

There Are Victories

By

Charles Yale Harrison

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: There are Victories

Date of first publication: 1933

Author: Charles Yale Harrison (1898-1954)

Date first posted: Apr. 7, 2019

Date last updated: Apr. 7, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190435

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

By the same author

NOVELS

THERE ARE VICTORIES
A CHILD IS BORN
GENERALS DIE IN BED

BIOGRAPHY

CLARENCE DARROW

THERE
ARE VICTORIES

CHARLES YALE
HARRISON

Covici • Friede • Publishers
New York

COPYRIGHT, 1933, by CHARLES YALE HARRISON

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

for EDNA

*Ther-with Fortune seyde “chek here!”
And “mate!” in the myd point of the chekkere.*

—CHAUCER, *Death of Blanche*

Note

There Are Victories is a work of fiction
and no person should identify himself
with any of the characters therein.

There Are Victories

—(I)—

The Mother Superior slept badly that night. Shortly after midnight she dressed and wandered through the long, dimly lit corridors, looking into doorways, nodding to the sisters on duty. Outside of the dormitory of *les petites* she paused, listening. From behind the heavy oak Gothic door she heard the slender cry of a weeping child and the soothing undertones of Sister Theresa as she comforted the little one. Soon the frightened sobbing of the child subsided and when all was quiet she entered the large, airy dormitory. Near the door, under a crucifix, Sister Theresa sat reading a prayer book. She rose.

“Reverend Mother,” the Sister murmured respectfully. She lowered her eyes and observed with deep satisfaction the sweeping fold of her dress as it broke over her high arching instep.

“Who was the frightened one?” the Mother Superior asked. She wrinkled her seventy-year-old face as she smiled gently.

“The new little girl—Ruth Courtney.”

“Ah,” the Mother Superior said with sympathetic understanding, nodding her head slowly.

“She sat up screaming,” Sister Theresa went on, “and nearly wakened the others.”

“Did she call for anyone?”

“She sat up in a cold sweat, God comfort her, and called for her mother.”

“Ah,” the Mother Superior said again.

“It is the second time this week. It was worse when she first came. It is a month now.”

“And how did you console her, Sister Theresa?”

“I ran quickly to her bedside and put my arms around her. Then when she was frightened no longer I pointed to the image of the Blessed Virgin and told her that She watches after all the children of men. I patted her hand saying that no harm could come to her as long as the Holy Mother of God looked down upon her.”

“And then?”

“She looked up blinking in the light of the candle, smiled, and was soon asleep.”

The Mother Superior closed her eyes and prayed: “Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope—to thee do we cry, poor banished daughters of Eve.”

The two women stood in silence for a moment and then the older one went on: “We must be patient and gentle with her; she has had a very unhappy few years—may the most prudent Virgin protect her. The child’s mother recently married for the second time. The stepfather—well, at any rate the young one, it seems, was in the way. Be sure and tell me from time to time how she gets along.”

The Mother Superior moved silently to the bed on which little five-year-old Ruth Courtney lay sleeping. The girl’s disheveled mass of bright auburn hair sprawled on her pillow; her face was drawn even in sleep and her delicate nostrils were distended somewhat, like those of a startled pureblooded filly. As the reverend mother looked on in reposeful silence, the girl’s face grew placid and soon there appeared the faintest trace of a smile. The woman blessed herself and, nodding to Sister Theresa, left the dormitory and continued her rounds of the convent.

It was now three years since Mrs. Throop placed her daughter, Ruth, in the gnarled and tired hands of the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Montreal. At first she had protested, she wanted the girl at home, but Major Throop was an intolerant man and he soon had his way.

Three short childhood years! An endless procession of swift, joyous days. Who would have thought that the stone-fenced gray buildings of the convent could conceal so much happiness from the curious eyes of non-believing passers-by? Or is it that the simple happiness of children is to be found everywhere: in a cloistered convent, a squalid slum dwelling (where adults moil and suffer but where children laugh and play in happy ignorance), or in the dull, stuffy atmosphere of the home of a merchant or stock trader?

Ruth no longer awoke in the night and called for her mother. In the quiet routine of the convent she was happy. Her companions were girls of her station in life; the daughters of wealthy merchants, brokers, government officials. The convent day was short, crowded with lessons, devotion and games. And there was Sister Constance who taught drawing and coached the girls in the social graces:

“Now you curtsy and say ‘how d’you do.’ No, no, not so, but with your lips like this. See!” Sister Constance tightened her lips primly and said: “Stewed prunes and prisms—how d’you dew.” The girls laughed and after class went about saying “stewed prunes and prisms” to each other.

There was painting in water colors: ochre sunsets and schooners sailing on green and purple seas, brigantines painted in such a fashion as to drive a marine engineer to despair—pictures which the girls’ parents proudly hung on walls for envious relatives to see. Nor was the art of music forgotten:

“Who can tell me who the three B’s of music are?”

A fluttering of hands and a timid, stammering girl rises to her feet:

“Bach——”

A long pause followed by the breathless, ill-suppressed excitement of the girls who know.

Finally: “Beethoven——”

Another pause and the gentle prompting of the Sister:

“Come, come! Bach and Beethoven. And who else?”

The Sister calls upon another girl and the answer is triumphantly given.

“Brahms, that’s right,” the Sister says. “Papa Brahms he was called.” There are amused smiles from the girls as the Sister continues: “A fatherly gentleman he was—you may see his picture in the library. He is seated at the piano and has a very important beard.”

Later in the afternoon there were piano lessons by Sister Espérance who had short, firm fingers and who played divinely and could have been a famous virtuoso. All the girls were extremely sorry for her, for it was a well-known fact that she could, if she had so desired, be playing at His Majesty’s Theatre on Guy Street in a yellow evening gown with officers and gentlemen at her feet. They felt very proud of their music teacher, looking upon her lessons as a simple, devout gift laid at the feet of God. But the most romantic figure at the convent, in the eyes of the girls, was the Mother Superior herself. She, so the story ran, was once loved by an English lord who was, naturally, a Protestant. He would have taken her to his castle in England but he insisted that she renounce her faith and accept his. This, of course, she had refused to do—and here she was!

Three years have passed since the afternoon when Ruth, accompanied by her mother, came to the convent and now the girl sits before the piano struggling with a two-hand arpeggio in a Mozart sonata. Three years in which there is scarce time to think of a prim and hard-mouthed mother.

One Spring day Bishop Villeneuve of Montreal visited the Convent of the Sacred Heart. He was a middle-aged, tall, ascetic man who was dressed in a fine broadcloth cassock faced with rich satin. The Bishop moved with grace and aristocratic poise; the power and vastness of the Church was evidenced in his every movement. To the Mother Superior he said: "There is a little girl here—the daughter of a Mrs. Throop, a very devout woman. The child's name is Courtney—Ruth Courtney."

Later in the day Ruth was presented to His Grace. She lowered her eyes as she curtsied; looking sedate and prim in her black frock and thin, starched, white collar. As the late afternoon sunlight flooded the somber reception room the Bishop said: "I see your mother quite often, my child. Are you well? Are you happy here? You should be, you know. What message shall I give her?"

"I—I am quite well, Your Grace."

"Yes, yes," the Bishop said in an abstracted manner as though he had not heard what the child had said. He had many responsibilities: churches, charities, property. This was a routine visit. He looked up suddenly and observed Ruth's pallid beauty offset set by the mass of her luxuriant auburn hair.

—The girl is beautiful, too beautiful, the Bishop thought. It is sometimes a curse of God. . . .

He leaned forward, patted her hand, remarking:

"You must pray to the Blessèd Virgin to guide you through life, to make your heart pure. Life is full of many temptations. Do you understand?" For a moment his voice was soft and then it changed and became hard and inflexible. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Grace."

That night in the dormitory, the figure of the Virgin Mary seemed less motherly, more distant and abstracted, like the Bishop who supervised many charities and was greatly concerned with God's work here on earth. In the guttering candlelight it seemed as if the Mother of God herself looked at her with tight, compressed, practical lips—like the Bishop.

If one wandered carelessly through the heart of Montreal, round the Hotel de Ville, across the asphalted *Champ de Mars* (at that time resounding to the tramping feet of soldiers training for the war against the Boers), up narrow Notre Dame Street, along St. Antoine Street with its machine shops and huge warehouses, back along St. James Street lined with banks and newspaper offices, one came sooner or later to Place d'Armes. To the east and west of the square stood large brown office buildings which housed the musty offices of Queen's Counsellors, barristers and notaries. In the center of the plaza stood a bronze figure of *Maisonneuve*, holding the royal flag of France aloft to the indifferent gaze of hurrying passers-by. To the north of the square stood the squat, threatening Bank of Montreal building with its stone columns of marbled viridescence which stood guard like sentries before the temple of commerce. On the other side of the square, facing the bank, stood the gray, gothic Notre Dame Cathedral, ancient and discolored by the intruding but nevertheless welcome smoke of industry. The imposing cruciformed building dwarfed the flag-bearing *Maisonneuve* to minute impotence; the contrast was symbolical of the towering power of the Church as compared to the puny strength of individual man. At the foot of the church passed Notre Dame Street, dark with dingy office buildings and smaller storehouses, hundred-year-old buildings which here and there housed a sweet-sour-smelling saloon.

One Sunday morning in her eighth year Ruth and a host of girls from the convent came to the cathedral for holy communion. It was a proud day for Mrs. Throop. She wore an all-embracing fluttering dress, a short military jacket, a tightly fitting bonnet and long white kid gloves. Major Throop, twisting and tugging at his drooping mustache, stood beside his wife near the holy water stoup watching the company of devout *Pleiades* march sedately into the cathedral. The girls shimmered in white silken dresses, their faces were covered with long veils and each head was crowned with a wreath of *fleur-de-lis*.

Inside the cathedral the Bishop himself administered the blessed sacrament. Mrs. Throop looked upon the scene in reverent wonder. She recalled the day of her own communion and soon found herself weeping. She daintily tapped each eye with a sad gesture of philosophical resignation.

—I am nearly thirty-five. Heavens, how time flies! Now it is communion, soon it will be marriage. . . .

The intonations of the Bishop's Latin (desecrated by his French-Canadian accent) brought to Mrs. Throop's mind a schoolgirl joke. She tried to dismiss the thought, but without avail. "Tempus is always fugiting," she said to herself. She smiled and then remembered that levity in church was sinful. She finally composed herself and followed the ceremony with close attention.

To Mrs. Throop the ritual was so satisfying; despite its mystery there was something so positively substantial about it all: the massiveness of the pillared stone nave, the comfort of numbers, the tonal ascensions and descensions of the service, the majestic bearing of the Bishop.

After communion the Throops walked out on to the broad, shallow steps of the cathedral, blinked in the sudden brilliant Canadian sunlight and pulled their gloves on with studied care and composure. For Mrs. Throop the Place d'Armes was the symbol of her security and peace of mind; behind her stood the cathedral, gray and worn with time, and before her crouched the Bank of Montreal, looking like a low-slung British bulldog with monstrous, long, green fangs.

Later, with Ruth home for the afternoon (a very special privilege), the Throops ate the customary, substantial English Sunday dinner: roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, a tart, and afterwards old port, rich and nutty—as old and as pleasant to the taste as the Bank and the cathedral were to the sight.

When Ruth was twelve years old she found herself troubled in mind. The tall young priest, who occasionally substituted for old Father Boniface on Sundays, had set the convent afire. True, he was not aware of the impression he made on the Mother Superior's charges, but he was a sensation nevertheless. He walked toward the chapel lost in thought, oblivious of two hundred pairs of eyes which hungrily followed him. His thoughts were of his duty to God and his heart was filled with a craving for piety and grace. He was tall, dark, and sallow and he wore his snugly fitting cassock with a dandyism ordinarily unassociated with the Church. When he crossed the yard leading to the chapel his skirts swished and flared in a most disturbing manner. At his first appearance at the convent, little Ruth fell hopelessly in love with him, but so, unfortunately, did some two hundred other girls. For weeks Ruth planned to find a way of speaking to him. To stand in his presence, to feel his eyes upon you, to hear his voice addressed only to you! What she would say to him and what he would speak of to her did not enter her mind. The thought was too tremendous to admit analysis. Sometimes of a Saturday he came to the convent to hear confession, and Ruth decided that she must attract the attention of the young priest at all costs. And what could be a better place than in the privacy of a confessional! It was true that a latticed wall separated priest and penitent, but one accepted the fortunes of love and war with fortitude; it was this stoicism which set the warrior apart from his fellows. She would win his pity and attention (she dreaded to think the word "love"—it was too much!) by making a sensational confession.

There were few girls in the chapel and she hurriedly entered the booth, knelt (her heart thumped extravagantly), and said:

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned. I confess to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. . . ."

As she recited the list of the holy company, a certain terror seized her. She had completely forgotten John the Baptist and the holy apostles in making her plans. This was a most grievous sin which she was committing. A masculine odor came through the latticed wall and she heard the young priest's even breathing. These worldly considerations made her forget the eternal punishment which would most certainly await her for using confession for a carnal purpose and she continued:

“. . . and to all the Saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore I beseech the Blessed Mary ever Virgin. . . .” Here again followed the names of the heavenly company; but this time Ruth was not frightened; she had made her bargain with the Lord and had decided to pay the price. And so on to the end of the confiteor.

She peered through the lattice and with great effort imagined she saw the murky outline of the young priest beyond. Ruth continued:

“Since my last confession two weeks ago I accuse myself of——”

She paused for a moment and in that moment all her plans vanished. She forgot the gaudy sins which were calculated to win the slender priest’s sympathy.

“I—I accuse myself of—of having had impure thoughts and desires.”

Again she paused, expecting to hear a startled exclamation; but the voice of the priest, maddeningly calm, asked:

“And what, my daughter, was the nature of your thoughts?”

She searched her brain for a specific picture of tainted desire but her thoughts remained confused but chaste. A phrase came to her assistance:

“I—I lusted, father.”

The sacerdotal calm behind the lattice continued.

“Lusted after what?”

“After sin!”

“What sin?”

Ruth was now hopelessly involved; her mind refused to function. Sin is sin and this scholastic searching for specific truth brought her to the verge of tears. She floundered and stammered:

“I have—I have forgotten, father.”

“Forgotten your sins?”

“Yes, father.” (Contritely.)

There was a silence as the young priest meditated for a moment; then he announced:

“For little girls who cannot remember and who waste the father confessor’s time—I give ten Hail Marys to be said before going to bed tonight.” There was

an amused, tolerant note in his voice. Then: “Thy sins are forgiven thee. . . .”

Hot and confused with shame and disappointment, Ruth left the booth.

—(VI)—

Between Ruth and the realities of life (the mysteries of childhood), stood the mystic ritual of the Church. It was soothing, like the warm ample breasts of a mother. In its bosom one forgot; forgot darkened hallways and corridors, the whispering profundities of adults, the dark, forbidding sins which haunt the minds of Catholic children, the eyes of shabbily dressed men who looked strangely at the girls as they sometimes paraded through the Montreal streets, the vague matters of which the older girls spoke in undertones (marriage, love, birth, death). To Ruth the Church was sanctuary; sanctuary from life and the need of facing it. A dimly lit sanctuary with thin, curling wisps of incense in which music swelled and ascended to the arched ceiling of the nave.

Once when Ruth had lied to Sister Espérance, the thought of her sin tormented her all week. But on Sunday a feeling of peace and forgiveness came over her as the priest intoned: “Sprinkle me, O Lord, with hyssop and I shall be cleansed: wash me and I shall become whiter than snow.”

And at night in bed the rich phrases echoed in her ears:

—I am sinful but the Lord will sprinkle me with hyssop, sprinkle me, sprinkle me, and I shall become whiter, whiter than snow.

The words soothed and reassured. One prostrated oneself before the Lord and he sprinkled the body with hyssop and one was cleansed.

—He wouldn’t sprinkle the clothes with hyssop. You were naked and hyssop was sprinkled on the naked body. And I shall become whiter than snow.

It was a long time afterward that she learned with keen disappointment that hyssop was a sort of caper.

“Like those used in the sauce that went with boiled mutton,” she thought.

As Ruth grew older her perplexity increased. New forces were at work, strange influences molded her character. She experienced unfamiliar palpitations when she beheld the figure of the Lord crucified, her hands trembled suddenly in class on a hot droning afternoon and at night she was troubled by dreams peopled with images alien to her quiet, convent experience. Spring, which hitherto had been merely the end of the shut-in winter, this year became a heady season of doubt and bewilderment.

At confession and at other times when she had looked through her missal and was reminded of sexual sins, the text had appeared meaningless. She used to read the short table of sins (“to help the memory when we prepare for confession”) and wondered how they could possibly apply to her: “Have you been guilty of lascivious dressing or painting; lewd company; have you read immodest books? Been guilty of unchaste songs, discourses, words, looks, or actions by yourself or others? Wilfully entertained impure thoughts or desires?”

Now the last question held her eye. She was not sure. Was a dream a wilful entertainment? She was not certain.

At night in the dormitory as her comrades undressed, slipping nightdress over petticoats and slips, convent-fashion, her heart beat a shade faster when, by chance, she beheld the white body of a neighbor. . . .

And like St. Augustine, who, too, was tempted in his youth, she felt the briars of impure fantasy growing rank over her head. Nor were release and forgetfulness to be had in the dark, in the solitude of her bed. Here, too, there was temptation. Even after three fervent, pleading Hail Marys were uttered, the disturbing thoughts refused to surrender dominion of the girl’s mind—and heart. At such times she prayed incessantly, like the most devout *réligieuse*, inflicted penances upon herself and fasted until Sister Constance, she who taught English, was convinced that Ruth surely must have a vocation, that she was a blessed one of God.

Perhaps, Sister Constance thought, the girl’s pallor and luminous eyes are evidences of her saintliness. Perhaps, like St. Theresa when she fell before the image of Christ and felt every carnal emotion perish within her, the girl is ridding herself of the bonds which hold the soul imprisoned.

One night as Sister Constance passed Ruth’s bed she heard the girl praying

in her sleep. And now more than ever the sister felt that the girl had seen the face of the Lord. The nun knelt at the sleeping girl's bedside and joined her in prayer.

—Who can tell in what strange manner the Lord makes His will manifest? Perhaps I am now being called to assist this pure and beautiful young virgin to holiness.

In the morning Ruth awoke tired and depressed. The circles under her eyes were dark and in the sight of Sister Constance the girl's harrowed expression was a clear indication of inner grace. At mass the girl bowed her head in deep devotion as the priest uttered the words: "Sprinkle me, oh Lord, with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; wash me, and I shall become whiter than the snow."

The soul, Montaigne remarked, discharges her love and hate upon substitute objects when the true and natural ones are wanting. The exhausted female spider approaching her moment of death continues to spin the protective web-covering after the eggs have been destroyed and substituted by the cunning naturalist. So Ruth found in the Church a receptacle for the love which normally should have flown to her mother. The still, brooding quality which marks the virginal opening of the flower (slowly, imperceptibly) needed the emotional solace of a mother, needed the assuasive comfort of warm breasts. But this was lacking and she turned to the Church ritual for comfort; to ritual the power of which lies not so much in the uttered words but in the very act itself: the catharsis of confession, the *via dolorosa*, the rosary, holy communion. She loved the Church: the medieval twilight of the high-arching nave of the cathedral, weighted with mystery; the deep gloom stabbed here and there by flickering points of candle light, the deep resonant tones of the organ during High Mass; the magic words of the priest as he bowed and struck his breast three times—“*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.*”

Her body quivered with awe and emotional tension as the surpliced priest knelt, adored the Sacred Host and then rising, elevated it as the three mystic chimes of the altar bell sounded faintly. The world outside the convent, the world of the flesh, the worldly world in which her stepfather and mother moved, seemed remote and unimportant at such moments. And after the priest uttered the three final words in which all the pomp and authority of the Church were contained: “*Ite; missa est*”—go; the mass is ended—she walked with her comrades into the blinding light of day, out of one world into another. As she moved down the steps on to the flagged walk, her face was suffused with a glowing expression such as Joan of Arc must have had when she valorously faced her stupid accusers.

As the convent sundial circled off Ruth’s years (she read the motto of the dial carelessly, not understanding its prophetic legend), she began to mature into nascent, beautiful womanhood. Now that she was more calm, Sister Constance said that this serenity, too, was an evidence of God’s call to the girl. Hers is the beauty, the sister said, which comes from the soul, the outer evidence of inner grace.

—A saint beautiful in body as well as in soul. And I, by the grace of God and the Lady of Sorrows, shall be the handmaiden to bring her to the

throne of the Lord.

The ritual of the Church, her music (she now played the massive Bach preludes and fugues), the affection of the sisters, the air of quiet devotion—these were symbolized in the physical convent: the ivy-covered walls, the time-colored limestone, the gray wall tracery, so that many years afterward when she remembered these peaceful days she said: “Ah, the old convent! What an old and familiar friend!”

But then it was too late.

The following Spring, when the northern slope of Mount Royal was stippled with the pointed viridity of newfledged birch and maple, Mrs. Throop, the Major willing, took Ruth home.

It was different outside of the convent: life, speech, dress, manners, the tempo of things, everything was different. It was difficult at first to become accustomed to the new viewpoint. A very simple thing, for example, was the matter of early mass. In the convent, the day started with chapel and gave point and reality to the succeeding hours. Here at home, going to the seven o'clock mass was the cause of irritation and commotion. The servants had to get up an hour earlier, there were little annoying complaints and soon Ruth fell into the slipshod church habits of her parents.

Even Mrs. Throop, now that she was nearing forty-five and leaned rather heavily on the Church, considered an occasional high mass as full payment for a seat on the right hand of God. The attitude of Ruth's stepfather, Major Throop, towards the Church was as perfunctory as the brushing of one's teeth; and the Major's point of view affected the habits of his entire household. This was so altogether different from the brooding quiet of convent devotion, where the ritual (the tolling of the bell on Sunday, the silent genuflecting sisters and girls) seemed to have a special inwrought significance. Now going to church was accompanied with much chatter and grumbling, and when the family arrived at the steps of the cathedral Ruth was bored by the empty gossip and whispered inanities of the black-frocked parishioners. For the first few months she was unhappy; she was lost in this new world and when finally she stammered her thoughts to her mother she was told that this was the world and one had to become accustomed to it.

"After all," Mrs. Throop said, "you can't live in a convent all your life, can you?"

"No," Ruth admitted.

"Perhaps," her mother went on, "you would like to take the veil."

"I don't know," Ruth said after a long pause.

"If you don't know then you haven't a vocation. Besides I have other plans for you." Then, putting her arm about her daughter's waist, she said: "You will become used to things soon and then you'll be much happier."

“Yes, mother.” (Dutifully and without conviction.)

“You are sixteen now and you’ve got to be thinking about becoming a practical young lady—not a mooning convent girl. Goodness knows I am a devout woman—I hope—but the religion of the world is different from the devotion of a convent.”

Ruth sat silently listening to her mother and nodding her head.

So this was the world, the world of the flesh of which the sisters had repeatedly spoken. Flesh: the word described her new world with pointed aptitude. The Major, fleshy, red-faced and bloated after dinner, sipping his heavy, rich port and smoking his cigar; her mother’s perpetual concern with food and clothes; those interminable suety dinners, the endless dull conversation, the Sunday afternoon stupefaction. . . . By four o’clock on the Sabbath, Ruth experienced a profound longing for the convent and its quiet ways; the convent—the antithesis of the world in which she now lived. She wanted to return and yet she knew that this was impossible. Inexperienced as she was, she knew that life lies ahead of one and there is no turning back.

In the summer, fortunately, there was a change of routine. The Troops spent July in the Laurentians and August at Uncle Francis’s seaside estate on the Gaspé peninsula. At the seashore Ruth fell into a happy mood, half brooding, half carefree; at the sea she found an attitude in Nature which was synonymous with the spiritual tone of the convent. There were mornings on the hot beach and in the afternoons she swam until she was exhausted and threw herself on the sand panting for breath. When she returned to Montreal in the fall, she was beginning to revel in her new freedom: there were long walks on the footpaths of the mountain, riding on the bridle paths of a week-end morning. And most fortunate of all, there were new duties, new responsibilities, new faces, new pleasures, new companions. . . .

Early in October she entered the last grade of the Catholic High School.

“She is a convent girl,” the young men thought, “and therefore fair game.”

When Ruth entered a room, masculine eyes would suddenly dart up and stare at her willowy beauty with quick hot eagerness.

——A convent girl (they thought) a quiet cloistered convent, many women, girls, virginity, unspoiled freshness, dormitory girl-to-girl secrets, wonder what those young kids, no men handy, think about, talk about, do.

Of an evening, sometimes, when the drawing room was filled with men and women and the air was heavy with perfume and the dizzying odor of men (cigars, masculine cosmetics, the odor of bodies) she was asked to play for her mother’s guests. As she bent over the keyboard and beat the thrumming tomtom deep in the bass of the Waldstein Sonata, her lips puckered in musical ecstasy; later, as her indomitable hair swayed to the tempo of the gay rondo, many pairs of masculine eyes would ravenously stare at her ivory hands, svelte waist, girl-breasts.

There was a burst of applause as she concluded the final movement and a husky voice said: “ ‘Pale Hands I Love’—play that, Ruth, will you please?”

At such times she saw glances of admiration, smiling faces, clapping hands. She did not, could not, see the wolfish gleam. And with a slight feeling of distaste she played the requested banal piece.

In the center of Montreal stands Mount Royal after which the city is named. It protrudes suddenly from the flatlands of the center of the island, verdant and delightful, surrounded by miles of grayish dwellings and smoking, flatulent factory chimneys. From the lookout at the summit, the buildings and streets look like ruts of dun basalt at the base of a long extinct volcano. In the summertime Ruth rode up the spiraling roadways to the plateau on the top and leaned over the railing of the lookout at the serried streets and the midget people below. Here one bought spruce beer, rich and creamy, and later jog-trotted home in the family's victoria. Sometimes Major Throop accompanied his stepdaughter. He puffed at his enormous pipe and bemoaned the fact that the beauty of the mountain was despoiled by the herd.

"Too damned good for the beggars," he said on one occasion, "coming up here and littering the driveways and walks with their filthy leavings. Picnics—huh!"

And Ruth was inclined to agree. The people who walked up the roads, singing and shouting, sitting under trees, swarms of children grouped about large and sweating parents, seemed so remote from her own life. It was as though these people were of a different species. They were loud French-Canadians from Maisonneuve and the east end of the city and swarthy Jews from St. Lawrence Boulevard and St. Urbain Street. And the Major detested French-Canadians; hated their simple ways, their *patois* (he himself spoke Parisian French with an execrable English accent), their celluloid collars (worn only by mechanics on Sunday but which the major attributed to all French-Canadians, the Bishop of Montreal excepted), their gaudy manner of dress: red and green cravats, brightly colored gingham dresses, buttoned tan shoes. "Dressed like a Frenchman," was a terrible phrase on the lips of the Major.

"That sort of thing," he said, thinking of the mechanics and their families on the side of the mountain, "is all right in France but it's no damned good here. This is Canada." By which he meant the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Governor-General, Westmount, the defeat of Montcalm by Wolf—and all things English. "They have parks in the east end—Dominion Park and merry-go-rounds and chute-the-chutes—why do they have to come here?" (Petulantly.)

Ruth didn't know, but even with the French-Canadians and Jews the mountain was a delightful thing. There was the cable car by which one was

hauled up to its top, as though one were flying; there were long walks with her companions when they clambered up the sides picking choke-cherries and coming home with stained fingers and mouths.

And in the wintertime the mountain was the joy of every lover of winter sports. There was tobogganing down the icy Park Slide all lit up with colored electric lights, skating parties on the open-air rink on Fletcher's Field at the eastern base of the mountain. And one winter after an early thaw it suddenly froze again and the fields were crusted with a veritable sheet of ice so that Ruth and her friends coasted up and down the rolling fields as though they were on skis, only it was infinitely faster and much more fun. Then when the snow was good and deep there were night snowshoe parties. The boys and girls, accompanied by a few silly chaperons (who were easily lost in the woods near Outremont), made the trip halfway around the mountain, tumbled into ten-foot snow drifts, and rubbed each other's faces with the light, feathery Canadian snow. Sometimes when the Major took his stepdaughter for a night drive in a red cutter to the top of the mountain the city below presented a miraculous appearance: thousands of arc-lights shone on the glistening snow-covered streets and one thought, if one were not too cynical, that it looked like a fairy city encrusted with diamonds—which was precisely what Ruth thought. When parties came to the top during a sleigh ride in a huge affair drawn by eight horses with colored feathers in their harness, the party invariably became silent at the sight of the white city below—afterwards there was hot chocolate with floating islands of whipped cream and dainty biscuits.

One winter there was a civic celebration on Fletcher's Field. The city had built an enormous ice palace (it was really a castle but the aldermen thought that palace sounded more regal) made of great blocks of ice with turrets, machicolations, a towered donjon. At night the interior was illuminated by colored electric lights and, when viewed from the summit of the mountain, it was an exciting sight. On the night of the gala celebration the Throops and many friends came to see the storming of the castle. Edgar Kennedy, the son of the shipping man, came along to watch the fun. At the outset he attached himself to Ruth; this was her first experience with a "young man" and she enjoyed it greatly. There was an immense crowd around the palace waiting for the storming to begin. Soon from all sides of the field massed battalions of sportsmen marched on the ice structure: French-Canadian snowshoe clubs with their cat-gut shoes slung over their shoulders, and Westmount skiing clubs carrying their skis at the slope like rifles, tobogganers, hockey teams, skaters. As they approached the iced fosse they discharged roman candles at the bastions and other Montrealers hidden in the castle returned the red and green fire from the lancet windows. Intricate fireworks leaped up from the bailey of

the castle and the night was lit up with whirling and scurrying pyrotechnics.

It was all very exciting and as the attackers made their final rush upon the castle, the crowd broke through the police lines. Edgar caught Ruth by the hand and pulled her along towards the ice moat. He was ordinarily a pale young man, but now his face was bright red with the cold, he laughed as he ran and his breath steamed with the frost, and in some strange way this reminded Ruth of the gallant knights of old. (When she thought about it later she smiled because it was the dragon which belched fire and not the knight.) There were shouts from the assailants as they took the castle and Ruth and Edgar crowded quite close to watch the official surrender. It was very romantic standing there pressed close to Edgar (the crowd was irresistible, there was simply nothing that she could do about it) watching the parabolas of light go rocketing over the battlements of the ice palace.

Of course in the excessive excitement Ruth and Edgar lost touch with the older people, and when the celebration was over they walked along St. Catherine Street and wandered off into one of the side streets and found a grill room where they had a cold bird and a bottle of wine. Ruth was terribly thrilled, although Edgar, who was nearly twenty and was going into his father's shipping business when he got out of McGill, was quite casual about it all.

It was past midnight when Edgar brought her home and Mrs. Throop was waiting up and greeted her daughter with pretended anxiety. She was rather pleased, because the Kennedys were quite acceptable; the young man's father, it is true, had worked up from the ranks, but that was forgotten in view of the high position he now held in the life of the business community. All in all, Ruth's mother was satisfied and as she went to bed she smiled and told the Major, who was nearly asleep and resented pre-slumber conversation, that everything seemed to be going well with Ruth and young Kennedy.

"Imagine her scampering off and coming home at this hour," she said. The Major merely grunted. "Of course, the Kennedys are a little tiresome but after all he is head of the Board of Trade." The Major made no reply. "They went into the Hoffman Grill on McGill College Avenue and had some chicken and burgundy. It's romantic, Frederick," she said to her husband with a note of expectation in her voice, "romantic, that's what I call it."

But by this time the Major was sound asleep.

Francis Steele—Uncle Francis as he was known in the Throop ménage—was Mrs. Throop's oldest brother. He was a man of spotless repute: upright, God-fearing, a lay pillar of the Church. His Grace, the Bishop of Montreal, continually referred to him as "a worthy man, a very worthy man, indeed," and the Throops were excessively and particularly proud of the fact that the fame of Uncle Francis had spread to Rome, where the Holy Father had been apprised of Mr. Steele's benefactions. In business—his business was timberlands in Northern Quebec and Ontario—Steele was cautious, prudent and at all times realistic, which, he was fond of remarking, was as it should be. Although he was quick to seize upon all modern ideas in his business, in the matter of personal appearance he was reactionary. Until the day he died he clung to the mutton-chop whiskers of the Eighteen-Eighties, the square brown bowler hat and suit to match. His picture, which often appeared in the newspapers, revealed a high forehead and benevolent expression.

Two years before the time when Ruth left the convent, he had made a pilgrimage to Rome where he had knelt before His Holiness and kissed the papal ring. He never tired of telling of his experiences in Rome and of a Sunday when he dined at the Throops' (he was a bachelor) he recounted the glories of the Holy City in all their minute details: St. Peter's, the Swiss Guards, the distinctive apparel of the cardinals and the papal secretaries. It was usually tea time before he reached the part where he had genuflected before the Holy Father.

"Apparently Monsignor Bruchesi had sent word ahead of my coming," he said, "for when I knelt before His Holiness, he looked straight into my eyes, sir—straight into my eyes, and I could have sworn that he recognized me. Perhaps it was my pictures in the *Star*. Well, there I was kneeling before the Pope *and suddenly he smiled.*"

This remark was always received in the most solemn silence, everyone being agreed that when a pope smiled it was no matter for idle levity. Satisfied with the effect his story was creating, Steele would continue:

"Of course *I* did not smile but simply bowed my head and leaned forward just a trifle to kiss the ring. You may think I am exaggerating, but I am not, as I put my lips to the ring, he pressed it"—Steele uttered the word he as though it were capitalized,—"*f*irmly against my mouth. A sort of gesture of recognition, I should say."

At this point in his narrative Steele brought his hands together, fingers tip to tip, and closed his eyes. Apart from his sideburn whiskers his hands were the most noticeable part of his person. The fingers were inordinately long and tapered toward meticulously manicured nails; they were the sort of fingers which most people associate with pianists. They were strangely lustrous as if they had an inner light which gave life to their pallor. As the family listened in respectful silence he continued:

“That wasn’t all that happened in Rome. Did you ever hear of the flagellants?” As no one replied, he remarked: “Ah, there are Catholics. Of course that sort of thing couldn’t go on in Canada, or England, for that matter. But just the same, it was splendid to see Catholics who take their religion seriously; not like the Americans, for example, who are simply trying to make Catholicism bigger and better as they do in most things.”

By this time the supper of cold cuts and a bottle of imported English ale was ready.

The story of Steele’s pilgrimage to Rome seldom varied and there was a sort of ritual about it. It was always told in the drawing room with the narrator standing with legs apart before the fireplace whether it was winter or summer, while before him the Throops, the Major, Ruth, and her mother, sat in rapt and respectful attitudes. And, indeed, Steele merited respect and the awe of his relatives, not only because of his pilgrimage to Rome and his audience with the Pope, but also because of his great wealth and power. His connections with the Steeles of London made it possible to secure positions in the Grand Trunk Railway offices for the host of lesser and importuning Steeles and Throops in Montreal. It was a known fact in Montreal that when one said Steele one meant Grand Trunk.

To Ruth, even now that she was sixteen and looked at life with the mild skepticism which marks that age in some matters, her uncle seemed too utterly important and grand to be true. His pontifical manner, his reputation as a millionaire, the Steele tradition (never very clearly defined), and his public benefactions, caused him to appear in the eyes of his niece as a species of lay archbishop. True, he lacked the white woolen pallium with its four purple crosses, but then his graying sideburn whiskers, his squarish bowler hat and his grand manner set him apart from men made of more common clay. In the circumscribed provincial world in which Ruth lived, Steele was the personification of all that really mattered. To her he was the Church, morality, the British Empire (of which Canada was the pivotal point), economic security, the representative of the English-speaking race, as distinct from the teeming French-Canadians who spawned east of St. Lawrence Boulevard.

During the summer the Throops used his estate on the Gaspé peninsula which jutted into the clear waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; in the wintertime there were theater parties and concerts at His Majesty's Theatre, and when he was abroad there were presents sent from foreign cities: shawls from Paisley, combs from Madrid, perfumes from Paris, printed music from Berlin, and on Ruth's birthday he called in the afternoon with a little chamois bag which contained five hundred dollars in gold—jingling gold coins which he had just gotten from the St. James Street office of the Bank of Montreal, "as sound as the Bank of England." He was always present at her birthdays and even when she was in the convent he had deposited a substantial check to the account (which he had opened on the day when she was born) of Ruth Courtney, in trust. At the parties he drank the very mild punch, made a fuss about the bringing of the birthday cake (there was always a joke about the number of candles, he deliberately made errors in counting them) and was the last to leave.

In St. James Street, where he conducted his business in pulp and paper, Steele was held in high esteem. He was shrewd, to be sure, but he was always ready to do a favor and if he sometimes wiped out a competitor, this, too, was to be expected. He was, as the British like to say, a man's man. At five o'clock, after a day's work, he stood up against the St. Regis bar and drank his gin and bitters with members of the banking and commercial fraternity. Here the talk was of timberland options, the grain and stock markets and the silver mines of Northern Ontario. Among the smartly dressed younger men of the street, Steele's antiquated attire set him apart and stamped him as a businessman of the old school; safe, conservative and reliable.

But his mode of dress was a mere idiosyncrasy. He enjoyed a roistering supper at the Knights of Columbus and detested the mournful philosophy of the Canadian Protestants; he favored Sunday amusements, baseball and lacrosse (although as late as 1912 he deplored baseball as a Yankee importation). At a stag dinner he was gay, and towards the end, when the brandy was being served, he could tell a spicy story with the best of the youngsters.

"Nothing dirty, mind you. I'm dead set against smut for smut's sake."

He was fond of the story which concerned a method of distinguishing the spelling of the feminine Frances from the masculine Francis "which happens to be my own name," he explained. "The looped 'e' reminds one of the young lady while the perpendicular 'i' is properly reminiscent of the young fellow."

But such levity occurred on rare occasions and was promptly forgotten the following day. On St. James Street, at the Bishop's residence, he was

circumspect, dignified, and in proper fear of the Lord.

Once again the last few remaining patches of snow, hidden in the crevices on the sides of the mountain, had melted; once again the March slush was converted into running rivulets of brownish gray. April blew and shouted and soon came May, gentle and self-conscious, giving roundness to straight-lined Winter, touching the tips of the budding birch with a suggestion of pale jade and russet-tinting the crisp young leaves of the sturdy red maple. Once again Spring performed her fecund ritual.

From St. Lawrence Boulevard east to proletarian Maisonneuve, little wooden establishments opened and sold spruce beer, liquid tang of the pine forest, and brown crystal cubes of maple sugar. In the Bonsecœur Market in the East End, *habitant* peasants from the countryside north of the city sold their Spring wares: freshly caught speckled brook trout, maple syrup and square-faced sinister bottles full of purple native port wine. In all parts of town carriages were polished or painted and greased (at first the automobile made little headway against the horse in Canada) and the cutters and sleighs were stored until the following winter; bear skins which covered one during long cold drives were sprinkled with camphor and neatly folded and stored in redolent cedar chests.

Once again Francis Steele's shining victoria called at the Throops of a sunlit Saturday afternoon and the coachman, tall-hatted and erect, sat motionless on the driver's seat while his master took his tea within. In the living hall before the curtained entrance which led to the dining room, tea was being served. Mrs. Throop officiated with the grace of a lady but in the spirit of a drill master. The servants performed their duties meticulously but always conscious that madame, despite her quick conversation and fleeting and reappearing smile, was fully aware of the slightest flaw in the service. Tea was a ritual and consisted of the brew and cookies, nothing more. Heavy teas of sandwiches or meat were considered as bordering on Protestantism—it was all right for Methodists or Presbyterians. Near his hostess sat the Bishop (he was French-Canadian and detested tea, and privately said that it was fit only for Englishmen), conversing with a visiting Italian church dignitary who smiled tolerantly when the Bishop expressed the hope that some day he might live to see a French-Canadian Pope.

“There are not many of us to be sure, a few million, but none more devout and loyal to the Church in the whole world,” the Bishop said.

The Italian dignitary, a little wiry man with quick nervous gestures, agreed and remarked that that was the reason the Eucharistic Congress was to be held in Montreal the following year.

“The Holy Father knows, he knows,” the papal emissary said, nodding his head.

Near the window looking out on the front lawn, stood Major Throop, disconsolate in the presence of greatness more glittering than his own. In another part of the room were Steele and Ruth and two Franciscan brothers of whom Mrs. Throop was fond and whom she invited to tea every Saturday. They returned to the monastery with bundles of old clothes, cakes and food which they distributed to the poor. The monks stood awkwardly holding their teacups and nibbled at Mrs. Throop’s dainty cookies and hoped that it would soon be time to go; the elegance of the Throop household disconcerted them and made them feel ill at ease. This sort of thing, one of them said later when they got outside, was all right for the Bishop. Their shaved heads and their sandaled bare feet stood out in contrast to the well-groomed assembly.

“It’s a shame to be indoors on a beautiful day like this,” Steele said to Ruth. “Don’t you think it would be much better to be, let us say, on top of the mountain?”

Ruth agreed and looked apprehensively towards her mother. There was no escaping tea. “I’ve half a mind to ask your mother to let us go for a drive. Would you care to come along?”

“I’d love to, but mother will never consent,” Ruth replied.

“Very well, then,” her uncle said, “we’ll see.”

He moved across the room weaving his way through the guests, past the harassed Franciscan brothers who held empty cups in their hands unhappily, and finally arrived at his sister’s side. He leaned over her shoulder and whispered in her ear. She nodded absently; the visiting dignitary was discussing the possible canonization of two Canadian priests who had been burned to death by the Hurons in the early days of the settlement and Mrs. Throop was engrossed in the narrative. “We shan’t be long,” her brother whispered.

“Be sure and have her back in time for dinner,” Mrs. Throop replied and turned her attention to the Bishop’s remarks, who, while pleased with this papal gesture toward the millions of French-Canadian Catholics, felt that a living native cardinal was better than two dead saints.

“We are poorly represented at Rome, Venerable Brother,” the Bishop said,

“not at all commensurate with the piety and works of the Church in Quebec. Our churches, charities and orders are the pride of Catholicism, if I may say so, and exceeded only by our brethren in Mexico. Consider for a moment the shrine at Sainte Anne de Beaupré . . .”

Steele returned to his niece’s side, the bearer of glad tidings:

“We may go,” he announced, “and I must have you back by dinner time. You’d better hurry and get your things.”

As they left the room Mrs. Throop shook her finger admonishingly at her brother who waved his hand in reply. In the hallway the two monks stood silently in the corner waiting for Mrs. Throop to find time to give them her offering for the pious and deserving poor.

“Still waiting?” Ruth said to the younger of the two brothers, who blushed and nodded.

Outside, the coachman threw a light covering over Ruth’s knees and set his horses off at a gentle trot in the direction of the mountain. Soon the rubber-tired wheels of the carriage crunched the gravel road which wound its way up the side of the mountain. The late afternoon sun shone brightly and the aimless talk of the pair was punctuated by the clippety-clop of the horses’ hoof-beats. They passed the lookout and proceeded to the woods on the plateau which lay on the side nearest Westmount. Here Steele ordered his coachman to halt. They were at the edge of a dark-green fir forest.

“Shall we walk a bit?” Steele asked. Ruth agreed.

They entered the cool aromatic woods treading silently on the deep carpet of dead brown pine needles. Ruth was quietly happy in the presence of her uncle; to her he was everything that a man should be, everything, for example, that Major Throop was not. He had none of her stepfather’s querulousness, and she saw in his immaculately groomed person the spiritual power of the Church (she did not reason these things but rather felt them), the permanence of Canadian Pacific stocks and bonds, the bulldog stability of the Bank of Montreal. In his booming voice there was the note of authority of the Church, in his square-cut shoulders there was the security of her class. In the heaviness of his watch chain, in the costly ruddiness of his ruby watch charm; in the heavy odor of his shaving lotions (which reminded her in a vague manner of the convent incense and which faintly disturbed her), in the fuzzy sideburns, the cutaway coat, the striped trousers, the deliberate manner of speech—in all these externals she sensed the security of values and social peace, the tranquillity which comes with ownership.

They strolled through lanes of tall pines which lifted their spires towards the sky and shut out the fast-fading sunlight; occasionally a breath of wind stirred the massed needles overhead causing a hushed lament.

“Do you know,” Steele said after they had been walking in silence for some time, “that when I die I am going to make you my heiress—unless, of course, I should marry in the meantime—which is very unlikely.”

“Oh, uncle, you mustn’t talk of dying.”

“Do you think anyone would like to marry an old codger like your uncle?”

“Yes—yes, I should imagine anyone would,” Ruth said, lying. She thought him satisfactory as an uncle but she couldn’t quite imagine anyone loving him—that way.

“Well, I’m afraid I’m not the marrying kind.” He was flattered by the girl’s concern and remarked tritely upon the inevitability of death.

“We must all go sooner or later. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.”

“Oh, please, Uncle Francis, let’s not talk of such things on such a beautiful day.”

“Very well, then, let’s talk of what you will do when you will have a great big chunk of my money.”

“I don’t know, really I don’t. I haven’t thought of it.”

“Well, just try and think.”

Ruth walked along by her uncle’s side smiling and thinking. Then, looking up suddenly, she said with bright animation:

“I know. I’d build a great stone mansion somewhere deep in the Laurentians. On top of a mountain, perhaps. Mother and the Major would live with me and I’d have the loveliest girls as servants. Maybe it would be a castle with a keep and a moat and a great living hall with an enormous fireplace large enough to hold half an oak tree at one time. I’d have a chapel built such as we had at the convent and once a week an old priest like Father Boniface would come and say mass for us.”

“No men?” Steele asked laughing.

“No, I hardly think so, not in the beginning, anyhow.”

“Only the priest?”

“Well, later perhaps a knight—but a very polite one and one that had slain

at least six dragons.”

“I’m sure,” Steele said, “your stepfather would find that sort of thing very tiring. And what would your mother do without her Saturday teas, for I’m sure the Bishop wouldn’t like to make long, thorny trips to the top of a Laurentian mountain. *I know the Bishop!*” Then with feigned severity: “You’ll do no such thing with my money, young lady. I demand that you live in my red sandstone house on Sherbrooke Street and that as soon as possible you find yourself a suitable young man—no knights, you’ll have nothing but trouble and sleepless nights with a knight; there’s no telling what a romantic knight may suddenly do—marry him and live happily ever afterwards.”

“Oh, uncle, how tiresome!”

“Not at all. Your practical young husband will go to business every day and you’ll be the mistress of a great house and all the girls in Montreal will envy you. Besides, no intelligent young fellow will want to go and live in a castle on top of a mountain. Of course if your lovely servant maids are beautiful enough that might be an inducement. It would be for me.” He threw his head back and laughed noiselessly.

“Then perhaps,” Ruth said, unaware of the peculiar quality to the man’s laughter (they had been walking some time now and the sun was near the horizon), “I’d travel to break the monotony of castle life. I’d like to go all over the world: India, China, England, France, and Rome. Do you think the Holy Father would receive me? I’d kneel at his feet and kiss the holy ring.”

“In that case,” Steele replied, “you’d have to dress very sedately: a long black dress—I’m sure you’d look very beautiful in it—with long sleeves and a high collar. The Holy Father would be outraged at the sight of the frock you are now wearing.”

He looked sharply at the girl’s gay frock, observing her generous V-cut neck and the outline of her delicate girlish breasts which seemed to press timidly against the soft material of her dress. Then taking her warm hand in his (she felt a sudden chill as he did so), they walked on in silence for several paces. They were now in the heart of the woods, the voices of the Saturday afternoon picnickers were no longer audible. No sound was heard save the whisper of the wind as it moved gently through the heavy boughs overhead. They had been walking for some time (Ruth had forgotten about the waiting coachman) and were tired. They stood now in a cleared space soft with a heavy covering of dead pine needles. Steele paused and drew forth an immaculate stiff white linen handkerchief and patted his damp forehead.

“Whew! It *is* warm, isn’t it? Shall we sit for a little while?” He found a soft

spot at the foot of an old spruce tree and resting his back against it, invited his niece to sit with him. "Here, this is quite comfortable."

Ruth sank to his side with a graceful curtseying gesture. She rested her head against her uncle's broad shoulder and closed her eyes; she was tired. Steele slipped his arm about the girl's waist and she opened her eyes and made a *moue* of fatigue, smiled and closed them again.

The man ran his hand through his thinnish, graying hair; his head was damp and hot and he leaned back against the rough bark of the tree, inhaling the pungent, pine-scented air. As they sat resting, a vague uneasiness overcame the man. He looked down at the girl resting against his shoulder, and from his vantage point he observed her finely-shaped mouth, the delicate nostrils (tiny amber-white beads of perspiration on her forehead and upper lip) and the even, smooth cleft of her breasts. He smelled the young, sweet fragrance of her body and watched the slow, even rise and fall of her bosom. She had stretched out her long, slender legs and the hem of her skirt, caught by a twig, was above her knee to one side and exposed a vestige of white thigh. A desire to kiss Ruth possessed the man.

—She is a beautiful child. One kiss. To feel her youthful lips—it will be nothing, I promise you, nothing. There is something so life-giving about a young virgin. It would seem that from her lips I might find vigor and youth like the old king who was cold and dying and asked that virgins be brought to his bed.

Steele drew his arm close to himself bringing the girl's face closer to his. Ruth opened her eyes:

"It is getting dark," she said; "hadn't we better be getting back?"

The man ignored her question.

"You are so beautiful, Ruth—will you kiss your favorite uncle?" His voice was hoarse but she did not hear the note, hearing only the words. She held up her lips and the man pressed his close to hers. He held her long, his breath suddenly turned to flame and his body became rigid; with his free hand he found the cool flesh of her thigh and held her close. A few seconds passed and she did not quite understand what was happening. But the hand, which at first seemed to be where it was through sheer accident of posture, continued its way.

She broke free and held her uncle off at arm's length, breathing with difficulty, now acutely aware (though by instinct only) of what his intentions were and what had transpired.

“Uncle—Uncle Francis—what are you doing?” She stammered when she regained her breath. “What—what——?”

The man was on his feet now, pale and frightened, exercising self-control with the greatest of difficulty.

“Don’t be silly,” he finally managed to say, “don’t be silly.” The words came slowly as though they were being torn from him. “What are you frightened about? I—I merely kissed you. You *are* a silly little goose.” His voice took on the semblance of color, became less rigid and forced.

Ruth stood before the man with speech frozen in her throat. She wanted to run but her legs had lost their strength. In her throat she felt a sharp pain and her heart thumped madly. Her mind was a confused jumble. Then suddenly she found release in tears. She threw herself on the ground and wept, spasms of sobbing shaking her body.

Steele, alarmed and distracted, lifted her to her feet.

“Here, here, you silly little child, you mustn’t cry. *Whatever* is the matter with you?”

But the racking sobs continued and she turned her head from him. Then, as conciliatory words were of no avail, he spoke more sternly:

“Stop it, stop, do you hear! Stop it at once! Good heavens, what a fool you are. Stop! It is getting dark and we had better be getting on and I can’t take you back with a face like that.”

—God almighty what a fool I am. Couldn’t wait, eh? Your own niece and a child, you idiot. Why don’t you take a whore? God, I shall never be able to face Elizabeth!

The blackness of the trees, the stillness of the woods now that the sun had disappeared, accentuated the girl’s terror. For a few moments there was an awkward, frightful silence, then as Ruth collected herself she was able to say: “Take me home, please.”

She walked a little behind her uncle as they moved towards the road in search of the carriage; behind her the evening wind began to moan more keenly through the trees. She tried hard to think; she would have to make excuses to her mother (it was now nearly dark), her eyes must be red and her face was surely a sight, she thought. And as she walked she shivered, although the air was still warm. At last they came upon the road and saw the carriage lights which the coachman had lit when the light began to fade.

As they got into the victoria Steele patted Ruth’s limp hand and said:

“You are not to be a silly child, do you hear? You are a woman now and it is time . . .” His voice trailed off, leaving the thought incomplete. The expression on the girl’s face frightened him.

As the horses trotted down the mountain road Ruth sat with her eyes fixed straight ahead of her. Her head was hot and ached, her legs seemed stiff and frozen, her heart was a black void. For her a world had ended.

On entering the house Ruth discovered that she was late for dinner and ran upstairs to dress. Her clothes were laid out on her bed but her hands trembled so that when her mother knocked fifteen minutes later she was still undressed. Mrs. Throop bustled into the room.

“Come along, darling, hurry! You’re keeping the Bishop waiting and he says he’s famished. Good heavens, your hands are trembling and you’re as pale as death. Whatever is the matter with you? Are you ill?”

In reply Ruth sank to her bed, buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

“Ruth, my darling child,” Mrs. Throop said in alarm, “what’s the matter? Tell me! What’s happened to you? Oh, dear, I have a house full of guests and here you are carrying on like this. Tell mother what’s the matter.”

She knelt down at her daughter’s side, patted her hands and attempted to comfort her, but the weeping continued. When the girl’s sobbing had subsided she observed that Ruth’s pallor was intense and her eyes were wide open. Mrs. Throop took a handkerchief, soaked it with *eau de Cologne* and dabbed the girl’s temples with it.

When Ruth was more calm her mother urged her again:

“Now don’t upset yourself, Ruth dear, but if you can, tell me what is the matter.”

In a faltering and hushed voice Ruth stammered out her story: the drive to the top of the mountain, the walk through the woods, the heat of the afternoon, her fatigue, the cool pine grove, how she sat at her uncle’s side and rested her head against his shoulder, the kiss and——. Her mouth was hot and parched and as she talked she stumbled, groped for words to describe what had happened for which her convent vocabulary was now hopelessly inadequate.

“And then I felt his hands, they were cold and clammy, here on my—my leg.” She wanted to say thigh but she knew her mother preferred limb. She compromised on leg. “He pressed me hard up against his body and his hand——.” She could go no farther, not even to her mother, and she lapsed into silence.

Mrs. Throop listened without making comment. Then: “Why did you lean up against him?”

“I was hot and tired—he asked me to.”

“And why did you kiss him, being alone with him in the woods?”

“He—he is my uncle—your brother.” Ruth was astonished at her mother’s tone which was relentless now.

“And why, of all girls, should this happen to you? Why don’t things like this happen to me?”

“I don’t know. Please, mother, I don’t want to talk of it any more now.”

But the girl’s story held Mrs. Throop in morbid fascination. She urged her daughter to tell her more.

“There is nothing more, mother.”

Mrs. Throop looked grim and angry. Suddenly Ruth burst into a hot, resentful fury: “I hate him,” she said, nearly shouting; “I never want to see him again. I hope he dies—and I don’t want his filthy money. He—he told me that when he died he would leave his money to me, but I don’t want it. I suppose that he has been buying everything with his money, we——”

“Ruth, how dare you talk this way about your uncle?”

There were cruel, hard words—clenched fists—glowering resentful eyes. With a sinking feeling Ruth realized that she had not found sympathy in her mother, that the woman was groping for a reason to attack her, to defend her brother. Here, she realized, was no consoler, no assuager of grief and bewilderment. Here was a Steele, a defender of reputations, a preserver of the family, a silencer of family scandal.

“He’s a dirty old”—she groped for a suitable word—the word she wanted was “lecher”—“he’s a dirty swine.”

“Keep quiet,” Mrs. Throop ordered. “Your uncle is a clean upright man, a God-fearing man, do you hear? Why, I never heard of such a thing. How is it that things like that never happened to me when I was a girl? Tell me that?”

There was nothing for Ruth to say. Mrs. Throop paced up and down the room in murderous silence.

“Why is it that your uncle,” she continued, “who is nearly four times your age, a respected businessman, a benefactor of the poor and a generous contributor to the Church—why should this sterling person attempt to—er—make love to you?”

The word love startled the girl. Love? Was that love? She remembered the books she had read: the lyricism, the poetic fantasies.

—Is this what they meant? God, is it possible that Keats and all the great poets lied! Was Diana a harlot and Endymion a drooling swine like my uncle?

She was no longer interested in what her mother was saying; the words poured from the woman's lips, but Ruth found retreat within herself. She sat looking at the floor lost in thought as her mother continued her tirade.

—Love! His scarlet lips livid against his pasty green face. To think that he—.

Her mother was demanding an answer to a question she had made but which Ruth had not heard. Mrs. Throop stood over her daughter and continued with mounting righteous indignation.

“Very well, then, I'll tell you. You have a lustful heart—you tempted him, otherwise how could he have acted as you say?”

“What? What?” Ruth rose to her feet and looked at her mother in bewildered astonishment. At first she thought she had not heard correctly.

“Yes, I mean just that. It was your fault.”

“Mother, what are you saying?”

Mrs. Throop's passionate defense of her brother now carried her well beyond the pale of reason: “Yes, you are a little wanton. You either tempted him or else you have misinterpreted a perfectly innocent kiss as an attack on your—your virtue. It is strange, I must repeat, that no one ever insulted *me* that way. Well, in either case you are a—a wanton.” She spat the word out at her daughter in a burst of uncontrolled anger; her eyes blazed and her face was white under the stress of her overwhelming rage.

As Ruth heard the word “wanton,” her knees weakened under her. Her mother's attitude was impossible to understand; it seemed so completely irrational and without basis. She caught the edge of her table and steadied herself, desperately trying to understand what was happening. Then she, too, was overcome by passion; and she struck out in blind defense.

“You are not telling the truth—you are mistaken.”

“So you persist in your damnable lie, do you?”

“I am not lying——.”

Without warning Mrs. Throop stepped back and brought the palm of her hand sharply across her daughter's cheek. Ruth was stunned and stared for a moment or two at her mother, then she flung herself across the bed and buried her face in her hands. Her mother stood over her trembling with shame and

anger (she was now aware of the injustice of her charge but there was nothing to be done about it; better to have the last righteous word) and said:

“God forgive me for what I have done, but it is better that I should use my hands upon you than let you grow up to be a bad woman.”

Then she left the room.

For more than an hour Ruth lay upon her bed, numb with shame and bewilderment. After the blow it seemed as though her body had refused to function; her feet were cold and her mind was empty of thought. From the dining room downstairs she heard the sound of conversation and once she fancied she heard her mother’s voice in laughter. Then she heard the front door open and the sound of the guests departing. It was quite late (she had lost count of time) when a maid came and brought her a tray of food.

“Mrs. Throop says you are not to speak to anyone about what happened,” the maid said.

Ruth did not answer but drank some tea until she felt the warmth return to her fingers and toes. Later when she undressed and got into bed, sleep seemed out of the question.

——I shall never forget this day. I’ll never get through this night.

But an hour later, after much fretful tossing and twisting, she fell into a heavy, exhausted sleep.

At first her mother's attitude was incomprehensible to Ruth. The degrading blow, the intolerance, the lack of motherly sympathy; these rankled for a long time. But as weeks went by and as Summer came and went, the memory of the painful scene became more and more clouded. And now that it was Autumn she recalled only on the rarest occasions the stinging pain and chilling humiliation which her mother had inflicted upon her. And when, at times, Mrs. Throop's white, angry face stood before her eyes, she forgave her; forgave with that full, impulsive forgiveness which is youth's. She did not realize it then, but she had learned wisdom through pain and suffering and when the ache and turmoil of the soul had passed she thought more calmly of the matter. All too soon she realized that this new world in which she was now living had no place for the over-sensitive, that girls were expected to resist improper advances, as they were prudently called, with tact and grace—with a nonchalant settling of the skirts, so to speak; the flight from the poacher should be studied and collected, not emotional and dramatic. Fright bordering on hysteria, such as hers had been, was uncalled for; it was bad breeding, unsettling, anti-social—particularly if the offender was one around whom a whole family rotated. Such an attitude was dangerous, it muddied the clear waters. And as she grew older Ruth came to understand, if not to condone, this passionate impulse on her mother's part to maintain family serenity at all costs. For to Mrs. Throop her brother was the symbol of family security. In Francis Steele lay all the qualities which were revered by the Throops and their class. He was the figurehead of the social system in which the family found its warm and comfortable niche, he was the shield against which the blows of outsiders beat in vain. He was the totem which insured the happiness and security of the tribes Steele, Courtney, and Throop. He was Church, industry, commerce, flag, and morality. To have allowed his name to be smirched—the question of justice did not enter here—would have been tantamount to sacrilege, treason, indecency. It was not that her mother pardoned her brother's act, on the contrary; but there were consequences beyond the obvious ones and there were circumstances in life which were best ignored. The bitter words and the angry charge of inherent lust and sinfulness which Mrs. Throop had hurled at Ruth were not rational or fully considered. They were the things which are sometimes said when there is a gnawing fear that perhaps the dreaded truth will be uttered or that the rock on which one's life rests will suddenly be blown to atoms. These were the things which Ruth came to know in a dim way. She did not grant that her mother was right, she merely accepted the facts and

marveled that things could be so.

Fortunately her duties were many and engrossing. She was now in her last term at high school; there were social responsibilities and in her music she found solace and forgetfulness. And with the passing of time, although the wound had outwardly healed, its evil effects remained unseen to blossom forth at a time when she had nearly forgotten the dreadful pain and humiliation of that frightful afternoon and evening.

Edgar Kennedy's first experience with sex occurred eight years before his marriage to Ruth. It was during his third year at high school; together with a group of youths he ventured, one Saturday night, into that section of the city which lies east of St. Lawrence Boulevard and immediately south of St. Catherine Street. Here, prowling through the dingy streets, past mysterious alleyways and *cul-de-sacs*, they came upon a house more imposing in its appearance than the neighboring establishments. From the transom over the door came the warm, inviting red glow which proclaimed the profession practiced behind the iron-latticed shutters. Now, in this as in all matters, there are varying degrees of excellence. On entering, the youths discovered that it was an "exclusive" place. In the halls and in the reception room the floors were covered with elaborately designed carpets (the color scheme ran largely toward red and its variants: scarlet, pink, maroon); the furnishings, divans, settees, and hangings were done in rich red plush. On the walls there were expansive portraits of nude women done in the flamboyant style which finds great favor with the owners of these establishments, the purpose of these paintings being comparable to the still lifes of food found in restaurants. The young men in quest of love were greeted in the foyer of the main floor by Miss Quinn herself; she was cordial but not profuse in her greetings, as befitted the madame of an exclusive house. His companions, who were older than Edgar, joked with their hostess (she resented the appellation of "madame" and preferred to be called just plain Miss Quinn; later, after several years of success, she became quite respectable, within limits, and married a young Jewish shoe merchant and set his tottering business upon a solid if somewhat soiled foundation), and asked to see "the girls."

In accordance with the rigid procedure of such institutions the young men were shown into the parlor. Here there was more gilded furniture (the delicate legs of which curved outward in keeping with the moral and decorative scheme of the place), scarlet plush hangings, and several highly-polished brass cuspidors each standing on a little rubber mat. On one of the walls facing the chair on which Edgar sat there was a painting depicting a lush nude woman with large breasts and pinkish thighs reclining on a *chaise longue*. The girls arrived in due time, about a dozen of them dressed in evening gowns (this was no mere brothel where men came and went hurriedly) representing, between them, the entire range of feminine pulchritude. They were dark, tall, fair, short, svelte, and robust. The intellectual and spiritual qualities of the young ladies

were not readily ascertainable nor, to tell the truth, were Edgar and his comrades particularly concerned with these aspects of Miss Quinn's protégés. It sufficed that they were girls. "The best girls in Montreal," Miss Quinn boasted with an artificial and quick smile. She inclined slightly to obesity (the young Jewish merchant, among other things, admired heft) and there was in her a steely quality which reminded one of stiff, whipcord riding-breeches, spurs, and riding crops. Her house, she said with becoming modesty, was the most moral one in the city. Here, she liked to say, there was no rowdyism, no narcotics, no picking of pockets such as went on in the more disreputable houses further east, or across the street for that matter. Her girls were not hardened prostitutes who had made the rounds of other houses, graduating first from the street; no, she herself recruited them fresh from the factories of the East End or picked them up of a Saturday night on St. Catherine Street: tired waitresses, discouraged housemaids, outright wantons. They were good girls, Miss Quinn said, not whores; nearly every one of them went to church on Sunday. Some of them were so young and naïve that it was almost touching. As the young men sat in the parlor Miss Quinn told the story of a young girl from Three Rivers whose innocence and naïveté was really laughable: she was in love with a ragged artist who lived in one of the wooden houses behind Laval University. He called upon her every Monday night; ("we are not busy then and I didn't mind very much") they were really in love and he used to bring her presents. Then a rich relative died and he decided to go to Paris to study. One Monday night he called all dressed up in new clothes ("he offered to pay like a gentleman now that he had money") and asked to see his Yvette. She was very sad and wept a little. She understood, of course, that he would not be faithful to her while he was away but while she could not hope for fidelity she demanded that he exercise prudence. The girls in Paris, she had heard, were not—she hesitated to belittle her sisters in Paris—but they were not overclean. One would have to be extremely careful. Thereupon she took an ivory-bound missal from the drawer of her dresser and opening it gave him a scented package which had lain between its leaves. It was a package of rubber contraceptives. Her lover, also a devout Catholic, was outraged at this sacrilege and remonstrated with her. "I put them there," the girl explained, "because now they are as good as blessed. Nothing will happen to them or to you. Always wear one and think of me." The youths laughed but Edgar was visibly shocked. "I say," he said, "that's nothing to laugh about. I think it was—sinful." One of his friends, a lanky, pimply youth, who rated high in scholastic philosophy, ceased laughing and replied to Edgar: "Oh, I don't know, Kennedy. The girl, in her simple way, was as devout as she knew how. I think, like many good religious stories, it borders a little on the sacrilegious."

The youths ordered wine and Miss Quinn started the automatic piano. After the wine was finished and the dancing ended, the inevitable question arose as to who was to have whom. There was much laughing and joking, for they had been instructed that among the upper classes love is a matter for jest and that only the lower orders and poets take love seriously. They joked particularly about Edgar. This was his first experience in lust and this, for some unaccountable reason, was a cause for great levity. Finally, however, the youths, each paired with a girl, went off to various parts of the house, financial arrangements being arranged beforehand with Miss Quinn.

Upstairs in the bedrooms the furnishings were not so gaudy, not so pornographically regal; the upper chambers were for purposes—to use a current expression—strictly business. Here there were no gilded settees and no tinsel, and Edgar's girl's scarlet gown was the only stab of color in the bare, whitewashed room. Near one of the green shuttered windows stood a double brass bed; close at hand there was a small table with an ash-tray upon it and in the corner of the room there was a frayed armchair. Up against the wall facing the bed was a dresser with a mirror into which was stuck a card upon which was printed the following information: "I have this day examined Jeanne Larue and have found her free from all communicable diseases. Signed, Albert Giroux, M.D." The card was printed in French and English, Montreal being a bilingual city.

The sight of the card, the bareness of the room, the uncertainty as to what precisely was expected of him, filled Edgar with uneasiness. As the young lady went through the preliminaries of her ritual and as he felt her hands upon him this feeling of uneasiness began to approximate dread. He was seized with a desire to flee down the stairs, past the ornate reception room and out into the street. But Mlle. Larue, seeing his nervousness, sought to reassure him, and putting her arms about his neck, drew him down to the bed.

"This is the first time?"

"Yes, the first time."

"With anyone?"

"Yes."

She laughed and kissed him with her profusely rouged lips. "I am a lucky girl, no?"

Less than half an hour later, for time is of the essence in these matters, Edgar walked up the darkened street toward the lights of St. Catherine Street. As he came down the stairs from Jeanne's room he saw some of his comrades

in the reception room. They were waiting for him, but he asked the Negro maid to let him out. No, he did not wish to wait for his friends. He was ill. As he walked along the street he felt shaky and his head reeled. The experience had been worse than he expected. The physical aspect of the affair had been fairly tolerable, not nearly as thrilling as he had been led to believe, but when the girl concluded her ritual with her hygienic and precautionary ablutions before his very eyes (the prophylactic effects to which Dr. Giroux testified), the whole business suddenly filled him with nausea. As he approached St. Catherine Street, nature, fortunately entering into the matter, promptly relieved the suffering youth and he retched.

Two weeks later, having been thoroughly shamed by his companions for his squeamishness and made the butt of much masculine humor, Edgar returned to Miss Quinn's establishment. This time there was no nausea.

Edgar soon learned not to be too squeamish about life. Miss Quinn's profession, he soon came to realize, was but one aspect of a many-sided existence. Life and the philosophy of his social circle soon hardened him against emotional fastidiousness; one kept a stiff upper lip under all circumstances, one hid one's emotional responses under an impassive mask, one held one's liquor—in short, one behaved generally like a man. And later when he went terrified to the family physician, he was told that a fellow was not really a man until he had been bitten at least once. "It is nothing. A cold—but not in the head," the doctor said, smiling. And so Edgar became a man.

After Edgar left McGill, he was taken into his father's shipping business. He started at the bottom of the ladder, a phrase dear to Kennedy *père*, and was assured that his rise to the top would be commensurate with his ability. For a year he worked side by side with the clerks in the outer office—those harried workers whose meager salaries maintain them in that pathetic starched dignity which lifts them above the ranks of mere toilers. He was given a small salary and commanded to observe the petty regulations which governed his less fortunate co-workers. He arrived at the office at eighty-thirty, took half an hour for lunch, and knocked off at six o'clock. His father considered this the essence of democracy.

—No damned coddling and hereditary nonsense the way we had in the old country. What the lad needs is hard knocks, that's the way to learn the ropes. The same as I did, by gad.

Nevertheless, Edgar was promoted and advanced with rapid and most undemocratic regularity while his fellow clerks (pronounced with the broad English "a," to compensate them for the inadequate salaries they received) continued at the old and time-honored rates. The young man soon learned all there was to know about maritime insurance, Lloyd's, customs rates and a smattering of Admiralty law. Mr. Kennedy, a portly gentleman who wore a distinguished Edward VII beard and was a member of the Board of Trade, a respected member of the community, hoped to see his son in his place when the day for retirement arrived.

The cold necessity of business and the *mores* of his social group soon blunted whatever native fineness Edgar had the night when he turned with repugnance from the prostitute in Miss Quinn's house. He was now a frequent visitor of the bar at the Windsor Hotel where the bartenders knew him by sight

and by name. He smoked a very masculine pipe belligerently and prided himself on his knowledge of women and horse-flesh. He was acutely aware of the difference between women of his own class and those of a "lower" order; to the one he gave a shaded meticulous attention colored somewhat by a tired deference, while to the others, the less wealthy and baser born, he offered a boisterous good fellowship tinted with a touch of vulgarity. His affairs, carried on with women not of his class and station, usually ended up in a Drummond Street house of assignation—sneaking in and out and with much furtive looking up and down the street. On the way to his favorite house run by a yellowish, pallid Belgian who kept a huge, vicious police dog, he walked past a dilapidated Methodist mission in the window of which appeared the legend: "God is Love—Jesus Saves." But this gave Edgar no qualms; it was Protestant proselytizing and he proceeded down the street intent on his illicit love affair.

Edgar was now tall, dark, and handsome. His face was rather weak, marred by a soft receding chin and blue watery eyes, but when it was in repose it expressed a bewildered wistfulness, a pathetic indecision. But this was rare enough, as a rule his guards were up and he was militantly masculine. His black hair was slicked back pompadour style and his air was excessively man-of-the-world. His clothes, and this was most important, were fashioned by an obsequious little Englishman who owned a dingy little shop on St. James Street. It was here that all the solid citizens of the city and their sons had their clothes made: quite conservative suits with low rolled lapels and shortish jackets which curved above the groin with quiet exhibitionism, tweeds from Scotland and England, indistinct in coloring, which blended with the grayish buildings of the business thoroughfare. The styles were subdued and unaffected, nothing loud and shrieking like the Yankee styles. Oh, no, this was Montreal, not New York, a difference with a distinction—as the Montrealers were proud to remark.

In all matters Edgar Kennedy has come a long way since the day when, as a sensitive youth, he became nauseated and greenish pale at the sight of a Cadieux Street whore squatting prophylactically after her commission of the act of love. It is some six years since that night and now Edgar is ashamed and laughs at his squeamishness. He is a hard-drinking, level-headed, young man about town. And it is upon him that Mrs. Throop has her eye as a prospective husband for Ruth.

It was a merciless February morning. The thermometer registered twenty-two degrees below zero; a tradesman walking along St. Catherine Street shortly after nine was told by a stranger that his nose was frozen white, at which he grabbed a handful of snow and rubbed it frantically on his face. The sun shone on the glittering snow and the extreme cold kept most people indoors, the streets were deserted. At the Throop home the double windows were shut tight and the furnaceman was busy in the cellar feeding a roaring fire. A snowshoe party arranged for that night had to be canceled because of the drop in temperature. Ruth remembered these things long afterwards: the bitterly cold day, the canceled party, the frozen nose of the tradesman, because it was the day on which Francis Steele died.

At eleven o'clock, Mrs. Throop came into the living room and broke the news of her brother's death; her eyes were red with weeping and she blew her nose repeatedly. Steele had gone to work as usual that morning and an hour after he arrived at his office his secretary had found him lifeless at his desk. A doctor was hurriedly summoned, but it was no use. It was his heart. Soon the Throop telephone began to ring; there were calls from the newspapers, the Bishop, business acquaintances, and many lesser relatives.

At noon Major Throop came home complaining about the cold and took charge of the arrangements; after all, his wife was the closest living relative of the deceased and it was quite fitting that he should take charge. The house was alive with hushed tension. The Major sat at his desk in his study and issued orders that were discreetly mournful, as befitted the occasion and yet at the same time were curt and efficient. Shortly after lunch the undertaker called and before it had grown dark all necessary arrangements had been made.

The day before the funeral the air of sadness lessened and practical matters were openly discussed at dinner. In the evening, the Bishop called and remarked that Steele had ever been a great benefactor to the poor and a generous contributor to the Church.

"It is to be hoped," he said, "that he remembered the Holy Church in his will. Ah, me, the work of the Lord is endless—the charities, the convents, and what with the parochial schools continually under the fire of the Protestants . . ."

In the living room and in the hallways, the more distant and poorer

relatives of the deceased gathered and spoke in hushed voices. Newspaper clippings in which the dead man was extolled in extravagant eulogy were passed from hand to hand. The Bishop called again and the next day a requiem mass was performed. Fortunately the cold spell had broken and the trip to the cemetery on the Cote des Neiges was not unduly uncomfortable.

A few days later Francis Steele's relatives gathered in the offices of Sir Robert Blake K.C., for the reading of the will. It was a sharp sunlit afternoon and the gay sound of bells on the red cutters which raced through the Place d'Armes outside offered sharp contrast to the brownish gloom which pervaded the baronet-lawyer's library. The room was done in a melancholy brown which was conducive to the proper degree of respectful sorrow. Sir Robert had not yet arrived and the stiff-faced relatives sat about in glum silence.

One of the lesser Steeles, a distant cousin, pulled out a soiled handkerchief, blew his nose loudly, shook his head from side to side, and with great difficulty essayed a long-drawn-out snuffle. Mrs. Throop, as the chief mourner, resented that snuffle; it was, in a manner of speaking, poaching on her preserves. She glared at the offender and thought: "Pretending that he's deeply grieved—and besides the will's been written these three years. Cheap little upstart." Her stony stare made the sniffler feel ill at ease, he fidgeted, averted his eyes, and looked out of the window, his heart full of class hatred. As he looked down on the snow-banked square full of scurrying attorneys and businessmen, he wondered if Mr. Steele had made it, let us say (not that there was much chance)—two thousand dollars. He planned to buy with this money a few choice lots in Outremont.

—Bound to go up in value; the city's moving in that direction. Pay off a few of those debts.

He was a little fellow, nearing fifty, and had a narrow face and high cheek bones; his upper lip was adorned with a drooping, mournful mustache. His manner was that of a harassed English servant. As he looked into the square and saw the businessmen in their raccoon and beaver coats, his imagination soared:

—Let's say three thousand. After all, he was a charitable man and I always said that charity should begin at home, well, perhaps not at home, but in the family certainly. Now with three thousand dollars a man could start in business for himself. What was three thousand dollars to *him*? Nothing, nothing at all. A mere bag o' shells, bagatelle, bag o' shells. Funny how a man will think of the silliest things in the hour of sorrow. Then there's Madge—a proper young lady she is, thank God. What with the boys beginning to call and take her out she'll be needing clothes and things. Madge with her rosy cheeks and as perky as a lark on a spring morning although I says it myself what

shouldn't as her mother says. Still I'll bet he'll be leaving that Courtney girl over there more than we'll ever see and they call him a public benefactor. Less public and more family is what I say. But if it's three thousand there'll be little cause for complaint.

Having dared to hope that it would be three thousand dollars, the sniffer settled himself patiently in his seat and awaited the arrival of Sir Robert, wondering if the baronet would really shake hands with everyone present including himself.

At that moment His Grace, the Bishop, entered the room and after standing in the doorway and nodding pontifically to all present seated himself on the right of Mrs. Throop. His Grace folded his hands in his lap, fingered his cross for a moment, and then closed his eyes. His eyelids blotted out all worldly thoughts and objects: the greater and lesser Steeles, the brownish hangings, the dark mahogany library table and the photographs of eminent statesmen which dotted the walls. (Sir Wilfred Laurier, smiling and benevolent, a shock of white Liberal hair hanging over the rear of his stand-up collar; the Duke of Connaught in full military regalia, whose solid plebeian features struck ready response in the heart of every loyal Canadian suburbanite—a man, His Highness was, who but for the grace of God might be planting roses and making the seven-fifty-three every morning.)

The assembled relatives looked with respectful apprehension at the slumbering Bishop. What sublime thoughts occupied his mind? But as His Grace rested, exceedingly practical matters called for thought:

—If it is one sou less than a quarter of a million dollars for the Church may I never hope to look upon the face of His Holiness. The idea of a French-Canadian cardinal is not as preposterous as some may suppose.

Opening his eyes, the Bishop looked quickly about the room, closed them again and said to himself: "For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

The distant cousin resented the presence of the Bishop; the Church's emissary boded no good for him.

—As if they haven't got enough as it is, living in luxury, drinking the best o' wines. Not that I'm an atheist, but the Lord didn't have that sort of thing in mind when he founded the Church. Socialists, that's what the apostles were, socialists. Now with three thousand dollars. . . .

At that moment Sir Robert, followed by his secretary, entered the room.

Sir Robert Blake spread the tails of his morning coat with an authoritative gesture and seated himself facing the semi-circle of relatives and servants of his late client. He was a tall wiry man with mannered, precise movements of the hands; everything about him indicated poise, control and confidence. His complexion was ruddy, although it was many years since he had indulged in sports and despite his reputation as a gourmet he was active and narrow at the hips. Only his eyes betrayed a quick nervousness. At the height of the reciprocity agitation when his party chief, Sir Wilfred Laurier, was advocating greater reciprocal trade opportunities between the United States and Canada, Robert Blake deserted his party and assisted largely in bringing about the Conservative victory. Although it was strenuously denied, he was knighted for this act of apostasy. The knighthood brought many and influential clients.

Sir Robert smiled tolerantly at those present, the sort of smile that comes with years of security and ease. In a flat tone completely devoid of inflection he read the first paragraphs of the will which established his late client's competency. The devious tautology of the legal language soothed the scholastic soul of the Bishop, he found joy in the mere words, but the lesser, sniffing Steele was driven almost to distraction. The matter of competence having been thoroughly gone into, the soundness of mind and body stated and restated, Sir Robert eventually droned on with maddening composure into the sections dealing with bequests.

“To His Grace, Bishop Villeneuve, in trust . . .”

All eyes turned sharply toward the Bishop, there was a momentary hush and it seemed as though all hearts ceased beating. The prelate, however, sat slumped in his chair, his eyes were closed and it seemed as if the business in hand were furthest from his mind.

“. . . in trust for the Convent of the Sacred Heart, the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Catholic Reformatory . . .” Here followed a list of nunneries, charities, churches (the steeples of which required regilding, Steele had a mania for gilded steeples), orphanages. . . .

When the list of institutions was exhausted Sir Robert uttered the amount of the bequest to the Church. The Bishop opened his eyes and looked with mild astonishment at the baronet. As Sir Robert continued with other bequests he closed his eyes again and resumed his meditation:

—They will be pleased in Rome. Two dead saints indeed!

The lesser Steele looked with apprehension towards the droning lawyer and shifted his glance toward the Bishop.

—Them with their gold chalices and vestments! A person would think they had enough. All that money—what for? If it's a penny more than one thousand I'll be a bugger.

The lawyer droned on: To his servants, many of whom had spent most of their lives in his service. . . . His butler and housekeeper were especially mentioned and remembered. The butler, a man nearing seventy and, next to the Bishop, the most dignified man in the room, pulled a spotless handkerchief from his pocket and wept silently. The housekeeper, an upright and shriveled woman of indeterminate age, stared straight ahead of her as though she saw nothing.

The list of bequests continued. To his beloved sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Throop. . . . The sum was magnificent, more than she had expected. The total bequests so far were nearly one million dollars and still there were several pages of the will remaining to read.

“To my namesake and kinsman, Francis Xavier Steele . . .”

The sniffer stiffened suddenly as if preparing for a violent blow. At that moment Sir Robert cleared his throat and reached for a glass of water. The agony was unendurable, it seemed as though an eternity passed before the lawyer set the glass down again, another eternity passed during which Sir Robert drew his handkerchief from his breast pocket and leisurely patted his wetted lips.

“. . . I bequeath the sum of three thousand dollars.”

At length the lawyer arrived at the paragraph which dealt with the bequest to Ruth:

“And to my favorite niece, Ruth Courtney, to whom I am greatly indebted and whose prayers I desire above all things, I bequeath . . .” Here followed a long list of securities, choice city real estate, cash and government bonds. “. . . to be held in trust during the life of the legatee, the interest and income of which shall . . .”

All eyes turned upon Ruth, who sat listening to the terms of her inheritance. The Bishop beamed upon her and Mrs. Throop smiled with evident satisfaction and even Francis Xavier Steele felt mellow and nodded toward the girl. But Ruth was unsmiling and looked with a fixed expression at

the towers of the cathedral which loomed over the square.

A few minutes later when the reading was completed the Bishop shook hands cordially with Sir Robert and remarked:

“In death as in life, Sir Robert (he pronounced it Robair), he was a worthy man, a very worthy man.”

A few days later, at dinner, Ruth startled her mother and the Major by abruptly declaring that she would have nothing to do with her uncle's money.

"But, darling," Mrs. Throop said when she had recovered from the shock, "you can't do a thing like that."

"Why not?"

"Well—er—you simply can't, that's all. The money is there waiting and you've got to accept it."

"I won't, mother, I just can't."

The Major looked at his stepdaughter as though she had suddenly taken leave of her senses, but Mrs. Throop understood. She understood and she dreaded her daughter's decision becoming public knowledge. For two days she argued and pleaded, but Ruth was adamant.

"It isn't that I don't want to go about all my life remembering that—that afternoon. It isn't that. But I don't want his money. It seems as though he wanted to buy something that"—Ruth groped for words—"something that isn't for sale."

In desperation, Mrs. Throop called upon Sir Robert. She told the story of her brother and Ruth with as much delicacy and tact as she could muster.

"She was a young and sensitive convent girl at the time, highly imaginative, and in all probability misconstrued a perfectly harmless gesture. I'm sure you understand, Sir Robert."

During his lifetime Steele had been frank with his lawyer, between the two men there had been a complete understanding. There had been several conferences at which persons left Sir Robert's office after having received a check and duly signed a waiver of all claims. Sir Robert understood perfectly and said so with an utterly grave face.

It was decided that he would talk to Ruth, he would explain her status under the law and he would do his best to convince her to accept the money and keep the matter out of the Court of Probate.

The following day Ruth called upon Sir Robert and they motored to the Place Viger Hotel in the French quarter.

“The Ritz is all right for swank,” Sir Robert said, “but when it’s a matter of food give me the Place Viger. Fortunately it’s far from the stations and few Americans ever discover it.”

During the meal the greater part of the conversation was taken up with small talk and a long discussion by the baronet on the merits of tangerine juice as a basting for wild duck. It was his boast that he could cook a more perfect dinner than any chef in Canada. From the *hors d’oeuvres* to the dessert he traveled, gastronomically, from Northern Quebec (eggs served in warm maple syrup in the log cabin of a *habitant*—“a vile dish, my dear”) to Tahiti (sea trout on live embers in a wrapping of plantain leaves—“the meat is so tender it flakes in one’s fingers”) and on to a Maori pah in the North Island of New Zealand (mutton-bird caked with clay and baked in the mud of a hot spring).

When coffee was served Sir Robert suddenly launched into the business in hand.

“What’s this I hear about your not wanting to accept your uncle’s bequest?”

Ruth was unprepared for his sudden question and before she could frame a reply her host continued:

“Of course, you may turn it over to me as a gift. I shan’t mind, you know.”

“It’s hard for me to explain,” Ruth began.

“Your mother did all that yesterday,” the lawyer said. “She told me your unpleasant experience with your uncle. I understand how you feel about such a painful matter. But I think you should know that he was most anxious to see that you were made independent for life. I drew his will for him and he kept insisting that there was to be no hitch in the legalities.”

“But don’t you realize, Sir Robert, that I can’t take—I don’t want his money?”

“Why?”

“It’s a bribe. During his life he never came to me to ask my pardon. He came to the house very seldom after that afternoon. When he wrote the will he thought that he could buy my—my forgiveness with money. I don’t want to have anything to do with his money.”

“My dear girl,” Sir Robert said, “you must be more worldly and try and understand what was in your uncle’s mind when he left you this money which you so disdainfully toss away. You see, your uncle was an exceedingly practical man. He knew that money buys everything and in a measure he was

right. Certainly money bought *him* happiness—the sort of happiness he wanted. And when he died he made his servants and relatives happy, everyone but you. No doubt he even thought that he was purchasing a seat at the foot of the throne of God with his money.”

The lawyer smiled and added: “The poor apostles.”

But Ruth, ignoring his arguments, repeated: “I’m sorry, Sir Robert, I don’t want his money.”

As though he had not heard, Sir Robert continued: “Don’t you see that your uncle *has* bought forgiveness? He has bought and paid for it—and there’s no way of returning his money. He has paid you and now he is beyond your reproaches and rejections. He bought forgiveness and righteousness just as he bought timberlands and real estate. Cash down and no nonsense.”

As she listened Ruth began to realize the truth of Sir Robert’s remarks. She sat and toyed with her serviette as the lawyer went on:

“Mind you, I understand your feelings—fully. But, you see, your attitude is a moral one, an ethical one, and there is nothing very moral or ethical about money. Money, my dear, as you will doubtless discover if you live long enough, has a logic all its own. Some people fail to understand this. They bring to the pursuit of money the logic of finer things and they invariably end in defeat and failure.”

“Then you are advising me,” Ruth said, “to employ Uncle Francis’ logic.”

“Precisely,” Sir Robert said. “Now one of the laws which govern money ordains that it multiply itself. I shan’t go into the details of that. And this multiplication will go on whether you accept the money or not. The law says that this money is yours whether you want it or not. And in all my years of legal practice I have not discovered a method of returning a bequest to a deceased testator.”

Sir Robert smiled as he concluded his remarks and for some time Ruth sat in silence, thinking.

When he thought she had come to realize the truth of what he had said, he asked:

“Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Ruth said, “I understand.”

On the first day of the following month she received the first of the interest checks.

Mrs. Throop was exceedingly fond of Edgar Kennedy and by means of shrewd diplomacy less eligible young men were discouraged in calling upon the Throops.

After the March thaw there were walks through the footpaths of the mountain, afternoons in the drawing room at the piano and as Easter approached Ruth found herself in love. Her heart spilled over under the stimulus of this new and sudden emotion. One day as they cantered up the mountain roadway and he broke into a canter she sensed something heroic in the manner in which his knees gripped the horse's sides, the grace with which he held his reins, the ease with which he rose and fell in the saddle. There were days and hushed, keenly painful evenings. And Mrs. Throop was contented, extraordinarily contented.

There had been times in the past when Ruth was a source of worry to her mother. As the girl passed her twentieth birthday and brooded by herself, going to early mass every day, playing at the piano all through the day, Mrs. Throop had felt that the girl was a cross especially placed on her shoulders by an angry Providence. To Mrs. Richard Steele, a little frightened woman ever ready to agree with anyone more positive than herself, she said:

"My dear, at last I'm happy, truly happy. Of course, you know about Ruth and Edgar. A splendid young man. Following directly in his father's footsteps and to think that Ruth—you know, I was beginning to think that the girl would never realize—I mean to say, what with her music and moods. I was through with that sort of thing when I was seventeen but for a girl of twenty to be mooning about playing the piano all through the day, not answering when she was spoken to, day-dreaming—she'll make him a good wife. The day-dreamers always do. Emotional and that sort of thing." Mrs. Throop smiled with understanding at her sister-in-law. "Not that that sort of thing is absolutely essential to a happy marriage but——"

"Yes, I know, Elizabeth," Mrs. Steele broke in, "but men do care for that sort of thing these days. It's this modern dancing, the theater. You know, I think that actresses have made love entirely different than it was when we were younger. And the moving pictures. Heavens!"

"Her music worried me especially. Goodness knows that I am a lover of music. The first time I heard Tosti's *Good-bye* I broke down and wept. You

know the story, of course. His wife was being carried off to the lunatic asylum and he was so overcome by grief that he dashed off to his studio and as her shrieks resounded through the house he wrote the song. Well, it's different with foreign gentlemen; *our* men are colder, it seems."

"For which, thank God," Mrs. Steele said fervently.

"They went riding yesterday and she's quite taken up with him. She's really a child in spite of her deep feelings. You'll never guess what she asked me this morning at breakfast."

Mrs. Throop whispered to her sister-in-law. Mrs. Steele giggled and spluttered as she said:

"At *her* age! My, my! How splendid for Edgar. Even I, who was a silly little filly, knew *that* when I was sixteen, no, seventeen. Did you tell her everything, Elizabeth?"

"Everything," said Mrs. Throop with evident pleasure.

In practical matters Bishop Villeneuve of Montreal was, as Christ counseled, as cunning as a serpent, but in the realm of art and ritual (in the mind of the Bishop these were one) he was as gentle as a dove, as emotional as a young and innocent girl. This servant of God who had once walked calmly to the gallows supporting a condemned murderer, had an overwhelming love of music. A Bach partita exalted him to religious ecstasy and the Leipzig cantor's *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, Heilige Geist* moved him to tears.

It was a few days before Good Friday and the Bishop had been giving instructions to the cathedral organist. The little thin musician waited for His Grace to dismiss him, but the prelate closed his eyes in meditation for a moment. When he opened them he said:

“They are giving the *Passion According to St. Matthew* at His Majesty's Theater on the afternoon of Good Friday.”

“Yes, Your Grace, so I have heard.”

“I will not be here for the afternoon services because Steiner, the tenor, is singing the *Passion*. I must hear him—a splendid voice—a splendid voice.”

The organist agreed quickly, smiling eagerly. “A very capable artist, Your Grace.”

“Yes, a splendid tenor,” said the Bishop. “What a pity that he is a Protestant.”

Easter morning and the bells of Montreal's many churches call the faithful to mass. In the North End, in Maisonneuve, St. Henry, from the hovels in the side streets running off malodorous Craig Street, from stiff and starched Westmount come thousands upon thousands to witness the resurrection of their Lord. French-Canadian merchants from Papineau Avenue and St. Denis Street, in black broadcloth suits, prostitutes without rouge from Cadieux Street (for He who is risen once saved one of these from the bloody hands of the righteous), mechanics, *canadiens*, with scrubbed faces and mirrorlike celluloid collars and brilliant red ties, little dark-faced, pert French girls in white, boys in stiff new suits; on foot in Maisonneuve, in shiny buggies in St. Henry and Lachine, in smart limousines from Westmount and Outremont—all are on the way to church this bright Spring morning. The bells toll, greetings are called across the narrow streets, stalks of *fleur de lys* are set in lapels and in corsage bouquets at the waists of the young ladies. Among those going to church are Ruth and Edgar; he in morning coat, gray striped trousers and wing collar, she in a suit of silver-gray trimmed with fur and a cocky toque from under which there is the ever-present wisp of recalcitrant auburn hair. The car drops them on the St. James Street side of the Place d'Armes and they walk jauntily across to the cathedral. The carillon tolls a hymn, the doors of the church are flung wide and the faithful enter.

* * * * *

The Tuesday after Easter Sunday Mrs. Throop wrote to the society editors of the *Star*, the *Witness* and the *Herald* announcing the betrothal of her daughter to Edgar Kennedy. She deliberately ignored *La Presse*, which, while being a good Catholic paper, was French-Canadian. A similarity of religious belief, she felt, did not imply social equality.

It was June and the lilacs spread their delicate fragrance over sunny roads and lanes, splashing the countryside with minute dominions of faint purple. Four years had passed since that day on the summit of the mountain. The memory of it was all but wiped out, nearly but not quite forgotten. And now Ruth was to be married.

Mountains of flowers were banked high in the spacious Notre Dame Cathedral; near the altar stood the Bishop, imposing in his vestments; groups of friends and relatives were seated waiting for the ceremony to begin. Outside, a group of curious onlookers stood about watching the carriages and automobiles arriving. Ruth was dressed in white (as Mrs. Throop watched she thought of the day twelve years ago when her daughter came up these same steps and knelt before the same altar on her communion day) and the groom twitched nervously as the Bishop uttered the blessing in Latin. The organ thundered. Mrs. Throop wept and the Major fidgeted with his mustache, wondering if the detachment of officers were properly rehearsed. Outside, newspaper photographers were awaiting the appearance of the couple. There was a faint cheer as Ruth and her husband appeared on the carpeted steps of the cathedral. Two rows of officers of the groom's militia regiment drew their swords and formed a flashing arch under which the bridal pair walked to the limousine.

That night, after an exciting dinner, Ruth and Edgar took the express for Halifax from which they would go to Uncle Francis' summer place at Gaspé overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Ruth experienced new, profound emotions during this first month of her marriage. There were peaceful days spent lazying on the beach in costumes which shocked the simple Gaspé natives. The sea drew her to itself, its mystic power was as strongly attractive to her as the spiritual power of the Church. There were also nights. Deep rich plush-black nights when nothing could be seen from the house save an occasional white-crested wave riding perilously towards the shore. At such times the foreboding and fears which usually come with marriage seemed most threatening. When the sun shone in the daytime, sparkling on the blue waters of the gulf, all misgivings were dispelled.

One night, as the month was drawing to its close, she came and joined Edgar who sat on the verandah overlooking the water. They said nothing for a while. Overhead the stars marched silently in their predestined tracks, blanked out from time to time by ragged, harassed clouds which sped homeless across the skies. After a long intimate silence, Ruth said:

“Edgar, dear, I should like to live here forever.”

The gurgling of his pipe ceased as he removed it from his mouth to reply. “So would I.” Then after a silence: “But it simply can’t be done—I mean to say, there is business and things like that.”

“Yes, darling, I know—but for tonight let’s pretend that we’ll live here forever. Just for tonight say that you will.”

“Very well, dear—we will.”

For a time she sat looking out to sea, not speaking, then: “I have such a feeling of disaster about the city, about everything. It seems to me sometimes that all these things which we hold most precious will be taken away from us and destroyed. I feel that something—something dreadful is going to happen and I want to be happy forever, as we are now.” She put her hand in his and pressed it tightly.

Edgar laughed a sharp, reassuring masculine laugh. “Nonsense, my dear, you’re a little nervous tonight. The dark night, perhaps. Shall I ask Marie to serve you some tea?” He rose and went inside.

As Ruth sat waiting she looked out toward the surging gulf now being whipped into a senseless fury. Somewhere beyond the curtain of blackness lay Newfoundland, grim, bleak, inhabited by silent fishermen who lived

perpetually on the brink of disaster; who unadventurously rode the storm that hungry mouths might be fed. She recalled a summer's vacation on the island and remembered the gray poverty of the fishing villages, the strangely silent men, the disaster-haunted gaunt women. These were the waters through which Cabot sailed in the "Matthew," a cockleshell ship manned by eighteen outcasts, cutthroats, and dreamers who sought the fantastic riches of India. They had sailed through the rock-infested straits searching for the cities of the Orient and had found instead the gray, bare rocks of the Gulf islands. Cabot, "who found the new isle" for which the king rewarded him with ten pounds. But now there were no adventurers, and cutthroats perished miserably in sanitary whitewashed chambers or pleaded for clemency without grace or courage. There were no kings who sent mad Italian voyagers forth to seek new lands; there were no new lands to seek.

She shook this mood off with an effort; with an effort she came home to earth. Perhaps, she thought, the great adventures were those that lay closer to the hearth: one's everyday duties, love, the tremendous intensity of human relationships or the majestic throbbing of a choral prelude.

The door banged open behind her. It was Edgar who filled the darkness with his noisy presence followed by Ruth's maid, Marie, who carried a silver tray laden with tea things.

"Here, oh, princess," he said barging into the mellowness of her mood, "here are treasures of tea from India."

He switched on the electric light, blotting out the stars above and the heavy, tangible blackness which lay over the tumultuous sea.

When Ruth and Edgar returned to the sweltering city towards the end of July the newspapers carried sensational scare-heads telling of the consequences of the assassination of an Austrian archduke in the Balkans. As Balkans were always killing each other and as Anglo-Saxons considered political murder in extreme bad taste, the matter was expected to blow over as such things do with the non-Nordic peoples. Then followed days of diplomatic notes, ultimatums, mobilizations. King George reviewed the British Fleet, Earl Grey spoke of peace and in Europe the chancellories and general staffs worked late into the night with nervous haste. Ruth, too, had her problems: there was the business of selecting hangings, purchasing decorations and pictures. Servants were engaged, household routine was established. Unmindful of the impending catastrophe, the couple spent an entire day at an auction sale and returned home elated with the purchase of a set of Sèvres china. The news of England's declaration of war swept over the city, stopping business for the day. Excited groups gathered on street corners, before the news bulletin of the *Star* on St. James Street. Flags fluttered from all flag-poles through the city; there was an excited, tense air about everything and everybody as though a decaying and sluggish humanity had suddenly found the way to ultimate happiness. Young men marched through the streets on the way to work with military erectness, gray old codgers braced their shoulders and swung their arms to the rhythm of imaginary drums. Girls smiled and struck up quick, new friendships with perfect strangers. The old and familiar hatreds suddenly seemed unimportant. The Empire had found a common enemy.

The question of furnishings and Sèvres china was relegated to its proper place. Then stories of the "Old Contemptibles" at Mons reached Canada; the heroic rearguard action, the little dogged band at the modern Thermopylae in Belgium. The only Canadian cruiser in the Atlantic, the "Niobe," dashed up and down the eastern coast ready to engage von Tirpitz' fleet should it dare to venture near Halifax. Everything was disorganized. Edgar and the Major kept coming and going.

There was a great deal of amateur military tactics discussed at dinner, much marking of damask table linen with pencils. If only Kitchener would listen to Major Throop! But the Belgian forts continued to fall with astonishing regularity and finally Antwerp fell. There was talk of a regiment being recruited at once and sent overseas. Patriotic wealthy Montrealers volunteered to equip the new forces. There were parades, blaring bands, men in uniform

were embraced, kissed, adored. Aristocratic young ladies reared in luxury and refinement, prostrated themselves in patriotic self-abasement before lumberjacks and day laborers in uniform. Loyalty was no longer a political necessity or a duty, it was now a heady, wild delight.

One Saturday afternoon the 17th Lancers with Major Throop astride his spirited dun mount cantered along Sherbrooke Street. There were cheers from the sidewalks and Mrs. Throop and Ruth waved from the dining room balcony. Horses' hoofs clattered in the stately, tree-lined street below, colored pennants fluttered at the heads of the steel-tipped lances. It was all so exciting, it seemed as if everyone were not living ordinary, routine lives but rather taking part in a series of dramatic amateur tableaux. In the streets, in restaurants, and clubs there was much talk of cold steel and how the British preferred to use the bayonet.

——Wait until our lads give 'em a taste of British cold steel!

In the fall, the Duke of Connaught's younger daughter, Princess Patricia, graciously consented to become the patroness of the newly formed regiment. Only the cream of Canadian manhood was to be enlisted in this crack unit. The men were to be at least six feet tall and young men came from all over the country to join up. There were rigorous medical and endurance tests.

The question of shipping was of great importance and Edgar and his father made hurried and secret trips to Ottawa to discuss matters relating to the mercantile marine with the officials at the Department of Militia and Defence. On the return from one of these trips Edgar seemed flushed and important. It was at dinner and he toyed with his coffee and spoke with high boyish enthusiasm about the war.

"General Martinson says it will all be over by Christmas," he said. "The Germans were perfect idiots about the business at the Marne. Couldn't bring up their heavy artillery fast enough."

"Do you really think it will be over so soon?" Ruth asked.

"Wait until the Russian steam roller gets into action properly. All this retreating is really a trap. Leave it to old Kitchener. It'll all be over by Christmas but the cheering. Watch and see!"

He sat looking at his Queen Anne silver spoon, lost in thought. Then, blurting it out like a school boy, he said: "I say, Ruth, old General Martinson has fixed it up for me."

"Fixed it up?" Ruth asked. "Fixed what up, dear?"

"Well, you see, it was this way. I felt that I simply couldn't hang about in pater's office doing easy, safe work while the men are doing such splendid work—I mean at Mons. Martinson has arranged for me to have a commission in the Princess Pats. Do you think they actually saw angels defending them during the retreat?—the Germans called it a rout, but it was very orderly, falling back that way, fighting for every inch."

For some time Ruth felt too stunned to speak. Married only a few short months and now he was leaving her. She felt choked, the pain in her throat grew more acute (she felt all of her powerful emotions in the throat), and for a few minutes speech was impossible.

"I say," Edgar said, "you don't look any too pleased. It'll all be over by

Christmas. Martinson said that they have plans that will startle——.”

Ruth’s lower lips trembled, tears welled up into her eyes, blurring the beautiful Sèvres china, making the silver shaky and indefinite in outline.

“You really oughtn’t to take it so badly. After all, it’s the thing to do, you know.”

Ruth brought herself under control with an effort. “I suppose so,” she said, “but you see, I had different plans. But I suppose one shouldn’t have plans in times like these.”

After dinner they went to the Princess Theatre and saw some vaudeville acts. There was much playing of “God Save the King” and “Oh, Canada.” The audience was boisterous and rowdy, a few drunken soldiers kept getting up during the acts and walking up and down the aisles, but nobody seemed to mind. One of the acts closed with a British version of an American patriotic song. The words were hastily altered to meet the needs of the moment. At the end, the orchestra blared and the drums thumped and pounded and a little fellow in a derby hat pulled out a Union Jack and waved it at the audience. The audience became insanely wild, standing and cheering. When, at the end of the program, the orchestra played the national anthem Edgar stood very erect in the corner of the box.

When they returned, the red sandstone house seemed very remote and alien. After they went to bed Edgar fell into a happy, untroubled sleep but Ruth lay awake long. She was pregnant.

“It is better not to have told him,” she thought, “he might think that I am deterring him. It will be hard for him to understand that I need him so much now.”

The crowd on Fletcher's Field was unbearable the day on which the princess inspected the regiment. Hawkers sold flags, peanuts, and celluloid pins with the portrait of the princess smiling out of a circle of Allied flags. People rushed and shoved, shouted, cheered. Ruth stood in a special section roped off and reserved for distinguished visitors together with her mother, officials and gold-braided military authorities. Bishop Villeneuve was there in his ecclesiastical robes; solemn and frowning as though he, for one, was opposed to the hostile French-Canadian attitude towards the war. A creased old *habitant* coming down from the backwoods a few days before and hearing of the war had remarked: "*C'est bon!* Englishmen being killed? Fine!" This business belonged exclusively to *les mad anglais*.

But *La Presse*, the French-Canadian members of parliament, and the Bishop took the correct stand on the question. The Catholic ranks of the Princess Pats had marched to Notre Dame Cathedral the day before and the Bishop himself had blessed their standards, calling upon the gentle Christ to assist them to victory. The Bishop, being a loyal Canadian, conveniently forgot that Bach was a German and called upon the faithful to boycott German goods; the following year Mr. Steiner, that splendid tenor, did not return to Montreal. Instead, a less gifted but more Latin singer was found.

The field was packed with shoving, shouting humanity. A regiment was going to the front! Suddenly there were cheers, shouts. The shouting grew in volume. A fleet of cars drew up to the field and Her Highness, Princess Patricia, alighted from her limousine. The battalion presented arms, a thousand bayonets coming from the slope to the salute flashed in the sunlight. The band blared the opening bars of the national anthem. The princess, accompanied by staff officers in red and gold walked quickly down between the ranks. Order arms! Attention! Slope arms! Companies: by the right—quick march! The band broke into the quick march-past, "The British Grenadiers," and the regiment marching past the reviewing point headed down Park Avenue towards St. Catherine Street. The crowd broke and followed the soldiers downtown.

There was great running and scurrying and in the confusion Ruth lost Mrs. Throop. She saw the masses of people following the retreating battalion, she heard the shouts, the hysterical girls: Oh, boy-ees! Good-by-ee! Soon the music receded in the distance, the rising and falling bayonets disappeared

somewhere beyond Pine Avenue and in a few moments the field was cleared. The grass of Fletcher's Field, usually so green and well-kept was now littered with refuse, leavings of sandwiches, peanut shells, orange peel trampled by many heels into the turf. The press of the crowd, the odors of many bodies and now the sight of the droppings of the herd filled Ruth with disgust.

Looking up at the summit of the mountain she walked towards the cable car and was soon whirled upwards toward the top. As the frail-looking car went flying up, the Field below became clean, the street cars dwindled in size, and soon the roofs of the houses and the gilt steeples of the church in the East End became visible. The noises of the city could no longer be heard. Here there were no cheering crowds sending fine young men to their death, separating newly married husbands and wives. The summit was deserted, there were more exciting things for people to do today. St. Catherine and Windsor Streets were packed with the cheering throng but up on the mountain it was lonely and quiet. Only a bent, aged gardener swept dead autumn leaves together in brittle brown piles at the side of the road leading to the lookout. Once she fancied she heard the strains of a band.

It was dark when she started the long walk down towards home.

A few months passed and the casualty lists began to appear. Long, closely printed lists: Adams, Ahern, Burns, Cohen, Daniels. . . . Bitter reality in contrast to the glowing stories of victories of the western front: Ferguson, Finklestien, Garrison, Henley. . . . Alphabetical heartbreak. The news of the gallant stand of the Canadians at Ypres filled the news columns and the editorials with elation and the homes of thousands of Montrealers with overwhelming sorrow: Jones, Albert, Pte., killed in action; Kelly, Patrick, Pte., died of wounds; Kennedy, Francis, Pte., missing; Leary, George, Capt., killed in action. “. . . When the cloud of yellow smoke appeared over the German lines it was thought at first that the trenches had caught fire. But soon the cries of ‘Gas, gas!’ went up. On the right and left of the Canadian units the French and Belgians fell back, terrified, leaving the flanks exposed. One officer suspected that urine would counteract the effects of the gas and passed the word down the line. At first there was some confusion but soon officers and men were tying handkerchiefs about their faces and manning the parapets. Soon the Germans, following the screen of gas, attacked. They expected that the lines were completely evacuated. Surprise turned into dismay as the Canadians poured a deadly stream of fire from their trenches, repulsing the first attack and holding back the invasion until reinforcements filled up the gaps. On all sides, the screams of gassed men could be heard distinctly. . . .” Monnison, Charles, Pte., gassed; McCarthy, F.X. Lieut., gassed; O’Brien, Joseph, Sgt., missing; Pascal, François, Pte., killed in. . . .

To the cacophony of guns, the cries of the wounded, the chorus of patriotic shouting, there was at first, almost inaudible, but growing in volume, an obligato of wailing and sorrowful prayer. At night when the marching bands were asleep in the barracks, when the hob-nailed boots stood unlaced beneath the bunks in the Peel Street dormitories, when the presses had ceased whirring, when the statesmen slumbered, over the city, in the dead of night there arose a moaning and weeping. In hovels near the waterfront, in living quarters behind little shops, in Pine Avenue mansions, in brothels, in bedrooms, women cried aloud or bit their lips. Ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand women with sons, lovers and husbands on the battlefields, eaten by rats and vermin, lay thinking at night. In other cities other tens of thousands of women and in other countries more countless thousands; a threnody of millions of voices. Millions of prayers uttered in the silence of the night! The prayer gathered in volume, united, took on a physical force and rushed madly about and finally exhausted itself like a spent bullet and fell to earth. Eyes were red and ugly with much weeping and in the morning there were tired heads and smarting eyes and the day seemed long and endless. There were greetings to be uttered, duties to be performed, food to be cooked, dishes to be washed, dances to be attended, home fires to be kept burning, troubles to be packed up with aching hearts and fingers in old kit bags, smiles to be smiled. And at four o'clock in the afternoon there was tea.

Like strange and macabre flowers which bloom and thrive on the blood of the dead, widows' weeds appeared throughout the city, in the streets, in restaurants, entering the gaping doors of churches. For there was no hope anywhere, everywhere strident bands, cheering insane crowds—Oh, boy-ees! Good-by-ee!—the endless casualty lists—Adams, Ahern, Burns. . . . There was nowhere to turn except to the vaulted silence of the church and even here on Sundays the shouts of war entered the sermons and tore the sorrowing mood to shreds. Here in the cathedral on week-days, when the pews were deserted, Ruth came to find consolation. In the darkened nave she could see a bereft woman, black and gaunt in mourning, kneeling long in prayer. It was soothing to fall on one's knees and find peace and sanctuary from the howling of the mob within the comforting shadow of the altar and the Holy Mother of God.

One afternoon she rode to the cathedral and spent an hour in meditation and prayer. But the old mood was gone. She remembered the old chapel at the

convent; its serene stillness, the surcease of worldly pain which followed soon after one genuflected and lifted up one's voice in prayer. And now, it seemed, one's words echoed back as though the arched ceiling shut out the supplications of the faithful. In this selfsame pew she had heard the *B minor Mass* with Edgar, it seemed then that there were something beyond the building of stone, mortar and glass. A veil had been torn away that Easter morning and she saw something beyond. But now a new mood had come upon the world. Despite all her efforts, the thoughts crowded in upon her, refused to be dispelled. There was a horror abroad that threatened to destroy all the old values; coarseness and brutality had seized everyone. Vulgarity, bestiality, and callousness were everywhere; in the newspapers, in the theaters, in the shops, in the streets. As she drove past Fletcher's Field that morning she had seen recruits at bayonet practice, plunging the glinting, steely blades into the straw entrails of effigies dressed in German uniforms. She still heard the simulated shrieks of fury (soon they would become real) as the soldiers lunged at the swinging dummies. Speech, too, was coarsened, colored by the barrack-room, stained by tobacco juice. The world in which simple happiness had once been possible was demolished by a blast of artillery. Flowers, a Spring morning, a Bach prelude: these were no more. The hot lava of war had stiffened them and rendered them unrecognizable.

Every Thursday afternoon Ruth came to her mother's home to roll bandages for the wounded. Sitting at the table talking of military politics, the Allied successes or reverses, were many ladies whose husbands and sons were distinguished in the Army, the Church or politics. Mademoiselle, the taut, emaciated spinster sister of the Bishop, usually sat next to Ruth and wound strips of gauze into neat, tightly pulled rolls. Ruth rolled her bandages, thinking of the grisly use to which they would later be put. The conversation was colored by the barrack-room jargon which was now so popular in the drawing room. Ruth looked up suddenly and spoke:

"It seems to me that the Holy Father could end the whole ghastly business overnight. If he were to excommunicate every Catholic who enlisted or continued to fight, the war would end tomorrow."

Mrs. Throop looked up startled, horrified. The other women went on knitting, heedless of Ruth's treasonable heresy. Mademoiselle, the Bishop's sister, raised her eyebrows and condescendingly remarked: "*Mon Dieu*, Madame Kennedy! It is very obvious that you are ignorant of the responsibilities of the Holy Father. The war is not of the Pope's making and he cannot stop it. The world is paying for its sinfulness and the Pope cannot interfere with God's will. Let us rather roll these bandages and help succour the afflicted and wounded."

"Nevertheless," Ruth went on, "I should imagine that the Lord——"

"Ruth," Mrs. Throop interrupted in a commanding tone, "Ruth—please remember that Mademoiselle is better posted on these matters than we are."

"But," the Bishop's sister said, speaking in a hushed voice as though she were imparting State information, "my good brother, the Bishop, tells me that His Holiness is only too anxious to act as an agent for peace—that is, when the proper time arrives."

"Yes, of course," Mrs. Richard Steele added, "then again you must remember, Ruth dear, that after all, the war was started by the Protestant Kaiser and it would be poor taste for the Holy Father to interfere. Imagine what the Anglican bishops would say!"

"Quite so," the Bishop's sister agreed. "Quite so."

The broad steps of the cathedral. It was Spring once more. The Bishop greeted Ruth:

“Ah, Madame Kennedy! It is so good to see you. Mademoiselle, my sister, tells me that you are worried by the war. What news does the captain, your good husband, send? Nothing? No news, you English say, is good news.”

“It seems to me, Your Grace,” Ruth said, “that if the Holy Father threatened them all with excommunication unless the war ended, it would be over tomorrow.”

The Bishop smiled benignly. “My daughter, you are an emotional child. What a pity that you have not devoted your life to the Church. What good you could have done! The duty of every good Catholic is to be obedient to authority and today our authorities demand that the war be fought to a successful conclusion. But let us not distract our minds with thoughts such as these. You are going to confession?”

Ruth nodded and together they entered the cathedral.

The lilacs were in bloom again when Ruth went to the maternity hospital. The chirping of the birds and the hypnotic buzzing of the insects were interrupted by the brassy bands as battalions marched through the city. Nowhere was it possible to escape the war. She lay on her back and looked out of her window at the green sides of the mountain, waiting. Her body was tightly rounded and in her face there was a gentleness which comes to women only when they are with child. Her doctor was a Norwegian woman who had come to Montreal a few years before and soon became famous as an obstetrician. Dr. Petersen was huge, built like a longshoreman, with enormous hands, and affected masculine clothes, smoked little cigars. Despite her ungainly hulk she was as gentle as the most feminine woman.

The doctor dropped into Ruth's room occasionally and both women soon came to enjoy each other's company. Ruth noticed that a fierce hatred of men ran through the doctor's conversation.

"Ah, to think that we must go through this sort of thing for a man," the doctor said.

"Did you ever——."

"Yes, once, and be sure that no man is really worth it."

"Do you really think so?"

"Well, perhaps I am wrong. But I can only speak from what I know, not only from my own experience but from what I have seen professionally."

Dr. Petersen applied the stethoscope to Ruth's chest and listened carefully. "Heart's all right. How do you feel?"

"Splendid," Ruth replied, "splendid—but a little frightened."

One evening the doctor called to see Ruth. She seated herself near the bed and looked through the open windows towards the dark towering mountain. She sat silently, monstrous and grotesque, outlined against the delicate coloring of the room. Some minutes passed before she spoke.

"Where I come from," she said, "in the north of Norway, the peasants have a splendid way with which to make the man realize the full seriousness of childbirth. To make him witness the delivery is not enough. Every young husband is compelled to have his wife sit astride his knees as the first-born

comes into the world. He sits there sometimes one, two, five, six hours; he feels every tremor of his wife's body, feels it stiffen in pain and finally feels it relax as the child is born.

“Once in our village (I was a young girl then) a young scamp had gotten one of the village girls into trouble and the elders of the village decided not to do anything about it until the time for delivery came. Then they took the young fellow under threat of violence and led him to where the girl was. We lived in the next house and I remember as though it were yesterday: the frightened, pale face of the young fellow, his staring eyes.”

“Doctor, doctor,” Ruth interrupted. “My poor boy, he'll be a nervous wreck when he's born.”

The doctor laughed. Her grim mood vanished instantaneously. “You are perfectly right. But how do you know it's going to be a boy?”

* * * * *

The following morning, shortly before dawn, Guy was born.

But the weeping of men and women, the agonized staring into the dark by millions of distracted mothers, did not halt the war. Those who conducted it had other plans, could not reckon with so inconsequential a thing as the human heart. All her life Ruth had been told of the power of prayer and now, she thought, a veritable barrage of prayer must be assaulting the citadel of heaven. Could it be that God, like the Pope, was powerless to interfere with the madness of men?

One night, nearly eighteen months after Guy was born, she went to see the official motion pictures of the battle of the Somme. She sat terrified as the picture unfolded. This, then, was the holy patriotic duty which statesmen and prelates had elevated and sanctified. Men gouging each other with bayonets, blowing each other to shreds with hand grenades, turning living lungs to water with poisonous gases. This was what men were doing to those who were created in the likeness of God! And nobody, it seemed, could do anything to end it.

It was too much, she could stand it no longer. She rushed up the aisle, past the astonished ushers and out into the electric-lit night of Bleury Street. A queue had formed before the box-office; laughing men and women were patiently waiting their turn to enter and be amused. Elderly men and women, who doubtless had sons in the war, young women with husbands or fiancés in Flanders—laughing and joking. They would go inside and the orchestra would blare patriotic songs and the audience would tap out the rhythm with their feet and hum and sit watching this picture of carnage.

It seemed that all the mothers and fathers whose sons were being destroyed would rise up and rush into the streets and tear down all that stood for this insane inhumanity. But no, their eyes were clouded. This was war. It had ever been thus. It was patriotism. Kill the Huns! Instead of an overwhelming feeling of revulsion, instead of a powerful assertion of human dignity which would demand that the slaughter cease, the audience sat and cheered the sight of young lads marching up to the front. Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, boys, smile, while there's a lucifer to light your fag, smile, boys, that's the style. Oh, what's the use of worrying, it never was worth while, so—but the sight of a young lad leaning up against the wire with both of his hands pressed to his stomach, bending over in agony, persisted. That was no acting, that lad had a piece of shrapnel in his entrails, he had opened his mouth on the

screen and, of course, no sound reached the audience. Something in Ruth's head shrieked in sympathy.

She walked rapidly past the bank on the corner of St. Catherine Street and on down darkened Bleury Street towards Craig: Dorchester, Lagauchetière, Vitre. . . . On down into St. Peter Street, redolent with the pungent odor of spices and coffee, with the shriek of that young soldier ringing in her ears. . . .

—Good God in heaven why do you allow such things to happen? Once things were not so terrible. There was the peace of the convent. Ah, the old familiar chapel and the Stations of the Cross. Thou hast made this journey to die for me with love unutterable. And that lad with shrapnel in his stomach with love unutterable. Guy, too, will grow up and will he have shrapnel in his innards doubled up like that with an audience looking and not hearing his dying shriek tapping the floor to the tune of pack up your troubles.

She was near the river. Up there past Quebec was Gaspé and beyond that Newfoundland and beyond that England and France where the boys were dying, where Edgar was. She heard the thunder of the guns, clearly, distinctly. Her head throbbed and she felt rain on her face though it was not raining. She turned and ran frightened up St. Peter Street. At the corner of Notre Dame Street she hailed a taxi and gave the driver her address. She paid the driver when he pulled up in front of the serene red sandstone house and rushed upstairs when the butler had opened the door. In the nursery little Guy was asleep, breathing evenly, tiny beads of perspiration on his protruding forehead.

—That poor lad with the shrapnel.

She picked the sleeping child up in her arms and kissed him violently. The child opened his eyes, startled, and looked at his mother as if he were about to weep.

Then he began to cry softly, tears rolled down his face, trickling towards the corners of his mouth.

“Sh! darling, nothing's the matter. Mummy loves you, that's all. Kiss me, Guy darling.”

The child put his fleshy little lips up to be kissed; his eyes were heavily laden with sleep and in a few moments his head rested in the crook of his mother's arm and he was asleep.

When Ruth got to her room she found a cablegram lying on her boudoir table. Her heart thumped as she nervously ripped the flap into jagged pieces. The cablegram was dated at Liverpool. She sighed with relieved satisfaction as

she read that Edgar would arrive in Montreal in about ten days. The next day a letter came from London: he had been buried alive twice and his nerves were gone. General Martinson had arranged things so that he was being transferred to the Paymaster's Corps for duty in Canada. The letter was terse and cold, like a military dispatch, like most of his letters lately. His handwriting seemed to have changed. It was loose and sprawled over the page like the writing of a boy of ten. When she had brushed her hair she knelt by the side of her bed and prayed, but her thoughts were confused; it seemed difficult to remember the old prayers which had come so readily to her lips when she was a girl. She recalled only one, the prayer which the Mother Superior always said in time of great sorrow or doubt:

“Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, to thee do we turn, poor banished daughters of Eve.”

The day on which Edgar was to arrive finally came, it came dreary with gray, cynical rain which dripped down one's collar, oozed through clothing and chilled one to the bone. At the monstrosity which the Grand Trunk Lines called the Bonaventure Station, Ruth waited about, hour after hour. The train was late and no one seemed to know why it was delayed. She wandered through the barnlike building, listened to the sad expiring noises which locomotives make when they are at rest. In the waiting room dull people sat about, aimlessly spitting at the pot-bellied Quebec heaters. She went into the station restaurant, ordered some tea and after taking a mouthful of the pallid, weak stuff, walked out to the platform, heard the rain splash on the roof of the train shed and thought of the malicious words which Samuel Butler had written about the city: "Oh God, oh Montreal!"

She wondered how Edgar would look and if anything remained of their love after this absence of three years.

—Of course, the three years must have altered him dreadfully, three years of war and then those terrible experiences: buried alive, all that. I will be good to him, look after him, amuse him, poor boy. No good ever came of suffering, only bitterness, hatred and more suffering. But there's nothing one can do, it seems, only keep one's chin up and go on.

A rush of people from the waiting room interrupted her thoughts. The train had arrived! There was much pushing and shoving at the barrier and then a few grinning soldiers came through the gate. The first was a private; one of his arms was amputated and with a cry his mother fell upon him. The lad's peasant face remained stolid under his mother's weeping, then, gradually, his granite face softened, twisted itself up into a painful grimace and he wept, holding the wizened, creased woman in his arms. They stood helpless, clinging to each other as the crowds pushed past them. The woman looked fixedly at her son and he kept saying, "excuse me, excuse me," to the jostling passers-by. Other soldiers walked into the station and stared about them like children waiting for someone to care for them.

Then came Edgar. His face was haggard but bronzed and Ruth noticed with astonishment that his hair was quite gray at the temples. The left side of his face twitched nervously as she ran forward to greet him. He kissed her awkwardly and drew away quickly. The odor of whisky was on his breath.

“Edgar, Edgar, how are you? Are you ill? You look tired. Come, let’s hurry. The car is here.”

He answered in an abstracted manner and it was not until the car had pulled past the Windsor Hotel that he asked about Guy. His face was thin and he smoked his cigarette without removing it once from his mouth. As the car turned east along St. Catherine Street he leaned his head against the cushioned side of the car and closed his eyes. In a few seconds he breathed heavily and drooled at the mouth. When the car pulled up at their home he sat up and said: “Sorry, Ruth, seems as though I haven’t slept in years. Sorry.”

The servants were assembled at the door when they entered. Marie uttered a loud cry when she saw her master and Edgar turned to Ruth with a snarl:

“For Christ’s sake—take that babbling idiot away.”

Ruth stared at him in amazement and without speaking he turned and walked to his room.

A little later, after he had washed and brushed his hair he came to her room and stood shamefaced as he offered his apologies. He was tired, hadn’t slept all night.

“Rotten trip across and that God-damned stretch from Halifax——” He smiled a tired, broken smile and swayed unsteadily as he walked toward her.

“Really, Ruth, I’m damned glad to get home.” Then, slumping into a seat he watched her prepare for dinner. Suddenly he remembered that he hadn’t seen his son. He returned in a little while and remarked off-handedly that the little son-of-a-gun didn’t seem a bit pleased to see him.

“Sat up in bed and looked at me as though I were a stranger.”

“Well, you are, aren’t you, dear?” she smiled.

Edgar poured himself a whisky and gulped it with the eagerness of one who feels that he is lost without drink. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ruth watching him.

“Got into the habit in the line. Christ, you couldn’t live through that bloody mess for a week without the stuff.”

“Yes, I understand, but be careful, darling, will you?”

He walked over to her and embraced her, holding her tightly in his arms.

“I haven’t had anyone call me darling for—for nearly three years.”

“Poor thing.”

“It’s funny—coming home. I expected it would be different.”

“How?”

“Quiet like. Quiet like a dead sector up the line. When you lie in the mud you always think of this—coming home. You imagine all sorts of things: fireworks and excitement. Well, here I am”—he poured another drink—“at home and nothing’s happened.”

He stood erect near her table, his thumb was thrust through his Sam Browne belt. He was a soldier, tanned, hard, military; but there was something gone out of him, as though his spine had been removed and a ramrod inserted in its place. Then, too, his eyes! They were weak, shifty, as though he had seen something frightful and was afraid to look too suddenly in any direction for fear he would see it again.

“When’s dinner?” he asked. “I’m starved.”

But at dinner during the meat course, his head sank to his chest and he fell asleep.

Edgar's duties were light, but even these taxed his shattered ability to the utmost. In the morning he awoke haggard and pale, his hands shook and his nerves seemed taut to the point of snapping. He was bad-tempered and the servants were terrified of him when he lost his self-control. Each morning was a separate hell during which Ruth moved in dread of her husband, and the nights were equally fearful. In the dark he would reach for her with brutal, unloving hands and when she locked her door against him there was a scene. Only when his duties took him to Ottawa did Ruth find peace.

It was during the last few months of the war that her situation became intolerable and she went to her mother for advice and consolation. Mrs. Throop was deeply engaged in war work. She was incensed at the anti-conscription riots in the city of Quebec and before Ruth had an opportunity to talk, her mother had started:

"If I were Borden," she said, "I would call out the troops and shoot down every *habitant*. Think of it, my dear, our men are overseas giving their lives and blood for their country and the Empire and these cowardly ruffians are rioting and refusing to do their bit. I'd turn machine guns on every mother's son of them. That's what I'd do."

She sat back belligerently in her chair and faced Ruth as if daring her to take issue with her.

"What do you think, my dear?" she asked after a moment's pause.

"I don't know. I haven't been thinking about the riots. I wanted to see you about Edgar."

"Poor lad. There you are, here is your own husband back from the war all shattered by shell fire and these traitors are stabbing him and his comrades in the back. You see, it comes right into one's own home."

"He's drinking and it's becoming almost intolerable. The servants refuse to stay. His language and his actions are——."

"The poor boy's been through hell-fire and you must be patient and sympathetic with him."

"I—I mean when he comes home at night, drunk. It wasn't as though he went to his room and sobered up. He insists on—on coming to me—in that condition. I want to know, mother, what I should do about it?"

“I’m afraid, my dear, that there isn’t anything you can do. Keep a stiff upper lip and do the best you can for the poor boy. After all, we must remember what he’s been through. Do your duty, darling, and pray to the Lord to make him sound and normal again. Remember, there is no power greater than prayer.”

* * * * *

Little Guy looked at his father mistrustfully and was barely civil only as a result of Ruth’s continual coaching.

“You mustn’t stare at daddy so when—he’s feeling a little ill. He was in the war, Guy dear, and got hurt and now he’s unsteady on his feet.”

Once when she was speaking to him about his father’s expected return from the capital he asked very gravely:

“Mummy, is daddy really my father?”

Unsmilingly, her heart tugging desperately, she answered: “Why, of course he is, darling. What a silly question!”

Then after a frightful few seconds of silence she bundled him off to bed.

Edgar sat in the Pullman smoking compartment and listened to the conversation of his fellow officers in the Pay Corps as the train sped on toward Ottawa. At first the men were concerned with the new Allied drive at Amiens, the Conscription Act—but finally they turned to women and sex. The officers told story after story humorlessly, as though the telling were a grim duty. When the outskirts of the capital flashed into view they had settled into that glugged silence which follows an avalanche of smut.

Suddenly the pasty-faced subaltern who faced Edgar straightened himself and said:

“Well, it all boils down to this—there are two kinds of frigging, domestic and imported. Personally I prefer the latter. So many wives are too damned cold and churchy. Reminds me of the fellow who was arrested for—what do they called it?—necrophilia. When the judge asked why he had done it, he said: ‘How was I to know she was dead, your honor? She always acted that way.’ ”

And by that time the train had pulled into the station.

That summer when the Canadian Corps was trekking up towards Amiens, dripping sweat under the merciless August sun, Ruth went to her beach home at Gaspé. She sent Marie ahead to put things in order and a few days later came on with Guy, leaving the butler in charge of the house. Edgar was in Ottawa and there were no prospects of his getting away until late September. At Gaspé the houses for the most part were deserted; all the young men had gone to the war, the few who had failed to enlist in the early war years had been conscripted a few months before. Now only elderly tradesmen brought supplies from the little seaside village, coming up in dilapidated vehicles and puffing as they climbed the hill leading to the house overlooking the Gulf. It seemed strangely peaceful, not a vestige of war was here apparent: no uniforms, no blaring, strident bands, and even newspapers were rigorously excluded from the household to make the escape complete. Ruth had had enough of the war. Guy, of course, could not read and Marie, being French-Canadian, was uninterested in the war. To her, it was a piece of cruel, typically Anglo-Saxon madness. If King George (next to Sir Wilfred Laurier, she supposed King George was the greatest man in the British Empire), if King George wished to send all *les anglais* out on to battlefields and kill off the blond snobs of Westmount and other points west of St. Lawrence Boulevard, that was none of her concern. She adored her mistress and Guy, she attended to her household duties and rigorously kept her political opinions to herself.

In the morning Ruth and the boy would dress for the beach and run down the steep hill leading to the water. The boy's knees were a little knocked and he ran at the side of his mother like a little foal, looking up into her face and laughing nervously. He loved the water and called swimming "taking a barf in the big tub." They sprawled naked on the sands and became browner every day.

It was here that she had first felt (she wondered as she recalled) the feeling of dread, the premonition of disaster before going back to the city. She lay face downward on the sand and watched Guy paddling in the water. Now, as at all times, the sight of the sea filled her with brooding thought. The sea, the callous, indifferent sea which went its own way, above and beyond the empty stupidities of men. What cared it that millions of men were drenching the earth with their blood? It was vast, imperturbable and could wash away the blood of the countless slain, wash away and render first white and then invisible the millions of corpses which men in their mad eagerness were piling up in

France, in Belgium, Italy, Russia, Macedonia—everywhere. The sea had existed before this puny, arrogant two-legged thing appeared on the surface of the earth. It would be here, undulating, ceaseless, long after he was gone, destroyed, in all probability, by his inability to live in peace with his fellows.

Nothing mattered to Ruth when she lay watching the sea. It gave her a feeling of melancholy peace; in its presence she knew that time would bleach and wash out the cruelties, all the misunderstandings. It wore away a continent with the same dogged heartlessness that it dashed a schooner to pieces; it washed one with invigorating spray with the same gentleness that it lulled one to sleep at night with the hypnotic booming of its surf.

Day after day passed with Ruth watching Guy run through the sand kicking it up in headlong sprays, looking out to sea towards Newfoundland until the white glitter of the sun turned the sea black in mid-afternoon. Then at six the tinkle of the dinner bell came over the hill and reminded them of good things to eat. When she returned with the boy, there was no running, there was no hurry. Together they climbed the hill in silence.

Late in August Ruth began to tire of the loneliness of Gaspé. The endless days, the roaring surf at night, after a time again filled her with a vague sense of disaster. At first she shook off the feeling by swimming out to sea, feeling the sharp, playful spray on her face, tasting the bitter brine in her mouth, lying exhausted on the hot sands. But in the evening when the sun dipped low on the horizon and made the Gulf blood-stained and ominous the sense of catastrophe returned. Now she no longer saw the little match-box "Mathew" and its romantic crew of eighteen cutthroats out there between the peninsula and Newfoundland; instead there were destroyers and submarines, squat and gray, blackening the sky with belched heavy smoke and befouling the water with tracks of dirty oil and bilge like the slime of saurian reptiles. Suddenly the solitude of the house on the cliff and the deserted beach became intolerable. She telegraphed to Edgar at Ottawa saying that she was on her way home. She packed hurriedly, gave orders for the closing of the house for the season, and took the night train for Montreal.

The night was hot and oppressive and she slept fitfully. An hour before dawn she sat up with a feeling of panic; the train was standing still in a siding and trainload after trainload of troops passed her darkened compartment window. The young conscript soldiers sprawled in the green plush seats asleep under the sickly yellow lights like grotesque wax dummies in uniform. She dozed off and when she awoke the train was hurtling over the uneven tracks in the gray light of early dawn. Guy slept calmly, his covers thrown back and his little chest rising and falling steadily. He spoke quietly in his sleep but his words were indistinct, and once, shortly before the sun rose in full splendor, he gurgled with laughter and turned towards Ruth and smiled. But his eyes were closed.

The following afternoon the train pulled into the dingy Bonaventure Station. There were noise and confusion everywhere; troops leaving for camp and overseas, men returning to the city on leave, military police with red and black armbands, welfare workers and civilians. Ruth pushed through the crowds and made for the waiting room where she expected the chauffeur would be waiting. But he was not to be found. She wondered whether there had been a mistake; then she remembered that she had only wired to Edgar at his office in Ottawa, perhaps he hadn't returned in time to make all arrangements.

She called a cab and gave the driver her address. In a few minutes the car pulled up before the Sherbrooke Street house. The butler answered in response to Marie's ring; he appeared nervous and ill at ease when he saw Ruth.

"I did not expect madame home so soon. Captain Kennedy did not tell me you were coming." He shifted from foot to foot like a guilty schoolboy.

"Is Captain Kennedy at home?"

"Yes, madame."

"The man is an idiot," Ruth thought as the butler stood motionless before her. "Weren't you told that I was coming home today?"

"No, madame." He looked up the wide branched staircase toward her husband's rooms.

"When did Captain Kennedy arrive?"

"He has been here about ten days."

Of course, that explained it. The telegram had not reached him.

"Will you please bring my things upstairs?" Her request galvanized the butler into life and he seized the bags and started up the stairs ahead of her.

Near the fork of the red carpeted staircase a shout of laughter came from Edgar's room. He was drunk again, Ruth thought. His voice was loud and his words sounded thick and tangled. He was angry and ended his sentence with a burst of obscenity which was immediately followed by a woman's high-pitched voice. The butler paused and made conversation in a limp effort to drown out his master's voice.

"Are there any more bags, madame, or are these all?"

At that moment the door of her husband's room was flung open. Edgar faced his unknown guest and only his broad back was visible to Ruth as she stood frozen into immobility on the staircase. Instead of his customary Salisbury boots he wore slippers and his tunic was thrown over his shoulders as a cape.

"Now get th' hell out of here, you little bitch. Get out of here before I throw you out," he shouted to the person in the room.

His hair was disheveled and he shoved the door away from him until it disappeared out of Ruth's sight, banged against the wall inside the room and slowly swung into view again. He grasped the ornate brass knob of his door to steady himself. In the few seconds which elapsed during which the door swung slowly back into Ruth's field of vision, some obscure, irrational compulsion

transformed Edgar's drunken mood from one of rage to whining impotency.

He swayed from the waist, and he pleaded with the unseen visitor: "Now go 'way, will you go 'way? I don't want you any more. Go 'way."

He laughed at some humorous remark he was about to make, and, although his back was turned toward Ruth, she knew the expression of his face: mouth twisted to one side, his nervous eyes screwed up into an impotent smile.

"Now you'd better go 'way 'fore I lose my temper again."

He laughed again and then with drunken petulance: "Say, ain't you got no home?"

As Ruth listened to this conversation she knew that she should do something, move on or cry out in pain and humiliation, but she felt paralyzed, there was nothing she could do but stare and listen as though hypnotized by the pounding of her heart. Finally, with an almost superhuman effort she grasped Guy's little hand and took a few steps upwards on the staircase. At that moment Edgar turned and faced Ruth. He stared for a few seconds, his jaw dropped as though it had become unhinged and he blinked, trying to piece together the situation from the indistinct pictures which his brain gave him in lieu of thought.

Then in a pitiful voice (blurred in accent but clear in tone), he said: "Oh, my God." He swayed for a moment as if he had received a blow between the eyes from an unseen fist and turned towards the woman in his room. "See, see!" he shouted to the woman, pointing to Ruth, "that's what you've done to me. Oh, my God!"

He slammed the door shut and Ruth heard a thudding sound as though some great weight had suddenly fallen to the floor. The woman's voice within rose high in tipsy vituperation and then quickly became muffled before reaching the full force of its crescendo. It was as if (so it seemed to Ruth) a brutal hand had suddenly choked it off.

From the moment that Edgar's door swung open until the unseen lady's invective was abruptly choked off, the hall clock at the foot of the stairs indicated the passing of precisely thirty seconds—an inconsequential atom of time—during which Ruth stood perfectly motionless. She was aware of many things: the shrill coarseness of the woman's voice, her husband's stupefied condition, the pallor of the butler's face, Marie's expression of astonishment which turned to embarrassment and then to pity, Guy's confused silence. Thirty seconds of transfixed inaction—and then she walked on up the stairs holding her son's cold little hand, followed by the servants.

Once within the sanctuary of her room, she sank into a chair and allowed her emotions to flood over her. Marie had taken Guy to his room and returned to unpack. There was something so reassuring in the heavy, peasant femininity of Marie as she lifted things from the trunks and put them away in drawers, there was relief from pain in watching manual work being performed, in observing the rhythmic movements of mechanical toil. An hour passed during which she heard the opening and shutting of doors, a car pulled up before the house, the staircase creaked as someone walked stealthily down the steps, there was the shifting and metallic grinding of gears as the motor got under way. Then there were long silences.

Towards dinner time there was a knock on her door and Edgar entered. Ice and cold water had tightened the flabbiness of his face into a semblance of firmness, but his eyes were still bloodshot and bleary. His attitude alternated between befuddled contrition and self-assertive masculinity. Finally he found speech—it was lame and inadequate:

“I say, Ruth, I'm awfully sorry—I don't know how to explain—I mean, a man might understand——”

For a few moments she found it difficult to reply to this banal evasion. Still, there was in her no desire to inflict pain or even to upbraid him; she simply wanted to be left alone. But he, with coarse masculine insistence, preferred to force matters to some sort of conclusion—uncertainty was the thing he dreaded most. He stood before her, awaiting her reply and because some remark was necessary she said:

“But, Edgar—in our own home——”

His jaws stiffened and he wetted his dry lips. Since he had come into the

room he had avoided her eyes, but now he looked up and she saw that it was painful for him.

“Listen, Ruth.” There was an abject quality in his voice as he spoke. “It looks bad, I know, but you’ve got to believe me. You’ve got to. I know I shouldn’t have brought her here. Nothing—nothing happened, really. We were quite tight when we arrived last night—I suppose the butler told you—but nothing happened.”

Ruth listened with a peculiar feeling; it was as if something within her head had been anæsthetized.

—Nothing happened. Would it have been worse if something, as he calls it, happened? Not a word to allay the pain which I feel. Only stupid schoolboy excuses. I have come a long way since the convent. But in my own home!

There was a strange odor in the room which was not quite successfully drowned by the clean sharp smell of his witch hazel. He still stood before her like a child caught in a naughty act. She realized that she must search in the maze of her confused thoughts and emotions for something to say, although she knew that silence would be better.

“Edgar, I cannot go on living this way. I know what you have suffered in France, but I cannot have—have this sort of thing going on in my home.”

—Another woman, a filthy person, in the bed in which we have loved one another.

“You see, Ruth, it was this way——” He halted, groping for words.

“It is not that I mind whether anything really happened,” she said, “but after these years—the pain of the war. . . .”

She wanted to recount their many ties: the profoundly happy days at Gaspé, the birth of Guy with his father on the battlefield, but to speak of these things in the room where the odor of the other woman persisted would have soiled the tragic beauty of the years which now lay behind them, it would have been indecent. Still, she had to tell him as gently as possible some of the thoughts which cried aloud for expression now that he had come to her.

“Ever since you have returned from the war I have been frightened of you. Even Guy distrusts you. When you had been back only a few months he asked me if you were really his father.”

He winced but said nothing. He rested against the mantle of the fireplace, his thumb hooked into the waist piece of his Sam Browne belt. The blue and white ribbon of the Military Cross, the brass insignia, the polished leather

made his abject humility seem more incongruous and pitiful. He said nothing and in the half darkness thoughts and powerful emotions reared through their minds like wild stallions. Down in the street below a regiment of conscripts marched by on their way to the Peel Street barracks. The band blared and thumped “Tipperary.”

—They took him away and killed him. He’s not the same Edgar who sat with me and wept when he heard the beautiful music of the *Passion*. They have coarsened him, made him a drunkard and a brute. The war! Dragged the filth of the brothel into my own home. They said peace, peace, and they gave me war. They said love and they gave me this!

The sound of the marching men died away, leaving the darkness still.

“God, Ruth—dear, I tell you I’m sorry.”

A dolorous aria of the *Passion* ran through her mind, crowding out the things she wanted to say. She found herself humming the air, and the words, like insistent, ill-mannered intruders, kept befuddling her mind, confusing her thought. She wanted to say that she was going away, that she could no longer live with him, but instead she heard the words of the singer: *O Schmerz! hier zittert das gequalte Herz . . . Was ist die Ursach’ aller solcher Plagen?* Strange that after all these years she should remember so distinctly a few bars of music and the rich quality of a German tenor’s voice!

She sat in the unlighted room and wished that Edgar would go. There was nothing more to be said. But he remained, vague and motionless in the dark, thumb through his belt, tunic decorated with ribbons, face haggard.

—They took him and creased his face with the stamp of death, hardening his eyes, so that now he cannot look anywhere for fear that he will see that which he is trying to forget. The horrible odor of that woman, the sour reek of stale whisky on his breath, the clean smell of witch hazel. I had better tell him bluntly, tell him that I cannot live with him any longer. He really doesn’t need me. Will get along much better without me. Of course, his pride will be hurt and he will plead and beg like a little dog. But that is the better way, I think.

“Why don’t you say something, Ruth?”

“I was thinking that perhaps it will be better for both of us if we separated.”

“Ruth—we can’t do that!”

“Can’t? Why not?”

“We simply can’t. Think of our families, of what people will say.” His words sounded silly and empty, frightened.

—Of course, think of what they will say! They will say dreadful things and it will be hard to explain. Try to explain how I feel now as I sit here and smell the odors of the other woman, odors are difficult to explain to families. Yes, they will say dreadful things. But I am through. Say it to him quite definitely, say it to him while the air of this room is still foul with the odor of the woman who has just left.

“You see, Edgar, it is not really our fault. We were married just a few months and then you went off to war. You’re different now. Let us not part too bitterly. Something happened to both of us and we cannot live together any longer.”

“What are you talking about? We’re married, aren’t we?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well?”

“Well, it can’t go on any longer. I am leaving in the morning. I am taking Guy with me.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Why can’t I?”

“Because I’ll stop you.”

There was nothing more to be said. The darkness, she felt, was too intimate and she snapped the lights on. His face was drawn and disfigured with suppressed anger. She felt the full fury of his impotent rage about to burst. And at that moment there was a knock at the door. It was the butler. Dinner was served.

As they walked out into the hall Guy, pale, and eyes wide with fright, stood outside the door.

The evening was torture for Ruth. There was dinner with Edgar, sobered and sullen, while Guy looked on with a white, scared face. The conversation was strained and desultory and the boy sensed this nervous tension. After dinner Edgar went to his club and shortly before midnight Ruth heard him return, she heard his unsteady footsteps as he ascended the stairs to the first landing and then his lurching clumsiness as he walked to his room. Marie, exhausted with unpacking before dinner, had packed again. Now, however, everything was in readiness for the morning. She had telephoned to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and reserved a suite. She was expected sometime in the morning.

There was a knock at her door, an unsteady, sustained knock which contained a note of defiance in its knuckled tone. Edgar entered and looked in angry astonishment at the packed trunks and valises. His face was still sullen.

“Say, you’re not really goin’?”

“It’s no use, Edgar, I’m very tired. I’ve had a very trying day and I want some rest. Please go.”

“Well, I say you’re not goin’ and by God I’ll see that you don’t. You’re my wife, see, and if you make one move out of here I’m goin’ to break your god-damned neck!”

“Please, Edgar, I am very tired. Go away.”

Her request infuriated him, in his befuddled state it became a major affront.

“Go ’way, eh? Go ’way? Tha’sh how you treat your legal an’ lawful husband, eh? Me lyin’ in the god-damned mud ’n crap over in France an’ you havin’ the time o’ your life here an’ me go ’way, eh? You god-damned bitch!”

“Edgar, please don’t shout, you’ll wake the servants. Guy has been so nervous today that——.”

“Don’t answer me back. You’ve got too much of what the cat licks her arse with. Tha’sh what the sergeant-major used t’ say—he’s dead, poor fellow, got a bullet through his head, saw his brains run down the collar of his tunic. Laugh every time I think of him. Too much tongue, tha’sh what’s the matter with you. Now, shut up. D’yuh hear, shut up!”

His voice rose to a scream, specks of froth appeared at the corners of his mouth. He began to pace awkwardly up and down the room. Now and then he

collided with a piece of furniture and he stood off and surveyed the offending article with an air of injured righteousness.

A terrified silence fell upon Ruth. She was filled with a vast pity for the poor wretch who paced bravely to and fro before her, frightening her into speechlessness with the threat of his fists. This was what the war had done for him, she thought, it had taken the lowest in his nature and exalted it. It had made virtues of his weaknesses, it had elevated the lust for blood into a holy thing. The brutal power of the fist which men had been curbing through all the long painful centuries was now supreme. The war had converted Edgar into a drunken, vicious sot, it had made him forget the restraints which once held men in check. It had made filth a laughing matter, the subject for marching songs as they sent youngsters to slaughter. For how could men stab at each other's hearts while love, beauty and peace were ideals? How could one stand the maddening strain of shellfire without a compensating destruction of all the old values? She had heard of the drunken brawls, the lines of waiting men before brothels in France—she had heard these things and hoped they were not true. And now she understood. How could millions of men who bore no hate against each other kill and blind and maim unless everything that once held the bestial passion of men in thrall were not loosed, encouraged, excited? And now this thing had come into her life dragging its blood-stained feet through her home, tracking up her life with its hob-nailed putrescence. Those things which once had set men apart from beasts were now held in low esteem. Pity, beauty, music, all the things of the spirit, these were now considered effeminate, things to be laughed at in mess halls. And the brutal fist, the red, hairy fist which men had chained and bled of its senseless power was now smashing the helpless to the sound of thunder of artillery and crass trumpeting bands. The cries of the wounded and the dying were drowned out by the shouts of victories, the orations of statesmen, the chantings of priests. . . .

Her silence became a challenge. The quarry should struggle and scream.

Edgar muttered out of the corner of his mouth: "Sittin' there so god-damned superior—like a staff officer. Who the hell do you think you are?"

He staggered toward her, seized her arm and pulled her to her feet. "I say you won't leave this house." The pressure on her arm tightened but she said nothing. "You—you——."

Words did not come readily to his thickened tongue and he brought his unsteady hand across her face. She staggered back and fell across her bed, stunned by the force of his blow. He threw himself on the bed at her side, putting his arm about her roughly.

“Tha’sh where you belong—in bed with your husband.”

She was weeping and her tears roused him to newer heights of sexual fury.

When his insane passion had subsided he closed his eyes; in a few minutes he was breathing heavily in a deep sleep. Ruth left and roused Marie and asked that the guest’s room be prepared for her.

Early in the morning she took Guy and Marie and went to the hotel. Before leaving she looked into her room. Edgar was still sprawling, dressed, upon her bed. He lay very still and in the gray morning light his face wore a greenish pallor and Ruth observed that his spurs had torn her Venetian lace bed spread into shreds.

In the summer of 1918, Major Throop died a most inglorious death at Étapes, the Canadian base in France. All during the war he had been shifted from one safe town to another well behind the front: St. Pol, Boulogne, Étapes. His letters contained the pathos of the elderly soldier at the base. "How I wish," he wrote to his wife, "that I could go up the line and take my place with the splendid young fellows who are doing their bit so gallantly. During the Boer War I remember. . . ." He couldn't stand the sneers of the men who returned to the base with their sleeves decorated with brassy perpendicular wound stripes, nor the youthful bravado as the youngsters marched up the muddy road leading to the troop trains. "It seems a pity that after all these years in the 17th Lancers [prancing horses on Sherbrooke Street, bright pennants, glittering lances] I should be teaching young lads how to build sanitary conveniences," (he nearly wrote privvies), "when in reality my heart is where the fighting is thickest."

Then one day he walked back to camp in a heavy rain and five days later he was dead of pneumonia. "Throop, Frederick, Major; died of illness on active service."

The news of the Major's death came the morning that Ruth left her home and it was not until noon that Mrs. Throop called her daughter on the telephone.

Mrs. Throop sounded metallicly tearful as her voice came over the wire: "My dear, what have you done—and on the day that your stepfather died." There was an accusing note in her voice as though in some way Ruth was responsible for the wet weather in Northern France.

"I am so sorry about—about father. When did you hear?"

"I must see you, Ruth dear, and I must find a way to bring you poor children together again."

"I don't want to live with Edgar again, mother, he——."

There was a sound of weeping at the other end which interrupted Ruth. Then, weakly tearful, Mrs. Throop chided her daughter: "How can you say such things? You know in this hour of darkness we mustn't be selfish, Ruth dear, with our men dying on the field of battle. . . ."

The nobility of her thoughts overcame Mrs. Throop's emotions and she

burst into uncontrolled tears. Later in the day, fashionably mournful in sudden widow's weeds, she called at the hotel.

When Mrs. Throop realized that she could not move Ruth she sought the aid of Bishop Villeneuve. Seated in a comfortable armchair near a window which faced the campus of McGill University, now being trampled into a mire by marching feet, the Bishop cleared his throat and said with understanding and tact: "Ruth, my child, your mother has told me everything. I understand how you feel and I sympathize deeply with you. It is in times such as these that the Church offers its greatest solace."

"Yes, I know," Ruth said without animation.

"Do you not think that wisdom would lie in going back to your home, in trying to forget and finding happiness in devotion to your child and perhaps later in redeeming your husband?"

"I am not sure, Your Grace."

"It is difficult, I know. Your early training with the gentle nuns of the Sacred Heart did not prepare you for this sort of thing. I have always felt that we do not sufficiently train our girls to withstand the rigors of life. Of course, I do not hold with some of the Protestants that all the mysteries of life should be explained in a spirit of crass materialism. We teach, and it is true, to rely upon the healing power of prayer."

"I cannot go back. He is different now. It is as though a strange man came into my room and bruised my arms and——."

"Yes, yes, I understand, my child."

"The boy, too, is frightened of him."

The Bishop sat in a purple, ecclesiastical silence and fingered his rosary. Patience and sympathy, life had taught him, tempered the most rebellious spirit and a woman's heart roweled by a brutal husband required but time and the soothing power of the Church.

"I know I will suffer for this," Ruth said; "the people in the hotel look strangely at me. A married woman, separated from her husband, it seems, is fair game. But our marriage, Your Grace, is at an end."

The Bishop smiled sadly. "You are mistaken. In your sorrow you have fallen into a great error. A Christian marriage cannot come to an end. It is deathless."

At this point a vague helplessness seized Ruth. These were words against which she could not prevail. They were the words of her childhood, she had heard them from the lips of the gentle Mother Superior, this was the language of her childhood prayers, words such as these, mystical and pervasive, were recited by her as she stood before the picture of the bleeding Christ. How could she now pit herself against the basic truths of her early life? A tumult arose in her mind. There was the chapel at the convent with its tendrils deep in her being, and again there was the war, the casualty lists; there was the healing power of confession and against this stood the cruel brass of the strident military bands. On the one hand there was the tranquil peace of the cathedral, the majestic tones of the *B minor Mass*, the flickering candles in the musty stone nave making the rich shadows tremble on the cool flagged floor; on the other hand there was that terrible look which never left Edgar's eyes (cold, terrified) as though something dreadful was stamped on his eyeballs that even his eyelids could not blot from his vision.

There was the odor of death upon her husband; it was as though he had been touched with the finger of a nameless plague and now the exhalation of this mass putrescence rose to her nostrils: the pungent redolence of barrooms, the sour, musty odor of brothels, the perfume of many bodies, living and dead. But no matter, this thing must not pollute her life and the life of her son. It must not drag its slimy belly across her life. And now, at once, she felt helpless, for she realized there was no sanctuary from this anywhere in the world. This was what the world wanted; it glorified the monster in song and in speech. The world was happy to destroy the old temples, young girls were glad to throw off the old restraints, young women were free of the old responsibilities.

One night, before a regiment left for France, she had seen a soldier and a woman under the light of a street lamp lying unashamed performing the most intimate of all human acts before the gaze of passers-by. True, it was near an alley on Craig Street, near the cesspit of the city, in the shadow of the row upon row of brothels; it was on the sidewalk where the filth of many feet sullied the act. And when this could happen, she thought, the time was at hand, even though it never happened again.

—It is impossible that my marriage with Edgar cannot end. I must make him realize what I have suffered, my arm, his hand across my face, the sight of him sprawling on my bed, his spurs tearing the bedclothes. It seemed as if he always came to me wearing spurs, always except those first few months before he went away. . . .

“But, Your Grace, is it deathless—I hope you will not think me impertinent

—when my husband brings a loose woman, a street-walker, into my home?”

The Bishop said nothing.

“It would be different if that were all, but ever since he came back from France he has been so calloused and brutal. He forced himself upon me, there were times——.”

The Bishop raised his hand as though to ward off the painfulness of the conversation, as though he were holding the cross between the devil and himself.

“There were times when he treated me like a prostitute, his terms of endearment were coarse and dirty and when I stiffened and drew away from him—I say these things because I think you should know, Your Grace—he sneeringly called me a wife, as though the word were a term of reproach.”

“In spite of these things, my child——.”

“That isn’t all. After I had reproached him for having brought a woman into my home, he struck me.”

She walked to the window to hide her emotion and looked through the haze of her tears at the gray buildings of the university at the foot of the mountain.

“Be sure, my daughter, that my heart is only with you at this moment. I feel your pain and humiliation and I understand your resentment and rebelliousness. But you must remember that Christian marriage is a sacrament. It was given to us as a symbol of the marriage of Christ and the Church, it therefore carries with it the grace of God which makes it possible for men and women who are united in holy matrimony to overcome all the temptations, difficulties and sorrows which sometimes accompany this state. In calling your marriage ended you declare that you wish to destroy this symbol. This means that you are prepared to attack the very cornerstone on which the Church is built. Surely this is not what you have in mind?”

——Shall I tell him of the night when he turned from me as though I were something he had not bargained for and said: “There’s two kinds of f——ing, domestic and imported, and you’re just domestic.” Shall I ask him if this is part of the sacrament? No, it wouldn’t be fair. He means well and I shouldn’t cause him any pain. It’s simply that we aren’t talking the same language.

“No—that is not what I had in mind.”

“You see, if marriage is a sacrament, as indeed it is, then it is this blessed state which raises human beings to heavenly dignity. It raises them above the status of animals, for without marriage men and women would be like the

beasts of the field. It is, therefore, your duty as a good Catholic daughter to bear your cross with humility and in fear of the Lord.”

“Do you then advise me to return to Edgar?”

“Yes, my child, forgive him, help him to find himself. Answer him with love and charity. Pray for him—and for me.” The Bishop crossed himself and lowered his eyes for a moment.

“Is this all that the Church, in which I have always lived and trusted, has to offer? To go back to a man who reeks of other women, to love him and be charitable to him? This is all that you have to offer me, Your Grace?”

“My daughter, it has been sufficient for millions of women since the Church was founded. It should be enough for you.”

Ruth rose to her feet; her lips were dry and her heart beat irregularly.

“Then I will have to go elsewhere for consolation and guidance. I can live without a Church which has only this to offer.”

The Bishop stopped toying with his beads. The heavy golden cross fell to the end of its chain and dangled there as His Grace rose.

“My child,” he said, his voice was cold and acidulous now, “I see that God has gone out of your heart. I will not remain to listen to such—such atheism.”

A long and painful silence fell between them and then the Bishop, having recovered his poise, held up his right hand in a pontifical manner and remarked: “You will find, my child, that my counsel is the wisest. To forsake your husband and your Church will be fatal—in that direction lies death everlasting.”

Above all Edgar wanted certainty. He had lost the feel of things, and situations, people, relationships, had lost their hard and certain outlines. In the trenches things were different; one knew the feel of a Mills grenade—hard, oval, segmented, pin in place, spring under the flat of one's hand; a Lewis gun—low, squat, round, flat pan which rattled with ninety rounds of nickel-plated ammunition; a trench—musty, slithery in the winter, bulwarks, supports, sandbags. The quick murderous rush of the trench raid, bayonets on guard, sudden thrusts in the dark at shadows, moving living objects. These were intelligible.

He poured himself a drink and sat in his room waiting for dinner to be announced. He felt lonely and defeated. His mind groped and stumbled, searching for the meaning of things:

—After all, I lived up to my end of the bargain. I did what they wanted me to. When I came back to London on leave I was just the thing the girls wanted. Couldn't do enough for me. All kinds—waitresses, wives, girls. And towards the end Lady Sybil. Her husband killed at Gallipoli. Great troops, the Anzacs. The water was wired and when they were waist deep in it trying to cut through, the Turks let 'em have it from the hills. She was fine, she could understand. They had a taste of TNT in London, that's why. She understood how a man felt coming out of the trenches and wanting a bit of dirty frigging. Why the hell couldn't my own wife feel that way about me? And now things have gone to smash.

He drank his whisky at a gulp and quickly poured himself another. It was not until he had had three that he felt a loosening up within him. Couldn't live without the stuff ever since he'd been buried alive in that dug-out and his men had spent more than an hour digging him out. He had never been the same since. It was as though something had gone wrong inside his head. Lately he sat up in the middle of the night in a dead sweat imagining that he heard an H.E. shell roaring towards him and only whisky gave him a feeling of ease and well-being. Nor were things better during the day, he was bewildered, and now that Ruth had left him his evenings, too, were empty. His simple duties in the Paymaster's Corps were becoming increasingly difficult.

The thought of Ruth (when he was not aching for her) filled him with hatred. She symbolized the vague, indefinite things against which he could no longer cope. Even with men, especially civilians, he felt an angry impatience.

Their cool ways, their timid, calculated manners infuriated him. What a man needed, he thought, was a bit of hard living. They all seemed to be living like women, careful, soft, pretty. People seemed to be scared of a little dirt.

The whisky began to take effect; he felt as if he could take life as it came now. Things were not quite so uncertain. He rose unsteadily to his feet. At that moment the butler knocked and announced dinner.

“I’m going out,” Edgar said, ignoring the man. “Get me my cap and stick.”

The butler did not quite understand; his master had been waiting for dinner and now he was suddenly going out.

“Will you be back soon, sir? Shall I keep some dinner for you?”

To Edgar, the man’s stiffness, his pallor and frightened eyes seemed challengingly annoying.

—That’s the way they all look at you these days. As though you didn’t know what the hell you are doing.

“No, I’m going out, I told you. I don’t want any dinner. What the hell are you staring at?”

“Staring, sir?”

“Yes, staring, you idiot!”

The butler stood speechless before his master and Edgar pushed him out of the way up against the wall and walked down the staircase and out into the street. He walked east along Sherbrooke Street and at Bleury turned down the hill to St. Catherine Street. There were soldiers on the street, many of them, and it gave Edgar a satisfying feeling to have the men draw themselves up stiffly as they saluted him. His blood pulsed pleasantly through his body. The garish lights near St. Lawrence Boulevard drew him on and he turned the corner going south. He paused for a while, observing the photographs of the stripped girls outside of the tab musical show theater near Lagauchetière Street. He smiled to himself as he saw the bulging breasts of the dancers and the slapstick make-up on the faces of the comedians. That’s what a man needs, he said to himself, as he walked on, a bit of dirty friggling.

He paused for a moment before the swinging doors of a saloon and then walked in. There were a number of soldiers in uniform at the bar. They drew up stiffly, resenting the intrusion of a commissioned officer. A corporal clicked his heels and saluted for the men present.

“All right, men,” Edgar said smiling and swaying a little. “Stand easy—

and have one on me.” He ordered drinks all round, paying with a large bill. Turning to one of the soldiers he asked: “What’s your name?”

“Rodgers, sir.”

He put his arm on the private’s shoulder.

“Don’t you think, Rodgers, that what a man needs once in a while is a little dirty frigging?”

The young soldier looked at him in amazement.

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I mean, don’t you ever feel that you’d like to take all the God-damned civilians and run your fist into their faces? Don’t nice, clean, respectable women drive you crazy sometimes?” His face was white and his hands trembled.

“No, sir.”

“You’re an idiot, do you hear?”

The soldier drew away, frightened, and the bartender leaned forward over the bar and cautioned Edgar: “I’d be going, if I was you, sir. The M.P.’s don’t like to see officers in bars used by the men, sir.”

“Sorry,” Edgar murmured. “Fill ’em up again for the boys. Take it out of the change. I’m going.”

There were strange faces about him in the darkened streets, shuffling Chinese and the gray, puffed faces of lechers. Women walked silently on the sidewalks. From behind green shutters he heard the hushed voices of women calling him: “ ’Allo, bebie—haf goot time? *Ici, ici*, come in, haf lots Fransh girls—chip, no mooch cost. ’Allo soldier boy!” A policeman stood under a greenish-yellow street-light and twirled his night-stick. He wondered what an officer was doing down in the gut of the city and saluted as the captain walked past. At the corner of Cadieux Street Edgar paused and looked up towards the lights of St. Catherine Street. He leaned against the wall of a house; he was tired with much walking. A red glow came from the transom over the door. The house seemed familiar. He lurched up the painted wooden steps and rang the bell. The little slot opened behind the wire screening and the face of a Negress appeared:

“Are you alone, honey?”

“I’m all alone. Come on, open up.”

In the hall there were red lights which made the flesh-tinted picture of a

reclining nude look warm and inviting. The madame piloted Edgar into the reception room. He looked about; there was something familiar about the room.

—I guess they're all alike.

“Just a minute,” the madame said. She went to the foot of the stairs and called: “Laid-ees! Laid-ees.” The pointed sounds of high-heeled shoes were heard in the hallway and on the stairs.

“In the red room, girls. In the red room. The gentleman is in the red room.”

After the death of her husband, more than ever before, Mrs. Throop sought grace and consolation in the spacious lap of the Church. Her days were filled with the performance of good works (her faith was never questioned); she organized charity bazaars for the orphans, she served on the board of a home for fallen women and collected funds for foreign missions. If only everyone in the world could come to realize the spiritual power and beauty of Catholicism, she thought, much of the world's evils would be ended. She rose early in the morning, attended the seven o'clock mass, observed the least of the fast days and made the Stations of the Cross every afternoon at four. Her piety was a source of great pleasure to the Bishop, who had many fields to till and required the assistance of many workers. Her newly found tranquillity, however, was disturbed by Ruth's separation from Edgar. She discussed this, her only cross, with the Bishop.

"We were wrong, my dear Madame Throop," he said on one occasion, "not to have encouraged her to dedicate her life to the Church. She has the warmth and devotion which, when laid at the feet of the Lord, lead to spiritual greatness, but when misdirected or poisoned by purely worldly considerations may lead to self-indulgence and sin."

Mrs. Throop sighed in agreement. "Quite true, Your Grace. She once spoke of having a vocation, but I was inclined to think that it was a mere childish notion. What a beautiful, soulful girl she was!"

"She was not meant for marriage. Still, she has accepted the sacrament and she must bring all the gentleness of her character to bear upon the salvation of her husband. I would suggest that you speak kindly to her and see if you can effect a reconciliation."

A few days after the Armistice was signed, Mrs. Throop decided to call on her daughter. On the way up to the Ritz-Carlton from the cathedral, where she had been doing the Stations of the Cross, she felt greatly distressed over the plight in which her daughter found herself:

—A young married woman without the restraints of a home and husband. Good heavens! What was it that Frederick used to say? A young pretty widow and a divorcée (Protestant, of course,) are fair game and no damned nonsense. Even now when men ask after her there's an odd note in their voices.

It was five o'clock when Mrs. Throop entered her daughter's suite; tea was being served and soon she was comfortably settled in the corner of a settee. She was in black and was aware that she cut a smart figure.

—The trouble I had with that tailor at Fairweather's!

She took a sip of tea and remarked:

"I was thinking today how everything has changed."

"Yes, they have, haven't they?"

—What a meaningless thing to say. What is she leading up to now? Edgar, I suppose.

"It was the war. Everything was different before the war. Poor Frederick! If the Lord had only seen fit to spare him a few more weeks. The war is over now—but he is gone. I've ordered a mass said for him every Thursday. Father Boniface, you remember him at the convent when you were a little girl, he's going to do it. A devout man but without great practical wisdom."

—Why is it that the gentle old priest has a poverty-stricken little church in the North End while others with less grace are given positions of authority and power? Practical wisdom, even in the Church, is better than a pure heart. Dear old Father Boniface!

"I remember him well."

"The Bishop said to me yesterday that he had been to see you."

"Yes, he called."

"You offended His Grace, my dear."

Ruth remained silent. She could not hope to justify herself in her mother's eyes. Mrs. Throop went on:

"Ruth, darling, how long do you think this can go on? What will become of the house? Edgar is going to pieces."

"I'm going to see Sir Robert about the house. Perhaps he can sell it. I don't need it any longer. As for Edgar, I simply cannot live with him. It's not his fault, perhaps, any more than it is mine. Things just happened that way—went to smash."

Mrs. Throop began to weep, quietly.

—What a wedding! I still have the newspaper clippings. Two rows of officers forming an arch with their swords. And now, poor lad, drinking himself to death and Frederick dead. No rest or peace whichever way one

turns.

“Then one would imagine that we would try and save as much of the old life as we could.”

“There’s none left. It’s all been smashed by the guns.”

“What do you propose to do?”

“I’m not sure. Go away somewhere, I suppose.”

“And Guy?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think that other men are different?”

“I don’t know. They’re all pretty much the same, I suppose.”

“Of course, poor Frederick, God rest his soul, was trying enough, the Lord forgive me for saying it. But there’s nothing to do. They nearly all drink and do things, I suppose, all of them. The best thing to do is to close your eyes and live your own life. Close your eyes! Because if one looks too closely one sees only sin and evil. You have your home, your child, and the Church, and that should be enough to keep your mind from sin.”

Mrs. Throop took her daughter’s hand and looked earnestly into her eyes.

“Oh, I feel that something dreadful is happening to you. It’s nothing that the Bishop said, I assure you, but, promise me that you will not——” She hesitated to utter the thought. The threat of fire everlasting and the fumes of hell were ever-present realities to her and it was her duty to warn her only child.

“Promise me that you will not live in sin with another man.”

“Mother, what are you talking about?”

“Promise me, Ruth, darling.”

“I can’t get a divorce, can I?”

“Ruth, what are you saying?”

“I’ll be excommunicated if I do. If I fall in love with another man I must strangle all my natural feelings so as not to live in sin. Isn’t that so?”

Mrs. Throop buried her face in her hands and wept aloud. A cold, sadistic anger seized Ruth as she went on: “At the moment I don’t want to see another man as long as I live. But I can’t promise for the future. Anyhow, I’m not afraid of hell any longer. I have had a taste of it for the past four years. Besides

I don't think that God would make a hell any more than he made the war. He couldn't be nearly as cruel and murderous as men—slaughtering each other, tearing each other's hearts out."

"Ruth, you don't know what you're saying!"

"Don't I? Well, perhaps you can tell me why they took Edgar and made a horrible wreck of him so that he'll never be able to go back to the old way of living again—made him a foul, filthy beast. Now, please don't talk to me about sin and hell. I'm not frightened of either any longer."

Then as her mother continued to weep, Ruth put her arms about her and kissed her. But to Mrs. Throop it was the kiss of Judas, tainted with sin and betrayal, reeking with the sulphurous odors of hell.

Then one day old Father Boniface called upon Ruth. His Grace had suggested that he call. It gladdened the priest's heart to see so many of the convent girls now grown to womanhood.

"I should have known you by your hair, my child. You look tired."

"I am tired, father."

He had heard that she had left Edgar. It was too bad, too bad. How had it happened? And as Ruth replied, the aged priest sat silently and listened. His teeth were nearly all gone and his mouth, following his receding gums, gave him the appearance of an old woman. His yellow, thin hands rested heavily on the polished knob of his stout blackthorn stick. In the room beyond, Guy was talking to Marie and Ruth lowered her voice as she took issue with her mother, the Bishop, the Church. When she had finished, Father Boniface sat without speaking for a long time.

"It is strange," he finally said, "how life leads us into unknown paths. I remember when I was a little boy living in Quebec (he pronounced it Kebek) that one bright Spring morning we were playing soldiers near the Plain of Abraham where General Wolfe's armies vanquished the soldiers of Montcalm. We were divided into two armies, the English and the French, and I, naturally, was the commander of the French forces. I remember how, ignoring history, and the outcome of the battle, I led my forces and completely routed my foes. General Wolfe, who was a pugnacious little fellow of about ten (he went into business when he grew up and became successful), kept crying that if I were Montcalm it wasn't fair for me to win the battle. And I resolved that day that I would become a great soldier like Montcalm who, but for the interference of the Governor-General, would have kept Canada for the French."

Father Boniface smiled and looked out of the window at the mountain. It was late afternoon and it was rapidly growing dark. The story seemed pointless to Ruth. The old man was apparently senile and appeared to have forgotten what he set out to say. After a moment's embarrassed silence she called Marie and asked to have tea served. Guy came running into the room and stood close to his mother, one arm on her shoulder, and regarded the priest with open inquisitive eyes.

As he sipped his tea his face suddenly brightened.

“Oh, yes, I remember,” he said. “We were playing soldiers and I had scored a victory. Yes, yes, I remember. Well, Montcalm, the real Montcalm, not I, started in the army and was buried at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec and as for me, I started on the Plains of Abraham and ended in the Church. So you see, we all come to the same end though by different paths. That was what I wanted to say.”

He got up to go, looking with feeble eyes for his hat and stick. In the electric light Ruth saw that his cassock was faded and shabby, worn to a rusty brown.

“I am happy you called, Father Boniface. It brought back the old convent. It seems so long ago.”

“I was told,” the old priest replied, “that you were so embittered that you were nearly an atheist. That was why I hurried up to see you. Good heavens, I said to myself, it cannot be that Ruth Courtney is an atheist.”

“Do you think that not wanting to live with one’s husband has anything to do with atheism, father?”

For a moment the priest was lost in thought, then he answered with some hesitation:

“The Church has very definite opinions about these matters and I presume that the Church in all its wisdom is right. But of this I am sure: God will find room in heaven for an atheist such as you.”

“Oh, father, I am so grateful.”

“You see, Christ was a woman, too. He will understand.”

Ruth escorted him down the corridor to the elevator, through the lobby past smartly-gowned women and well-groomed men, and out to the street. He disappeared into the darkness and the last she ever saw of Father Boniface was his loose cassock, like an old woman’s skirts, flapping in the sharp November wind.

The nights were particularly lonely after Marie had put Guy to bed and the days, too, were not without a certain bleakness. She remembered how men had looked at her when she first came from the convent. The sudden stare, the following of masculine eyes, the hot eagerness which she had mistaken for admiration were now clearly understood; she had heard much masculine talk since that time. She was fair game. She sensed this in the smirking faces of the men who greeted her in the street, at parties, or in the hotel lobby. There were suave questions, little, ambiguous jokes built upon the assumption that a woman can live without a man no longer than a lecher can live without gratifying his lust.

“How do you get along?”

There would be a cold silence, tense with the feeling for Ruth that she must fight her way past the implied insult of this question.

“Get along? What do you mean?”

“I mean it must be rather tiresome living all alone at a hotel.”

“I have a large suite.”

—Will the man never go? See, he wants to be the good friend, wants to substitute his vile body for another. His lips are dry. Oh, how he would love to console me. Yes, yes, I understand.

Then the defeated stammerings and the solicitous offering of assistance:

“I mean, any time that you feel I can be of any help do not hesitate to call upon me. We are still on Roslyn Avenue. Or better still, call me at the office.”

In the Spring following the Armistice, Edgar's father came to see Ruth. His beard was now quite white and his manner was less assured than it was on her wedding day. He played with the black cord of his glasses and came to the point after a painful, halting beginning.

"I have never blamed you, Ruth, I was never certain of him. I tried very hard to prepare him to take over my business. It is a big thing now. The war has made me rich."

He stopped suddenly as though the thought were unpleasant. Ruth experienced a feeling of pity for the man; something of the old confidence which had helped him win control of a fleet of merchant ships was now gone.

—There is something so pathetic about the man. The war gave him ships, money, fame but, like a mad practical joker, took away his boy, my husband.

"He was never very strong in character and they did something to him in the army that broke him completely. The war strengthened some but for those who were sensitive or weak, it was hell. Here at home, doing normal things he would have made you a good husband." The old man's voice cracked and he removed his black corded glasses and wiped them carefully. "He came late in my life, too late perhaps, and I pinned all of my hopes on him. And now he is broken. That is what I came to see you about. I should like very much for you to take him back—it would be a great gesture. Your life still lies ahead of you, I know, and it is not right that I should ask you to do what I would not undertake if I were in your position. I understand thoroughly." He concluded as though he were debating the question with himself.

"How is he?" Ruth asked.

"Very bad. He's drinking too much, far too much. He seems to have lost his grip on things. The simplest problems are beyond his ability, poor lad."

"It was that way ever since he came home."

"Yes. Things have reached the point where—where I have asked him not to come to the office any longer. He is living with us now and it is all very dreadful—I mean, the people he brings home——."

"I understand."

“When I came here I had intended to ask you to try to live with him once more and try to rehabilitate him, but when I entered this room I realized that such a thing was impossible. It is too much to ask of you. It is more than anyone should expect—even a father.”

The old man’s eyes, half-hidden behind his bushy brows and long black lashes, became wet. He removed his glasses and without shame dried his tears. He felt he could do this thing only in the presence of this woman with whom he shared a community of suffering.

“I allow him to have his own way as much as possible. After all, it is not entirely his fault. I cannot be too severe with my own son, can I?”

“No, no, of course not,” Ruth replied with sudden pity.

“Can I?” her father-in-law asked again as though his question had not been answered. Ruth shook her head.

“You will be going away, I imagine,” he said after a moment’s pause; “it will be hard to live here now. This is a small city and Edgar, poor boy, will prove very unpleasant, I am afraid. It is all your fault, he says. Of course, I do not agree with him. [This with sudden reassurance.] His attitude frightens me; it is threatening. I think, my dear girl, that it would be better if you went away for some time.”

“I was planning to send Guy to a good English school when he is old enough. They take them quite young there, don’t they? Mother is talking of going to England to live with the Steeles. Perhaps she will take him along. I don’t know.”

“I will not presume to give you advice. I have lived a long time and I’ve had a hard struggle. I built a very small business into a big thing. But really, dear girl, it is nothing compared to the exorbitant price I’ve had to pay. When my ships were on the seven seas—running the submarine blockade—I thought I had won a victory, but there are no victories. And as time goes on, others, too, will discover this.

There was nothing that Ruth could say in reply. She, too, had thought of these things. Mr. Kennedy leaned forward in his chair and spoke in a low voice touched with resigned sorrow. He patted Ruth’s arm affectionately as he continued:

“Go away somewhere and live your own life. Montreal is the last city in the world in which you can do it. Go to London, or Paris, or New York. Find yourself a corner in life, seize it and fight bitterly to hold it; squeeze every bit of happiness out of life that you can. I know I should talk to you of your

responsibilities to your family, your home, and your Church. Instead, I would suggest that you think of your responsibility to yourself.”

He smiled brightly and stroked his gray van Dyke beard.

“I fancy that the Bishop would be quite shocked to hear me speak this way, but then the Bishop hasn’t lost what I have, nor seen as much.”

They sat for some time in silence, the old man tapping his thumb-nail with his glasses. The quiet was not broken until Guy, laughing and boisterous, ran into the room and shattered it to bits with his shouts.

Suddenly, Ruth discovered, Guy was no longer a little boy. Almost imperceptibly he had grown taller and at once, it seemed, he began to resent the solicitous care which his mother bestowed upon him. He was now lanky and strained hard at the maternal leash, resented Marie's constant supervision, wanted to get off by himself at times, hated to be called darling.

"Aw, mum, I'm getting to be a big fellow. I don't like to sit on your lap. What would the fellows say if they saw me?"

It was painful to realize that the first six years of brooding care were now forgotten, even resented. She remembered the bits of broken fragile robin's egg which she had found one Spring in the country: the fluttering mother bird, the nervous cries and then the catastrophe as the fledgling fell to earth, wounded. Ruth shuddered as she recalled.

—But it will not be so with Guy. I have the means to see that he flies safely. He will be unhappy without a father, living in the company of women all during his childhood and youth. A sound English school will do him good. Eton, perhaps. The Steeles in London will be able to manage that. Cricket pavilions, brightly colored blazers, ginger beer, tuck shops, top hats on Sunday. . . .

The lad had come to hate life in the hotel, it was too confining. He was happy at the private school to which he was being sent because there were other boys, but in the late afternoon he dawdled about the lobby or sometimes went riding with Marie or Ruth. On Sundays he sat in the hotel dining room, stiff and uncomfortable, yawned and wished in his little heart that he had a dad like the other boys—or at least a dog. But the hotel management prohibited dogs, and in the street, when he went walking with Marie, he stopped all sorts of stray dogs, patted their heads and, kneeling by their sides, spoke softly to them. The lad had legs like a colt and outgrew his clothes almost from month to month.

"He'll be tall like your father," Mrs. Throop would say. "Perhaps it *will* be best for him to go to a good school."

She said this mournfully knowing that once the lad was abroad all hope of a possible reconciliation between Edgar and Ruth would be ended.

—It will be cheaper in England. The Russian bonds are worthless and

now that Frederick is no longer here, God rest his soul, I would rather be with my own in England.

“And then,” Mrs. Throop said, “I can take a run up to the school from London every now and then and see how he’s getting along. Perhaps you *are* wise in wanting him to go, Ruth, darling. They grow up weak and flabby when they haven’t a man to keep a firm grip on them.”

But Ruth was undecided. After all, the lad was a mere child. Still, this sort of thing was no good for a growing boy. She wavered until the following Spring. Nothing decisive had occurred to alter her monotonous routine.

Then one night as she was coming home from the theater, she saw Edgar standing in front of the hotel. He was engaged in a fierce discussion with the doorman. He was unkempt and disheveled as though he had slept in his clothes for days. His eyes were bloodshot and for a moment she hesitated before getting out of the car. The doorman had placed his bulk before the drunken man and firmly refused to allow him to pass. Ruth decided to make a dash for it and started for one of the doors on the Peel Street side of the corner. Edgar saw her and staggered in her direction. She was a few paces from the door and she heard his shuffling, unsteady steps. As she opened the door and started to go through the entrance she heard his high-pitched voice scream after her: “There she goes, the ——.” The door was not quick enough in shutting out the detestable word: “whore.”

She was pale when she entered her apartment, sleep was out of the question and she spent the night desperately trying to formulate a definite line of action.

——Things can’t go on like this any longer. I shall have to go away. What if poor Guy had witnessed such a scene! He must go abroad with mother, then I will settle my affairs here. After that I want to get away somewhere, New York, perhaps. The future will have to take care of itself.

The next few days were spent in agitated preparation. She made arrangements at the bank to have an account opened in London for Guy’s benefit; there were clothes to be bought for the boy, reservations to be made for the passage. Finally everything was in readiness and she went to the dock to see Guy and her mother off. She had imagined that the moment of parting would be tearful, but within a few minutes Guy had made friends with one of the junior officers. When it was time to say good-by there was a scurrying and a searching and he was eventually brought up out of the engine room in the company of his newly found friend, full of tales of the wonders of the ship. It was not until Ruth saw the huge liner swing out into the St. Lawrence that a desire to weep overcame her.

She was lonely, dreadfully lonely, for the first few days after the boy had sailed, but soon the winding up of her affairs occupied all of her attention. There were afternoons spent with Sir Robert; there were papers to be signed and real estate men to be interviewed now that she had decided to sell the Sherbrooke Street house.

“I think you will find New York an ideal place in which to hide,” Sir Robert said. “It is full of people who only ask to be let alone. And with an income such as yours it will be paradise.”

Late that afternoon she gave Marie instructions to pack. They would leave the following night.

“Any place is better than Montreal, don’t you think, Marie?”

“Yes, madame,” the maid replied, thinking of the influx of Protestants since the close of the war. “Certainly, madame.”

The train stopped for a while at Rouse's Point to allow the United States customs and immigration officials to board, and then continued south. It was hard to sleep; the night was warm and the rhythm of the wheels on the rails brought tangled melodies to her mind, insistent, difficult to dispel. Even now that all of her ties with Montreal were irrevocably broken she was surprised at her courage of the past month. She had thought the parting with Guy would be painful, but it was not. Far more important to him were the ship's officers, the deck machinery, the ventilator—"What are those things for, mum?" She had hugged him, feeling that the moment called for great emotion, but the boy drew away quickly, ashamed of the warmth of her embrace. Then the tugs came and there was great excitement as Guy leaned over the side and watched the lines made fast. There were last-minute warnings, shouts of "all ashore" and soon the great liner was out in midstream. There was the dismal playing of bands which make sailings such a trial at a parting—and then back to the loneliness of the hotel. And now—why to New York? Why not to London with the lad, or to Paris? She did not know.

—New York is big, it is as unfathomable as the sea, one can lose oneself in its lights, among its million houses. There will be evenings, delightfully lonely. I have had too much of men. It will be cool and dry, alone. I shall walk at night (she remembered a few days in New York one year before Easter), through the mysterious streets, endless, straight, like poplar-lined roads of France. There will be music, I will hear the great symphonies, the renowned orchestras, the celebrated virtuosi. I will come and go and there will be no men.

She was free now. Guy was in England, the slim, hard English masters would rear him and make him firm and able to face the world. They would do it better than she had done so far. She thought of poor women whose husbands came home drunk on Saturday nights, whose lives were a series of brutal assaults, who had to submit meekly. What did such women do? For them there was no sanctuary in hotels, no luxurious compartments on trains while they fled to other cities. What did they do? Did they lie submissively while the drunken beast had his way? Or did the worms of poverty gnaw away the emotions until all sensibility was lost.

As the train rushed ahead she lay upon her berth, hands under her head and thought of what lay behind her. A whole life: the convent, Edgar, Guy. . . .

Perhaps, after all, she had been too sensitive, perhaps it all would have turned out differently if she had closed her eyes as her mother had advised. After all, it was true that men *did* drink—and all that.

—Strange how the world has a way of passing off its ugliness with a phrase like “all that.” Perhaps it is better so. Maybe one should not be too squeamish.

But after all, she consoled herself, there was no other way of facing the world except as oneself. On this there could be no compromise. Then she recalled with a hot feeling of shame, that her road to freedom was made possible by Uncle Francis’s money—that, too, had been a compromise. And if one were able to compromise once, why not again? Possibly the distaste of meeting the world halfway grew less as time went on. In time, perhaps, the experience might grow pleasant. But come what might, she was glad that she had made the break, not only with the human wreck which the war had gratuitously presented to her but with everything which now lay behind her. She was glad that she had broken with her past before an osmosis of character had taken place, before she had come to accept things as they occurred, no longer critical, no longer measuring life according to the ideals which she had set for herself in the quiet of the convent, during her bright, brave youth.

The rhythm of the wheels on the endless rails continued to give movement to her thoughts. Rhythm and words, words and rhythm, growing in intensity like the incessant onrush of the scherzo in Beethoven’s last symphony. Scherzo! An interlude, sudden, sparkling and lively, before the last movements, a happy interval before the thunderous dissonances of the final passages. On this thought she fell into a sound sleep.

It was early when she awoke and from her window she could see the red early morning sunlight touching the Palisades with color. The Hudson was clear and lively, it reminded her of her beloved St. Lawrence. In the corridors outside the compartment she heard the sounds of slippers. The train rushed on, past little river villages which spot the Hudson Valley. She dressed, feeling unusually cheerful and bright. Soon the houses became more and more dense as the train continued its headlong flight. Tenement houses came into view. Lines of washed clothes, bridges, and soon the train plunged into the sudden gloom of the Park Avenue tunnel.

Ruth was in New York.

Ruth established herself at a hotel overlooking Central Park and at once, it seemed, she became a New Yorker. The city demanded no passport or certificate of birth; it gave immediate sanctuary. Montreal is a horizontal city, an island inundated by low, frame dwellings stretching from Maisonneuve to Lachine in lazy flatness. New York, on the other hand, is massive and perpendicular. At first its tall silent buildings (at night) bewildered Ruth, she wandered through its streets, which seemed to taper off into infinity, and listened hungrily to its anonymous, ceaseless buzz of traffic. She felt as though the city had immediately accepted her. It had taken her to its steel-riveted heart, this city which seemed to have a corner for everyone. Always the varying sounds of the city were present. In the late afternoon there was the humming noise of the northbound traffic rising to a crescendo at dinner time, at noon there were the impatient cries of automobile klaxons, the doleful clanging of cells on the rickety Fifty-ninth Street crosstown cars and late at night there was the melancholy hooting of the boats on the rivers.

From the very first she said to herself that this was her city. If it contained within itself all that was symbolical of mechanical heartlessness, yet it also possessed creations of the spirit: art galleries, museums, concert halls, theaters, libraries. Its many and varied contradictions fascinated her; squalid slums and beautiful parks, blistering pavements (it was summer) and cool, shady walks in the Park, cruel indifference and adolescent sentimentality, grinding poverty and unbelievable luxury. And amid all this turmoil and seeming confusion Ruth came and went in happy anonymity.

She rode in the Park of a morning and spent glorious afternoons in Fifty-seventh Street shops indulging herself in mad extravagances: a modernistic cigarette case made of onyx and platinum, a black evening gown, ornamented with silvered flowers to be worn when she took dinner on the hotel roof garden; gloves and shoes, underthings and accessories which would have shocked her mother by their cost and frivolity. She remembered with the feeling of a schoolgirl on a lark how her mother disapproved of ornament in dress. Once when she had pinned a corsage of violets at her waist when going to a party, her mother had said: "My dear, aren't you a trifle overdressed?" Mrs. Throop had always urged Ruth to bargain and even after she was married she conducted price wars with the tradespeople on her daughter's behalf. And now Ruth took delight in the sheer spending of money.

Marie thought her mistress had taken leave of her senses. Moreover, the metropolis frightened her. If Montreal with its tens of thousands of Protestants and hundreds of English churches was godless—New York was worse! Here, it seemed, there were no Catholics at all. Everywhere there were Jews and foreigners and when she saw and heard haggling pushcart peddlers, as she did on one occasion, she wavered for a moment in her faith and wondered whether her Lord really *had been* a Jew. The Irish priest who acted as father confessor at the little Catholic church on Columbus Avenue had difficulty in understanding her halting English.

“Imagine,” she said to Ruth the first time she returned from confession, “imagine a Catholic who does not speak French!”

As far as Marie was concerned, the New York Catholics, with their nasal speech and American ways were just so many worthless godless Protestants. To her mother in a little Quebec village she wrote: “New York is very big. It has as much land as from St. Jerome to St. Marguerite but I am not happy here. It is full of sin, the women dress like bad women and money is as water which is strange because no one seems to work. When I first saw the sinfulness of the people here I was greatly frightened but when I considered that they are mostly Jews and Protestants I said to myself may the Lord have mercy on their souls, it serves them right. But the Catholics here are not much better than *les anglais*. [To Marie all non-Catholics were *les anglais*.] I am sure Father Joli would be unable to tell a Catholic from a Protestant on the street. . . .”

The leaves began to fall in Central Park, lifeless and crackling. They were swept into piles and burned—quick, sudden puffs of flame and Summer was over. Those who had fled the hot pavements and the stifling air of the city in July were now returning and the streets echoed with the sound of many feet. Another season was beginning. Portraits of popular actors and actresses were hung before Broadway theaters, marquees were lighted up in the evening after the dark months. Broadway roused itself from its dawdling Summer lethargy and once more became a thing of loud, vulgar beauty. Enameled blondes went from booking office to office (“I tell you, my dear, there’s nothing in show business, nothing but one night stands and rubes in hick towns getting gay for the price of a meal”). Flashily dressed hoofers three-sheeting before the Palace Theatre, dreaming of the gust of fame that would carry them to musical comedy and the pages of *Vanity Fair*. In the daytime the street was dull and colorless like the pallid face of a vaudeville impresario but at night the street took on a strychninized gayety. The city poured its tens of thousands into Broadway: yellowish, wasp-waisted clerks from shipping rooms and offices, eager stenographers, and robust matrons with fagged-out husbands, all trying to capture some of the wantonness of Broadway.

Towards the end of the month, Ruth rented an apartment on Central Park South; it was a relief to return to the privacy of her own quarters after the seemingly endless months of hotel life. Then followed the deep sense of pleasure which all experience in the creation of a home: there were conferences with decorators, there were hangings to be bought, art galleries to be visited, furniture to be selected and arranged and rearranged.

Outside in the Park the trees were now starkly bare, the last stubbornly clinging leaf had been torn from its branch and swept to the ground. In the November dusk, as Ruth returned from an afternoon of shopping, the city revealed itself as a mad, Gargantuan fantasy.

—The same genius which created the artillery that wrecked Edgar’s life and sent him back to me a broken wreck built this most beautiful of all cities.

She stood sometimes at the French windows of her living room which opened out to a stone balcony and watched the skyscrapers as window after window lighted up in the late afternoon gloom, and it seemed to her at such times as though the buildings and their serried lights had movements, as if by some incredible dynamics they were escalated towards the darkness which lay

above and beyond the tallest structure.

The last purchase for her home had been a piano. She had gone from showroom to showroom testing the various instruments and then finally chose the Baldwin grand piano. The afternoon the instrument was moved into her living room was one of excessive happiness. She spent hours running her fingers over its light-actioned keys, listening with delight to the true tones of the bass and treble, sparkling, but without the harsh brilliance of other instruments. It was months since she had played and at first her fingers were stiff and awkward, but before long she was deep in the droning F-minor étude of Chopin and soon found herself at the memorable *ritardando* at the close.

That evening she dressed for dinner and afterwards went to the piano again with the eagerness of a child returning to a lost and forgotten plaything.

Now and then she left the piano and moved about the room impatient with the awkwardness of her hands; she hummed snatches of music and returned again to the keyboard and looked through an album for something suitable to the new mood which had now come upon her.

—Chopin: why do people sneer at men who use perfume. Scriabin: you can hear the agony of his diseased body in the woeful tones of his preludes. Bach: he wrote music as though he were fearful that something might remain for those who came after him.

Footsteps sounded sharp and clear outside as heels struck the winter pavements. Women in high-collared fur wraps which partly concealed colorful evening gowns stepped from limousines escorted by men in severe black and white. Laughing youths and girls emerged from the brightly lit lobbies of hotels. The city rang with new life. Ruth had found her niche, she was at home in New York.

The days were frosty and crisp, Ruth's apartment was a cloistered retreat. Its atmosphere was reminiscent of the convent; it was asexual, hushed, calm. Her self-imposed ritual was monotonously delightful. In the morning before seven, a shower, a brisk walk or quick ride through the park, breakfast alone, with Marie, quiet and respectful to the point of reverence, waiting upon her. Then a long day of music: Beethoven sonatas, Scarlatti pastorales, Schubert imprompti, Bach preludes. (She cared little for reading, it lacked the quick and immediate emotional release which music gave her. Nevertheless she bought books, and looked through a volume occasionally but was impatient of the tediousness of literary technique. In music it was different; with one chord Bach could force acceptance of his mood.) In the afternoon there was tea which was a solemn rite and before dinner there were letters to be written.

Sir Robert had disposed of the house, some stock in a pulp and paper company had become worthless; the baronet wrote, making suggestions and enclosed papers to be signed. Every three months her income was deposited in a New York bank and she felt that her substance came like manna from heaven—and as mysteriously. She understood nothing of business and was grateful to Sir Robert who deftly managed her affairs and kept the golden stream flowing without interruption. She supposed that behind her wealth there were men and women working to produce this income, but the picture was romantically misty and rose-colored: strong-muscled and clean-limbed lumberjacks felling trees and floating them down Quebec rivers to the mills; miners black with honest grime, digging in the Cobalt silver mines (she had once visited Cobalt and had gone down in the shaft with the superintendent). Her notions of industry were as false as the pictures on some of her stock certificates, as distorted as an industrial mural on the walls of a bank. That was how the world was ordered. To be sure, there were injustice and evil: sin, war, moral filth, but this was the creation of something evil in man. She had suffered from these things, but in no way did she directly associate the social tragedy with her own. Things happened and one accepted one's fate as best one could. The golden stream made the acceptance easier to bear. There were others less fortunate than she. . . . But at this point the picture became confused and involved and she put the thought behind her, passing on to other and more pleasant ideas.

There was about her life now a coolness and cleanliness which she ascribed to the absence of men. There were no more men, no burning atmosphere of

irritation which men bring with them wherever they go. Her apartment had beauty without voluptuous feminine luxury, serenity without coldness; it lacked the humidity which is always present when the two sexes are in play and struggle with each other.

——No more men! No more men! Whatever warmth I had in the past is now chilled and dead.

She recalled the high hopes, the taut romanticism of her youth, her engagement to Edgar. And now looking back over the past ten years during which her youth had come to an end and a new aspect of life had unfolded itself before her, she felt that in some way she had been the victim of an enormous fraud in which nearly all the forces of society and some of Nature seemed to have had conspired against her. Marriage had turned out to be a fumbling assault on her wedding night. She had accepted it as a bitterness which she supposed one had to endure, but now she realized the significance of her first sexual relationship with Edgar. The years had been a painful negation of everything she had anticipated during her convent days. And now that she had rejected the spurious bargain and once more lived in peace and solitude she was inordinately happy.

——No more men! I swear it!

But in the passionate statement of her new credo there was a note of doubt and when she sometimes felt that she could not maintain this unnatural attitude forever, she fled to her music for relief and sanctuary. At night when the winter winds howled and rattled the windows of her living room she experienced a monastic delight in her seclusive happiness, and before retiring she took fierce, defensive pleasure in observing her slim, firm body which belonged only to herself.

On such nights, however, her sleep was not wholly cloudless.

Even when Ruth spent an evening at the theater or at a recital, she did so in a spirit of aloofness. It accentuated the feeling of being cloistered to put the last touches to her toilet after dinner, call her car and go to the theater alone. It made the sense of being impervious to men seem more great—more acute, although she would not admit this even to herself. This sequestered solitude became something of a triumph for Ruth; the gesture had in it something in the nature of a taunt to all men.

She chose her clothes with meticulous care and before appearing in public, she spent hours at the hairdresser's. At such times she noted with cold satisfaction the look of disappointment in the eyes of the attendants of the apartment house as she left the lobby alone, returning unescorted shortly after eleven.

One night, a little before theater time, as she waited for the elevator at her floor, the door facing her own opened and a young man in evening clothes emerged and took his place beside her at the elevator shaft door. He stood a little to her rear, made an almost imperceptible bow and removed his top hat with an air of deference. As the door swung open she hesitated for a moment and she heard the young man say: "Please." She stepped into the car and he followed, smiling pleasantly. He was tall, dark, and he had an un-Nordic cast of features. He might have been of Latin extraction, perhaps Jewish. Too fine distinctions are impossible in New York.

—A Jew, very likely.

When the car reached the main floor he stepped back and Ruth felt that she was being bowed out. She resented this silent preliminary play of the sexes.

—Why are Jews always either obsequious or arrogant?

There was in his stepping back the implication that all he desired in the world was for her to pass before him. He smiled as she ignored him.

—Always alone. A tragic face but beautiful.

Ruth walked through the lobby and out under the striped awning to her waiting car. As she settled back in her seat she saw the young man looking intently at her.

The gears of the Lincoln meshed silently and the car moved west towards Columbus Circle. The man under the awning watched the car pull away from

the curb and stood watching the retreating tail lights until they became lost in the traffic. Then he turned and walked in the direction of Fifth Avenue.

One Saturday evening, some time later, the front-door bell rang. Marie was out shopping and Ruth answered. The bell rang rarely and she hesitated before answering. When she did, the young man with the dark features stood before the door, smiling.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Courtney,” he said. “We are having some cocktails and one of my guests insists upon having a squeeze of lemon in his drink. I’m all out of them. Have you a lemon to spare?”

For a moment Ruth seemed incapable of reply, the man’s air of self-assurance irritated her somewhat.

“Oh,” she said finally. “Lemons? Why, yes, just a moment, please.” She spoke coldly and turned, leaving the door ajar and returned with a few lemons. The young man thanked her with considerable profusion.

“Seems like mother used to do back home—borrowing sugar and things from the neighbors.” He smiled an open, good-natured smile.

“Yes. You are quite welcome.”

There was an awkward pause as the man made no move to go.

“May—may I ask you over for a drink? Perhaps you would like one?”

“No, thank you. Not just now.”

Still he hesitated. He stood there calmly as though he were in a drawing room, chatting amiably.

“Fine. Any time you like.” He paused for a moment, smiled and then announced: “My name is Walter Sprague.” Ruth nodded at this one-sided introduction and wondered what to say.

——I wish he would go away.

“Perhaps you’ll drop in some other time,” Sprague said.

“Perhaps,” she said—and the conversation was over.

A little later as she left her apartment, sounds of dance music and laughter came from the half-opened door which faced hers. Beyond she saw women in evening gowns and men in dinner jackets standing in groups or dancing in the foyer.

Outside the wind whistled through the naked branches of the winter trees, it blew strongly from the north, caught her breath and whipped the blood to her face. There were winds like this in Canada, she thought. She crossed the street and entered the Park. It was lonely, few persons were in sight, and bending against the wind, she walked north following the winding paved footpaths. The eager face of her young neighbor stood before her eyes and with an effort she dispelled the thought. She was inviolate, she said to herself, she was now beyond that sort of thing. She conjured up pictures of her meeting with Edgar, that horrible night on the train to Gaspé, the war, and her flight to New York.

No more men, she said to herself, I am happy now, no more men.

After an hour's brisk walking she ceased thinking, taking pleasure in the sheer animal joy of struggling with the insistent wind. When she returned Marie was back and had prepared a glass of hot milk for her. She was tired and turned in shortly afterwards.

In bed an indefinite fear took hold of her. She denied to herself with some passion that Sprague had made the slightest impression upon her. She was impervious, she said to herself, to that sort of thing and she thrust him from her mind with such animus that she actually began to hate him.

—He has an arrogant face, an arrogant boy's face. At home things were done differently. I didn't meet Edgar that way. It was slower. Things were not thrust upon one.

She found herself actively detesting the dark face, the bright eyes which twinkled almost insultingly. Then she realized the absurdity of her attitude.

—Perhaps I am being unreasoning. Granted that the call was honest. Lemons, of all things! Very well, then, the call was honest. But I want to be left alone. If he calls again I will not answer, I will have Marie tell him that I am out, that I do not care to see him.

She continued thinking about the call, twisting and turning in her mind until she was wide awake with nervous exhaustion. She rose and went to her medicine chest and prepared a sedative. Soon her nerves became quiet and back in bed she began to feel a sensation of drowsy lassitude.

In the morning she awoke tired. After breakfast she went to High Mass and afterwards waited for confessional. The confession booths were all occupied and she sat and waited for a vacancy listening to the dull whispers which came from behind the latticed doors. A creased woman sat beside her waiting her turn. The woman was poorly dressed and apparently was eager to escape from the splendor of the church into the boxlike booth where she could unburden

her pent-up heart in confession.

When Ruth entered the booth, it was hot and still retained the odor of the previous penitent. She heard the heavy wheezing of the priest and hoped he was not sleeping. Suddenly it all became dreadful, prosaic. Panic seized her and she wanted to leave. This was not what she wanted. It was different when she was a girl. The convent confessional was different. It was fresher, there was an air of mystery, of murky gloom about the ritual. She was on her knees.

“Bless me, father, for I have sinned. . . .”

“. . . lewd company; have you read immodest books?”

“No, father.”

“Talked, gazed, or laughed in church?”

“No, father.”

And so it went. She had been absent from mass.

“Ten Hail Marys and pray to the Holy Mother of God for forgiveness.”

This act seemed meaningless, the old savor was gone. In the street men and women were coming out of the church or were standing about in groups on the pavement. They seemed quite contented. Why had she come? She hadn't felt an inner necessity. Habit? Surely not that. Then what?

—Perhaps to get the feeling of the old chapel again. Something has gone out of it, maybe out of me. I'm not sure. There was a time when I felt greatly moved. It is flat now, quite flat.

For no apparent reason everything suddenly became pointless. There seemed to be no reason why she should continue living in New York, why she should have allowed Guy to be taken to England, why her life in Montreal should have gone to pieces. Other women managed to live quiet peaceful lives, undisturbed by doubts. She felt as if she alone had been singled out for unhappiness and torture by uncertainty. So many millions of women, she thought, are born, pass through childhood and adolescence, marry and bear and rear children and pass on to old age tranquilly, without shattering events. They were the ceaseless cotillions of sisters whom she now came to envy. She saw them walking with their husbands and children in the park, in the streets, happy and smiling, untroubled. Some were poor, most were harassed by life, but in nearly all the faces she saw a placidity which she envied. They were couples.

And yet, upon analysis, her life differed in few respects from that of a more contented woman. Her childhood had given every promise of happiness. Her eyes filled with tears when she thought of her convent days. The kindly sisters, the flowering gardens, the silently moving lips in prayer, the certainty! Had they taught her serenity in a world where tranquillity was impossible? What she wanted desperately now was assurance and peace. But, somehow, this was denied her. She tortured herself with searching. Had she been at fault? Had her demands on life been unreasonable? Was there a flaw in her character that made it impossible for her to live at peace with the world? What were the virtues which the convent had taught? Piety, honesty, fidelity, simplicity, faith. She had observed the letter and the spirit in all these and still her life had gone from defeat to defeat.

Had she been poorer, perhaps things would have gone differently. The war did not wreck *every* life. She remembered seeing the joyous reunion of couples after the war was over as they promenaded on Fletcher's Field and on the bypaths of the mountain. Perhaps the common struggle with poverty and for the daily necessities of life would have left little time for prying introspection. Perhaps she should have taken Edgar—after all, prostitutes have always existed—nursed him back to normality again.

—There is no escape, it seems. I am no happier now that I am living alone from men. I have lost a home, a husband, I am separated from my son. Perhaps the ugliness from which I have fled is part of life, just as beauty, great

music and pain are part of life.

As the days passed this mood remained. She did not see or hear from Sprague. She remained indoors and sat at her piano for many hours.

—You are a fool. The face of a strange man, the ring of a fresh voice, and all your resolutions stand at the point of dissolution.

And now quite suddenly she found that she played with greater ease, with a warmth and facility which seemed inexplicable. One afternoon as she sat playing a Schumann sonata (she had always found the piece tantalizingly difficult, a maze of technical obstacles), she discovered it was going with surprising ease.

—Why this sudden flow of beautiful music? Why don't my fingers tangle as they did two weeks ago?

She rose from the piano with a feeling of disgust and tossed the printed music to the floor with a gesture of childish anger. There was no peace for Ruth that afternoon. She paced the floor of her living room restlessly and when Marie came to announce dinner a few hours later, she found her mistress standing at the windows in the unlighted room, staring out at the serpentine headlights of the cars as they sped through the Park.

The late afternoon Autumn breeze puffed the curtains of Walter Sprague's bedroom and chilled his naked, sprawling body as he slept. He stirred, turned, and suddenly opened his eyes. The sun slanted across the room and the copper-colored light lay in a bright pool at the foot of his bed.

—God, another day. It's late, four o'clock, maybe.

He stretched lazily and surveyed the hard, flat muscles of his legs, saw his chest recede precipitately toward the level of his abdomen.

—Great. Thank God I'm not flabby yet.

He drew a deep lungful of air, forced his chest out, exhaled and stretched back lazily like a well-fed tomcat. He reached back to the end-table, drew a cigarette from his case and lit it, blowing clouds of smoke into the yellow shaft of sunlight. He was still only half-awake and thoughts crawled lazily through his mind.

—I wonder if anyone can see me from that hotel across the street. Strange, can't describe a man's body in a novel. It isn't done. Now with the female body it's different. All novelists do it. But the nearest most novelists come to undressing a hero in a love scene is to have him in his shirt-sleeves. The modernists go so far as to have him in pajamas—the most shapeless garment in all the world—but rarely naked. When the French illustrate a novel—perhaps for Anglo-Saxon consumption—the lady is all but completely exposed, but her lover is drawn in braces, shirt-sleeves, curled mustachios and tight-at-the-waist trousers. I remember the drawings in a French edition of *Nana*; the woman was almost nude, half-covered by a kimono. That was all right. But the man who stood over her was fully clothed except for his coat, which hung over a nearby chair; it seemed to make the woman's nakedness more complete. Yes, I guess clothes do help to create the impression of indecency. The same with the illustrations of the novels of Paul de Kock. What a name for a French novelist!

Walter sat up in bed, extinguished his cigarette, and, rising, prepared to make his toilet. From somewhere in the building there issued the odor of coffee which entered his room and sharpened his appetite. He dashed into the bathroom, hurriedly brushed his teeth, got under the shower and in a few minutes was vigorously rubbing himself dry. He slipped into a rough gray tweed suit bought in London that Spring and then stood before his mirror

carefully knotting his blue polka-dotted bow tie. Then he went to the restaurant on the street level, leisurely took his orange juice and coffee and returned to his rooms and read the afternoon papers.

He wondered what he should do that evening and looked through his engagement book in the hope that there was a possible dinner appointment he had overlooked. There was none. There were many names, of course, and a ring on the telephone would bring a ready dinner guest, but he was tired of that sort of thing. Ever since he had returned from Europe that Summer his life seemed thin and pointless. Somewhere in his background there was an extremely wealthy banker-father who lived in Chicago and saw to it that there was always a balance to Walter's credit in his New York bank. He had graduated from Harvard a few years before full of honors and with predictions of a brilliant career. But the post-war world seemed exhausted and weary—there was nothing he particularly cared to do.

Two years were spent wandering in Europe. He saw the occupation of the Ruhr, saw the Sengalese troops billeted in the Rhine towns, observed the defeated German faces after the Treaty of Versailles. In Poland he was cut off from Warsaw for two whole days while Trotsky and the Red Army played havoc with the French and the Polish. Then back to New York a full-fledged radical. The revolution seemed just around the corner. He supported with funds various radical undertakings: magazines, defence organizations, and political groups.

But nowhere did he find a niche into which he fitted completely. And now his father was writing letters suggesting that he enter business; there was a question of a New York branch office—stocks, bonds, investments, things like that. It was a mistaken notion, Sprague senior wrote, that there was no room in business for a man of culture. His associate, General Dawes, was a musician, “a damned fine one, too,” one of his partners was a well-known collector of first editions and it was known to everyone that old man Morgan had the finest collection of manuscripts in the world. But Walter was not convinced and replied to his father with evasive letters, postponing the day.

Walter felt depressed—lonely. He dreaded another night of talk with a group of Greenwich Village radicals. He was tired of taking his amusement and recreation *en masse*. Again he thumbed through his address book and after a minute's perusal put it aside in disgust. He walked to the window which faced west and looked out towards the Hudson River. It was late Autumn and cold. Down in the streets below people walked rapidly, half-running in the sudden chill. In the sky over the river to the west, the submerged sun still gave off a faint orange glow. Above the tinted horizon there were great vistas of

cold, streaked clouds, like enormous slabs of slate and above these was a gun-metal, heartless sky. The bleak sky, the hurrying people in the streets, filled Walter's heart with an inexplicable longing which demanded easement.

—This is a good day to get drunk. No, no women, well, perhaps one, a very special one. The sort of woman you think of when you hear the César Franck symphony, an emotional, understanding woman. Understanding in the sense that she might comprehend a mood such as this.

The sun dipped lower and lower until finally the pale orange afterglow disappeared altogether, leaving a black void like the dark, silent sea over a sunken ship. In the darkness Walter lit a cigarette and continued looking out of the window. From the apartment across the hall came the sound of a piano, the music came faint and indistinct.

—Ruth Courtney. I wonder who she is. Didn't seem glad to see me. She has an expression of sorrow as though she has suffered much. Some man, I suppose. There is a hurt look in her eyes which does not mar her beauty. Rather enhances it. Kind of aristocratic. Burne-Jonesish. A sad Victorian beauty walking within the sight and clamor of the skyscrapers. What an anomaly! Sad times, these, for aristocrats. The new era of tumbrils. I saw plenty of them in Berlin, Paris, Vienna. Russian émigrées: princesses, duchesses, the cream of Czarist Russia. Now tickled to death to be waitresses, many of them whores. Take me, sir. I am princess, Russian princess. Fifty thousand marks—two dollars in American money. A German professor before the war worked all his life to save fifty thousand marks—now the price of a night with a Russian princess. I wonder why the thought should give me such pleasure, when heads roll maybe mine will be among them. Maybe I am like some of the French nobility who preached the teachings of Voltaire and Rousseau and made it possible for members of their own family to be guillotined or sent into exile. Radical, hell! Harvard, good connections, a checking account, an apartment on Central Park South. It's easy to be a radical with plenty of bail money in the family. Wonder if our women will ever be driven from the country to wait on tables in foreign countries. Never, maybe.

The sound of the piano persisted, broke into the stream of his thought.

—I wonder how well she plays. I've only heard snatches of music coming through the walls.

Walter rose and without switching on the lights moved towards the door leading to his foyer.

The morning mail brought Ruth a letter from England. Mrs. Throop enclosed a photograph of Guy, and Ruth looked at the picture with sentimental longing. The lad wore a smart striped blazer with his school crest sewed on to it and on the crown of his head a cocky school cap perched a little to one side. The boy had enclosed a note in his grandmother's letter.

"Dear Mater," he wrote, "I am in the third form now and have been ragged only once. I get along well with the other fellows. I play cricket which is more fun than baseball and I am well hoping you are the same. Your loving son, Guy. P.S. Please send me a camera."

Ruth read and reread the few schoolboy clichés over and over again. She must go out this very afternoon and get him a camera.

—Heavens! What a lad! Tall for his eight years and with the same uncertain serious expression which his father always had. I shall buy him the best camera in New York this very afternoon.

She turned to her mother's letter with the familiar JMJ in the left-hand corner. It was full of family gossip, devout expressions and admonitions not to forget holy communion and confession. "To this day I have the greatest difficulty in explaining to our relatives why you continue to remain away from your husband. A good Catholic wife, my dear child, overlooks many things and finds strength and courage in prayer. Lately I have been feeling very apprehensive about you. I sense that you are in great danger and I have been wanting to come and spend a few months with you but my health has been failing lately and I do not feel strong enough to make the sea trip. Remember that you always have the Church to lean upon in your hour of doubt and never forget that your strongest weapon is prayer. I pray for you every night. Your brokenhearted mother. . . ."

—Let me see! Mother must be about sixty-three years old and Guy is eight. I am thirty years old.

Ruth put the letter down and rose from her *chaise longue* and walked to the full-length mirror in her boudoir. She looked into the glass, peering anxiously for signs of age. There were none. The hollow line under the cheekbone which betrays the woman of thirty was not there. Her hair still held its color and luster, not a sign of graying hair. She smiled as she looked at herself.

—I think that perhaps my sorrows and struggles with life have not been as devastating as I have been imagining. It seems that I always acted without reason. Why did I suddenly decide to send Guy to England? Was it that I wanted to be free and unbound so that it would be easier to meet another man? Perhaps, after all, I am not a good mother. Surely a good mother would have kept her only child by her side no matter what happened. Two years have now passed since the boy left for England and you have not gone to see him. It would be different if you were poor and lacked the means to travel. All that separated you was six days on a luxury liner. Why did you come to New York? Would you not have been as happy, or unhappy, in London? My life has been a senseless thing, unguided by reason or logic. In the Spring I will go to England and live with my son. I will take a house somewhere on the London-Portsmouth road, not far from the city—perhaps I will find peace and happiness there. I do not want this young man, I do not want any men. A life of mistakes. Still, it is easy to condemn after the heat of the moment is past. Life is not lived in retrospect. On the spur of the moment, under the press of circumstances, one does things and they are not always the wisest. It is easy to sit in an arm chair afterwards and say “this was foolish,” or “this was wise.” Other women would have done otherwise. It is hard to say. I have acted in a way that always seemed the most decent and honorable, still mother thinks I am a poor wife and the world, I am sure, will uphold her. Supposing someone were to ask me why I had suddenly sent Guy abroad and gone off by myself, how could I justify myself? That night at the cinema when I saw the young soldier lean over and hold his stomach and the people applauded as the troops rushed forward, I ran home to little Guy—he was only two years old then—and took him up out of his cot and kissed his sleepy little eyes. And then, without reason to go off alone to New York and send him to school, why? Are these the actions of a good mother? At the time I thought he would be happier without me—that I would be happier, is that what you meant? Never mind. In the Spring I will go to England and live close by his side. We will take long walks in the summer on the green rolling Sussex downs, we will motor through the Lake country and visit the ruins of old castles. We will be happy.

But when she rose and walked to her windows and looked out upon the gay hurrying people in the streets below, the feeling of restlessness, of wanting to go away and live with Guy left her.

—Perhaps it will be best if I were to visit him for the Summer only when he is on vacation. I will spend July and August with him. We will go to Brighton and stroll on the Marine Parade and stop at the Metropole Hotel and in the Autumn he will go back to school and I will return to New York.

Ruth stood at her window and looked into the Park and at the outline of the buildings over towards Fifth Avenue. She had become accustomed to the lively, ceaseless tempo of this city, its reassuring hum of traffic, its museums, concerts, theaters. She was in love with its smart shops. She had adapted herself to its ways. A visit to England, yes, but to go away forever perhaps, that would be foolish, she felt.

Of late Ruth had noticed that it was necessary for her to whip up an interest in Guy. The desire to see him was purely mechanical, if not forthright simulation. She did not realize that subconsciously thoughts of the lad were painful. Memories of Guy were mingled with bitter recollections: a brutal husband, the shrill voice of a strange woman in her home, vulgar oaths, an unsympathetic mother, a bed covering torn to shreds by spurs. . . . Instinctively (because the mind wards off pain just as the body does) she repulsed all thoughts which were associated with her dead past. This fear of pain had driven her into seclusion, impelled her flight to New York, prevented her from visiting England. But she did not analyze her actions or impulses, she merely sought escape in rationalizations and confused thought. Now that she had decided to visit England she experienced an emotional catharsis and as she approached her piano that morning she was in a happy mood. She felt that all her problems had been solved and all pain was swept away by the stream of her thought. She ran through a few Chopin études, making her fingers more pliant and agile, and soon found calm and serenity in the joy of musical interpretation. It was past noon before she began to tire and by that time her lunch was ready.

After lunch Ruth returned to the piano and played until half-past four. Then there was the welcome break during which Marie served tea and cookies with a seriousness worthy of a more solemn rite. It was bleak outside and a noisy blaze burned in the fireplace before which the tea things were set. When Marie returned to the room twenty minutes later to clear away she said: "There is someone to see you, madame."

"To see me? Who is it?"

She felt that surely she must have gone pale and the only outward evidence of the nervousness she felt was the quick manner in which she flicked the ash from the end of her cigarette—but this almost indiscernible gesture did not escape the observant eye of her maid.

"A gentleman. His name is Mr. Sprague; he said, please will you see him." Marie looked at her mistress anxiously as she waited for instructions. "What shall I say to him, madame?"

"Please—please show him in, of course." As Marie turned to leave, she added: "Serve another cup and brew some more tea."

In a few moments Walter entered the room with boyish eagerness. "I say, this is awfully nice of you," he said, bowing as he approached her. "You must think I'm frightfully impertinent, don't you?" There was something decidedly open about the young man. "I couldn't help hearing you play. I'm very fond of music. Of course, you're a concertist, you have the manner."

"No, I simply play for my own amusement. I'm afraid I'm not quite good enough to play in public."

"I think you're quite splendid. Of course so far I've only heard you through the walls—and it does sound a bit muffled."

Ruth poured him a cup of tea. "Cream?" she asked.

"I'll take lemon if you have any," and he laughed. "The first time I spoke to you it was about lemons, wasn't it? You were rather angry, weren't you? A poor neighbor, I thought."

"Did you really think so?"

"Well—not really. You're not a New Yorker, are you?"

“No.”

“Boston?”

“No, what makes you think so?”

“Your r’s are a little blurred.”

“I’m Canadian—Montreal.”

“French?”

“No, English. And you? Are you a native?”

“There are no native New Yorkers, it seems. At least I’ve never discovered any. No, I’m from Chicago.”

There was a pause as though all possible subjects had been exhausted. Then Sprague continued:

“Do you think it was boorish for me to barge in on you like this?”

Ruth laughed. “No, not at all. I’m very happy to have you although at home we didn’t do things like this.”

“Nor did we.”

“But since the war—it seems all right.”

“Yes. Before the war—well, I was a kid then—if a man wanted to meet a woman it took time and there were all sorts of maneuvers. I think it’s better this way, don’t you think?”

Without waiting for an answer, as if assuming she agreed, he rose and walked to the piano and leaned up against its curved side. “I’m very eager to hear you play,” he said. Ruth moved to the bench and opened the keyboard.

“What would you like to hear?”

“Anything you’d like to play.”

She poised her hands over the keys for a moment, thinking. Then as she brought her hands to the keyboard a series of chords filled the room, shattering the mood of the conversation. The music held in it a mounting note of premonition, a warning of overwhelming tragedy. Strange, Walter thought, how music can do that; a few notes, a succession of chords and the composer has you in his hands. As he listened, the chords ceased and gave way to a slow contrapuntal passage as though the danger which seemed to threaten in the opening bars was now definitely past. The music trilled lightly now, note against note. And then, without warning, there was a flashing storm of

mounting chords, broader and more majestic than before. Ruth hovered over the keys, left hand insistently rumbling in the bass, right hand sharply striking the high treble notes. The movement was coming to a close—three mounting chords, vast and sustained, and the prelude was over. There was a pause during which the silence was actually painful and then the delicate, simple theme of the fugue was established. The clear, treble note etched a pattern against the mood of the now silent (but remembered) prelude. Then almost imperceptibly the other voices of the fugue came in, first one and then the others, gaining in volume and force and soon the quiet pastoral simplicity of the theme, too, was lost in the thunder of the bass. Loud and loud, one theme playing against another. The premonition of danger was here again. The simple, subdued notes during the establishment of the theme had been a delusion and held in them, unsuspected at first, all the pent-up fury of this cataract of sound. It seemed that the crescendi could go no further, and yet another and still another. This was tragedy, but not the tragedy of crawling mortals; this was sound, but surpassing in beauty the sounds of Nature herself. The bass rumbled, threateningly. Then almost without warning there was a major chord ending the composition, it seemed, on a note of hope; earthly hope, which brought Walter back to the lingering taste of tea in his mouth, the room, its hangings, and the inspired woman at the Baldwin who now sat limp and smiled at him. The silence was a living thing and filled the room as surely as the music which had preceded it.

He wanted to speak but feared to utter the pitiful squeaking sound of words which seem so empty and inadequate after the tonal sublimity of music. Soon the faint sound of traffic from the street below became audible, gradually breaking the mood. They smiled at each other without speaking. It was Ruth who spoke first.

“Do you like it?”

“Beautiful—beautiful. It’s Bach, I know. What’s it called? I can’t remember the label titles of musical compositions.”

“One of his preludes and fugues. Shall I play more?”

“Please, no. Not for the moment at least. Let the mood of what you just played stay with me. Where did you learn to play?”

“At convent. Are you surprised?”

“No, why should I be? You’re Catholic, of course?”

“After a fashion, but I’ve been in doubt lately.”

“If I’m not being too inquisitive, may I ask why?”

“The war—a husband, but mostly the war. If there were a God——” she interrupted herself. This was not what she wanted to say at this moment.

“Go ahead.”

“What I wanted to say was that God couldn’t have allowed all that sort of thing to go on without lifting His finger.”

“God, I’m afraid, had nothing to do with it. He must have taken one look at it and turned His head away in disgust. Nothing He could do.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“Heavens, no—but it’s a convenient figure of speech. It fills gaps in the conversation. And you?”

“I’m not sure,” Ruth replied.

Sprague laughed, throwing his head back. The sound seemed to be coming all the way up from somewhere deep within him. It was an open, natural thing as though laughing gave him visceral pleasure. She felt strangely uneasy as he did so.

“Tell me all about yourself.”

She laughed and parried: “All! This afternoon?”

“Well, briefly, at least. I like to know about people as soon as I meet them.”

“Very well, then,” her tone reproved him gently, “once there was a little girl whose hair was much redder than it is now——”

“It isn’t red at all, now. It’s chestnut with bright copper streaks in it.”

“. . . and she first remembers a father with a soft face, she doesn’t remember much about the face except that the eyes were brown and deep—a sort of face that only had eyes and he wore loose Windsor ties.”

“And then what happened?”

“Let me see. There was a convent with a garden and sisters walking up and down in pairs after dinner in the evening. There was a sundial in the convent garden that had a very gloomy motto—and she was very happy. Everything was simple. Then the first little doubt stole over the convent wall. She forgets now just what it was, perhaps it was about the things she did not quite understand at the time. Then there was communion, a white dress and lilies of the valley, and a proud mother and a stepfather who was a major and who had fierce mustaches and was very stupid in spite of them, even the silly little

goose of a girl could see that. Then there were many years in which nothing happened and after that there was music and a man who later turned out to be her husband. Then a great war broke out and the girl who was now a wife was dreadfully frightened. Then the soldier-husband came back from the war, but he wasn't a hero at all, he was a very horrid monster and the little girl who had been brought up on prayers and beautiful sounds that came from a great, deep-booming organ ran away to New York where she swore that she would never speak to a man again——."

"Until," Walter broke in, "until another monster came begging for lemons and the princess relented and played bewitching music that changed the dragon—or was it a monster?—back into a fairy prince."

"And they lived happily," Ruth concluded, "for ever and a day and had two hundred and seventeen black little children, all of whom loved pancakes made of buckwheat."

They laughed and Ruth noted with surprise that it was quite dark now. Over on Columbus Circle the electric lights were flashing their messages about tires and newspapers. The northward stream of motor traffic was heavy.

She looked at the clock and Walter came forward eagerly:

"If you haven't a dinner engagement—and nuns who live remote from the world seldom have—I'd like very much to have you dine with me."

Ruth hesitated for a moment before accepting and Sprague continued:

"You may have your choice. A Hindu restaurant where we can get curried beef and spiced drinks, a Syrian place where they will serve us lamb roasted on the spit followed by black Turkish coffee, a German rathskeller where they will ply us with heavy food and beer until we are unable to move or, best of all, a French establishment where the food is as artistic and logical as the French themselves are reputed to be."

Ruth laughed and said: "Very well—but give me at least an hour to bathe and dress. By that time I will have decided which nation to honor with our presence."

"And when you're ready," Walter said as he made for the door, "ring my bell and we'll have cocktails before we go."

They had dinner in a secluded little French restaurant east of Fifth Avenue in the Sixties, not far from the Park. It was after eight when they arrived and the room was almost deserted as they seated themselves at a table near a curtained window overlooking the street. After they had ordered food and wine, they lit cigarettes and Ruth took up the conversation where they had left off in her apartment.

“And now you must tell me something about yourself.”

“There seems nothing much to tell. Came out of college a few years ago. Traveled until this Spring and now I’m at my wits’ end to keep from going mad.”

“Mad? Why?”

“I need something to do. Something to keep me occupied all the time.”

“What do you want to do?”

“That’s the trouble, I don’t know. I’ve tried writing, but it was no go. I haven’t the irrepressible egoism which every writer must have. At the moment when I think of something which ought to be written, it all seems terribly important. But after it’s written, it seems all wrong. It reads flat and uninteresting.”

“And besides writing—or trying to write—what else do you do?”

“Sleep late, go to concerts once in a while. Ever since I came back from Europe I’ve been a radical of sorts. I help to support a radical monthly magazine, take part in its editorial squabbles—a privilege which my money buys for me—rather costly, but a privilege nevertheless. That takes up a few days a month.”

He spoke quietly and tapped the ashes from his cigarette with a thoughtful, abstracted expression on his face. Ruth regarded him carefully: his faultless dinner jacket, immaculate shirt-front, well-groomed appearance.

—Some woman will come along while he is in this mood and give him something to keep him occupied. Why should a boy like him be at his wits’ end in New York—of all places. He seems to be in comfortable circumstances. A spoiled son, very likely.

Walter looked up suddenly as he became aware of her scrutiny. He smiled

and gestured with his hand as though asking her not to take his complaints too seriously.

“But, really, it’s not as bad as it sounds. You were beginning to pity me, weren’t you?”

“No, I was thinking that you didn’t look as pitiful as you sounded.”

He poised a mouthful of food on his fork as he replied.

“I have one saving grace—saving, that is, for myself. I’d be a hopeless introvert if it weren’t for my love of things into which I can get my teeth. Solid things. Food, books, music, life. Do you think, for example, that music is a solid, real thing?”

“Oh, yes. It’s very real to me.”

“I mean that it can take the place of things which most people cannot live without.”

“By all means yes.”

“Sometimes when the material realities appear about to dissolve—and these are times when it seems most probable—falling back on books and music and things like that help to get me through a bad, restless night.”

“I know precisely what you mean.”

—And who but I should know. The weeks and months spent alone, holding firmly to my music; otherwise I should have gone mad. . . .

“At college,” Walter said, “they were always puzzled by me. One day I was terribly interested in Bergsonian philosophy and the next I was preparing to take part in a wrestling match.”

“I’d be puzzled too.”

“And here in New York the professional radicals distrust me intensely because I love both Karl Marx and baseball. My games as well as my ideas must have intestines.”

He reached across the table and filled her glass with wine, carefully tilting the bottle so as not to raise the sediment. They drank and for some time neither spoke. Then Ruth said:

“I was thinking how unconventional our meeting was. You knocked at the door—or did you ring the bell?—and that’s all there was to it. I do wish it had been more formal—there is such a fine, romantic flavor to form.”

“Yes, it would have been fine to have met you at a ball, properly

introduced, chaperoned—but things like that don't seem to happen any more.”

“More's the pity, so that now I don't know who you are or . . .”

“Chicago—son of James Sprague—Chicago National Bank. You may have heard, perhaps. A generous and crusty old father who wants me to become a banker too.”

“How dreadful!” She laughed, mocking him gently. “And, of course, you don't want to.”

“Not very much.”

“So you ran off and became a radical.”

“Well, hardly. I wouldn't put it that way.”

“If I'm not too inquisitive, I should like to know how it happened.”

“I don't suppose it just happened. Many things helped: books, seeing workers on strike, hearing their complaints, the callous way in which things were managed. There must have been dozens of contributing reasons—the mess in Europe, Russia—some of them conscious, most of them, I suppose, unconscious.”

“But there must have been one thing that started you off. Something like a vocation, perhaps.”

“Yes, I suppose so. But I hate religious comparisons. About three years ago in Poland, shortly after I left college. A classmate was living in Warsaw, special correspondent for the Times. One day I dropped into his office. He was on his way out to visit General Headquarters to get a pass to go up the line where the Poles were making a desperate effort to check the advance of Trotsky's Red Army. The streets were full of soldiers, awkward in their new French uniforms, the city was in a state of panic. He asked me to come with him and as I had nothing special to do I went along. We spent the next few days trailing the Polish Army as they pressed the Russians back. One day we came on a section of the countryside where a bitter battle had been fought a few weeks before. The place was literally covered with dead, thousands of them. . . .”

Walter interrupted himself, lit a cigarette and said: “Perhaps I shouldn't go any further with the story. Hardly the sort of thing to talk about at dinner, don't you think?”

“No, I don't mind,” Ruth said. “Ever since the war, it's all right. For years, it seems, that's all people have been talking about—the dead, wounded, men

killed in battle. Go ahead, please.”

“Well, the bodies were strewn about like so much litter. Regiments, squadrons of cavalry, tanks, went over the field as though the dead which lay on either side had not once been human beings who once felt emotions, loved, lived, wept and laughed.”

He paused again, filled his glass which he had emptied twice during the conversation and drank thirstily.

“Be honest,” he said, “if this is boring, say so. I won’t mind.”

“No, not at all. Please go on. You were on the battlefield.”

“Yes. It was a beautiful day. The sun shone and in the distance I could see a little river sparkling in the sunlight, beyond the river there was a white village of a score of houses and behind the village some dark hills. Suddenly, as we walked, we came across two skeletons. One was a Pole and the other a Russian. We could tell by the rags of uniforms which clung to their frames. They had died in a hand-to-hand struggle and now in death they were embracing each other. It seemed as though their death had made them one, that they had much in common and only in death did they realize their community of interests. Seems silly, doesn’t it, a thing like that making a radical of one?”

“No,” Ruth replied, “not silly. I can understand how you felt.”

“But not how it made me a radical; is that right?”

“Yes. Why a radical?”

“Well, I’m coming to that. As I looked at the two skeletons I remembered how the armies had shifted back and forth in France and Belgium, our own American boys dying in senseless attacks on trenches and other boys in Italy, in Mesopotamia, in Turkey, in Greece. All the hurraing in which I had taken part here at home seemed so callous and stupid. I had always known that markets, raw materials and finance played their rôles in war, and still it all meant nothing to me until I looked down at those two dead soldiers embracing each other. Perhaps I was unduly emotional at the time, I’m sure that my father would have said ‘let the dead bury the dead,’ or something like that; but all that night as we rode back to Warsaw in the staff car I was troubled by a thousand questions. Why must young men go to war and kill each other? Why must we have war and what can be done about it? I won’t bore you with all my mental processes—but that was the beginning.”

They had finished the roast and the waiter was serving the dessert and coffee. There was a pause as the plates were cleared away and they regarded

each other in intimate silence as they ate their fruit. Ruth noticed that Walter's face was now eager and alive. His eyes shone and she saw that he was anxious to continue his story.

—It seems years since I have sat with a man at dinner, listened to the rich inflexions of his voice. I think I could be happy with him, I have had enough of loneliness. . . .

“There were other things which helped in my—my conversion, I use the word because it may help you to understand my feelings at the time. Not that I was really converted. I was convinced, which is another matter, I think. I began to take an interest in radical affairs, went to meetings, took part in strikes and demonstrations, read some political economy. One day I took a trip through a chemical plant where they were making muriatic acid. I saw the workers wandering through the whitish, sulphurous mist, looking like scarecrows in their acid-eaten clothes. I learned that many of them die of consumption, that at best they don't last very long. Perhaps I should have told myself to take the world as I find it, but I'm not built that way. It wasn't long before I had established—for my own satisfaction, at any rate—the relationship between the exploitation of workers and war. I mean, the struggle for profits and then for markets and raw materials. And now I realize that as long as that circle of circumstances remains unbroken there will be wars; skeletons will clutch at each other desperately in a death embrace—and, to be more personal, if I may—husbands will come home brutalized by the horrors they have seen.”

Walter paused and as he did so the stern expression of his face relaxed and he broke into a quick, frank smile. “And now, if you will join me, we'll have another bottle of wine. I'm parched.” The wine was brought and he filled their glasses and they drank. “Now that I've had my say, I'm quite willing to turn to something more amusing.”

“Not so fast,” Ruth remarked. “There are a few things I'd like to have cleared up. About this question of atheism.”

—I am a fool. What a fool! Here I am with a beautiful woman and what do I do? Talk politics, no, that wouldn't be so bad—but sociology, pacifism. Once it was done with poetry, now it's done with posing as a lover of humanity.

“What about atheism?” Walter asked.

“I can see that war made you feel badly, made you want to change things and I can understand that seeing workers being slowly poisoned for miserable wages would make you a radical. But how does the Church and God enter all

this?”

“Because the Church—I hope this doesn’t offend you—not only the Catholic Church but all churches—are part and parcel of the whole fraud which keeps men chained to starvation jobs, sends them to war.”

Ruth raised her eyebrows incredulously.

“How?”

“You remember how ministers and priests used to bless the colors as the regiments went off to war?”

“Ye-es.” (Reluctantly.)

“In Germany they used to bless the cannons as they came out of Krupp’s, to help them do a better job, no doubt. Industry for profits, war for the defence of profits, religion to dull the rebellious spirits of the masses; Marx was right, it’s an opiate.”

—An opiate? How is it possible? The Sisters, the quiet convent, the feeling of peace which used to come over me as Mass was being said. Surely all this was not a fraud, it seemed to fill a void, to answer something within me that must be as old as the world. The beautiful *B Minor Mass*—a fraud? Father Boniface, ragged and honest, giving his life to the poor and the needy—a fraud? The Bishop, well, I’m not so sure. No, he, too, was honest but perhaps power always seems dishonest—he did what he thought best. And what if there are religious frauds—are there no frauds among radicals, everywhere?

He broke into her thoughts with a question: “Have I been too harsh?”

“I don’t know. I’m afraid I can’t agree—not yet. You see, the happiest days of my life were spent at convent. The sisters, the clean, unpolluted atmosphere, the beauty of the Mass——”

“Yes,” Walter said, “I understand perfectly.”

—I guess that explains it. The sad eyes, her resentment of intrusion, wanting to be alone. To have lived her girlhood in a convent with the sisters in piety and serenity and then to come out and have to face the filth of modern life—war, hypocrisy, the duplicity of a war-hardened, drunken husband, perhaps; I can imagine. From the idealism of the convent to the hard materialism of life today. Heavens, what a mess! Don’t say anything else just now. It wouldn’t be right. Win her over slowly—maybe if she read and came to know things, gradually she would be happier. She must be terribly confused.

—I remember (Ruth thought) a dimly lit dormitory. I must have been

about five or six at the most. The reassuring voice of the sister on duty. She pointed to the image of the Holy Mother of God and in the guttering candlelight, the all-wise, tolerant face of the Virgin seemed to smile. Then everything became calm and peaceful, my childish fears abated, the thumping of my heart ceased. Then I must have fallen asleep. . . .

“I can understand how you feel about the Church,” Walter said. “There are aspects of it which are truly beautiful, but its conservatism is unbearable; I mean its views on divorce and birth-control, its kowtowing to the lords of the earth—and I have no earthly use for conservatism, no matter where I find it. When I meet smug, self-assured conservatives in these times I always want to ask Disraeli’s question: ‘You call yourselves conservatives, but tell me, gentlemen, what precisely is it that you wish to conserve?’ ”

Ruth was amused despite the fact that during the whole conversation Walter had been attacking the fundamentals upon which her life had hitherto rested. He seemed to take delight in challenging the dogmas which she had always taken for granted. Until she had left Edgar her life had been sheltered, even provincial. Now as she sat and listened she realized how barren of ideas her life had been in the past. To be sure, there had been good living in Montreal, expensive sport, exclusive entertainment—but always the emphasis had been on things, not ideas. People were considered distinguished or interesting only because of who they were or what they were, rarely for the quality or originality of their ideas. Persons who went about advocating new or strange doctrines were usually grubby nobodies, stunted little men and dowdy, bedraggled women—suffragettes or socialists. As she looked across the table at Walter she wondered whether it was possible that her partial acceptance of his ideas was due to the fact that he was a gentleman: well-groomed, cultured, soft-spoken. Was there, she thought, a sexual basis for the reception of ideas?

—My other set of ideas—the ones I received at convent—were they acceptable because I was emotionally open, receptive? Did the Mass—cleansing me with hyssop—the beautiful ritual mean much to me because I was an eager adolescent girl? And now that I am lonely and in need of love . . . ?

The thought trailed off into nothingness. As Walter talked she felt that there were many questions she wanted to ask but they were indefinite and as yet incoherent.

Walter had signaled the waiter and called for the bill. After he had paid, he helped her on with her wrap and slipping his arm into hers they walked into the street.

“And now?” he asked. “It’s really too early to go home. Would you like to

dance?”

She paused for a moment before replying. Overhead the stars shone brilliantly, the impatient November wind snapped and tugged at their clothing. “Yes, it would be fun. Let’s. But we’re to walk—the air will help the wine.”

They turned, and ignoring a cruising taxi, turned west and walked towards Fifth Avenue and then down in the direction of Forty-Second Street. The Avenue was deserted save for an occasional pedestrian who bent over before the north wind as it swept down the ravined thoroughfare.

Later at a hotel grill they danced and drank. It was pleasant to sit in the corner of the restaurant and against the tonal background of the jazz orchestra to carry on the quasi-intimate conversation of a man and woman who are newly acquainted. From time to time they halted their talk and danced in silence, happy in the intimate physical contact of jazz.

—I was a fool to have said no more men.

Once while they were resting and sipping their drinks Ruth said: “When I first met you I thought you were a Jew. Are you?”

“Would it make any difference?”

“No, certainly not.”

“I’m not. I come of good Episcopalian stock; the common prayer book, the collects, Gregorian chants and all the trimmings. What made you think so?”

“You are dark and there is something about your face—a sort of impatient eagerness—which I always associate with Jews.”

“I don’t know,” Walter replied, “there may be Jewish blood in me. There’s no telling. The Jews are an insistent people and great travelers to boot.”

It was long past midnight when Ruth looked at her wrist-watch. “Shall we go?” she asked.

“Yes, but there will be other dinners and more walks down the Avenue?”

Ruth nodded her head.

“And more talk?”

“Then I shall have to read books and have ready answers for you. In the future I will not allow you to lord it over the conversation as you did tonight.” She laughed as she spoke.

“Fine. I’ll bring you an arm-load of books in the morning. It’ll take us a year to fight about them. But promise you’ll read them—some of them.”

“I promise.”

“And will you play for me again? Bach’s great *Toccatà and Fugue* on a gloomy afternoon—yes?”

“In that case you’ll have to give me weeks for preparation.”

“Of course. We’ve lots of time. I promise I shan’t be too impatient.”

Outside the hotel entrance they got into a cab. He held her arm firmly as she stepped into the car and they sat close to one another as it sped up the Avenue towards Central Park. Then without a word he put his arm about her and kissed her. She did not draw away or resist him. At the moment it seemed the most natural thing to do and with her lips she returned the pressure and moisture of his.

—Mother used to say that men do not respect women who allow themselves to be kissed the first day. But it is years since I have felt the warm lips of a man. He is younger than I am—twenty-three or so—but I don’t care. Oh, I have been a fool too long. . . .

Like St. Augustine's conversion to Christianity (painfully groping from skepticism to Neo-platonism and thence to the religion of St. Paul), Ruth's transition from an already wavering piety to agnosticism was accompanied by turmoil and strife of the spirit. The Numidian saint during his years of doubt and searching was not yet ready for the message of the intolerant rabbi and agonizingly cried to his god: "Give me chastity—but not yet!" And so it was with Ruth:

——Not yet, oh Lord, not yet!

The alchemy of irreligion worked slowly but nevertheless inexorably. She was assailed by doubts, questions, fears. There were radical texts to be read, atheistic dogmas to be debated and always there was Walter laughing, coaxing, urging; Walter hovering over her conversion like a devout monk assisting her, paradoxically, to fight down doubt in the search for skepticism.

At night sometimes she remembered the convent—but its ponderous walls now grew misty in her memory, the sisters now flitted through her mind like phantom things in an ill-remembered dream.

In the very nature of things, the events which followed were inevitable. Every incident in Ruth's past seemed to lead directly to her affair with Walter: her emotional, consecrated years at the convent, her marriage to Edgar, the frightful night on the train to Gaspé, the groping, fumbling hands (there were other hands—pallid, smooth), the war, the aching sympathy for men dying of wounds, Edgar's return, her flight, her loneliness. . . .

She realized that her retreat from the world had been a specious escape. Then, without warning, it seemed, her life had taken on fresh meaning. Walter was constantly in her thoughts. She awoke each morning aware that another adventurous day lay before her. They rode in the Park every morning, there were recitals or tea in the afternoon, in the evenings there were theater parties or long talks which lasted until the early hours of the morning. And when the time came each day for them to take leave of one another, the partings became more and more painful. By the time the first evidences of Spring were at hand they were deeply in love with each other.

Then one night Walter sensed that she did not want him to go. Nothing had been said, but there was something in her manner which told him that they were now lovers. But not content with the subtle message and demanding certainty, he asked: "May I stay, Ruth, darling?"

She did not answer immediately but looked into his eyes searching for reassurance. Then she nodded.

He had always hoped that when this moment came that he would be passionately happy, that he would be boisterous and declaim noble sentiments, give voice to grand thoughts. But when he spoke, it was to utter a disappointing commonplace.

"I'll be back in a moment," he said as he rose, "there are some things which I ought to get in my apartment."

He was gone for some time and when he returned to the drawing room she was gone. A light burned in her room and when he entered she was in bed with her face turned to the wall like a frightened bride.

"Please," she asked turning her face toward him, "please put the light out."

He undressed in the dark. Below in the Park, couples walked on the paths and their voices, the released, happy voices of lovers in the Springtime, floated

up to him as he stood at the open window.

In the dark he reached for her and she started from him.

“Ruth, darling, why do you draw away?”

She did not answer and he did not press her for a reply. Then, after a long while: “I don’t know, Walter.”

“You do love me, don’t you? I’ll go if you like.”

“No, no, please stay. I’m sorry. It’s something I can’t explain.”

She moved closer to him, felt his face with her hands, played with his hair, drew his mouth to hers.

They spoke in broken, halting sentences; the syntax of fresh love.

“Why did you draw away?”

“It’s hard to say.”

“But you do love me?”

“Yes, of course, precious, but——.”

“But what?”

There was a long silence as Ruth lay with her head in the crook of his arm, flagrantly contented. Then she began to speak in a whisper:

“You will listen carefully and try to understand?”

“Yes, Ruth darling, tell me what it is.”

“A long time ago—I was about fifteen or perhaps sixteen—just fresh from the convent—an uncle, it was he who left me the money I now have—well, one afternoon, it was about this time of the year—we rode up the side of the mountain in his victoria and walked through the pine forest. I was a silly little goose then and really believed that men were made in the image of God——.”

She put her hands to his face and caressed his cheeks with her fingers and kissed his mouth.

“You are not to be offended, my lover, I was not thinking of you. Sometimes when I am not thinking, I say things like that. Even if you are an infidel I still think *you* are created in the image of God—but I was a stupid little thing then—and I used to throw myself about, it was a warm day and we sat down under some trees. He was a very rich man, my mother’s brother, and I thought he was the grandest person. He asked me to rest up against him and I was very proud to be with him. And then——.” She paused.

“Go ahead, darling, what is it? Tell me.”

“Suddenly his hands—they were white as though they had never seen the sun—were under my dress. At first I didn’t understand, then I jumped to my feet, terribly frightened.”

“Oh, you poor thing!”

“That was my first experience——.”

“God, how awful!”

“Ever since then—a man’s touch—I felt the same on my wedding night.”

Walter put his arms about her, pressed her slender body close to him. He felt her tangled hair in his face, and gently stroked her head and shoulder. In the dark, a hot tear fell upon his bare arm, then another. But there was no sound.

“Please, darling, you mustn’t,” he said, “please.”

* * * * *

Later, much later, Ruth arose and came back with fruit and a tall, dark bottle of sparkling burgundy. They sat and talked, supremely happy.

“Whatever shall I say to Marie?”

“Tell her we’re married.”

“Impossible, she knows Catholics can’t be divorced.”

“Then say nothing. Let her think what she pleases. What shall we do about our apartments? Will you give yours up or shall I move in here?”

“I don’t know, let’s not think about it now, darling.”

“Do you feel sinful, Ruth dearest?”

“I should feel very terrible about it—but really I don’t feel the least gnawing of my conscience. I suppose that’s because I’m now beyond redemption.”

“An abandoned woman—beautiful, darling, but quite abandoned.” He laughed and tousled her hair as he spoke.

Ruth’s face clouded and she suddenly became serious:

“Promise me that you’ll always love me, Walter. It would be too terrible if this——.”

“I promise. For always and always.”

“And you won’t leave me some night and go off with another woman?”

“Promise, cross my heart—hope to die.”

The burgundy was finished and Ruth left the room and soon returned with another bottle. Her face was alight.

“Walter, dear, what do you think happened? I found Marie in the kitchen pretending that she couldn’t sleep. She beamed on me and with tears in her eyes—yes, real tears—she kissed me and hoped that I would be happy and asked very eagerly if she might not drink a toast to our happiness.”

Walter slipped his dressing gown on and together they went into the dining room. Marie was radiant. She blushed and offered her compliments to monsieur. Three glasses were filled and before drinking, Marie made a little speech in which she said that she hoped everyone would be happy, that love was the most important thing in the world, that God loved love most of all and forgave all sins which were committed in its name. Furthermore, she hoped that no matter what happened that madame would still keep her on.

* * * * *

It was late afternoon when Ruth and her lover awoke.

The months which followed were the fullest in Ruth's adult life. For the first time since she left the convent she experienced a profound inner quietude, a glowing satisfaction. All doubts were dispelled; misgivings were transformed into certitudes by the illogical but efficacious power of human affection. Where pleading, texts and rationalizing had failed utterly, love—all cynicism notwithstanding—triumphed.

They had made no definite arrangements, sometimes Walter stayed overnight in Ruth's apartment and at other times it was the other way about. There was an air of indefiniteness about the practical aspects of their mode of living. There were long breakfasts and endless talks after which Walter hurried off downtown. There was a Wall Street brokerage house where his duties were light and remunerative. The senior partner was a classmate of Walter's father. He was home quite early in the afternoon. There were recitals, or matinées and long rambling conversations that seemed to be interminable and terribly important, so that Ruth once remarked: "I thought we would soon talk ourselves out but just before falling asleep at night I always remember something I have forgotten to tell you."

Occasionally there were parties, sometimes in one apartment, sometimes in the other, at which there were artists and writers, shabby but light-hearted bohemians from Greenwich Village. Walter had a large and regular income and there were always liberal and radical magazines that were needing money, geniuses to be sent away to the country where masterpieces were to be completed, and his apartment was a veritable meeting-place. Drinks were served, discussions became furious and then suddenly subsided when food was served and the phonograph was turned on. There was dancing until the early hours of the morning. Ruth's calmness pervaded these parties and squabbling theorists appealed to her to settle their never-ending disputes.

One night when they were alone she asked Walter why the revolutionists, from whose lips the words freedom and humanity fell with monotonous regularity, were in reality intolerant and oppressive in their personal relationships. There was one fellow, brilliant and humanitarian, who called for the brotherhood of man, and beat his wife. She observed that radicals, for example, when in controversy, called each other "comrade" with venom and hatred. There was much talk of barricades and having discussed the day when their political enemies (the artists included cultural ones) would be done away

with, the parties broke up and everybody went home sated with food and argument.

At these parties Marie, sometimes assisted by a Japanese butler, engaged for the evening, moved from group to group serving refreshments. She listened to the terrible arguments fearful lest words be abandoned for the fist. In Mont Tremblant for example, when men shouted at each other with purple faces, blood was invariably spilled afterwards. These infidels, she wrote home, were a strange brood; but there was nothing to fear from them. The Church was in no danger, they talked blasphemously—and that was the end of it. She could not understand how madame, who was so dignified and refined, and monsieur, who was obviously *un gentilhomme* could consort with such persons—worse than the most unlettered *habitant* from the backwoods.

* * * * *

And so, living in happy oblivion of the practical world which surrounded them, the first warm June mornings arrived for Ruth and Walter. The first intolerable, hot flush of passion was past and a more quiet and profoundly satisfying period lay before them.

Gallic romanticism was one thing and one's duty to the Church and to God was another and so Marie, in order to discover what her status in the new ménage was, wrote to Father Joli who tended his small flock at Mont Tremblant, Quebec.

The reverend father was cautious in his advice: "My dear Marie," he wrote, "there are many things which happen in a great city which could never happen in a small town like ours, for which I thank the Lord and all his saints. The question you ask is somewhat unusual but it would be unwise, I think, for you to leave your present situation because you think your mistress is living in sin. Your duty is clear: pray that your mistress may be led back to the way of righteousness—and, my daughter, pray for me."

The following Sunday Marie went to early mass, prayed for Father Joli, her mistress' soul—and asked the Lord to arrange matters so that there would be no drastic changes in madame's ménage.

One day at breakfast Ruth and Walter sat reading the morning newspaper. He was lost in an involved news dispatch from Russia, she in a criticism of a piano recital they had heard the night before. They were both silent and ate their food in a half-abstracted manner. Suddenly Walter looked up while Ruth continued to read. Absently she lifted her cup to her lips and sipped her coffee, at the same time following the printed lines. An idea occurred to him and he stirred his coffee and smiled as he turned the thought over in his mind. He called her by name.

“Yes, Walter,” she replied without looking up, but smiling.

“I have been thinking——”

“Yes, what about?” Still looking at the paper.

“Do you realize that we are really married—actually married?”

Ruth looked up, astonished. “What do you mean?” she asked.

His mood was infectious and she smiled in sympathy. He leaned across the table and placed his hand on hers.

“Do you realize,” he said, “that we are fully and absolutely married—man and wife—till death do us part and all that?”

“Walter dear, you’re very lovely, but don’t you think you’re a little mad?”

“Not at all. I suppose you’re one of those old fuddy-duddies who think all marriages take place in church, or at the City Hall—or in heaven.”

“Walter, if you’re off on another attack on the holy state of matrimony, please save your breath. I agree with you. It’s all nonsense. Now go ahead and read about Stalin and Trotsky and let me be. Wilkinson says that de Pachmann is a faker.”

“To hell with Wilkinson! Listen to me!” He was greatly excited and Ruth leaned back with a gesture of resignation.

“Not more than half an hour,” she said, “I’ve some shopping to do this morning. Go ahead, dear.”

“All right, then. You think that people are married when the man slips a ring on the woman’s finger, don’t you?”

“Sometimes they are.”

“And you think that when they take an apartment or a home in the suburbs and have children they’re married, don’t you?”

“Nearly always. Of course, I’m an old fuddy-duddy and I don’t understand these matters.”

“Well, they’re not, see? Priests don’t marry, nor do city clerks. Suburban homes may be inhabited by persons living in the foulest sin and rings are sold in the five-and-ten-cent stores——”

“Darling,” Ruth laughed, “if you don’t come out with it, I’ll burst.”

“People are married,” Walter said slowly and emphatically, punctuating each word with a stab of his finger at an imaginary foe, “when they read at the breakfast table and not before.”

“Walter darling—you *are* an idiot.”

“No, I’m not. Here we’re thinking we’re living in sin and all the time we’ve been as married as the most righteous philistines. And think of it: the mayor didn’t do it, nor did the bishop. The New York *Herald* did it.”

Ruth said nothing in reply but looked at him with great affection.

“Sin is exciting, shameful and dreadful,” he went on, “and here we are living like sedate, respectable persons—reading the paper at breakfast as though love didn’t matter.”

He leaped from his chair and, running behind her, pulled her head back and kissed her eyes and mouth.

“Darling,” he was tipsy with exuberance, “darling, we are married—do you hear? Married! And we haven’t had a wedding. But we shall have one. As soon as possible. Tomorrow—we shall invite all our friends and we’ll drink and dance——”

“Walter, what are you saying?”

“I shall buy you a wedding ring this very day and we shall be married before all our friends.”

“But Walter, we can’t. I’m not divorced. It’ll be bigamy.” She was startled as she spoke.

“I don’t mean that sort of wedding—we needn’t have the sanction of the church or the civil authorities. Our love and our consciences are enough.”

She was shocked but happy beyond expression. He continued, still holding

her head in his hands and talking down to her:

“Of course, we shan’t be able to invite our parents, they’d never understand. They told us that marriage is a sacrament—the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. But, strangely enough, that’s just what our wedding will be. All our friends will be there, for love must be sanctified in the presence of one’s dearest friends. We shall both drink from a delicate wine glass and afterwards I shall crush it under my heel, as the Jews do, as a symbol that no one else shall ever drink from the cup of our happiness.”

“Oh, Walter, I am so happy. You are an idiot, darling, but I am so happy. Let me go. There are a million things to be done, shopping——.”

“I’ll sit down this minute,” Walter said, “and call our friends.”

It was ten o’clock when the conversation ended but it was nearly noon when they got around to dressing and making the necessary telephone calls.

For the following three months Walter and Ruth were vagabonds. She wanted him to see her native Canada, and above all, she longed for the sight of the sea again. It was decided that they would cruise in the West Indies first. They packed light, tropical clothing and Walter took along a pith helmet.

They spent the first pleasant day on board making acquaintances, sipping long, cool drinks on deck, and dancing after dinner. The United Fruit boat, immaculate in a fresh coat of white paint and appointed with innumerable luxuries, steamed into the dusk of the first day.

As the sun set and the water became sinister and deep, a subdued mood took hold of Ruth. She sat in her deck chair and watched the dark, purple water and the black shadow which the ship cast on the face of the sea, imponderable and old with aeons of restless tossing. An excessive sadness overcame her. She had felt this way with Edgar at Gaspé (the thought startled her for a moment) and now with Walter. Always in the presence of the sea she wanted life and abiding love with terrifying desperation. Time had not evaporated her fierce desire for happiness nor made her indifferent.

As though he sensed the nature of her thoughts, Walter asked: “Are you happy, Ruth darling?”

She looked up, startled. “Why yes, of course. What makes you ask?”

“Here you are with your blessed sea—it is growing dark—the feeling of the ship under you—and still you look as sad as a motherless foal.”

“But I am happy, dear, dreadfully happy. Like all cowards I am frightened of happiness.”

“Frightened of happiness? What nonsense!”

——Nonsense, a brisk tone, a dark night at Gaspé. Edgar said the same thing. Then, too, I felt the premonition of disaster.

“Promise me that you will always love me.”

“Always, Ruth.” His hand searched for hers under the plaid rug. Finding it, he held it tightly. “Always.”

There was a long silence and only the swish of the sea was heard. The faint sound of music was heard from the other end of the ship.

“Do you really feel as if you were married to me?”

“As married as if it were done in a great, granite cathedral by a surpliced priest—as married, precious, as if the floor of the nave were strewn with orchids and lilies, and little flower girls preceded you and the organ pealed a processional and your mother were there weeping.”

“And when you grow tired of me will you be horrid and remember that we aren’t properly married?”

“Darling, but we are married. If it weren’t for your husband and the ban of the Church we would be married—with bell and candle. Or is that how you’re excommunicated? Besides I shan’t grow tired of you.”

“Because I’m so dreadfully frightened. I *am* older than you, you know.”

“Good heavens, woman, you may be a few years older than I, but that—that simply adds to your charm.”

* * * * *

They wandered about West Indian cities, saw the high-perched, massive citadel overlooking the Haitian capital, drank Bacardi cocktails in Havana (and marveled at the indescribable rags of the poor in the poverty-stricken sections of the city), rode in a carriage on the gravel roads of Bermuda, bathed in the blue waters at Hamilton and saw bananas loaded on the docks of Puerto Cortés where the ship stopped over for a morning. The sea was placid although it was the time of year when sailors feared the Caribbean hurricanes. Schools of silvery flying fish came up in sprays before the oncoming ship and the sun turned their scales into myriad-colored tiny rainbows.

They returned to New York early in September and Ruth insisted that Walter see the Laurentians in the Autumn. So one morning they got into his roadster and turned the nose of the car north towards Canada and raced for the border. They stopped for a day in Montreal at the Mount Royal Hotel (she preferred not to go to the Ritz) and bought a basket of *Veuve Clicquot* at the commission store on Peel Street and drank a pint of it before breakfast. “Like sailors on pay day,” Walter said. They felt very gay all morning, riding up the side of the mountain and looking down on the city.

Then north through St. Jerome to the Laurentians. It was late September and the rolling mountains, the most beautiful he had ever seen, Walter admitted, flashed by the car. The Canadian maples blazed brilliantly: red, brown, yellow and with a tardy yellowish green here and there. The mountains rolled towards the north and in the distance all colors were merged into a noncommittal hazy blue. Now, Ruth thought, life seemed to be abandoning

itself to one last bacchanalia of color, one last orgy before the white death arrived.

The next day they returned to Montreal and walked about the city looking at the churches and the historical museums, they motored past the Sacred Heart Convent where Ruth had spent her childhood years. That night at the hotel Ruth told Walter that she was pregnant.

“What shall I do?” she asked.

“Why there’s only one thing to do. Have it, by all means.” He got up from his seat and walked over to her, pulling her face towards him, and kissed her. “I think it will be great—splendid.”

“But we can’t, Walter.”

“Why not?”

“It will complicate matters. After all—now please don’t be angry—we aren’t married. And a child will make matters so much worse.”

“Dearest, you are quite silly, really you are. It will simplify everything. If a child doesn’t marry us, then nothing does. Besides, common-law marriages are legal in New York.”

“You seem to forget that I am not divorced, Walter.”

“Oh, hell, it’s lousy either way, isn’t it? If we’re married then we’re bigamists and if not we’re adulterers.” Then brightening: “But we’re going to have the baby in any case. There’s no law against that.”

“But what about my mother?”

“Tell her about it, of course.”

Ruth looked at Walter in astonishment. “Tell her about it? What are you talking about, dear? It’s simply out of the question.”

“Why?”

“Because she’s a devout Catholic.”

“But does that mean if her daughter has a child that she’s not to know of it?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so.”

“But why?”

“It would kill her.”

“Kill her? How?”

“Oh, Walter, you just don’t understand. *You* can tell your parents that we are married, but——.”

“Why can’t you? I mean, is there any essential difference?”

“No, but I am married and I have a husband——.”

“You haven’t seen him in years. He means nothing to you. Apart from the stupid law he’s nothing but a stranger to you.”

“But mother doesn’t recognize that.”

“But if you tell her that you are now married she’ll have to recognize it.”

“She won’t, she’ll simply feel disgraced. It’ll kill her. You don’t understand.”

“I *do* understand.”

“You don’t understand that all this business of sin and hell are terrible realities to her. She would feel that I am worse than a prostitute.”

“I understand thoroughly, I tell you. She’s a religious bigot and we’re not. We ask nothing of her, not even her approval. But she’s got to know. It’ll be painful, I know, but it’ll save you a lot of evasion and unhappiness afterwards. We’ve simply got to tell her, it’s the only honest thing to do.”

“Yes, with anyone but my mother. She’s old and this would be the end. I don’t want to be cruel.”

“Well, then get a divorce.”

“That would be just as bad, maybe worse. I don’t want to hurt anyone just because I want to be happy according to my own lights. Just let’s go on as we are.”

“But you are pregnant—and I want a child. Don’t you?”

“Yes, but I can’t. I can’t.”

There was something dogged in her voice. She sat at the window and looked down into the street below and kept repeating the phrase.

“But sooner or later she’ll know, one way or another. If you have the baby, don’t you want Guy to know that he has a brother or a sister?”

“I can’t, Walter, really, I can’t.” (He felt a slight impatience at her constant repetition.)

“I have written mother and dad saying that we were married. You don’t mind that,” he added with some coldness.

“No, that’s all right. I’m glad about that.”

“I don’t see why you should be so concerned about her feelings. I mean that business about your uncle and her attitude——.”

“Please don’t say that, Walter. She’s my mother. She and Guy are all I have left of my family. I don’t want to cause anyone any pain.”

“All right, dear, let’s not talk about it. It seems so utterly silly—but have it your way. I won’t say another word about your mother. But you will have the baby, won’t you?” She nodded.

In the morning they crossed the Victoria Bridge and headed south towards New York.

The thing of which Ruth had dreamed all her life had come to pass. She had found the love of one man, she lived unmolested, and her new-born child gave her great joy. (Bruce was born the June following their return from Canada.) There had been no difficulty at the hospital: father—Walter Sprague; mother—Ruth Courtney Sprague. And that was all there was to it.

That Spring Walter's parents came east on their way to Germany; Mrs. Sprague needed the waters of a European spa and her husband, brow-beaten but grumbling, came along. There were jokes about being granddad and grandma so soon, there were congratulations. Mrs. Sprague took Ruth aside, told her of her rheumatism and poured a flood of maternal, unscientific advice into her ears. Walter considered that they were man and wife and nothing was said on the subject other than the introduction: "This is my wife, Ruth." The Spragues were happy that Walter had settled down. Sprague senior secured a position for his son in his New York branch, increased his income, settled some property and bonds on him, and two weeks later, accompanied by his wife, left for Europe.

"You see," Walter said, "it's as simple as that."

But he did not mention the question of telling Ruth's mother of their union. The subject was a painful one and there seemed nothing further to say. Walter wanted to engage a nurse for the baby but Ruth wanted to experience the joy of doing things for the infant. The child was the living result of her new love and the performance of the most menial tasks for him gave her an abiding pleasure. Later she refused to have a governess for the boy as he grew up. She planned to teach him his alphabet, tell him stories and play with him. The warmth of a hovering mother had been denied to her when she was a child; her earliest memories were of strange women, nurses, no doubt, and later the convent. . . . It would be different with Bruce.

There were uneventful days on which she thought she had never felt a greater and more enduring felicity. Hers was the satisfaction which veterans of many wars find in the prosaic tending of an obscure rose garden. There were quiet evenings, an occasional concert, the theater. Since Bruce's coming Walter found many of his pleasures at home. The boy filled him with almost incoherent delight; he gloried in every meaningless gurgle and wrote long letters to his father telling of the infant's indescribable wisdom. He made far-fetched plans for the youngster's future: the lad would need money and an

extensive education. Something might happen to his granddad's money and he would have to have an independent fortune. He threw himself into business and spent long hours at the office. The thought of the child threw him into ecstasies of work and he telephoned from the office several times a day.

In the afternoon, following tea, little Bruce sometimes sat propped up in an armchair and listened to Ruth at the piano. The child listened with wide-open eyes, mystified at the thunders of sound which issued from the instrument. Sometimes when the music descended into the minor and its keening filled the room, his little lower lip would protrude and his blue eyes filled with tears; then as the music became animated again, his face brightened in sympathy.

Ruth's correspondence with her mother caused her uneasiness of spirit. All reference to Walter and Bruce had to be carefully omitted and sometimes she felt that she was tearing something vital out of herself as she wrote of her life as though these, her most precious treasures, had died or had never come to life. At such times she wondered whether her acceptance of Walter's neoteric concept of morality were wholly honest.

—Perhaps, after all, I have changed very little since the day when I left the convent. Perhaps people do not change much in any direction. If I am so modern why am I so afraid of telling mother of my greatest happiness? If I were as strong as I think I am I would tell her—let the world know.

But there was the question of Guy; it was different where he was concerned. There was his career. He would in all likelihood come back to Canada. People thought differently there. As she thought, she heard the whispers of the Pine Avenue circles: "Do you know, they say his mother ran off, lived with a young man in New York. Of course all her talk about poor Edgar was nonsense. . . ." In fancy she saw the amused smiles, heard the tones of cutting irony.

Such thoughts, fortunately, were rare enough. She wrote to her mother once a month and in time her letters became noncommittal and vague. She spoke of her music, how she was becoming accustomed to New York, a veritable New Yorker. The mother replied faithfully, telling of her life in England, recounting Guy's progress ("do you realize, Ruth dear, that he is now a tall boy, he reaches above my shoulders") and praying that her daughter was living a good Christian life. The letters JMJ headed each sheet of paper and the flap of each envelope was sealed with the mystic initials SAG.

—Guy is nearly thirteen years old. Let me see, that means I am nearly thirty-four and Walter is twenty-eight.

The thought depressed her but the mirror still gave back her image tall and

slender, white and resilient. Her hair, too, held its auburn glint.

—There is nothing to fear.

Thus, the thin stream of days trickled through her fingers, each day placidly joyous, filled with the delight in simple things which give profound elemental pleasure to those who ask but little: a child, music, the love of one man and the droning sound of life as the days sometimes hurried, sometimes languidly passed by.

For years Walter had been engrossed in his work. It was now five years since he and Ruth had gone to live with each other. She was a good wife, had given him a lusty youngster and now for the first time he had a definite motive in life. He recalled the groping, uncertain days before he had met her—the wild nights, the awakening in strange beds, the horrible, shamefaced feeling in the morning.

All that was gone now. He was now in complete charge of his father's business in New York; he was respected by his associates. For a man not quite thirty he had done exceedingly well. He had been a good father, providing insurance policies and securities for the lad when he would no longer be here. He had not been wholly faithful to Ruth—but no more unfaithful than most men. He detested the word anyhow. Faithfulness! The word was forever on the lips of women, he thought. One could be loyal, jealous of the honor of one's wife and family, provide for them, love them and then one peccadillo—and the man was a faithless wretch.

Not that he was any worse than most men, a good deal better in fact, but whichever way one turned one seemed to run into women; at parties, in the office, at the club sometimes—and things just happened, not very often, but they happened. He suspected that Ruth was aware of these little excursions into sex—there was something in the way she looked at him when he came home from a trip to Philadelphia. Her questions were sometimes too insistent. At such times he felt somewhat helpless, she seemed to know more about the masculine heart than he did, she asked questions in such a way as to put him out of sorts for the entire day. There was a reproachful look in her eyes as he answered—and still nothing very definite. Then, too, the physical expression of her love for him had grown fiercer during the past five years. It seemed as if she felt that he were trying to escape from her.

His operations on the stock market were extremely successful. He had nearly trebled his capital during the last two years; he was a member of many boards of directors. It was the Summer of 1929, and he rode with the tide. It seemed as if she were jealous of his success, fearful that when he became an important figure in Wall Street he would no longer find her necessary. Once in a very long while she would give expression to this fear, half-jokingly:

“When you become a great, important man, Walter, will you still love me?”

The question annoyed him. The fact that he considered their relationship permanent was evident in all his actions: in his will, in the provisions that he was making for her and for Bruce. He answered with a touch of impatience:

“What a question, Ruth!”

“You are not answering.”

“Of course, I’ll love you.”

“And you’ll never leave me?”

“Never.” And he returned to the financial page of his paper.

The winter of 1929 came and passed. The huge edifice which men had constructed in America began to crumble. Everywhere men and women were stunned and bewildered. Suddenly, it seemed, the factories had ceased roaring and humming and the streets became filled with lonely and homeless people. A feeling of dissolution pervaded everything; it was felt in lonely farmhouses, in small villages and towns and in steel-ribbed cities, now ominous with the silence of listless men. All the firmness and hope seemed to have gone out of life in America. In the streets one saw harassed, frightened faces, gaunt and pale. In desperation some threw their bodies from the windows of tall buildings, spattering the sidewalks with futile blood.

Walter came home late from the office; each day was a day of madness as his associates scrambled and clawed for what little security remained. He found no solace at home; schemes and plans for preserving his business raced through his mind at dinner, at the theater, in bed. His hands absently fondled Ruth's body—but his thoughts were of other things. Stocks in which he had placed all his hopes were now worthless. Ruth, too, had been affected by the collapse in values. Some of her securities were now depleted of value. Another pulp and paper company had gone bankrupt and Sir Robert wrote advising her to put her remaining money into three per cent British consols.

"The return might be small," he wrote, "but at least they are absolutely safe, which is a considerable thing in these days."

Walter's face became lined and his nervousness increased from day to day. Reading bored him and during a piano recital he fidgeted and refused to return to his seat after the intermission.

But to Ruth, the wiping out of many of her holdings did not matter. She pitied Walter and understood how he felt about his losses.

"You mustn't take it so seriously," she consoled him, "after all, most of my money is still here. We have enough to live on comfortably and besides no matter what happens we have each other and Bruce."

"It isn't the loss of the money," he replied, "it's the feeling that the bottom has fallen out of everything. There was a time once when it was possible to face the next day with some sort of security but all that seems to have gone forever."

No matter what happened, she kept saying to herself, they had their love for one another. And she marveled at those who took their lives because ease and luxury had suddenly been snatched from them. What empty lives they must have lived, she thought.

—It will not be so with me. I have Walter and the boy and now at last I am happy. A few crumbs more or less do not matter.

In this thought she found peace and wondered at her stoical fortitude.

It was late November. The wind, laden with piercing, slanting rain, whined and whistled through the darkened streets. An air of utter restfulness pervaded the apartment, now dimly lit with shaded lamps. Walter sat reading in the living room, Bruce was asleep in his room upstairs and Ruth was seated near the radio. Soon the sad, moaning strains of Bach's *Arioso* filled the room. And as she listened, imperceptibly, long lines of men, wraith-like, came to life in her mind; they were the hungry unemployed she had seen downtown the day before. She saw the vacant crowds gathered before the offices advertising work; she felt the painful hopelessness which brooded over the city like a premonition of death. As the wind assaulted the windows with thin pellets of rain and as the gentle rising and falling of the violins continued, she felt a ruthfulness, a glowing human feeling for the homeless, the hungry, the desperate. The violins wailed, giving voice to the mystic sorrow which lies unspoken in the hearts of inarticulate men.

November, slanting, driving rains, homeless men and women crawling into doorways, into holes in the ground, forgotten by their fellows and by God—slowly ascending, slowly descending, beautiful, mournful music. To think that men could create in their wisdom such exquisite music and at the same time and out of the same cosmic substance fashion life so that multitudes wanted for the most simple necessities: warmth, shelter, food, love. For a moment the solo violin contained in its rich tonal ascension all the hopes and aspirations of a weary and struggling mankind. And at this moment Ruth felt a powerful necessity for a credo that would strengthen her in the face of this grinding poverty, these pursued men and women, this overwhelming barrenness of body and soul which confronted one on all sides. To have some consuming devotion to an idea or belief that would finally triumph over the powers of darkness and destruction! To have a faith that would arise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of chaos and despair! But this, she realized, was beyond her. She knew that she lacked the courage to fight and struggle against forces which would crush her as though she were a crawling insect. It was this feeling of impotence in the face of an all-destroying enemy that impelled her to take refuge in a narrower hope.

Very well, then, it was something in the nature of a victory to live to see the next day, to rear a child, to love one's husband, to do some little insignificant personal good to one more unfortunate than one's self. And if (now the violins were falling), she could only keep the boy and Walter, she

would be content, if not fully appeased, for the rest of her days. The music approached its closing measures and at length came to its haunting, last end.

Walter looked up from his book. “That was so beautiful, Ruth, what is it called?”

For a moment Ruth did not reply, then: “It’s miserable outside,” she said absently, “listen to the angry rain on the windows.”

Outdoors the late Autumn rain dashed itself against the pavements of the street, the roofs of houses and windows of the brightly lighted rooms making the sound of cruel, hideous laughter.

As the months wore on, Walter became increasingly nervous and irritable. One night at dinner his hands shook and he sat pale and taut until the spell passed. Ruth was frightened.

“Don’t you think,” she said, “that you ought to go away somewhere and rest?”

“I can’t go away. Things are in a critical way at the office. I simply can’t.”

“But you must. You’ll have a breakdown if you don’t.”

He said nothing in reply and poured himself a stiff drink of whisky to steady his shaking hands. After dinner when Ruth returned to the question of a vacation he was more calm and began to discuss the possibility of a sea trip.

“Would you like to come along?” he asked.

“Perhaps it would be wiser if you took your rest by yourself. Get away from everything.”

“No—come along, Ruth. I’d feel better if you were with me. I feel as though I can’t bear to be alone.”

Her eyes became wet; he looked so tired and worn and the expression of his necessity for her touched her.

“And Bruce? I could arrange to have him sent to a boarding kindergarten—he’s old enough.”

“No. We’ll have Marie look after him on board. It’ll do him good too. It isn’t you and the lad I want to get away from—it’s the terrible mess at the office.” He closed his eyes wearily and rested his head in his hands. When he looked up Ruth asked:

“And where shall we go, dear?”

“The Riviera, perhaps. What do you say? We’ll rent a villa with spacious, grassy terraces and we’ll take sun-baths every day. God, it seems years since I’ve felt the warmth of the sun on my body.” His eyes took on new life and brilliance as he spoke.

“Later, perhaps, we could go to Rome,” Ruth suggested.

“Yes, and on our way back home you could stop off in England. It’ll be a

good opportunity for you to see Guy.”

Ruth’s face clouded suddenly as he spoke. She recovered herself quickly and asked:

“And where would you stop while I was in England?”

“Stop?” There was a sharply curved note of surprise in his voice. “What do you mean? We’d be with you, of course. Bruce and I. It would be a splendid opportunity to tell your mother.”

“Walter—what are you saying? You know it’s utterly impossible. Must we have this discussion all over again?”

“Look here, Ruth—now for God’s sake take that terrified expression off your face and listen to reason.”

“I’m not terrified——.”

“All right, then!” He was annoyed and excited, his hands began to shake again but the conversation was now too far gone to be halted. “Now listen to me carefully. I’m tired of this pretense. It’s a long time since I last mentioned it but I feel degraded every time you get a letter from England. What do you write to your mother? What lies do you tell her about how you live and spend your days? You must have built up an enormous fiction. How can you strangle the mention of Bruce and myself? I should think it would drive you mad.”

“It does—but there isn’t anything I can do about it. I told you that day in Montreal that it would be wrong to bring another life into this mess, but you insisted. Now you must let me have my way.”

For a moment Walter did not reply and Ruth lighted a cigarette waiting for the inevitable storm to break.

——How can I go to her and say this is the man with whom I have lived for five years—and this is our son. God, I can see her face. She would freeze, perhaps call me a whore, no, harlot is the word she would use. She’d think of darling Bruce as a bastard. I can’t do it. That is my dead past, I must leave it undisturbed.

When Walter spoke again he did so with careful deliberation. “Listen, Ruth,” he said quietly, “you simply must make a decision. We can’t go on like this, living in concealment from your mother and Guy. Heavens, we’ve been living together for five years, even the State of New York recognizes the validity of such an arrangement.”

“Not while Edgar is alive.”

“Then divorce him.”

“Impossible. I won’t do it.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to hurt Mother—and Guy.”

“How Guy?”

“He’s been brought up as a Catholic.”

“But don’t you realize, Ruth, that some day, sooner or later, they’ll be bound to find out?”

“How? Why must they find out?”

“I mean—supposing you were to die——?”

“I’m not dying——.”

“Or suppose we were to separate. You might want to go back to them.”

“Are you thinking of that?”

“No—but you must do something about this. I can’t go on being part of an enormous fraud.”

“I’m the one who’s being dishonest. I’ll take the responsibility. You must allow me to do as I think best. This is my problem.”

“No, the boy and I are involved. We’re very much part of the present.”

“I can’t do anything about it.”

Her inability to carry the discussion beyond a blind refusal infuriated Walter. He rose to his feet. “You can do something about it,” he shouted. “You can and you will—or I’ll leave you. Do you hear?”

He stood over her and glared.

“You may leave me, Walter—but I can’t do it.” But her voice lacked conviction as she spoke. They sat in angry silence for some time and then, long afterwards, Walter said:

“I can’t understand your attitude on the question of a divorce. After all, many Catholics get divorces when their marriages become intolerable. Your marriage to Edgar is a dead thing, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” (Dully.)

“The whole world, with the exception of the Church, will grant that ours is

a decent union. It's solid, we've acknowledged it before the world—except your mother—and we have a son. Now it is right that we should legalize it. You must admit that even your mother would prefer a divorced daughter to one living in sin, as she would call it. It is time we made a final decision. Bruce is growing up. You are getting older——.”

She winced at this.

“—anyhow, a divorce would clear up the whole mess. No matter what your mother thinks of it, she'll be compelled to see the honesty of our relationship.”

He walked over to her chair, put his hands on her shoulders, then bending over he kissed her and coaxed:

“Do as I say, dear. You'll see that everything will come out all right. Be a sensible, logical girl.”

“But I'm not logical,” she said smiling, “and I'm afraid I never have been.”

“You will, then?”

“And what would be my first move?”

“Write to Sir Robert. Ask him to speak to Edgar. If he consents perhaps it can be done quietly. I wouldn't want any publicity, if it can be helped. Will you write?”

She hesitated for a moment. “If I can't get a divorce before we sail then we shan't call on Mother in England, yes? We'll wait until I am divorced and then tell her—perhaps next year?”

“All right. I'm agreeable.”

“And one more thing.”

“What is it?”

“After I am divorced and you meet my mother—you are to say that Bruce is your son—that I am not his mother.”

Walter felt the blood rising to his head. With a great effort he conquered his anger.

——She is still under the influence of the Church. After all these years of liberal thought she is still emotionally in the convent. She would deny it, of course, but the whole idea of religious sin is still very real for her. There is nothing I can do. . . .

And without pleasure and with a chilled quality in his voice he agreed.

—There is no use quarreling. She is what she is and nothing I can say will alter her, poor girl. I thought when I first met her that I could win her over to my point of view but the convent had her first. Intellectually she has accepted a modern viewpoint but emotionally she still genuflects in the chapel in Montreal. She can't make the break. . . .

A week later Sir Robert wrote to Ruth: "In the past I did not wish to cause you any needless unpleasantness by referring to Mr. Kennedy. But now, in view of the fact that you are contemplating making application for a divorce, I think that you should know that for the past year your husband has been an inmate of the asylum at Verdun. No matter how regretful your relationship was with him, I know you will be pained at this news . . . please accept my sympathy. His terrible experiences during the war have now resulted in a complete mental breakdown. Under the circumstances we can look for no assistance in his direction. In any case I would have advised that you secure your divorce either at Reno or in Mexico rather than in Canada where, as you may know, divorces are granted by Act of Parliament and only in rare cases. The fact that your husband is insane as a result of his war experiences would not help matters with the members of parliament. . . ."

When Ruth showed Walter the letter he was pleased that she had made the first move. After some discussion it was finally decided that they would go abroad and on their return his lawyer would take the necessary steps to make an application for divorce in Reno. A residence would have to be established and that would take several months. In the meantime they were eager to get away and with matters in satisfactory abeyance they sailed a few days later.

* * * * *

Two months later when they returned to New York, Walter was immediately drawn into his work at the office. A plan of reorganization was under way and only once during the weeks that followed did he mention the question of Ruth's divorce. The press of work and the fact that action would be started as soon as they were ready made him less insistent.

"It can wait for a few months," he said to Ruth one night. "As soon as I can see Reynolds and talk matters over with him, I'll arrange for a meeting between you. It must be handled in such a way so as not to get into the papers. He can fix that."

And as the months passed and nothing happened Ruth stopped thinking about the matter altogether.

But the good effects of Walter's trip abroad soon began to wear off; he was

again harassed by financial worries, he began to lose weight, his nervousness returned. The plan of reorganization effected little good and business continued to be progressively bad. The day at the office was long and in the evening he was worn out and haggard. And the quiet of his home no longer appealed to him. Music, books and ideas now irritated him—he wanted more biting pleasures. Gradually he began to spend less and less time with Ruth. He came home late after a night of drinking and dissipation and left for the office early in the morning.

It was late, quite dark outside and quiet. The office sounded deserted, apparently the staff had gone home hours before and he had not noticed it. It was nearly eight o'clock. Walter had been sitting at his desk looking through papers until now his head ached dreadfully, a dull throbbing pain that furrowed his forehead. He passed his hand wearily across his eyes and opened the lower drawer of his desk, drew out a bottle of whisky and poured himself a generous drink. It burned the back of his throat pleasantly as it went down. He poured himself another.

Then rising, he walked to the window which faced the river. He stood for some time lost in thought, staring aimlessly at the deserted streets several hundred feet below.

—It is late but I do not want to go home.

The two drinks were without effect and he poured himself another and soon felt a glowing sensation at the pit of his stomach, the pressure at the base of his skull eased somewhat and the blood seemed to course through his veins more freely. Back at the window he continued to look at the lighted skyscrapers, the red and green lights of the tug-boats on the river, the illuminated outlines of the Brooklyn Bridge.

—This is the thing which man built in his image. It is a beautiful, pulsing creature of his genius. And yet men are dying by their own hands because they cannot live in it. It is a marvelous structure, this city, surpassing all that man has created before; and because men are woodenly stupid and avaricious the thing will yet destroy them.

He switched the lights out and drawing a chair close to the window, sat staring at the lower end of the city. In all directions there were massed and serried lights, miles of them, up and down. He heard the rumble of heavy trucks through the city's arteries and sitting there in the dark he marveled at the intricacy of its nervous system; an interwoven web of telephone and telegraph wire buried under its streets, its dynamos, its heating plants, traffic signals, towering skyscrapers, bridges, its six million frightened, inadequate people, factories, offices. And now something had happened to all this, and men were bewildered because the Golem had hewn too much wood, drawn too much water, laden the storehouses with too much food, created too much beauty until men scattered in terror before the giant and none knew how to bring him

low. Somewhere in the distance there arose the roar of an elevated train speeding north and from the direction of the market there came the heavy rumble of food trucks. From the north there came the mingled sounds of clangor, rumble and muffled thunder which is the composite clamor of New York at night and out in the harbor he heard the sad hooting of ocean craft and the piping warnings of smaller river vessels.

He rose and moved away from the window, switching on the light.

—What the hell am I thinking about? Whining like a mooning adolescent. Have another drink.

He poured himself a fourth drink and then a fifth. Soon the room swayed slightly, pleasantly. His lips hung loosely and he grinned to himself. He picked up the receiver of his telephone and dialed a number. A woman's voice answered.

"I'll be up to see you in a few minutes," he said, speaking into the instrument. His voice was blurred and he smiled drunkenly to himself. "Say, you'd better anoint yourself with oil b'cause my cup runneth over, light incense and perfume your fair body with myrrh and frankincense, kid, because your lord cometh—perhaps more than once."

The voice at the other end of the line giggled.

"Oh, Mr. Sprague, you *are* so funny."

Walter sat with his face close to the mouthpiece staring at it, his mouth twisted into a snarl. "I don't feel funny."

"I'll wait for you. Are you hungry?"

"No. But I'm drunk—do you hear—I'm drunk, but I'm not unconscious yet, I can still see the world, God damn it!"

He took another drink before leaving the office. Outside he walked toward Trinity Church where he hailed a taxi. He gave an uptown address east of Fifth Avenue and settled back in the hard leather seat as the car sped northward.

For the first time since they had been living together Walter did not come home that night. As usual Marie set the dinner table for three and after waiting until the roast was cold Ruth and Bruce dined by themselves. All through the meal she was silent and tormented by fear. At nine o'clock, when she could endure the suspense no longer, she called the office, but there was no answer.

—Perhaps he was called away from town suddenly.

She rejected this idea; he had always telephoned before leaving the city. She paced up and down the living room, looking out of the window at the street below, eagerly staring into the darkness each time a car pulled up before the entrance to the apartment house.

—Maybe something has happened to him. He has been drinking too much lately and he may have met with an accident.

This, too, seemed implausible upon closer examination. If he were hurt she would have been notified by this time, he always carried papers of identification: his driver's license, his card case. . . .

—This is the first time.

At midnight, when he had not returned, Ruth began to prepare to retire. She dawdled and spent nearly an hour in the bath, hoping that he would come in the meantime. It was past one when she was in bed, but sleep was impossible. She tossed and turned, smoking cigarette after cigarette until she was wide awake.

In desperation she rose and sat by her table, reading, but the printed words refused to make sense and she gave it up. She went downstairs to the dining room and found a decanter of whisky, poured herself a drink and quickly returned to her room.

—It will never do for him to come in and find me waiting for him. Get hold of yourself, for God's sake. You mustn't allow yourself to go to pieces. It is nothing. Possibly he met some friends and they are drinking somewhere.

For a while this train of thought proved satisfactory but always she returned to the basis of her doubt.

—Then why hasn't he called? Surely he must know that I am waiting up for him.

When the first steely streak of dawn appeared in the east and its cold light penetrated her room, she was convinced that the thing which she had feared most had come to pass. She remembered the nights after the war when Edgar came home, the cold expression of hatred on his face as she confronted him, the odor of whisky and women. . . .

—And now am I to go through all that again?

She racked her brain trying to think who the woman could be and wondering what plan of action she should adopt.

—I must be careful. He is all I have now and I must not lose him. I must be careful.

The following afternoon Walter returned. He had been out of town, he said, and looked surprised when she said that she had not received his secretary's telephone call. He would have to speak to the girl about her carelessness; this was the second time in a week that she had neglected to carry out simple instructions.

There was nothing she could say, the excuse was valid. But Walter's voice lacked conviction and his eyes were tired and dark-ringed.

Months passed and matters between Ruth and Walter did not improve. He was absent from home on many occasions and now the calls from his secretary were not overlooked. The evenings were painful and lonely for Ruth. Then, suddenly, Walter would have a change of heart. He spent evenings at home, he sent her flowers and extravagant gifts every afternoon. For a week or ten days he was overwhelmingly considerate and solicitous and then again he would become a stranger in his home.

One morning after an absence of two days Ruth felt that she must discover what her status was in his life. It was at breakfast. He was silent and distracted as though he were taking his food in the presence of strangers. Marie had taken Bruce to the Park and they were alone.

“Walter, I cannot stand this much longer,” Ruth said without warning preliminaries. He looked up in surprise from his paper and frowned.

“Can’t stand what?” he asked.

“This sort of thing. Your staying away for nights.”

“I have to leave town and there’s no use talking about it. Business is impossible.”

“But night after night?”

“Yes, night after night,” he snapped. “I can’t help it. You don’t want me to ruin myself because you must have an excessive amount of attention, do you?”

He looked at her with an angry, cold expression.

—God, what a woman! Now I suppose there will be scenes. What in heaven has happened to her? Her skin is yellow and there are dark rings under her eyes. She was beautiful once. I’m tired of this professional wifeliness. I’ve done my duty, taken care of them, made provisions for my son, what more can a man do?

Ruth looked at him feeling that she must not allow this conversation to end in vague generalities and a perfunctory kiss.

—What have I done that he should look at me so. I am not as young as I was when we first met. I am a little older than he, I wonder if that is the reason. Perhaps he has found another woman, someone younger than I. But he must tell me, I must hear it from his lips, not in degrading innuendo. I would sooner

know the truth than sit here night after night waiting for him. I am tired, too, and I must look dreadful. I see it in his eyes.

She leaned forward across the table and rested her hand on his, but he made no answering response and folded up his paper with a gesture of annoyance.

“I want you to be honest with me, Walter. Don’t you love me any longer?”

He made a grimace of bored impatience. “Why, of course, I love you. I’m here, am I not?”

“Yes, you are here, but that is all—just here.”

“Now, listen, Ruth, I don’t know what you’re driving at, and, to tell you the truth, I haven’t very much time. Things are in bad shape at the office, I’m being driven frantic by things.”

“If it’s only money that’s worrying you, keeping you away from home, you know you needn’t be alarmed. My money is practically untouched and you can have as much of it as you need.”

“I don’t need any, thank you. I can support the mother of my son without assistance.”

——The mother of his son! He said it as if he were frightened to call me his wife, as though the word were something distasteful. But I *am* his wife, no matter what the world says, no matter what he thinks. I have lived with him for nearly seven years. I have been faithful to him, far more loyal to him than he has been to me.

“I know you’ve been a good father and—may I say husband? I hope the word doesn’t offend you.”

Walter threw his paper to the table and walked to the window and stared down into the street for a moment and then came back to the table.

“Why in God’s name do you bring that up? I consider you my wife and have acknowledged you to the whole world.”

“I noticed that you referred to me as the mother of your son.”

“Well, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but am I not more than that?”

“Of course, I haven’t denied it, have I?”

“No—but you seem to be evading it.”

“Why this sudden questioning, may I ask?”

“I want to know things—for certain.”

“What things?”

“I want to know, Walter, whether you still love me and whether you are being loyal to me.”

“Loyal,” he repeated, “of course I’m loyal. I carry the responsibilities of this home, do I not? I have the best interests of my family at heart, isn’t that true? Of course, I’m loyal.”

“I don’t mean that.”

“Well, for God’s sake, what *do* you mean?”

“I mean about other women. Are you being faithful to me, that’s what I mean.”

He did not answer at the moment and she pursued the question relentlessly.

“Tell me, Walter, are you being unfaithful to me?”

“Yes.”

A terrible silence fell between them. The color left Ruth’s face. Walter walked to a table, nervously took a cigarette from a humidior and lighted it.

When she spoke again her voice had lost its modulations. The words issued from her mouth listlessly, flatly.

“Who is she?”

“You don’t know her.”

“And is she the only one—since we have been living together?”

“No.”

“Then there have been others?”

“Yes, but please don’t look so tragic.”

“What do you think I should do—laugh?”

“Do? Why there’s nothing to do. I still love you, Ruth, these other things don’t matter. Really they don’t. You shouldn’t have asked, but having asked, I had to tell you the truth. I’m sorry.”

“I don’t believe you love me. If you did, you couldn’t leave me here night after night for other women.”

“But I do love you. It is different with them.”

“Different? How?”

“I don’t love them, I tell you. I consider you my wife—you are my wife—this is my home. The other thing is something else; love doesn’t enter into it. I want you to believe me.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“It’s true, nevertheless.”

“Well, I can’t have it.”

He went to the sideboard and poured himself a drink of whisky and drank it hastily, then he poured another and took it to the table and faced Ruth.

“Listen, Ruth. I want to have a complete and final understanding with you on this question. We’ve been living together now for nearly seven years. That’s longer than most people who are churched live together. It’s a good record—and I don’t want it to end just because you are suddenly developing a streak of unreasonable conservatism. We were liberal-minded about these matters when we set up house together and I expect the same attitude now.”

“Liberal-minded? Do I understand that you want me to sanction your running around with other women? And that if I am meek and blind you will consider me a liberal-minded woman, too? Is that it? Do you consider me conservative because I expect fidelity from you?”

“Intelligent, modern people don’t use the word in that sense any longer. Most progressive women are ashamed to use the word as you do. You know as well as I do that the idea of fidelity between the sexes is a stupid religious concept. It’s a convention which dates from the time when married women were regarded as chattels and now you ask me to consider myself bound by such a shabby, outworn conception of morality. I have lived with you for nearly seven years. That, apparently counts for nothing with you. I have cared for you, nursed you when you were ill, have acknowledged you as my wife and the mother of my son; that, too, I suppose counts for nothing. I am jealous of your honor, I plan for Bruce’s future. All this doesn’t matter. But if I so much as spend an idle hour with another woman, you——.”

“Not to mention the idle nights,” Ruth interrupted.

“Very well, then, idle nights. But if I spend an evening with a woman who doesn’t mean anything to me, then I am unfaithful. Unfaithful to what?”

“To me.”

“How?”

“Because it’s indecent. If we love each other such a thing should be impossible.”

“Nonsense. What’s indecent about it? Are you indecent because you are still legally married to Edgar and at the same time live with me? I don’t say that you are. I simply mean that love, sex, passion—call it what you will—is not indecent.”

“It is a horrible thing to come to the woman you love soiled and reeking of another woman; moreover, it’s hypocritical.”

“I’m not a hypocrite. Do you hear? I’ll not allow you to sit there and say things like that.”

“Am I to suppose that you wouldn’t mind if I did the same thing—spent a night with another man?”

“No, I wouldn’t mind.”

“You mean that it wouldn’t cause you any pain if I were unfaithful to you?”

“No—it wouldn’t cause me any pain. It wouldn’t and it shouldn’t.”

“Then you don’t love me any longer and there’s nothing more to be said.”

“But I do, perhaps not as much as in the beginning, but surely you don’t expect that. You must try and be a modern, intelligent woman. You are not in the convent, you yourself have admitted the absurdities of religious concepts about morality. Your living with me all these years is proof of that. Why don’t you realize that all this nonsense about fidelity isn’t valid any longer?”

“You don’t love me any longer,” Ruth repeated dully.

“Please don’t keep repeating the same thing over and over again. Are the things which I have been saying true or not? Answer me that.”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so. Maybe they are—but I still think that it’s disgusting of you to go to other women and then come to me and expect me to applaud you for it. It’s vile and filthy and nothing you can say, no matter how glibly you say it, will ever convince me.”

“See here, Ruth, I’ll not allow you to call me vile and filthy. Do you hear? I’ll not allow it.” He was shouting now and he came close to her and shook his finger in her face.

“Please, Walter, don’t threaten me. I do not condone your infidelity and

nothing you say or do will make me alter my attitude. If I can't have you clean and undefiled, then I don't want you."

"Very well. Do as you please. I'm tired of all this old-fashioned professional wife business. Good-by."

He walked from the room without another word, leaving her sitting at the table. She remained there confused and bewildered, trying to determine the extent of her misfortune.

—And now what? I can't go on like this, living in the knowledge that he comes to me from the beds of other women. It was this way with Edgar. I don't want what any other decent woman would refuse under the circumstances. But then, maybe I'm not a decent woman.

Her head began to ache, it seemed that her eyes were being drawn upward in agony. She went to her room and sat at her dressing table, dabbing her head with *eau de Cologne*. She had not slept well for weeks now, and in exhaustion she threw herself on the bed and tried to sleep but sleep would not come. She felt as though she were without skin, as though her nerves were exposed and raw, sensitive to every passing influence.

At noon Marie brought her a tray of food but she could not eat. Instead she drank some black coffee in the vain effort to calm herself and ease the pain which racked her head and which, in cruel sympathy, had now communicated itself to her whole body.

Shortly before six Ruth began to prepare for dinner. She looked worn and haggard, her skin was flabby and lifeless. She looked at herself in the mirror in astonishment and began, painstakingly, to apply cosmetics. After half an hour with rouge, mascara, creams and lotions she had improved her appearance but little. The color on her cheeks refused to spread and stood out like two unrelated spots of pink and merely accentuated the ghastliness of her complexion. She sat before her glass and surveyed her work with a sinking heart.

—Whatever has happened to me? Six months of worry and I have begun to look like an old woman. It must be that I was hollow underneath and cracked under the first strain. Of course, he is younger than I am. He has suffered less and feels more youthful. And now if I go down to dinner looking like this, he will think that I am an old harridan; I will see it in his eyes. Why should I look like this? I have lived well, have taken care of myself and still I look older than I am. Thirty-seven years old! Most women are just beginning to live at my age. The dangerous age, they call it. Dangerous because they want to live, have affairs, have one last fling at life, and here am I fighting desperately to hang on to the little I have. What is it that I lack? Perhaps if I had not forsaken my faith it would stand me in good stead now. But how is that possible? I simply do not believe any longer. Or my music! Perhaps I should have made it my life work, so that I would not feel so dependent upon Walter. But he is all I have. Nothing else. How can I go to mother? Darling Bruce, she would call him a bastard, and I would have to spend the rest of my days listening to her cant and reproaches. I couldn't leave him behind and I couldn't take him. God, what skin! Dry and stubborn, refusing to take the rouge, two red spots like a consumptive. He will hate me more than ever if he sees me like this. But I must go downstairs. I must face him, I must ask him questions. I cannot go on living like this. Let him get out and leave me alone. Alone? And then how will you live? The old loneliness? All over again? Yes, I could live with Bruce—then I wouldn't know, it is better that way, not to know. We will live together and I will see that he grows up to be a fine man. And Walter will come and see him but I know I shall not be able to face him—he will be gay and civil and perhaps very pitying. Oh, anything but pity! He will think: that is the woman I used to live with, she was young when it first happened. She had fine, firm skin then, hard breasts and her hair was bright auburn, it's hennaed now and the day before she goes to the hairdresser it's

gray at the roots and unless she takes very great care of herself she looks like an old harridan. Of course, I was young then, he will say, didn't know what I was doing. She was older than I was. Poor thing! I should be very modern, I know. I should walk down to the living room and calmly tell him to go his way, that I am self-sufficient. I wonder what these heroic modern young women feel and think at night. Good fellows! Thank you very much and the man goes his way, while she smiles a brave little smile. But you can't fool me, miss, I know; it hurts. If you wear panties and long trailing evening gowns, you can't fool me. I know it hurts. It's because it's cheaper that way, that's why men want freedom. But when Bruce was being born there was no freedom then; he came in the old conservative way, tearing my flesh and draining my blood. But then, perhaps modern intelligent women don't have babies like that any more. Maybe childbirth is an old shabby convention like fidelity and not beating one's wife. I must remember to tell him that. He's brave because he's younger than I am and because he's pinned his faith on life and I'm weak because I have only wanted love. And now it is ending. The days we spent together were the happiest in my life. And soon there will be dreary days and the taste of our happiness will grow foul and bitter and he will come to hate me more and more. Perhaps he would have felt differently if we were married. It would be idiotic to go through with the divorce now. My marriage with Edgar, which was ugly and intolerable, the Church and society insisted on calling my real marriage, but it was not. It was sanctified adultery. And if I went to confession now the priest would tell me that Walter's infidelity is God's way of showing me the path to redemption. Mother would say crawl to the foot of the Cross and pray for forgiveness. But I cannot, I do not believe any longer and to go through the empty gestures would be stupid and hypocritical. I should have been freed from my first marriage and the Church and the world should have recognized that Walter is my husband and that Bruce is not a bastard. Yes, if things had been otherwise, it would be different now. But I must go down. It is better so.

* * * * *

When Walter returned home that evening he was distant and sullen and sat in silence throughout dinner. An air of suspended hostility hung over the apartment and stilled Bruce's customary little-boy chatter and froze Marie's good humor into stiff civility. When the meal was finished Walter rose abruptly and announced that he had to go out. Ruth followed him into the hall.

"Walter, please don't leave me alone tonight."

He looked at her coldly and continued to get into his coat. "I'm sorry, I have an engagement."

“Please, I’ve had a terrible day—there are things I want to speak to you about.”

“I’ll try and be back early, before midnight perhaps. I’ll see you later.” He turned and made for the door.

“Aren’t you going to kiss me before you go?” She knew that her voice sounded weak and pathetic, that she shouldn’t have asked to be kissed, but the words were out before she could restrain herself. He bent down and kissed her lightly.

“Now, go to bed. Don’t wait up for me. We’ll talk another time.”

He turned sharply, opened the door and walked out into the corridor. When Ruth returned, Marie had taken Bruce upstairs to put him to bed. For a while she sat reading the evening paper, then, unable to endure the loneliness, went upstairs to bed.

The morning mail brought a letter from England. Her correspondence with her mother and Guy gave her little pleasure; there had been evasions and during the last seven years she could not mention her life with Walter nor the birth of Bruce. When it was necessary to write to England, which she did on the rarest occasions, she was compelled to keep track of the threads of the fiction which ran through all her letters. In one letter she had not written because she had taken a sea trip to Central America, in another it was because she had been ill. She wrote of the fictitious persons whom she had met, how she spent her time and once she wrote that she was preparing for the concert stage and was immersed in her work. But always there was a reason for her not visiting England. But of late the demands of her mother and son that she visit them increased with each letter.

She looked at the squarish envelope and hesitated before opening it.

—But how can I go to England? I can see mother's face as I present Bruce as her grandson! And even Guy will not understand. I wanted him to be brought up by cold, hard English masters and, no doubt, they have done their job well. I see it in his letters. He will be polite and hurt. Oh, God!

She opened the letter and read: "My dear Child: This Christmas will be the eighth since we have seen each other and only seven days by boat separates us. I have been to Germany lately taking the cure at Badenbaden and my health is now much improved, for which I thank God every day. I wrote to you from Berlin but you didn't reply. Why do you not write more often? Are you ill or are you having financial difficulties? I wrote to Sir Robert asking about your finances and he replied saying that most of your securities had weathered the storm. He said he saw you in New York three years ago, that he had lunch with you at an hotel and that you were looking splendid at the time. And now I have a surprise for you. Guy came down from college the other day, happy and cheerful as a soldier on leave because he had won an exchange scholarship. It seems that he will go to America shortly after the first of the year and I have been thinking that it would be a good idea if I were to come along with him. You will be surprised when you see Guy, he is tall, smart and very clever at his studies—a proper Englishman. I'm sure you'll be very proud of him. His scholarship gives him two years at Harvard and he will be able to run down from Cambridge very often to see us both. I was thinking it would be a good idea if we were both to take a suite at one of the better hotels, preferably the

Plaza. It is now the first week in December and I think we will sail about the 19th, which ought to bring us into New York on Christmas Day. . . .”

For some minutes after Ruth had finished, she stared at the untidy scrawl of her mother’s letter.

——What am I to do now? Walter will be angry. He will think that this is a scheme to bind him, that I wrote asking them to come. God, oh, God, what shall I do? This is the last straw.

Sleepless nights—eternities of wakeful tossing in bed, staring long into the doubt-inhabited blackness of her room. Then, after endless waiting, there came the dismal, ghostly patch of light on the wall facing the east.

—How melancholy is the dawn when life has lost its meaning.

Ruth rose in desperation one night and dressed; sleep was out of the question. She went to Bruce's room and stood over his bed watching as he breathed softly. The room was overheated and tiny beads of perspiration stood out on his broad, arched forehead. She went to a window and opened it.

Lighting a cigarette she went out into the silent, deserted street and walked toward the garage where a drowsy attendant got the roadster for her. She turned north and went through the Park to Seventy-second street, over to Riverside Drive and then north. The roaring motor carried her past sleeping apartment houses, past empty park benches and north toward Van Courtlandt Park. The river was on her left, gray and forbidding in the gray light.

—Dripping wet like a drowned scraggy alley cat. Never!

Up past Inwood, Marble Hill, Fieldston, Riverdale and finally she brought the car to a halt. Before her lay the sweeping panorama of the Hudson and the Jersey shore beyond. The first gray smudge had touched the east; across the river the Palisades stood lonely, stark in the bleak light.

—Only mountains, rivers, plains, things without life, can achieve dignity.

She smoked a cigarette leisurely as she watched the cliffs of rock opposite and smiled cynically.

—A high lonely castle perched on an inaccessible mountain.

The black clefts on the face of the Palisades began to broaden and deepen in the growing light. Soon the river was dark blue, then ultramarine. When it was quite light and the sun had fully risen she turned about and drove home.

Shortly after midnight when Walter came home there was a shaded light burning in Ruth's room but he passed it by without entering and went to his room. He bathed with a slight feeling of repugnance and went to bed. At four o'clock he awoke, lighted a cigarette and lay smoking in the dark. As he thought of how he had spent the evening, he grimaced. He had been bored all evening, the woman was an idiot and kept chattering of the millionaires she had known, the trips she had taken on luxurious yachts.

—Her horrible voice and her enameled Broadway face which looked as if it would crack if she attempted anything but that careful artificial smile.

He recalled with a rising feeling of shame the woman's drunken quarrel in the speakeasy, the apologies to the manager, the embarrassed exit, the smirk on the face of the taxi driver and finally the business of getting the woman home. He smoked and stared into the dark, thinking.

—You idiot! And all this time Ruth was here waiting for you. God, what is it that drives men—some men—from the arms of a cultured, decent woman into the arms of chippies? Must be the lust for dirt which lies hidden in all of us. Of course, she looks haggard. It's enough to take the heart out of any woman, let alone a sensitive girl like Ruth. Poor kid, first that swine Edgar and now me! For heaven's sake, man, what do you expect from whores and wantons? Spin 'em on their heads and they're all sisters. Away night after night—and since the time we had the argument she hasn't said a word. Just looked at me with those soft gray eyes of hers. It's months since I've heard her play. The trouble with her is that she's too sensitive and fine for—for this. These are not days for fineness or sensitivity. One must be hard and merciless. Too honest to condone shoddiness—if she makes a mistake she suffers for it in silence. What a pity that she hasn't a tougher streak in her. Like some of the young women you meet these days; clean, hard kids. They walk upright by the sides of their men as equals. Well, it's too bad, but that's the way she is—and very good she is, too, in her own way. She must be in there awake, sick with worry. In the morning I'll stay late for breakfast, we'll talk until noon as we used to do. I'll tell her that I'm sorry, that I've been a fool. We'll go to Reno and make arrangements for her divorce—she must think I'm an awful cad, first hounding her to consent to a divorce and then dropping the whole business because a skirt crosses my path. We'll get the divorce and then take Bruce and go to England. We'll walk into her mother's home and I'll say: "Listen, Mrs.

Throop, we are married to each other. Ruth got a divorce and this is your new little grandson. Isn't he a swell little fellow?" Never mind what Ruth says, that would be the best way out. And surely she couldn't turn her heart from him, she couldn't possibly disown him because her God said, "suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And Guy must be quite a young man. Wonder how it would feel to have a great fellow in long trousers calling me dad. Funny, I bet. Then we'll all come back to New York and Guy could go to Harvard or Yale and he could run down during the holidays and see his mother. God, I'll bet she'll be happy. The first thing in the morning—I'll go in and kiss her and tell her what I've decided. . . .

He crushed the fire out of his cigarette and, smiling to himself, rolled over and fell into a peaceful, happy sleep.

It was long past midnight. Ruth had heard Walter come in about one o'clock and she now lay reading in her room which was unilluminated save for the thin shaft of light which beat down on her book from the bed reading lamp. For some time past she had been in that waking state of somnolence during which one stares unseeing at the printed word. Somewhere well into the book she started and passed her hand over her eyes. A paragraph had caught her attention and her eyes lost their fixedness.

The author had been discussing his heroine and Ruth reread the paragraph: "She was unhappy not because she was destined for unhappiness, but because she failed to understand that all life is based upon struggle, that discord and strife, not harmony and peace, are the common characteristics of life. She had failed to realize that the rule is not life *and* life, but always life *against* life."

She put the book down and for some time was lost in thought. Then, as the full force of the thought came upon her she smiled.

—How true. Of course, not life and life, but always life against life.

Outside, the street noises had subsided except for the occasional sustained rending sound of rubber on asphalt as a lonely car sped through the Park. On her dressing table her clock, with lively metallic rhythm, ticked off the cadenced minutes; otherwise the room was quiet. The familiar sounds of the house had long since ceased; she had heard Marie attend to her last duties, then the front door opened very quietly and she heard Walter come in, go to the bathroom and finally to bed. In the silence of her room she lay thinking:

—I am tired. I have never been so utterly tired before. Thirty-seven years of living, sleeping, loving, waiting, and now I am so tired, so weary that I cannot sleep.

She returned to the thought of the author.

—If it is true, then it is stupid to go on living. To live a few years longer? Why? To suffer more pain and humiliation?

Now, no longer did the thought frighten her as it did once. For the first time after all these unhappy months she was resolute.

—I am free. My life is my own, and I can do what I like with it.

She put her long, beautifully shaped hands under her head and lay looking

up at the pool of reflected soft light half-hidden in the darkness of the ceiling. All doubt and indecision had left her.

—I am tired of the ceaseless struggle, the empty victories, the shallow defeats.

How long she lay thinking thus she did not know. Then she spoke aloud as though there were someone present to hear her thoughts. To the stillness of the room, to the thin chatter of her clock, to Bruce and Walter who lay in the rooms beyond—to the whole world, she said: “Only slaves continue to live on terms not of their own making. Life for its own sake is nothing.”

Her voice as she spoke had a sharp, commanding quality which startled her. It sounded as though another person were talking; it was as if a stranger had come unbidden to her bedside and had uttered this thought for her.

For a few moments she was frightened, her breath came rapidly and her heart beat a staccato flurry. Then, as she became more composed, she lighted a cigarette and watched the blue and gray spirals of smoke twist themselves up the nebulous shaft of light which fell from above. She inhaled the fumes deeply with slow satisfaction like one who has cast up his accounts and is at peace with the world. When she had finished smoking she twisted the live coal into extinction with a thoroughness which bespoke finality. Rising, she moved to the glass of her table and for a few minutes she sat brushing her hair with long, sweeping strokes of her brush. In the uncertain light the glass gave back a vague reflection. But she was not deceived by the dim figure in the mirror, she knew that her body had lost its white resilience, she knew that her breasts were no longer firm and youthful, she knew that the darkness hid the hair which was now graying.

—In the morning light I know the mirror will be as truthful as ever.

She walked out of her room and into the nursery and soon stood over Bruce’s bed. This, which she had feared most, now held no terror for her.

—Even partings are easy when the love of life is past. He will not suffer, he is too young, poor little fellow. And sooner or later they forget. It is nothing, Bruce dear, there will be a little storm of sadness and then you will grow up and you will not have a desperate, sad mother to make your days unhappy. It is nothing, it doesn’t matter. Nothing matters any longer.

It was not as painful as she had imagined. Nothing is painful when one is in love with death and she turned and walked out of the room, and down the staircase to the floor below. Her feet were unshod and her hair hung loosely about her shoulders. In the living room she poured a small glass of brandy and

smiled as she slowly drank it.

—For the taste, surely not for what it can do for me now.

There were no cigarettes in the living room and she returned to her room. On the way downstairs she passed Walter's door and heard his heavy, even breathing.

—In love, as in all things, life against life.

* * * * *

She stood at the kitchen window lost in thought, absently watching the silently falling snow. Then she turned and saw that it was three o'clock.

—Three o'clock! I remember the sundial which stood in the convent garden. I did not understand its motto then. "It is later than you think." Much later, I should think. Tomorrow the pavements and the roofs will be white, children will play, laughing and shouting, unmindful of the muck underneath. Then it will thaw and run little rivers of gray and brown slush. Once again the streets will be unclean with the filth of many feet.

She saw the glass bowl in which Bruce kept two tiny Japanese turtles, she lifted it and the crimson-striped reptiles awoke and blinked in the unaccustomed light. She carried the bowl upstairs to the boy's room and placed it on the table near his bed.

—In the morning he will want them. And why should they die? They haven't harmed a soul nor brought pain and confusion into the lives of others.

She had watched them of a summer's afternoon lying motionless and unblinking with mouths agape until a luckless fly buzzed just a shade too close. Then the red-streaked little neck would shoot forward and the bony mouth snapped shut with a hard, dry sound.

—But you didn't know better, did you, you foolish, greedy things? And besides, you haven't any souls to tell you the difference between right and wrong. You were hungry and you killed. Perhaps the others, too, are no wiser. Life against life, eh?

Back in the kitchen she shut the window at the top and pulled the blind, made the door fast and drew one of the chairs into the center of the room. Then she lit a cigarette and smoked it leisurely.

—No, it would be silly to write a note. What can I say? I have no excuses to offer. When there is no life left then one must die. Life is impossible without richness, beauty, love and promise; and all these things are now beyond me. Once they were more than words to me, but that was before I

knew that they lied. They said peace and there was no peace. They sent Edgar back to me shaken by the sight of much blood and with the lust for whores in his veins. They said God, but God was ashamed of His children as a proud mother is of a deformed idiot-child. They said love but what they meant was whores and dirty jokes and gin parties. Yes, the guns have smashed everything. Now they love like hot bitches in the streets under the glare of street lamps as men and women walk by and laugh, and no voice is lifted up. Everywhere frightened, defeated faces; lustful faces, murderous faces—life against life. There is no way to turn. Only to the grave, my mother.

When she had finished her cigarette she ground the ember into dry, safe ash.

—How dreadful if beyond this there were another life, cruel and stupid as this one is.

Then, holding out her arms, as though extending them to a lover, she reached forward and, one by one, with studied deliberation, opened the four gas jets. They hissed in eager response. She listened, fascinated, and breathed deeply, unmindful of the acrid odor which filled her nostrils. Soon her heart began to beat a little more rapidly and she experienced a pleasant feeling of exhilaration, a heady wininess. . . .

The hissing sound filled her ears, became a sibilant song; her head felt light as if it had been touched by champagne. Tilting her head back she observed with mild amusement that the light overhead shimmered and seemed to be dancing to the whistling of the open vents. From somewhere afar she heard music coming closer and rising, as it came, to a treble crescendo. Soon the music filled the room with the sibilation of its melody.

She closed her eyes and saw herself as a girl. She is walking through a footpath leading from a dark pine forest. Her hair flies in the whistling wind. She is alone. This is strange! Where are the other girls? Where is Sister Constance? The narrow footpath widens and becomes a road, a wide lonely road on which she alone walks. It is nearly dark and at the end of the avenue there is a faint, bluish light. Suddenly in the distance a person approaches and as the figure comes closer (it came toward her with the swiftness of thought), she sees that it is a young man. As he walks he stares straight ahead of him and when he is abreast of her he turns abruptly and looks full into her frightened face with sad, reproachful eyes. He is a stranger but his eyes are those of Guy. She speaks to him: “No, not even you. I will not stop. It is too late and it does not really matter. I am tired, do you understand?” He listens as she speaks and then walks on. She suddenly remembers that there is something of great importance that she must tell him. She turns and pursues his retreating form.

“Guy, Guy darling,” she shouts. “Stop!” The young man halts and waits as she runs toward him, breathless and panting. “Guy darling, I want to tell you a story. Do not look at me so, I am your mother. A story—do you remember how it began? Once there was a country where everything was topsy-turvy and the old men had beards that reached to the bottoms of their vests.” She puts her hand to her head, trying desperately to remember something. Then her face brightens and she says: “Oh, yes, I have it now! I want you to know that I *haven’t* forgotten Bruce, he’s your little brother, you know. I saw him this very night and he was asleep and little beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. You are to help Walter look after him. There is plenty of money for you both but he is little and he will need you.” When she finished speaking she saw that the young man was gone and that she had been speaking to herself. The light at the end of the road grew brighter and more luminous and she began to run madly toward it. . . .

The music swelled louder and louder, it filled the room and shook the brilliant light above her head. The drums increased in volume, drowning out the thin, piping notes of the reed instruments. The kettle drums sounded those two fearful notes in the *Apotheosis* from *Goetterdammerung*. The room was as white as though a million suns were shining on an ice-covered wasteland. There was a hurricane of tympani. . . .

—Walter. . . . Walter.

Gradually the thunder of the percussion subsided. Once again the sweet woodwinds were heard and a solitary flute held a long, sustained note. The woodwinds died away whistling like the wind in the trees on a Spring evening. Soon there were no sounds, no throbbing drums, no strident brass, no whistling wind—only silence.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised. Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained. Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *There are Victories* by Charles Yale Harrison]