, and with On Yang Hsieu of Jo-eh, and that his services were at the disposal of anyone, but he would take no fee for them, deeming them Heaven-sent. And Peter de Cuyler Baird, having been long in China now, understood how a Manchu noble could have a store, for it was deemed in wisdom that a fortune garnered honestly in the marts of commerce was equally noble with honours gained with chivalry on the field of battle by Western men. And it came to pass that Peter de Cuyler Baird died suddenly one quiet night with a smile on his lips, leaving his fortune to his daughter, and behind him a translation of the T'ang Poets into metrical English verse—a crime more atrocious than the thing called mayhem, but pardonable to such a gentle, vague soul. And Li Sin, who was in Macao at the time, rushed northward, and brought home to Gramercy Park and the care of two gentle Old World aunts the young woman of seventeen, Jeannette Baird.

Captain Patrick Burgoyne, black- and curly-headed, blue-eyed, square of face, bulky of body and spare of flesh, groomed like a thoroughbred race horse from the shiny tip of his silk hat to his pearl-grey spats, strolled down Fifth Avenue from the Plaza. There was a subtle pleasure in the wearing of correct clothes after three years of furs in Greenland, a pleasure to the sting of a shower bath after a hard day's work in the city. Before Li Sin's store he paused and grinned—the losing grin of a good sportsman. He walked in. He looked over the squat Celestial as the spire of a church might overshadow the modest house alongside.

"Well?" asked Li Sin. He had not seen the Irish explorer for three years, but his greeting was as offhand as though they had parted yesterday.

"No luck!" Burgoyne laughed. "I don't believe there was ever a mammoth in Greenland."

"Too bad." Li Sin nodded his head. He had felt all along that Burgoyne's search for mammoth ivory would be in vain, but he was not the sort to rub it in with a tactless remark. "Three years gone!"

"Not quite altogether," Burgoyne laughed. "I did some exploring work up there, and I think I've got some new data on the upper inlets."

"Of course you have," said Li Sin, with a glint of admiration in his slant eyes.

If you look up Captain Patrick Burgoyne in that red Mecca called Who's Who, you will find his age, which is thirty-two. You will find details of his birth-place, Omagh, in the County Tyrone, Ireland—an abominable spot, with the worst golf course in the country. You will learn that he acquired a commission in the Leinster Fusiliers; that he transferred to the Rhodesian Rifles three years later with the rank of captain; that he left them to explore Africa; that he is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Now, if you want to know of his standing as an explorer, you will consult the proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society—a series of the most uninteresting pamphlets ever written by the hand of man. You will find articles there signed: "P. Burgoyne," giving the depths and shallows of uninteresting rivers, the barometric pressure on the tops of mountains with weird, unpronounceable names. They are read occasionally by the sort of people who make encyclopedias.

And if you want to know anything about the real Patrick Burgoyne, you will have to ask Sven Hedin, or the Duca degli Abruzzi, or old Bill Snyder, keeper at the New York Zoo for so many years. They will tell tales of him in Africa, when he tracked down the pygmy people of the Congo, or when he set out alone, except for native bearers, into the vast alluvial swamp south of Leopoldville, where, the rumour goes the pterosaur spreads its wings at night, and the unspeakable creatures that began with the creation of the world exist in that hot and damp inferno. Six months later he returned shaken and white—and afraid!

"What did you find out?" they clamoured at him on his return.

"Nothing!" he answered grimly. But for months his life was fought for in a great hospital. And at his ravings the doctors shuddered and nurses grew pale as death.

Abruzzi will tell you that of all men he saw but one whom all natives of all lands helped because of his glorious, breaking smile. Li Sin, whom he had met in Damascus, in Bokhara, in Teheran, in Wadi-Halfa, in Lhasa in Tibet, will tell you of the occasion when Burgoyne rescued a leper from stoning by Turkomans. His arm about the unfortunate devil, his great revolver out, his jaw set, he drove the threatening Turkomans before him until he got the unclean one into safe hands.

"A Chinaman might have done it," Li Sin says, "a Bengali even, or any Oriental, but a Western man, who fears the silver plague more than death—that is Burgoyne!"

Over the cages of many zoological gardens, where queer arctic or tropical beasts are found, you will find the inscription: "The Gift of Captain Patrick Burgoyne," and if you are interested and can gain the confidence of that queer, close-mouthed fraternity who tend zoological exhibits, they will tell you with pride that Burgoyne's specimens were as happy and contented on arriving in alien lands as they were in their own icy homes, or in the bush of their native forest. There was something strangely tender in the way he handled animals. And there was something strange in the trust they gave him.

"The dam'dest thing I ever knew," used to begin poor Bonavita, who is dead; and he would tell of the small cougar which Burgoyne had found somewhere in Columbia. A blind kitten, it had wandered away into the Columbian forest. Burgoyne, knowing it would die if left unaided, picked it up and fed it on milk. At Cartagena, three months afterward, he tried to give it away. None would have it.

"Well, damn you! I suppose I've got to take you along!" he addressed the queer pet affectionately. He took it to New York, caged and protected. He handed it over to the Bronx Gardens officials. In three days they telephoned him it was dying of a broken heart. He had to take it with him to Dublin, to London, to Paris. In each city he had to exercise it on a length of chain, blushing all the time.

"I feel like a musical-comedy star looking for notoriety!" he swore. But he had the same affection for it that another

man might have for a dog.

In Glasgow, on a lecture tour, he left the cougar in charge of the Royal Botanic Gardens, but through the belief in its tameness, as they saw it with Burgoyne, the keepers were lax in turning it into a cage. Somebody opened the door to feed it titbits. Like a flash, the cougar had leaped over their heads and had picked up Burgoyne's scent like a bird dog. It slipped through the thoroughfares, snarling, barking, now and then bewildered at the crowds. It arched its back as if to spring. A policeman pumped his revolver into it. It turned over on its back, clawing. It died.

"I'm sorry, Captain Burgoyne"—the lord mayor made a special visit to his hotel to see him—"from the bottom of my heart I'm sorry."

"It was the only thing to do," Burgoyne answered.

But never again did Patrick Burgoyne return to Glasgow.

"And where are you going now?" Li Sin asked.

"War," replied Burgoyne. "Do you know I didn't hear about the darned thing until I came to the Danish settlement at Dvorhag?"

"I thought so," the Manchu nodded. "You had better stay in New York for a month or so first. You need something human between times. You can't go straight from Greenland to what France is now."

"Yes, I think I had better," Burgoyne nodded.

He was standing in the shadow of a great stone Buddha as he was speaking. There was the rustle of a dress, the patter of feet, and a tall, straight young woman came up to Li Sin. Suddenly she noticed Burgoyne.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she told Li Sin, and turned to go.

"Jeannette," the Manchu smiled. "I want to present an old friend of mine, an old friend in spite of his youth, Captain Patrick Burgoyne. Burgoyne, you have heard me speak of Peter Baird's daughter. This is she!"

"So you are Patrick Burgoyne," she said simply. "I have heard so much of you from Li Sin, and you are exactly what I thought you would be like."

Burgoyne stammered for an instant. Three years' residence with no women to look on except the flat-faced, thick-lipped, exceedingly greasy, incredibly fat, and amazingly filthy Eskimos had not kept him in training for the fair women of his own world.

"I have to go up to my laboratory," Li Sin told him cruelly. "I want you to take him out to tea, Jeannette, and tell him all that has happened in the world since he left it."

"I should love to," she said, with that smile of hers, the quick parting of lips that suggested a rose-bud glistening with the dew of dawn.

The Manchu did not go up immediately to his laboratory. He watched Burgoyne pilot her to a hansom, and hand her in, as though she were a fragile piece of ling ware—something more tender than silk, more costly than rubies. Hong Kop, the lean, the silent Cantonese who was Li Sin's body servant, came silently into the store. He smiled as he saw the twain.

"Why do you smile, Hong Kop?" Li Sin came up behind him.

The Cantonese bowed. "The brook of Wang-hei-ho is wide," he quoted, and slipped through the shop like a shadow.

"But two outstretched arms can span it," Li Sin finished the proverb, and he too was smiling.

In a city where Patrick Burgoyne knew no women, beyond the staid wives of his explorer friends and the bespectacled, exceedingly proper but indubitably ugly women who came to his occasional lectures, it was, by all manner of logic, inevitable that he should seek the society of Jeannette Baird, which she accorded him without stint. And, as for her, Patrick Burgoyne was a revelation. For her circle was bound by the love of two aunts (who dressed in black and lived in Gramercy Park and preserved the samplers of the Baird womenfolk, dating back to the days of good Queen Anne), by the affection of Li Sin, by the acquaintance of a young circle with whom she was not intimate—for she never could learn to smoke, abhorred cocktails, and dancing after one o'clock in the morning tired her, healthy girl as she was. When Burgoyne tucked his sport shirt up for golf, there was a tremendous scar from elbow to wrist. A leopard had made an unexpected jump at him, and he had broken its flight with his forearm, as a boxer would block an opponent's lead.

"You might have been killed!" She shuddered as he told her the story in laughing, staccato sentences.

"Nasty little beggar he was," Burgoyne laughed, and he began to mangle up a bunker with his niblick.

And swimming—and it was a sight to see Pat swim, with that easy, flashing stroke of his learned from the Kroos of the Gold Coast—she saw the red depression about his left knee. A cobra had bitten him there in India, and the bite had to be hacked with a knife, filled with gunpowder, and a match set to it. Jeannette Baird grew white and sick at the story.

"It hurt," she said foolishly. "It hurt."

"It hurt?" He turned to her with his whimsical smile. "To be sure, it hurt. It's been my only operation, and I've been talking about it ever since."

I think they were indubitably in love with each other from the first instant they met. That woman with the slight athletic build, with the face of a spirit such as Benda might draw; pale, regular, like some fine lily; with the dim background of mysticism in her that had been the gift of the Golden Empire to one who loved it, it was impossible that Burgoyne should not be smitten by her as by a fever. There had been no thought of women in Burgoyne's life, beyond an infatuation for a New York debutante, which faded quickly, and the affair with the Russian countess who wanted to elope with him—an insane, quixotic, romantic thing that ended in pathos, and which I would invite murder by telling. These two things faded into a dim horizon, scattered, vanished, when the glorious sunlight of Jeannette Baird came across his path.

As for her, many-hued, delicate, the thing called love came like dawning. It burst into a red sweep of cloud and sun. And then gradually the clear brightness of it ran through her veins like a rare wine. Night after night, when she left Burgoyne she would look out of her window over the moonlit Bishop's Garden and finger the lute that Li Sin had given her—the lute that had been an Empress's. *Yu, Kung*, and *Chih* went the soft notes of the scale, now a murmur of drowsy birds and now thrumming boldly like the music of the Dragon-Boat Festival, and she would dream of the great epics of love, of the great T'ang poem which was Ming Huang's and Tai Chen's of the Thousand Songs, of Yang-ti the Strong and of Fai-Yen the Beauteous One, vague honey-coloured visions.

They might never have spoken to each other of the thing born in them, she because of her innate modesty and Burgoyne because he could never believe that such a vision of beauty could be his. A very modest man is Patrick Burgoyne. Monarchs have pinned orders on his breast, and he has hastened from their presence to hide them in the bottom of trunks. "Wear them?" he would stutter if the thing were suggested. "Is it a fool you want to make of me, or a sandwich man for a jeweller's shop?" But he was happy to be near her, happy to be noticed by her. And this he testified to by singing in a cracked, falsetto voice, off-tune, an Irish ballad in which he stated he was an orphan (which he was not—Sir Kevin and Lady Burgoyne being the haldest people I know) and an exile (he had the freedom of the city of Dublin somewhere in his pockets), and that he was about to lay his aged bones in a pauper's grave. This was a sign he was enjoying himself supremely.

They had gone down one spring morning to Cold Spring Harbour for a day with some friends. They were returning in the evening. They were standing on the edge of the platform waiting for their train. A special came crashing down the

track from Wading River. A porter trundled a truck along the platform. Unconsciously Burgoyne stepped out of the way. Fifty yards distant the express thundered.

"Look out!" some one called.

He lost his footing, stumbled, and fell on the track. Like a conjurer's trick, he whirled around on his face, his legs and arms outstretched taut, every atom of air expelled from his huge chest. Some one caught Jeannette Baird as she leaped forward. Like a crash of ordnance the train went past. Her scream cut through the air like a jagged bolt of lightning. As the last car passed Burgoyne jumped up. He began dusting the collar of his coat.

"I've got a red-hot cinder on the back of my neck," he half shouted. "Where is that porter until I murder him!"

He looked around for Jeannette Baird. She had slipped fainting to the platform. In one prodigious sweep he had gathered her into his arms.

"Oh, *machree, machree*," he crooned to her. "Oh, *machree, machree*!"

There is no need to describe those first months of the marriage of Burgoyne and Jeannette Baird. To every man and woman in this world at some allotted time comes that sweeping golden flood that carries them whirling onward past the solid banks of material things. There is that time when one awakens suddenly to the glory of the universe—to the wonder of the depth of blue in the heavens and the marvels of flowers, and the brown body of the homing bee. The ragged fleeces of the clouds seem the work of some Titan silversmith, and clearly, for an ineffable instant, one hears the mighty harmony of the fixed and wandering stars. There is no man or woman who at some time does not experience it. No, not one!

So, for two months, Patrick Burgoyne and his wife Jeannette lived in a world as much apart from the hustle and rage of New York as the world of the little folk of the hills is from the solid world of men. If such a thing as adoration can be given to a human being, Burgoyne gave it to that beautiful, mystical wife of his. If such a thing as worship is proper for men, it was lavished on Patrick Burgoyne.

"I'm so happy I will die," Jeannette used to tell him with tears in her eyes. "Can it last, Patrick, can it last?"

"When the war's over," he would tell her, "I'll come back to you. And together we'll roam the wide world, *machree*. And we'll never see the time passing until we're white-haired and drowsy with sleep. And we'll die together, and it will begin again among the stars."

It might have been her early love of Chinese wisdom and Chinese poetry that made war a vague, intangible thing to Jeannette Burgoyne. It might have been the strain of her dreaming father in her. Though she said nothing, she could never believe Burgoyne would leave her side.

There came a day when Burgoyne frowned viciously, began pacing the room, began tapping his fingers on the table. She felt a queer terror grip her heart. "Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

"Oh, no! Nothing. Nothing at all," he told her. She looked at him with dumb, stricken eyes.

A month before Burgoyne had offered his services to his country through the medium of his embassy. He was glad in the heart of him, though a trifle ashamed at that feeling, at the delay in the answer. It meant so much longer with Jeannette.

Came the day when he lunched with an attaché at Sherry's. The diplomat hailed him with forced humour. "Got a job for you!"

"Is it with the Leinsters?" Burgoyne asked eagerly.

The attaché shook his head. He looked away.

"Is it the Rhodesian Rifles, then?" asked Burgoyne.

"The fact of the matter is," the diplomat stated uneasily, "the Government would be glad if you'd investigate the African situation up in Mashonaland. There's something queer going on there."

Burgoyne laid down his knife and fork.

"Any intelligence officer can do that," he said.

"I'm sorry, old man," Barrett, the attaché, said. "You won't take it, then."

"I'm damned if I will!"

"I don't blame you," the diplomat told him. He had been at school at Portora with Burgoyne. "I'll try again."

So, impatient and restless, now frowning in anger, now in violent demonstrations to Jeannette, Burgoyne raged about like a panther in a cage. And Jeannette, looking at him fearfully, felt a tugging at her heartstrings.

"His love is drooping and dying," she thought to herself, "like a plucked rose."

When he was out, no longer did the tapestry of melody wreath itself about the cherished lute. She held herself upright and tears rolled down her face.

*"The birds have quit the hushed hillside," she sang the mournful melody of Li Hua. "The east wind wails like troubled ghosts who go hither and thither in ominous gloom. Athwart the trampled grass the sunlight pales. The warm blood in my veins is like chilled water in the frozen brooks."*

There was somewhere in the Baird family a grandfather—or was it a great-grandfather?—who belied the family standard of quietude and gentleness, and who had quadrupled the fortune by canny work in the shipping business. There was talk of his blackbirding to the French and English Indies. There were tales of his whaling ships leaving New Bedford armed to the teeth, and of their coming back laden with oil, while the barques of competitors came back not at all. These things may not be true, for lies attach themselves about strong men, as barnacles foul a ship.

But, true or not, a flare of the old man's blood and spirit glints forth occasionally in a Baird. It may lie dormant, and then a word, an occasion, may set it aflame. It dies out after, but that is a dangerous minute.

And now, while Patrick Burgoyne paced the floor, looked this way and that, drew paper toward him and threw it away again, the spirit of old Hell-Fire Baird began to light softly like the first glow of tinder in the breast of Jeannette. She began to brood with her eyelids half closed.

Impatiently Burgoyne went out of the house one day, and uptown to his club. He wanted to keep all worry from his wife until the last moment possible. He told her nothing of his plans. "Good God!" he thought, "poor child! That will come soon enough!"

From his club he got the embassy on the long-distance, Barrett talking.

"I just got word this minute, Patrick," the attaché told him. "You're appointed, if you'll take it, to the staff of a diplomatic mission coming across here. Go out and buy a hat with a red band. Congratulations, my boy!"

"My compliments to the diplomatic mission to the United States," Burgoyne's words dropped into the receiver like icicles, "and they can go to the devil. I'm a fighting man, and not a pink-tea liar."



He rushed back to the house and began slinging his things together. He called for Jeannette.

"Mavourneen, I've got to run up to Canada in an hour," he told her. There was a tremor in his voice.

"Well, why not?" she said coldly.

He looked at her strangely in a sort of daze. He couldn't understand her. He had expected her to cry, to throw her arms about him, to plead to be allowed to come. He remembered the words of some man at the club, a man who had had much experience with women, which Burgoyne had not. The saying was to the effect that women acted strangely at times, and when they acted strangely the best thing to do was to let them alone.

"Well, I'll be going," he said weakly.

"Go, by all means," she told him politely.

The door had hardly closed when her rage began. So this was love, she told herself bitterly. So this was what she had dreamed. The whole fabric of her dreams and visions had been ripped ruthlessly from bottom to top. She had given herself all to this man, body and heart and the faint, aromatic, precious thing which was her soul. He had pawed it, mauled it, played with it, amused himself with it, and then suddenly tired of it, as a man will of a flower worn all day in his buttonhole, of a certain tie, of a pair of spats. A sort of fierce modesty flamed within her. She, Jeannette Baird, to have been treated thus! She thrust her hands to her burning face.

"Let him go back to his bears and wolves," she said scornfully. "Let him go back to his savage lands. It is what he is fit for!"

All that night she lay awake, at times cold with scorn, and at times her face wet with tears. She held her pillow to her mouth to choke her sobs. Dawn came and the day drew on with leaden, lagging feet. Another hideous night, and Burgoyne came with the morning.

He ran—he could not wait to walk—into the little morning room where she sat before her untasted breakfast.

"Look at me!" he shouted joyfully.

His shoulders were bulging beneath a khaki tunic. Riding breeches glared out from his knees. Puttees wound upward from his heavy boots.

"I'm a Tommy," he gurgled. "I'm a plain private in a Canadian artillery regiment." He dived forward to catch her in his arms. "I've got two days' leave, and I've come all the way down to spend a few hours with you."

She stopped his spontaneous rush with a cold glance. "Well?" she asked frigidly.

"It was the only thing to do," Burgoyne explained. "When I get over to the other side—"

"I'm not interested, I'm afraid."

Burgoyne looked at her blankly. "Are you cracked, Jeannette?" he exploded.

"I'm not crazy, if that's what you mean. I know what I'm saying. We've been married three months now, and for a month and a half you've been trying to get away. Now, you've got away. You ought to be satisfied."

"Look here, Jeannette, for God's sake! You—"

"Patrick Burgoyne," she faced him, "if you had really cared for me, you'd have stayed here, where we were so happy for those two months. But you never cared for me. You were eager to get away."

"But you don't understand, girl"; he threw his hands apart. "I had to go. Would you have me stay here while my old comrades and my old friends are being killed—"

"I don't care," she said cruelly. He came toward her.

"And as for not caring for you, Jeannette," he told her; "if I could take my heart out of my body and lay it at your feet, I'd do it, by God! girl! if anything—"

"Well, here's something for you, Patrick Burgoyne," she said fiercely. "I care as little for you as for the fly on that windowpane. If there's one person on earth I detest, it's you. And I want you to know it!"

"Jeannette!" he implored.

"Please go!"

"For Heaven's sake, Jeannette, think of what you're saying. You're not meaning it, surely!"

"Will you please go?" There was a tired frown on her forehead, and she turned her head away. She made an impatient gesture with her hand.

He straightened himself suddenly and, swinging around with a click, went out through the door. She heard the big front door close and his firm, swinging tread going down the street. Every stride away from her seemed to tug at her heart as though a rough cable were tearing at the delicate organism of it, but she would not call him back. She would not. Never! Never! No!

For a month, now, the reports that the silent Cantonese, Hong Kop, had been bringing to Li Sin were steadily growing more and more serious. The Jeannette Baird of the days before Burgoyne appeared seemed to have vanished into thin air, and a feverish, hardened woman to have taken her place. The younger set, who had found her to be such a prude, as they termed it, now welcomed her with open arms. The abhorred cocktail had no longer any repulsion for her. The dances that lasted until morning found her going rhythmically at dawn. And men congregated about her as buzzards might over a dying man. There was John Van Rensselaer Adams, half decent. There was Major Lefferts, rotten to the core. And there was Rodney Keston, a slimy, cunning thing.

And, strange to say, it was to Rodney Keston, of all men, that Jeannette Burgoyne seemed to incline. A pale, soft, slight man, with a neat black beard and an ironic manner, and with something utterly effeminate about him, he was of the type which honest men feel should be stamped under heel as they crush the loathsome thing. One would fear hitting him, lest, instead of the swinging fist striking honest flesh and bone, it should plunge into some ulcerous mass, revolting, unthinkable.

"The only thing to do with a man like that," someone said, "is to bury him alive in lime! And yet, somehow, women like him. It's unbelievable!"

He did something for a living, did Rodney Keston—painted miniatures, or was an interior decorator, or something obnoxious of the kind. His talk was continually of art and letters, and he spoke off-handedly of strange, exotic works, of poets who used words for painting instead of writing, of novelists who created their heroes out of devil worshippers. Perhaps it was her reaction from Burgoyne—Burgoyne with the clean eye and the set jaw, Burgoyne with the two swinging arms, Burgoyne the smiling, that drove her to companionship with the flaccid, pale and melancholy charlatan with his eternal twaddle of super-art. And of the new set with whom she had come in contact, who knew vaguely that her husband had gone for a soldier, there were some who sneered openly and some who were disgusted and some who laughed.

"He's not such a fool as he looks," they told one another. "He's after her money. He'll get her to divorce this soldier gink—and then, oh, boy!"

There is something incredible in how the Chinese come to know matters which seem out of their ken. Hong Kop, the

mysterious, had no entry to the places affected by Jeannette Burgoyne and her protégé, or admirer, or whatever the beast might be called. By some intuition he appeared to know of every occurrence, and every word between them. To Li Sin he reported faithfully and in detail.

"Am I to kill this man Keston?" he suggested gently to his master. He felt longingly at the knife in his sleeve.

"Umm," Li Sin pondered for an instant. A twinge of scorn ran across his face. "No." The Cantonese bowed.

"You will go down to Chai-Net, Hong Kop," Li Sin ordered. "And you will tell her that I want her to take an automobile ride with me in the morning. I want to show her something. At six o'clock, Hong Kop."

The big grey touring car slipped westward from Gramercy Park. Faintly the noise of traffic had begun, a dull, rumbling sound like a drowsy sleeper walking. It swished through the grimy West Side. Hong Kop, the inscrutable, drove her with the easy motion of a gondola. In the rear Jeannette Burgoyne, erect and watchful, was studying the grave features of Li Sin.

"I knew you Chai-Net, when you were hardly the size of the child in the street there," he pointed to a pig-tailed girl of eight, bringing in milk from a doorstep. He was silent for a moment.

"I knew you when you were a young girl, Chai-Net, when I used to bring you presents from the New York you never knew, and I brought you back here, Chai-Net. And I introduced you to your husband, Chai-Net."

She made a quick, abrupt gesture.

"No, you will listen to me, Chai-Net, to Li Sin, who am old, to Li Sin who knew you all your life. And who picked you a husband, Chai-Net."

They had run through the slips to a ferryboat and were crossing now. The fresh, caressing wind of the East River came to them with a shock as of sprayed water.

"You do not know Patrick Burgoyne, Chai-Net. Look! There is the dawn still in the sky. I have often seen Burgoyne look at it; get up and laugh. 'Here's a bid for fortune,' he used to say, and that day he was off to find the lost Oasis of Sahara, or to chart the Azof Sea. A great poet and a great wanderer, and a great man, Chai-Net."

"That's all he wants—that! Not me!" she said chokingly.

"He will share all that with you, Chai-Net."

They had emerged on the Jersey shore. Hong Kop swung the car southward along the water front. "But you have got one rival, Chai-Net. And that takes him from you now."

She sat erect as if struck in the face. She flushed red. "A rival!"

"A rival, Chai-Net."

She sat back limply. A flood of colour came into her face. "Oh, shamed me!" she cried softly, reverting to the soft-toned Pekingese of her youth "Never again can I raise my head, Li Sin. Never again. Oh, shamed me, Li Sin! Oh, shamed me!"

"Look up, Chai-Net," Li Sin told her. "There is something I want you to see."

The rapid, shuffling steps of troops shuddered down the street. An officer came into sight, his revolver dangling at his thigh.

"You have never seen troops before, Chai-Net, troops going into war. I want you to see them, Chai-Net."

The regiment swung down the street, their jaws set, their faces drawn. There was no sound of bugles, no flurry of drums. "Look at them, Chai-Net," Li Sin went on. "They are not laughing. They are not enjoying themselves. No bands are playing. They are going into war!"

She was looking at them curiously. Somehow she had imagined a display of blue and gold lace, of people cheering, of bands playing, of hand-clapping, and waving handkerchiefs. Somehow the grim silence thrilled her, the set faces, the determination, the glint of the sun on rifles, the air of deadly business to hand.

"Look at the boy there, with the chubby cheeks. He should be laughing or dancing with girls. Look at the seriousness of the sergeant, the lean fellow with the scar. I know the white-haired major there; he leaves his wife and three children behind."

He saw a dawn of wonderment on her face; a sort of awe, such as one might feel in front of elemental forces.

"They may never get over, Chai-Net. They may be drowned as dogs are drowned. There are those who will never return. They have to go. Every fighting man has to go. Patrick Burgoyne has to go."

He laid his hand on hers for an instant. "There is your rival, Chai-Net."

A short rasping order and the troops stopped. The sun had risen over the tops of a ridge of clouds. He flashed on the burnished pieces and they turned suddenly into a forest of silver swords.

"Do you remember, Chai-Net, the song of Yang Kwei-fei:

*In hearts and gems I entertained my Lord.  
I danced to the Rainbow Skirt and Feather Jacket air.  
In the clouds, he said, he saw my light robes trail,  
And roses were as nothing to my cheeks.  
The tireless shuttles of the eternal stars  
Should never see him leave me, so he said.*

*The dragon flag is floating in the sun:  
The drum is throbbing and the trumpets blow:  
My Lord is leaving me; my king; my own.  
I mount the Gibbons' Tower and I watch  
The tall spears glitter by the Lake of Shang.  
My Lord is gone!*

*There was naught else could bring him from my side  
But the roll of battle chariots and the Tatar knives.  
No weeping from me, now I know myself  
The sister of shining swords. Chieh! Chieh!*

He paused for a minute. He held her hands. "Will you telegraph to Canada, Chai-Net?" he asked. A grey-haired colonel came toward the car. He shook hands with the Manchu. "This is no Boxer picnic," he told Li Sin—"nor sailing into Santiago with the bands playing. This is the most serious thing we've seen since the Revolution!"

They talked for a few minutes. The grizzled officer waved good-bye. Li Sin turned around to Jeannette. She was not there. "Where is Chai-Net, Hong Kop?" he asked.

"She went up the street a little way," Hong Kop replied in his Cantonese singsong. "She was crying, but her head was high. And her eyes were like a young queen's."

[End of *An Alley of Flashing Spears and other stories*, by Donn Byrne]