IT TAKES ALL KINDS

By

Louis Bromfield

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NEW YORK *and* LONDON
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FIRST EDITION

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The story Better Than Life *was originally published serially under the title of* And It All Came True *and is published in England under the title of* It Had To Happen. *The story* McLeod's Folly *was originally published serially under the title of* You Get What You Give.

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The individual stories contained in this volume are presented as separate eBooks.
(eBook transcriber's note)

III

New York Legend

THE old house is gone now, destroyed, slain, annihilated in the way of old houses in New York which disappear without leaving a legend. In its place is a monstrous new apartment house, as typical of its day as the old brownstone structure with its neo-Georgian façade was characteristic of the latter half of the nineteenth century. They pulled it down only a couple of years ago but already, as is the way in New York, the old house is forgotten.

When you pass the cold modern entrance to the great building which now stands on the corner, you have to think hard for a moment to remember what had been there only a little time before. I can remember, for in my childhood and youth, I used to go there very often, but I'll wager that your average New Yorker, even a New Yorker familiar with Murray Hill, could not tell you that only a little while ago there stood on that corner in the very center of the district a big house which, unless you studied it carefully, seemed to be nondescript, characterless—almost, you might say, self-effacing, like a timid old maid who dresses in a conventional, colorless fashion in order not to attract notice.

It sometimes behaved like a house in which someone lived—a house where there were deaths, births and funerals. One had the impression that behind its big old-fashioned mahogany doors people moved about, eating, sleeping,

making love. It was boarded up in the summer, but in winter the shutters were taken down and at the windows behind draperies of faded green brocade, patched lace curtains, newly washed, appeared. In the spring there were even flowers in the window boxes on the first floor.

It had all the appearance of a living house but it was dead. If you spent a day watching it, the only person you would have seen leaving it was an old gentleman, obviously English and obviously a manservant, who would come out from the areaway during the afternoon, returning in about an hour bearing a package or two. You might see a grocer's boy leave packages. Otherwise, there was no sign of life.

Year by year, one tall building after another crowded into the blocks near by, but the old house took no notice of them. Among the shadows which each year grew longer and longer, it continued to exist, dignified and aloof, like a superior old dowager who refuses to follow the fashion and dresses in the period which suited her best.

If you had continued your watch far into the night you would have seen another old gentleman, tall and slim and fragile, come out of the servants' entrance after midnight and walk twice round the block. Then he would return, and letting himself in with his latchkey, he would disappear once more.

There *was* life in the house but it was a kind of life in death. It had been like that for nearly forty years. My cousin lived there. I doubt if any of you have ever heard his name, although if you were old enough and had lived in certain fashionable circles in New York you would have known it well enough, for it was a name known everywhere in the Mauve Decade and a name which was flashy and even notorious a generation earlier.

When my cousin's wife died, he came back from the funeral and never went out again in the world which once he had loved so well. I remember the date of the funeral because Elena was buried three days after the Hotel Windsor fire.

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IN my childhood, the house was exactly what the house of a rich buccaneer banker should have been, for Michael Denning belonged to the age of Robber Barons—the New York of Jim Fisk and Jay Gould and Commodore Vanderbilt. He made his millions ruthlessly, unscrupulously and, by the standards of today, criminally. When I knew him in his old age he was a big man and vigorous still, with a white chin beard and congress boots, a loud voice and the domineering manner of a money-maker. In his way he was, I suppose, a kind of monster.

The same type exists today, but no longer is it free to bully and swindle and rob. The world and New York have changed a good deal—in some ways for the better; in other ways for the worse. I've seen a good deal of the change in progress, and the story of old Michael Denning's son Ogden is a story of change. He was born at the wrong time. He should, I think, have been born sixty years earlier or into this modern world. As it was, he fell between the two epochs, into a world which was sly and vulgar, false and provincial.

Old Michael was married for years to a plain, common, barren woman who ran his house like a Hessian trooper, berating the servants and quarreling with tradesmen. He had married her when, he was a young man and poor, having chosen a strapping, vigorous woman who turned gradually into a termagant. It did not matter much to him, for in his

earlier years he was too busy making and losing one fortune after another.

He would have liked children but she bore him none, and after a time he saw less and less of her, amusing himself elsewhere with girls he met through that lady-killer, Jim Fisk, and girls from the French opera and Koster and Bial's. He had a large appetite and a large capacity and in the face of such extravagant competition, his wife grew gradually more and more eccentric. Living in a house which the newspapers said cost half a million, she would go out in the morning to Third Avenue with a basket over her arm to do her own marketing.

The house was a sensation at the time it was built. I think the old robber wanted it not because he enjoyed a big luxurious house or even for show, but because it was a way of spending some of the millions with which he was surfeited at the time. In any case, it was left entirely to the architect and the furnishers, and in the end they delivered to him a solid monstrosity of black walnut, red plush, marble and statuary.

He and his wife moved into it and gave a great reception to which all New York was invited. They asked people they knew and people they didn't know. It was a kind of huge gesture in the style of the period and of Michael Denning himself—to show that he had arrived and to demonstrate his power. But it did not work out that way. He must have been puzzled when he found that, for all his power as a money-maker, there was one side of New York he could not dominate. None of the people he did not know came to the party, and a good many of those he did know failed to show up.

It must have been a strange sight—old Denning and his grenadier wife, dressed in their best, standing in the big ballroom waiting to receive guests who never came. A good many accepted the invitations and then failed to appear at the last moment. The only ones who came were Denning's pals, some rather déclassé women, and men who dared not offend him, accompanied by their flurried and indignant wives. There was food and champagne for three times as many people as appeared.

After midnight, old Denning stood on a chair in the ballroom and announced in his bull-like voice: "If there are still any stuffed monkeys here, they'd better go home now because the rest of us are going to have fun!" A few drifted away, and then, indeed, the fun began.

In rage and indignation the old boy had sent out to the French opera and to Koster and Bial's for singing and dancing acts. A whole new orchestra appeared, and by morning the party had turned into a party after his own heart—champagne and coryphées and singing and dancing. It was a famous scandal and a howling success. In the middle of the evening, the dragon wife went upstairs, packed her trunks and left the house, never to enter it again.

Whether the two ever met again I do not know, but a few years later she died. Why Michael Denning, who made his first entrance into New York City as a boy of eighteen driving cattle to market, should have wanted to give a fashionable party I do not know. From all evidence, one would have said that nothing could have interested him less. Heaven knows his real life was full enough, with his money-making, his girls and his champagne. But apparently even this great

robber baron had an Achilles' heel, and the Achilles' heel was "society."

For a long time afterward he took no notice of the people who had snubbed him save to keep watch and when the occasion arose to ruin one of them here and another there. He was accountable, I think, for the ruin of fifteen or twenty families of importance. One day they would be living in a fine house receiving and entertaining and the next they would be on the streets. Sometimes it was known openly that Denning was responsible, but more often the ruin occurred mysteriously.

After a time the responsibility for half the failures in New York was attributed to the buccaneer who had been snubbed. There was a time when old families trembled at the mention of his name—families who had not even troubled to answer the invitations to his notorious ball and reception. That was back in the sixties and seventies. Those who had snubbed him must have felt as did those Romans who were on the proscription lists of Sulla.

Old Denning was in his middle fifties when his hard-faced wife died. He was a big vigorous man but as sixty approached, something which appeared to be the Hereafter and turned out not to be seemed to trouble him. To the astonishment of the congregation he came on Sunday to the Church of the Ascension, and after that he never missed a Sunday.

The whole tempo of his life grew slower and more steady. He gave money to charities and heaped gifts on the destitute families of the parish. He even interested himself personally in the work and paid visits to tenements and squatters' shacks. That was how he met my aunt Sarah.

My aunt Sarah was a tall, rather frail woman who at the time she met Michael Denning was thirty-one and already resigned to the status of old maid for the rest of her life, a status as rigid, as fixed in its code of behavior in the New York of that day, as that of a Hindu widow. She had had a love tragedy, and so for the rest of her life there was, in the opinion fashionable in that day, nothing for her to do but devote herself to church work or sit quietly at home.

She was a handsome woman, so intensely feminine that in these days she would perhaps have been called kittenish. At that time, she was the ideal of womankind—pretty, shy, timid and frail and given to fainting now and then ever since her "decline." She went into a decline at the age of twenty-two when her fiance, a young fellow named Hubert Standish, was drowned before her eyes at Newport. After that she never went out again.

But it was not only the "decline" which shut in my aunt Sarah. Her family were among those who had not come to old Michael Denning's party; worse than that, her parents, who were my grandparents, had looked upon the invitation as an insult and never even troubled to answer it. On their part it was, I think, less snobbery than moral indignation. They were not themselves very rich, but they had enough money to live comfortably and well, and their position in the provincial society which centered about Washington Square was unassailable.

My grandfather was a lawyer, and his business was looking after the estates of old families like his own. It was a small life they led—Victorian, provincial and walled about by principle and prejudice and pride. My grandfather objected to Michael Denning not because he was a rather vulgar self-

made man who had millions, but because he had made those millions in an unscrupulous fashion. It was that which Aunt Sarah's father could not forgive him. He would never see him or meet him on the same level as that upon which he met honest businessmen. And so one morning he wakened to find he was a ruined man.

It was an intricate business which must have taken Michael Denning hours of detailed work to plan, for my grandfather's money was invested in a number of things. But the buccaneer managed it. Mysteriously, fantastically, my grandfather's investments turned into nothing at all, and he was left with his wife and two daughters to live on what he earned. And presently even that began to dwindle in the wake of his ruin and a whispering campaign which spread the rumor that he was a poor businessman, foolish and untrustworthy, perhaps not quite honest.

People began to withdraw their estates from his care and presently he had to give up his house and take his wife and his two daughters to live in a flat in Tenth Street over a drug store. Their position was still good but they had no money. Michael Denning had done his work thoroughly.

At the time the old rascal began attending the Church of the Ascension clad in respectable sheep's clothing, my aunt Sarah was the poverty-stricken old-maid daughter of a ruined man. She was resigned to her lot, as genteel women were in those days; I think it quite possible that at thirty-one she had even begun to find the kind of morbid pleasure which some women find in martyrdom. Her life was over! Fate had treated her shamefully, taking first her handsome lover and then her fortune. And everyone—her friends, her relatives, the congregation of her church—held the same belief.

I do not know what methods old Michael used in his courtship of my aunt Sarah. I have heard stories about them, and I knew both of them well enough to imagine a great part of the story. When I knew old Michael, he was already nearly seventy. I was only fifteen or sixteen when he died of a stroke, but the memory of him is one of the clearest I have. He was one of those unforgettable people who stamp themselves upon one's memory by sheer force of vitality and animal charm.

At seventy-odd, he was like a vigorous man of fifty, and at fifty-seven, he must have seemed to Aunt Sarah like an attractive man of forty. Even as an old man, he had personality and magnetism. His figure was that of a man of middle age accustomed to hard exercise, yet he never in all his life took any planned exercise. He rose early and walked to his office, not for exercise, but because he liked it.

He dissipated but dissipation seemed to have no effect on his powerful body save to keep off excess fat. It was impossible for him to do without women, and there were always plenty of them in his life, but he never became a roué and the ardent fire never died out.

I think his appeal for Aunt Sarah on that first day when they met in a Ninth Avenue tenement must have been purely physical. And it must have been a strange scene—that first meeting between the shabby, timid little woman believing her life was over at thirty-one, and the strapping, vigorous, middle-aged man who had ruined her father. Their son Ogden told me that she said of that meeting. "The first thing I thought was, 'Why, he isn't a bit the way people say.' " In that admission there was weakness, and from that moment she was lost.

I have no doubt that Michael Denning knew exactly how to play his game. He knew the thing to say and exactly how to say it, using his big husky voice as an instrument with which to charm. Her first impulse, she told her son long afterward, was to run away, but somehow she could not, and by that, of course, she meant that she did not want to. In any case, she did not run away, and after they had visited the other poor families in the tenement, he insisted on driving her home in his closed brougham.

"No one will see you," he said.

Probably she blushed, and being unworldly and confused, yielded because she did not know what else to do, and also because she wanted to yield. She insisted on only one thing—that he stop the brougham and let her descend two blocks from her house so that her father should never know. It was winter and already dark, and no one saw her scuttling away from the temptation of *liking* this middle-aged man who she had been taught to believe was an ogre.

He made no attempt to suggest another meeting. He simply got down and helped her out and bade her good night. It was all very formal save for one thing. Her hoop skirts caught in the narrow door of the brougham so that she pitched forward and for a moment he held her in his arms, suspended in mid-air, until the coachman freed her. It was unladylike and embarrassing, but it was funny, and my aunt Sarah never lacked a sense of humor. For all her blushes, she must have laughed.

When she returned to the flat over the drug store in Tenth Street she behaved as if nothing had happened, but after she had gone to bed she lay awake for hours until her sister, who was my mother and shared the bed, complained of her

restlessness. My mother told me long afterward that she thought her sister Sarah must be ill because until that night she had always slept quietly and soundly. But in the morning there was no sign of illness. There was color in her cheeks and a light in her eyes the family had not seen there since before her fiance was drowned.

It must have been an extraordinary night for a woman who had believed her life finished—lying there puzzled and a little frightened by the knowledge that at last something had happened to her. I don't imagine she knew quite what it was, or if she did know, she refused to admit it even to herself.

I have an idea that some of that first emotion had to do as much with her drowned lover as with Michael Denning. They must have been a good deal alike in a physical way, possessing the same physique and vitality and the same sort of good looks and animal charm. Of the two, Michael Denning was probably the more intelligent.

It was not Denning who made the next move; he was, I think, too wise and experienced for that. For days, perhaps for weeks, he did not see her again save in church on Sundays, when he appeared, dressed soberly, sitting in his pew in the midst of a congregation of people most of whom did not speak to him. And even then he did not bow to her. Instead of bowing, he did something far more clever. He knew perhaps that she would look toward him in spite of anything she could do, and he waited, watching her, until she stole a glance, and then he simply smiled at her, more with his eyes than with his mouth (it was a trick he had), showing her that they had a secret of which no one in the world save his coachman even had a suspicion.

And then one day they met again as if by accident in the same tenement. (It was not by accident because he had kept a man to watch all her movements and discovered that she made her visits neatly, on schedule, and that she visited this particular tenement on Thursdays.) Again they visited all the families, and again after dark she drove off with him in the brougham and he let her down two blocks from the flat over the drug store. Only this time she did not pretend she did not want to drive with him.

But when she got down she was careful this time that her hoop skirts should not trap her, because she had suffered so bitterly ever since it had happened before. Day after day she had felt his big muscular arms encircling her and holding her firmly while the coachman freed her skirts. For days she had been aware of the faint scent of good tobacco and expensive Eau de Cologne that came from his clothes. For days she had suffered from thoughts which no genteel woman of her day was supposed to have.

In a novel I suppose Michael Denning would have seduced her and left her ruined with an illegitimate child as his final act of vengeance against her father; but it was not like that. Denning, for all his skulduggery as a businessman, was not that bad. There was a certain grandeur about him, and as with all greatness, simplicity accompanied it—a simplicity that at times was almost childlike. I think that probably Aunt Sarah was suspicious of his intentions, but I think, too, that she could not have saved herself however base they might have been.

What he wanted was something at once grander and more naïve than mere seduction. Certainly no one suspected at the time. People attributed his sudden change and his interest in

good works to all sorts of things—repentance, social ambition, fear of the Hereafter—but none of the guesses was right.

Certainly he was not repentant. With regard to his own buccaneering I once heard him say, “All businessmen are crooked. You can’t touch pitch without being defiled. Some men are more clever than others and do things in a big way. Nobody notices the little fellow. That’s why no man in business can ever be a gentleman in the strictest sense of the word. That’s why this New York ‘society’ is so ridiculous. Its very foundations are laid by a lot of crooked businessmen pretending to be gentlemen.”

And it certainly wasn’t fear of the Hereafter, because on that subject he had a clear philosophy, which was, “Live as hard and fast as you can because this is the only life you’re sure of.”

It might have been social ambition save that it was on a much grander scale. He did not want to be invited to parties. He wanted nothing for himself. The truth was that he had plenty of money—millions and millions—and now that he was beginning to be old, he wanted to found a dynasty. He wanted the name of Denning to go on and on in New York and in America. But nobody suspected this until he was dead.

I think his choice of Aunt Sarah was an accident. He was, to be sure, on the lookout for a suitable woman to marry—a woman not so young as to make him appear ridiculous and not so old as to be useless for bearing children. He wanted, too, someone of good stock with the kind of background he himself had not known as the son of a poor farmer in upstate New York, or as a successful man with a grenadier wife and a troupe of ballet girls on the side. My aunt Sarah was all these

things, and what was most important of all, he fell in love with her. It wasn't only that she was pretty and feminine and soft, but there was, too, something in the circumstances of their meetings that attracted him. He was sentimental, and the sight of my aunt Sarah bending over the bed of a sick child in a tenement finished him.

And then before long he discovered, I think, what no one else had known—that in respectable, provincial New York society he had found a passionate woman, a mate worthy of himself. As an old man, he used sometimes to look at his wife, covered with jewels, her fine eyes flashing, and laugh loudly (in company where he dared) and say, "Look at Sally. She thought she was finished with life. She hadn't even begun to know how glorious it could be."

Meanwhile, their courtship went on secretly. How they managed to keep it secret in that tight little world is a mystery; perhaps they succeeded because it was carried on in the closed brougham and on the backstairs landings of tenements. The old coachman was discreet. He had been with Denning for twenty years and rarely a day passed without the necessity for discretion on his part. And then one day Michael said to my aunt, "We are going to be married."

At first she cried and protested, knowing all the time that the whole thing was as much her fault as his. All the time she had gone about in the dark clothes of a deaconess visiting the poor, she had been flirting and desperately in love. After what I suppose was called a "pretty scene" in those days, she yielded and agreed. They were not to tell any of her family. They would be married and go away one night to Charleston.

It was spring and the magnolias and azaleas were in bloom. Denning knew Charleston; he had been there during

the war. He could keep the news of the license an absolute secret. She could write her family a note.

I have that note in my possession. It is written in violet ink in a hand surprisingly firm for a lady who had always been led to believe that she was weak and helpless and a victim of fate. It is old and yellow now, but there is still passion and determination in it. It read:

Dear Father:

Please do not think that I have lost my mind or that I am inventing a preposterous lie. Do not be alarmed when I do not come home tonight. I will have gone on my wedding journey. I am marrying Michael Denning. No, I am not insane. Perhaps I should have told you earlier but I was afraid of scenes, and I meant to do it anyway—for the last four or five weeks—the moment he asked me.

I suppose you will want to know where on earth I met him. Well, it was while we were both visiting the poor. We met in the tenements. There, now none of you—Mother or Susan or you—will expire from curiosity.

He is not at all as you think. I am in love with him and willing to trust myself in his care for the rest of my life. I suppose you will want to disown me. I shall be sorry but I mean to cleave to Mr. Denning. I've no doubt that we shall all make it up in time. We are going to Charleston and then to New Orleans and expect to be back in June.

With much love to you all,

Your devoted and unworthy daughter,
Sarah.

The last phrase was, I am sure, written with humor.

The marriage was a sensation in New York. The spectacle of Michael Denning marrying the daughter of one of his victims was something not to be seen twice in a lifetime.

In June, they returned from their wedding journey. My aunt Sarah sent her mother a note saying that she had returned, that she was completely happy, and that she had but to send word for her to come at once to the flat in Tenth Street. She sent a fabulous basket of hothouse fruit with the note and wrote that for the next two weeks she would be at the vast brownstone house which Michael had built in the days when he was married to the grenadier. After that she would be at Newport, where she would spend the summer in the house which Michael had bought for her.

That first summer at Newport wasn't very successful. At first people didn't come near the Dennings—at least no one who didn't *have* to come because of Michael Denning's power—but before the summer was over some of Aunt Sarah's old friends came to call. The Sarah they saw was a changed woman—no longer dressed in drab gray and black, but wearing the most expensive clothes and looking pretty and dashing and happy.

It was clear that Michael Denning had found the woman he had been looking for all his life, and that he meant to devote the rest of his life to her. I don't think she minded not going out and not seeing people. I don't think she even minded the fact that she had had no sign of forgiveness from her own family. She was happy in a way that few women of her world knew. She had a wild, reckless lover who was not a "gentleman."

When they came back to town in the autumn, the world began to open up for them. People came to the house, and

sometimes they went out to dinner. It was not so hard as it would have been twenty years earlier because New York was changing. There were growing pains in evidence on all sides—new streets and new buildings; new people seen about at balls and receptions; people like Mrs. Manson Mingott building new houses far uptown in the Fifties. The little provincial New York of Washington Square was breaking up, leaving behind lovely old houses and families who could not keep up with the change, to be forgotten in the obscurity of side streets, to live alone for two or three generations until they disappeared, leaving no trace save old Dutch and English names in the nostalgic pages of Valentine's *Manual*.

The race was now to the rich and flamboyant. Men with not a tenth of Michael Denning's good looks and physical charm were becoming first respectable and then fashionable. Aunt Sarah helped a great deal. With her background and her husband's money, it was inevitable that Michael Denning should fix the background for a dynasty.

And the dynasty was under way. During those first months Sarah always had an excuse for not going out and not receiving. She had become pregnant at once and nine months after her marriage she gave birth to a son—a son who was endowed from that moment with the responsibility of a great fortune, and as an only son, the responsibility of carrying on Michael Denning's dynasty; for when he was born his mother nearly died, and when she had recovered she learned that she would never have any more children.

The son was named Ogden, the family name of Michael Denning's mother. He was my cousin and born two months after me. We were destined to know an intimacy unusual even between cousins, and for the last forty years of his life I

was the only person he spoke to outside of his lawyer and his servant.

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WHAT I have told you is, in spite of being a story itself, in a way only a prelude to the story. I have told it in detail because it is of great importance in the story of Ogden Denning and Elena. Ogden was born, needless to say, with a certain heritage, a certain physical endowment, and as they would say nowadays, in the world so distantly related to the world of Michael Denning and Aunt Sarah, with a certain gland control which would have determined his character in any age and any time, but his story would, I think, have been quite different if the story of his parents and the time in which they lived had been different.

Their story is important, too, because there was something profoundly American in them both and because the story of Michael Denning and his son Ogden is the story of so many Americans of his time. For me the story of Michael Denning did not end with his death but with the death of his son nearly fifty years later, for Ogden Denning in reality existed only as a part of his father's career. Ogden Denning was called into existence by the will of Michael Denning, and until he died, his whole life was determined by the will of an old man long dead.

He was born—Ogden—with the seed of death already in him, a throwback perhaps to some ancestor who had neither his father's vigor nor his mother's will. As a little boy, he was not strong and he had a natural timidity which increased with pampering, for old Michael Denning, who was now over sixty, worshiped the child with the adoration of an elderly

parent, and always in the back of his mind was the thought that his son must be a "gentleman."

He never could have been anything else, and I think the old man knew it and was at times saddened by the knowledge. He knew, old Denning, almost everything there was to know about living. He had begun in poverty and hardship. He had made his own success.

In his heart he always had a contempt for men who lived off inherited income, trembling each time there was a panic with the fear that suddenly it might vanish leaving them helpless. He himself had been ruined and penniless a half-dozen times, but in his tough old heart was the knowledge that he could always build another fortune. He was never afraid.

And now he knew his son would be one of those soft men who *inherited* money, and lived in terror of losing it. His son would never know what it was to be poor. I think the old man understood even in his day that there was some necessity, profound and urgent, in every good American to make his own success. Inherited success seemed to ruin young men.

But in spite of all that secret knowledge, he went on making his son into a "gentleman," preparing him for that world of the nineties which was just beginning to flower and for which in his heart the old man had only contempt. Everything was against the boy—his wealth; his elderly father; the whole world into which he was born. For it was no longer the little old provincial New York where a few buccaneers went their spectacular ways; it was an awkward adolescent New York in which the sons and grandsons of the old buccaneers were trying to create a world in imitation of Europe, in which they attempted to take the place (one might

have said) of princes whose families had existed before the crusades.

They did not know how to do it, and so what they managed to create was a society more like a circus than anything else —a world which was an imitation made for show, cheap, without cultivation, vulgar and founded almost entirely upon great wealth. They built themselves Gothic and Renaissance châteaux in the midst of a great city, without so much as a leaf or a twig anywhere near to provide an illusion of open country. In a way, they were trying to do what old Michael himself sought to do in another way. They tried to buy background.

Old Michael Denning knew that the good old buccaneering days were drawing to a close and that a too early decadence had set in. Being far more intelligent than most of his contemporaries, he saw the secret of the New York that was to come—the New York which made and destroyed families in a generation or two, and made and destroyed men overnight. And so when his son was fifteen he made plans to send him to the Far West. He bought a ranch and built a house, and told the boy that when he was eighteen he would go to Wyoming to stay until he was of age.

But it never happened. It might have saved Ogden, although I think the decadence was born in him, a very part of him. It was Aunt Sarah who prevented it. She had what she wanted now—money, and a great house, and a husband whom she loved.

I think she made no open opposition to the plan for sending her son to the West, but in her heart she was determined that it should never happen. She was, I think, quite as determined about this as she had been about

marrying Michael Denning. She, too, wanted her son to be a gentleman, not in the eternal sense as the old man had seen it, but in the fashionable sense of the day. But the plan never came to an issue, for one morning when she went into her husband's room she found him dead.

He had a fashionable funeral to which nearly everyone came, for with the help of Aunt Sarah he had turned the trick; he had made himself not only fashionable but respectable. He had founded a dynasty and left a great fortune to his wife and son. His old enemies, a good many of them turned respectable now like himself, sat on the stiff gold chairs and heard the rector of the Church of the Ascension deliver a sermon praising him. I went to the funeral. I was sixteen years old at the time and I remember it clearly. It was magnificent. Even my grandparents were there, for they had long since forgiven Aunt Sarah and the old man. They had a comfortable house on Sixteenth Street and a country place up the Hudson, bought for them by the rogue who had first ruined them and then married their daughter.

He left them enough money to live well for the rest of their lives. My mother, too, had a legacy and even my great-uncle William had a gift.

My great-uncle William enters the story much later, but in the last years of Michael Denning's life he had come to be a great friend of the old man. Uncle William was my grandfather's brother, although he was the age of my mother and my aunt Sarah. He was the godfather of my cousin Ogden and the black sheep of the family, and the old man liked him because he had never behaved as he should and had lived riotously. He wanted Uncle William to be sure of

enough money to go on having a good time for the rest of his life.

When the old buccaneer died, his son Ogden was nearly sixteen years old, and as different from his father at the same age as it was possible to be. At sixteen, Michael Denning had made his own living, working on a farm. At eighteen, he had come to New York driving cattle. At twenty-one, he was married to a woman whom he thought he loved and perhaps did love—a woman as hard as he was.

At sixteen, his son had horses of his own, a valet, a sailing yacht, and he had been to the most expensive and fashionable schools. Perhaps such a background created impressions which were not altogether true—that Ogden was insufferable, a snob and a waster. He was really none of these things. He was a tall, awkward, shy boy (his father had never known what shyness was, not even when he came to New York as an upstate country boy). Ogden was pale and gentle, and people liked him. He had a charm which came to him from his mother rather than from old Denning. There was nothing boisterous about him. You scarcely knew when he entered a room, but presently you were aware of something pleasant and warm and even a little fantastic. He was good-looking, with pale skin and reddish-brown wavy hair, eyes that were bright blue and like his father's save that they lacked the light of the old man's fierce vitality.

He rode well and swam and sailed a boat but he did these things only to please his father, who believed they were things a "gentleman" should do. He was solitary by nature, and what he really liked was poetry and pictures. I know that by the time he was fifteen he had already begun to suffer from the horrors his mother had installed in the great house

when she took possession of it—the bad pictures, the horrible tapestries, the inhuman furniture, the palms and the bric-a-brac.

It was an epoch with the worst taste the world has ever known, and in the New York into which Ogden was born, it was especially crowded with horrors. He divined how bad it all was in a day when everyone around him believed it to be all there was of beauty and good taste. He should have lived a generation earlier or a generation later. In either time he would have found himself; but in the New York of the Mauve Decade he was alone.

I liked him. I liked him for the simplicity which had survived in him, somehow, in spite of every force working against it. I liked him, too, for his quiet fidelity. He was slow in coming to know people, but once he accepted them, he had a doglike loyalty. As I think of him now, it seems to me that he was like a setter dog, quiet and gentle and full of trust. When he loved someone, he could believe no ill against him.

The lusty quality of the old man shocked and terrified him in spite of everything he could do. He adored his mother. To him she was, I think, everything that was beautiful and perfect. The passion which had been in both his parents was translated in Ogden into something else. It was there, but muted and controlled and not a little morbid. There was in him none of their recklessness.

He never saw the ranch in Wyoming, although he owned it until the day he died. After his father's funeral, my aunt Sarah decided that she had had enough of New York and would close the house and go to London. She was full of vigor and spirit. She still wanted fun, and I am sure that nothing would have pleased old Michael Denning more than

to know that, instead of turning her back on life when he died, she had gone on enjoying herself. She and Ogden stayed in Europe for the next seven years, until she was killed.

To this day I do not know whether Ogden liked the life he led over there. They stayed with dukes and bankers, and Aunt Sarah entertained a good deal. In summer they had a palace in Venice and a part of each winter they spent on the Riviera.

Sometimes I think that perhaps he would have liked Wyoming better. Certainly if he had gone to Wyoming his life would have been different. Certainly his mother would not have been killed, and he never would have met Elena, and certainly he would not have been so lonely in America.

During all those seven years I saw him only twice. Toward the end of the period, while he was spending his life between Venice, London and the Riviera, I had already gone to work in my father's brokerage office. He never entered my life again until he brought Elena back as his bride.

4

WHEN I was nineteen, my parents sent me to make the grand tour. They believed that the education of no young man was complete unless he had seen Paris, the Tower of Pisa, the Sistine Chapel and the ruins of Ancient Rome. They gave me plenty of money, and dutifully, like a good son, I visited all the places they had indicated for me. But I hate looking at spectacular sights. I have always liked a small intimate landscape with little gardens and humble cottages far more than all the palaces and mountains in the world; and so I hurried at top speed through Rome, Florence and the hill towns of Italy in order to have enough time left

before I returned to college to make a walking tour through the Black Forest.

I came to Bavaria early in September and set out alone, because the boy with whom I had meant to make the trip had to return to America at the last moment. The weather was superb, and the world I discovered was an enchanted one. For me it was like a lost paradise—like an enchanting country in which I had lived in some other life and to which I had now returned. It seemed to me that I knew it all—the hills; the pine forests which filled the air with their scent all through the heat of the day; the swift cool little streams and waterfalls; even the tiny gentians and campanulas that starred the grassy banks.

Setting out from Munich, I walked deeper and deeper into the mountains, farther and farther away from cities and show into a quiet, lovely forgotten world. In the early morning when I set out the mist would still be lingering like veils of gauze far down among the black trunks of the tall pines. By noon it would be burned away, and I would stop for beer and lunch at some tiny inn hidden among the pines.

Now and then I would meet a fellow walker, some sturdy Bavarian boy in *Lederhosen* with bare knees. When it grew hot we would swim in a lake or stand under a waterfall with the icy *Schneewasser* tumbling over our naked bodies like champagne. It was one of those times in one's life when it is good simply to be alive, to have a strong body, to feel the sun and the rain, and smell the scent of pine woods.

And in the midst of the Black Forest I fell in love for the first and only time in all my life with a girl to whom I did not speak save to call a friendly "*Grüss' Gott*" in passing.

It happened in a tiny watering place called Bad Münster. No one I know has ever heard of it, and now when I think of it, it sometimes seems to me that it was a kind of Never-Never Land which never existed at all but was born out of the enchantment of the *Schwarzwald*, the legendary home of gnomes and trolls and goddesses. Sometimes late at night at the moment between wakefulness and sleep I wonder whether the girl was real or only a kind of wood witch. Sometimes I doubt whether she herself and everything that happened after I saw her were not simply an illusion, from which I will one day awaken.

The tiny place had a tiny casino at the edge of a torrent which ran down from among the pines through the very center of the town. There were a half-dozen little villas with gardens filled at that season with dahlias and Michaelmas daisies, and in all the windows there were boxes and pots of pink geraniums and petunias. It lay in a valley and one came upon it suddenly, neat and pretty like a charming doll's village.

The people who lived in the hotel and the little village were butchers and bakers and little shopkeepers who could not afford places like Carlsbad and Bad Nauheim and Marienbad.

When I saw it, I thought, "I'll stay here for three or four days and rest." I had only four days left before I had to take the train to Hamburg to sail, for I had to be back at college before the end of the month. I stayed ten days and was two weeks late for the opening of school. I would have stayed longer if she had stayed, too; perhaps forever.

The hotel was built around three sides of a garden which ran to the edge of the little river, and I found a room there

with a balcony overlooking the courtyard and the waterfall. In the evening an orchestra played in the garden and people sat around tables listening and eating sandwiches and drinking beer. They were simple, friendly people, and they had a lot of curiosity about Americans and about me in particular. Most of them had relatives who had migrated to America and lived in Milwaukee and St. Louis and Cincinnati. It was hard to make them believe how different those great cities were from this enchanted village in the forest.

On the third morning, the day before I planned to leave, I wakened and went to my balcony to have coffee and rolls. It was a morning like any other morning, the air crisp and bright, with the sun streaming through the mist that still hung in the pines, and the sound of the waterfall heard above the singing of the kitchen maid on the terrace beneath the balcony. Yet it was not the same, because *she* was there on the balcony just opposite having coffee and rolls with a man. They were really too good to be believable. It was as if the little hotel were the setting for a comic opera, and now the hero and heroine had arrived. She was dressed in a gingham dress with puffed sleeves which left her arms bare, and she could not have been more than nineteen or twenty years old. Her hair was red-gold and was done in little curls all over her head, and the clear morning sun shining on it gave her a kind of halo. The man with her was dressed for walking in *Lederhosen* and bare knees and a gingham shirt open at the throat. He was dark with a long, aristocratic face and black eyes.

It struck me at once that these two were different from the others in this hotel and village. I could see them plainly,

although I could not hear their voices. And then suddenly she laughed, tossing back her head. It was a delicious sound, in which there was a reckless gayety, and when she laughed I knew with a sudden adolescent envy that she was in love. The man leaned across the table and kissed her, and then they saw me and she laughed again.

I did not see them again until early in the evening when the first chill had begun to slip down from the pine forest all around. They came into the garden and had some beer and then disappeared again into their room. They sat only a little way off from me, the girl facing me so that I could glance at her now and then without being noticed. She was lovely to look at but she had something beyond beauty, some exciting quality which attracted me.

The man held a light for her cigarette, and I felt a sudden twinge of jealousy which I told myself at once was absurd. The evening light faded until it was so dark that I could not have seen her face save for the warm light which came through the open doors of the dining room, where the stodgy guests of the hotel were gathering for dinner. There were pretty girls among them but they were heavy and giggly—*Backfisch*, all of them. This woman was something else. The pair rose suddenly and went into the hotel. Then it was that I saw she was tall and that she moved magnificently.

I suppose that I was ripe to fall in love and that I would have been attracted by any lovely woman. Yet there was something different about this. I was to know for the rest of my life how different it was. Now, as an old man, I believe profoundly that a man can fall in love with one woman who remains forever more desirable than any other he has ever seen.

In the morning I wakened and hurried through my bath and dressing, peeping now and then through the shutters to see if she had come to the balcony for her breakfast, but I saw nothing of her. I breakfasted and still she did not appear, and when I inquired of the chambermaid, she told me that they had already gone into the forest. From then on, I had the chambermaid call me at dawn so that I should not miss seeing her. When I asked the chambermaid who they were, she said, "They are Herr and Frau Doktor Müller." I was young, but I knew the world well enough to know that such a couple were never "Herr and Frau Doktor Müller."

I did even more preposterous things, like trying to discover which direction they had taken in order to follow them. For four days I wandered through the forest paths, and on the fifth I did encounter them on the edge of the stream far below the hotel. They had finished their lunch, and the dark man lay asleep with his head in the girl's lap. I was aware that I was an intruder and that I was a fool and that nothing could change the situation and that there was no hope of ever coming any nearer to her than I was at that very instant.

I prepared to turn and run, but at the same time, as if aware that she was being watched, she turned and looked at me and I was forced to continue along the path past her as if I had come upon them by accident instead of after a four-day search. She looked at me and smiled, and then put her finger to her lips. It was a frank and charming smile and I felt my face grow hot and my heart begin to pound, but somehow I managed to get past her without seeming too great a fool.

The torment was not confined to the day. At night I could not sleep but lay tossing, thinking of her and her lover in the room across the courtyard. I tried to imagine myself in his

place, and I kept seeing her white teeth and dark eyes and the tiny red-gold curls that covered her head. I knew that I should go away, and each night I planned to leave but in the morning I could not go.

I tried to draw the plump manager and his buxom wife into conversation about the pair, but with his broken English and my bad German we never got very far. When I asked where the couple came from he said, "Vienna," and that was all, although he looked at me with a humorous glint in his eye as if he knew what was the matter with me.

I saw them a half-dozen times within the next few days but the only time we spoke was when we passed once on the street and with a mocking smile, as if she, too, knew what was the matter with me, she said, "*Grüss' Gott*," like a peasant. When we had passed I turned to look after her, for I found pleasure even in the way she walked, and as I turned she turned too and gave me a smile. My heart leaped, and I thought, "To live with a woman like that! No, love couldn't be that wonderful!" I loved her recklessness and her humor and her coquetry.

And then one evening when I came in from the forest they had gone. When I asked the innkeeper where, he said, "To Munich, but they are not stopping there. They are going back to Austria." For a wild moment I thought of trying to follow them. Perhaps I should find her alone; but what should I do if I did find her thus? What could I say that would not be ridiculous? What could a shy, green American boy mean to a Continental woman like her?

I had missed my boat and was already late. All night I lay awake, and in the morning I left. When I had paid my bill, the innkeeper said, "And now I will tell you about Herr and Frau

Doktor Müller. You are an American and you are going home, so it will not matter, only you must promise to tell no one in this town."

I promised, and he said, "He is the Prince of Hohenheim—the heir to the principality. The woman I do not know; perhaps her name *is* Müller. I used to work in the kitchen of the great castle there. That is why he came here."

I think he told me the secret partly because he was humorously sorry for me and partly because he thought his little hotel in that forgotten part of the Black Forest would gain *réclame*. Perhaps I would go back and tell rich Americans that princes went to the Gasthof Eckermann in Bad Münster.

I walked to the nearest town on the railroad and went to Munich but I found no trace of them. Then I picked up my baggage and went to Hamburg to sail back again to the drab reality of America, feeling sick and romantic in the belief that I would never again see the girl who had looked up at me and smiled with her finger to her lips there in that enchanted forest.

5

I DID not forget her. I returned on a German boat, and I found myself questioning everyone about Hohenheim in a vague hope of finding out who the girl might be. I was curious, too, about the man. Beyond all dispute he was attractive, handsome, dashing—one of those whom one might call the Blessed, since God, it seemed, had given him everything. In the dark, handsome, sensual face there was intelligence as well as beauty.

I did find out a good deal, partly from books and partly from fellow passengers. Hohenheim was an independent principality, not large, but rich and singularly beautiful, which lay between Germany and Austria. The ruling prince was an old man, and his heir was a nephew just over thirty, gallant, distinguished, handsome. He was the one who had been in Bad Münster. One of my fellow passengers, a brewer from Munich, told me that he was famous for his conquests both of women and of horses. I could discover nothing at all about the girl.

When I arrived in New York, both my father and mother, dressed in mourning, met me at the dock. My mother was weeping. A week before, while I was at sea, my aunt Sarah, Ogden's mother, had been killed in a collision between trains on the Swiss-French frontier at Vallorbe. Ogden, who was with her, had suffered a broken arm.

"Otherwise," my father said, "he is all right."

I remember that the speech shocked me, although I could not at the moment have told you why, save that I knew, perhaps better than they, his singular, almost morbid devotion to his mother. Now, with the help of Freud and all the new psychology which has long since become commonplace, I can explain it to myself, but then I only knew that this was a terrible tragedy, far worse than the loss of a mother to a son like me or to any normal man.

The odd thing was that when they told me the news I had a sudden quick vision of Aunt Sarah as I knew her after old Michael had given life to her. I saw her—grand, humorous, frivolous and spirited—and in the same moment it occurred to me for the first time that there was a curious subtle

likeness between her and the girl I had seen in the Black Forest.

I returned to college, and from time to time I had letters from Ogden which were no different from the letters I had always had, describing his travels, the people he met, a room, a wedding, a painting which had roused his enthusiasm. It was only from friends returning from Europe who had seen him there that we heard of his reaction to his mother's death. It was not what I would have expected. Judging from his habits and character, one would have thought that he would hide himself away somewhere to grieve in solitude. Instead, he had cut loose for the first time in his life and was living high.

Perhaps it was some heritage from his father that suddenly came to the surface, but I think it much more likely that it was desperation and a grief which was beyond the solace of solitude.

I envied him. I thought, "If I had the money to do all that, I could probably forget that girl." She still troubled me, deep inside. She was there all the time, and she would reappear suddenly at the most inopportune moments to spoil whatever fun I might be having. If I became attracted by a pretty girl of my own class I would find myself, in the very midst of my admiration, comparing the brightness of her hair and the color of her eyes with those of the girl I had seen in Bad Münster. But most of all it was the smile—that smile she had given me when she raised her finger to her lips to keep me from disturbing the sleep of the dark man who lay with his head in her lap.

And then one day, nearly three years after Ogden's mother was killed, he sent me a note from the big brownstone house

in New York. He had returned without letting anyone know. He was married. He wanted me to come and dine that night to meet his wife.

I went, wondering whom he could have married without the news leaking out, for he was an important person, both as the son of old Michael Denning and as one of the richest of the spectacular young men of his time, and so he was known to newspapermen in London and Paris as well as New York. He received me in the long drawing room opening into the hall, still decorated in the hideous style of the times.

He looked older, thinner and paler, and there was something foreign about him which at first put a constraint on both of us. We had seen each other only two or three times in years, and during all that time we had been drifting farther and farther apart, he into Continental ways of thought and living, and I, through college and my father's brokerage office, into ways which were not American, perhaps, but exaggeratedly New York. We had cocktails together, and he said shyly, "My wife is late; she's likely to be late. I think you'll like her." He did not say it with irritation but almost with pride, as if he were so much in love with her that she not only had a right to be as late as she chose but that every other woman would do well to imitate her.

"Who was she?" I asked bluntly.

"An Austrian," he said. "I'll tell you about her after you've met her."

I stood with my back to the doorway opposite the great marble stairway, but in front of me there was, in those days, one of those vast mirrors which the New York of the Mauve Decade deemed elegant. Idly I stood watching the stairway,

when suddenly she appeared, coming slowly down it, one hand resting on the marble rail.

I think it was that gesture which first roused a train of recognition. There was something young in it, something eternally young and at the same time sensuous, as if she loved the *feel* of the smooth white marble. And then suddenly I *saw*. Some betraying look must have come into my eyes, for my cousin turned at the same time and over his face came a look of adoration.

Coming slowly down the stairs was the girl I had seen smiling at me beside the torrent in the Black Forest.

6

ANY other woman I would not have recognized in surroundings and in clothes so different, but her I would have known anywhere. She was dressed splendidly now, and she wore the superb collar of pearls which old Michael had given my aunt Sarah when he married her. Her radiant hair she still wore in the same fashion, done in little curls all over her small head.

I turned from the mirror sharply in order to see, not the reflection but the reality, and I remember that my heart beat wildly and that I felt a sudden wild sensation of soaring flight. A great many things happened all at once. Beyond the desire I felt (because there was something about her which always roused a great deal more than mere sentimental love), I thought again, “This is witchcraft. It can’t be true,” and then, “She does look like Aunt Sarah, only a million times more radiant and beautiful. That is why he married her.”

And then she was in that hideous room, and we were moving toward her. She smiled, and I thought with wild hope, “Perhaps she’ll remember me.” But she did not. She came toward me as toward a stranger, holding out her hand, a white hand on which there were no rings, and suddenly I felt sick at the knowledge that the awkward boy who had followed her and her lover in the Black Forest had made no impression at all. I was aware that there was a subtle change in her, as if a veil had come over her brightness. Where in the forest she had been like that gay, flashing torrent, she was still now, like a deep pool.

And then Ogden said, “This is my cousin William and my best friend in the world,” and in a flash I hated him, for by making that speech he had bound my hands and made me helpless.

7

THERE was, I remember, an excellent dinner of the kind Ogden took pleasure in giving—carefully thought out, studiously presented, with all sorts of things out of season. It was a dinner of the period when eating was eating. Although the three of us dined alone, there were ten courses with five kinds of wine, interrupted in the middle with Roman punch to refresh us and give us strength to go on. I do not remember any of the conversation, save that it was stilted and awkward, until Ogden began talking about some baroque doors he had bought in Vienna, and then he became enthusiastic and talked for nearly half an hour.

“I am going to do over the whole house,” he said. “That is much more amusing than building a new one. Anyway, I like the structure of this one. I don’t want to live ‘way uptown.

Elena and I bought a great many things in Vienna and Salzburg and Innsbruck—all baroque," he added enthusiastically.

I knew very little of the baroque style, for in those pseudo-Gothic days, it was considered overblown and vulgar. Indeed, in the circles we knew in New York no one spoke of it, if indeed there was anyone save architects who had ever heard of it. Neither Elena nor I was much interested, and in any case it would have been impossible for me even to pretend an interest with her sitting at the end of the long table, looking more beautiful in the gown of silver brocade than she had ever looked before.

The gown left her shoulders bare and showed rather more of the white firm breasts than was considered proper in the New York of that day. I was a little shocked and thought, "She must not wear gowns like that. She must not show that to all the men in New York," unaware then, as I now am not, that I was not so much shocked as jealous. It was as if she belonged to me, and even Ogden had no right to her.

After dinner, Ogden and I did not remain in the dining room, half stupefied with food and drink, while the ladies—in this case Elena alone—went into the drawing room. We went with her. The rest of the evening passed, for me at least, in a kind of nightmare-paradise in which I was filled with delight at having found her again and having her near me and tormented by the knowledge that she was still as far removed from me as she had been in those days in the Black Forest.

She did not talk much and it struck me again and again how different she was from the laughing girl in the gingham dress. She spoke rarely but she had a lovely voice—low, a

little hoarse—and she spoke with a faint accent that was irresistible. The stillness was still on her.

I thought, "Perhaps she is bored already," for I knew that Ogden could be a bore, especially when he got on to one of his hobbies; but slowly I came to understand that the stillness came of something more profound than boredom. "Perhaps," I thought, "it is only because she is a woman now and no longer a girl." And I kept thinking of the dark lover with the black eyes and the sensuous mouth who was so obviously not interested in *things*, but in living and in love.

That was what she needed, not a man like Ogden—precious, pale, handsome and curiously *dead*. What she wanted was life, and Ogden, I knew more at that time by instinct than by knowledge, could never bring her what she had need of. Ogden's character, his physique, his tastes—everything was against it. He would make a poor, fumbling lover.

And then presently she rose and said, "I will sing for you," and she went to the piano and seated herself and sang three or four songs in German in a lovely fresh voice that was like the girl I had known in the Black Forest and not at all like this grand *femme du monde* wearing my aunt Sarah's pearls, and when she had finished she rose and said, "I think I'll go to bed now. I'm still very tired from the voyage."

She said good night, shaking hands in the Continental fashion, and although I hoped again for some sign of recognition there was none. She did not remember me at all. We walked with her as far as the marble stairway, and as she turned to go upward, she looked at me suddenly. It was not more than a glance, yet it was charged mysteriously with appraisal and with—yes, I think—even then with invitation.

She said, “I hope we shall see a lot of you, William,” and went on up the stairs.

Silently we both stood waiting until she had disappeared. I did not speak, and Ogden said, “Yes, she is fascinating. She will be a sensation in New York.” It was as if he were speaking not of a woman but of a magnificent picture or a piece of furniture. It was a *very* Ogden remark. He *wanted* her to be admired and himself to be envied.

When she had gone, we went into the library for whisky and another cigar. It had not been changed since the death of old Michael and it was an ugly, heavy room, all mahogany and black leather, and the books were mostly lawbooks. Even the porcelain cuspidor which the old man clung to, in the privacy of his own room, was still there, half hidden beneath the great mahogany desk.

At sight of it, Ogden said, “I don’t know why they’ve kept that thing here all this time,” and with his foot he pushed it out into the center of the floor and rang for the butler. When the man came, he said, “Take that thing away and smash it. I never want to see it again.”

The gesture fascinated me. It was a kind of symbol—the smashing of that cuspidor—and in Ogden’s way of doing it there was an exaggerated emotion. It was not simply an order. It was an irritated command. The king is dead! Long live the king! It was as if the humble cuspidor were a scepter. But it was only the beginning of what Ogden meant to do. It was the first sign of the madness which later seemed to take complete possession of him.

The thought of smashing the cuspidor gave me a pang; it was so much a symbol of the old man’s vigor and commonness, wit and charm. And I could not help thinking

of the delight which the sight of his son's beautiful wife would have given old Michael.

When the butler had gone, I looked at Ogden and said, "Well, are you going to tell me about your wife?"

If I had been a simple man, or a fool, or a man not in love, I would have said, "I've seen her before." But I did not. I thought it better not to speak of that meeting three years before. I told myself that this was because I did not know how much he meant to tell me or even how much he knew of her past, and I did not want to embarrass him; but this was not true. I did it out of craftiness, because already I *knew* somehow that the marriage would be unhappy, and that in the end I might win her for myself.

The long deceit had its beginning on that very first night. What I did then was the result more of animal instinct than of reason and planning.

At first he did not answer my question, and then, looking at me sharply, he said, "I want to tell you. I feel a necessity for telling someone, but you must never repeat a word of it."

"Of course not," I said. "Why should I? You can trust me above anyone on earth." And it was quite true. I was no gossip, and I had no desire to repeat the story. What I wanted was to know my ground so that I should make no clumsy mistakes.

8

I UNDERSTOOD why he wanted no one to know the story. Aside from the scandalous side of it, the tale was so fantastically romantic that it was vulgar, and that element, I suspect, Ogden hated more than the scandal.

The whole thing began during the period when Ogden was drinking and running about with actresses and demimondaines. He told me all about that. “I never lived with any of them. I couldn’t. They were always so hard and common. But it amused me and helped me to forget my mother’s death.”

Although he did not say it, I knew that, like many weak men, he had paraded all these women before the world in order to make it believe that he was a devil with women. It is almost an axiom that the man with attraction for women works quietly and discreetly. He has no need to show off.

He had taken a villa at Nice where he lived quietly enough, sleeping most of the day in order to stay up all night in the restaurants and casinos. One night about eleven when he was playing in Monte Carlo, he felt suddenly tired and bored and ordered a fiacre to drive him back to the villa in Nice. It was a cold night but beautiful and clear, with the stars shining like diamonds above the Mediterranean. Wrapped in a blanket, he drove peacefully along, watching the lights in the villas below the Corniche Drive. And as he drove the feeling of satiation with the whole noisy life he had been leading grew stronger and stronger until he reached the decision of returning to America.

When the fiacre had reached that part of the Corniche Drive just before Nice where the road crosses high above a deep ravine, he ordered the driver to stop while he got out and walked. The view below was magnificent, with the lights from Villefranche in the distance and the moon painting the Mediterranean with silver. He stood for a long time looking down across the ravine toward the open sea and presently he heard someone sobbing.

Following the edge of the road, he walked toward the sound until in the moonlight he saw the figure of a woman lying among the rocks by the roadside. Kneeling down, he bent over her and raised her up. She did not resist but at first she could make no answer to his questions for sobbing. At last she said, “Please go away and leave me in peace.” But he refused to go, and presently he said, “Tell me where you live and I’ll drive you there.” But she only said, “Don’t bother about me. I don’t live anywhere. I’m finished. Please go away.”

At length he persuaded her to sit up, and in the moonlight, out of the shadow of the rocks, he saw that she was beautiful.

He said, “If you won’t tell me where you live, let me take you to my villa tonight, and tomorrow when you are feeling better you can go away. I shan’t trouble you and I shan’t even ask you questions.”

He argued for a long time and in the end she yielded, partly, I think, because she was so tired and partly because she really did not care what happened to her. And so he drove her to his villa.

The villa was large and the servants were French and came with the house, and in that world they were startled by nothing. Ogden said he felt they rather disapproved of him until the night he returned bringing Elena with him. From then on their attitude changed and they were all kindness and understanding. Once inside the house, he saw that she was, in spite of her weeping and her soiled clothes, more beautiful than he had believed—and something more than beautiful. He was aware of a kind of dazzling quality he had not seen in other women.

He wakened one of the maids and had broth and fruit brought to her, and she was put to bed in a room remote from his own. She never spoke at all save to answer yes or no to his questioning of what she wanted to eat and drink. There was something wild about her, like a wild bird brought into a house and caged.

In the morning the maid wakened him to say that the young lady was very ill and did not seem to know where she was. It was the beginning of a long illness which upset Ogden's plans for returning to America. The doctors of that day called it brain fever, and for more than three weeks they did not know whether the girl would live or die.

The odd thing was that no one on the whole coast seemed to have missed her. There were no inquiries registered with the police, and when the doctors insisted that they must know her name in order to protect themselves, Ogden hired detectives. After three days they returned with the news that she was a Frau Doktor Müller, an Austrian, who was registered at a small *pension* in Monte Carlo. The proprietress, an Italian woman, had not been alarmed by the disappearance of her guest, as Frau Doktor Müller had left her luggage and gone off almost at once, saying that she would return in a few days. They found her passport, which seemed to bear out the story, and Ogden had her luggage brought to his house.

Most men, I suppose, would have sent her off to a hospital or a clinic, but Ogden was a romantic always, and the situation appealed to his whole inclination to live by fantasy rather than by reality and common sense, and so he kept her at the villa, providing the best care possible to give her. Without it, I suppose, she might have died; but in the end,

three weeks after he had found her, she opened her eyes one morning and returned to life.

At first she was terrified, and then, when the doctors would allow it, she asked to see her benefactor. He came in and sat beside the bed, looking, I suppose, more reassuring than most men would have done under the circumstances. Her own instinct must have told her after a little while that she had nothing to fear from him. He explained who he was. He even told her, painstakingly, how rich he was—that he could not spend his income, and that she need not worry about the expense. Then, surprisingly, she said that she herself was well off and that she wanted him to keep an accounting so that she might pay him back. But on the first day she gave no hint of why she had been alone sobbing among the rocks by the side of the Corniche Road.

She grew stronger in the days that followed, almost, Ogden thought, in spite of herself because she showed no desire to live. She seemed to be wrapped in a thick veil of indifference. Sometimes, even while they were talking together, she would seem to slip away from him to some great distance.

Slowly he fell in love with her, seeing her there day after day on the terrace above the Mediterranean, frail in the beginning as if she were still hypnotized by staring too long into the eyes of death, and then with the color returning slowly to her face as her magnificent body and vitality forced her to live. He fell in love with her in his own way, not as you or I might have and certainly not as that lover I had seen at Bad Münster would have, but slowly and profoundly as he might have fallen in love with an antique statue. To him she was something very precious, which should be cherished.

Ogden suffered from sensibility of the kind that is like nerves exposed in the skin. His charm for others and his greatest weakness from the point of view of himself was, I think, the fact that he always put himself in the place of the other person. This gave him a kind of remoteness which as he grew older engulfed him in loneliness. When he talked to you, you sometimes had an impression that he was not talking to you at all, but to himself—that he was so sensitive throughout the conversation he was constantly substituting himself for you and asking you nothing, saying nothing that could possibly be painful or embarrassing; and so he kept you at a great distance, despite himself. Because of this he asked the girl no questions at all and she told him nothing, until one day nearly six weeks after he found her beside the road, when he said to her, "Where are you planning to go when you leave here?"

She answered him with indifference, "I don't know."

"Why not go home to your family and friends?" He was searching when he asked that question, feeling his way without coming directly to the point.

"I have no home and my friends are lost—long ago." She spoke dully, still in that same trance which had permitted her to remain on and on in his villa.

At last he found courage to speak. He told me that not only was he in love with her, but that marrying her seemed indicated by fate. It was a solution for him. It would sober his own life, restless and without direction since the death of his mother. The odd thing was that the element of the girl's resemblance to his mother and the influence of that fact on his own emotions never occurred to him consciously.

He said to her timidly, "Why don't you marry me?"

She did not answer him at once, and he told her modestly all the things he could offer her—the houses, the jewels, the money, never mentioning himself at all. She looked at him for a long time in silence, and I know that she must have been using her instinct, as any wise woman always does. I think her instinct told her: "This is a kind and charming man, weak and full of good will, who will never trouble you much."

I know the look, that gay, half-mocking glance of appraisal which she would give a man in whom she was interested—the look she had given me at the bottom of the marble stairs. I think she knew, too, that she was the kind of woman for whom a life spent in solitude meant nothing.

For the first time she laughed and said, "Why not?"

Ogden told her he was aware that she was not in love with him but that in the end he could make her happy, never suspecting then—in fact, he never did discover—how much it took to make her happy.

That night she came downstairs to dinner for the first time. They had champagne to celebrate the occasion, and after dinner she said, "You are taking a great gamble, marrying a woman about whom you know nothing." And Ogden, suddenly playing the romantic again, made the speech which such a remark called for: "I know all about you. I know all I want to know."

But she was not content. "No," she said, "I must tell you everything that led up to your finding me on the side of the road. I shan't marry you unless you listen, because you ought to know. Then, whatever happens, you can never reproach me with having deceived you." And she told him about the man I had seen her with in the Black Forest.

9

SHE was the daughter of a professor, coming from a family which had always devoted itself to music, the law and the arts, and when she was fifteen she was left an orphan and went to live with two aunts who had a little house in Semmering. It was not a gay life, and the aunts were both spinsters who were rigid in their thoughts, their habits, their morality. She had little fun save in summer when she went on walking tours, sometimes in the Tyrol, sometimes in the Salzkammergut. They did not object to that, because she always went with friends who were accompanied by the father of one of the girls.

But even on these tours she was aware of a restraint which took the edge off her fun. Even as a child she was aware, I think, of something deep inside her which made her different from the girls who were content to marry boys with whom they had grown up and settle down for the rest of their lives to children, beer, waltzes and coffee with whipped cream. Women like her seem to happen, sports of nature, without rhyme and reason, without regard to heredity, in any country and in any society. Perhaps, in her case, her nature was born of the mixture of wild Hungarian blood with that of the gentle, sentimental Viennese; for her mother was a Hungarian from Budapest.

On the walking tours she would sometimes escape, overcome by the dullness of her companions, and go high up in the mountains alone. Perhaps it was not their dullness which annoyed her so much as their incapacity to understand that surging unhappiness deep inside her which none of them shared. She herself did not understand it; it was only that she *knew* in some inner part of her young soul that life was never

so fine and so exciting as it could be. The only relief she knew was to escape into the mountains. When she returned home in the evening after a day of climbing, the storminess had gone out of her, and there was peace in her soul for a little time.

Then one day when she was twenty she was climbing not far from Innsbruck when she came on a man hobbling painfully toward her through the pines. He was, she thought, the most beautiful man she had ever seen. He was tall and dark, with black eyes. He had fallen and sprained his ankle. His hand was cut, and the side of his dark face was badly scratched.

She spoke to him and they sat down beside a stream while she took from her rucksack the bandages she always had there. With her big peasant's handkerchief she bathed the cut on his hand and bound it up; and she helped him to bandage the twisted ankle, and when the wounds were all dressed, they shared her lunch together beside the stream. She told him about herself, and he told her that he was a young Doktor Müller from Munich on his holiday. He too had a passion for climbing mountains.

I am inclined to believe that if one has the romantic temperament romantic things happen. Certainly I have never known them to happen to dull conventional people. On that sunny day above Innsbruck, if Elena had been like the other girls in the party with her, she would no doubt have aided the handsome stranger, but when it was done she would have said, "Good day, sir," and marched primly down the mountain alone to return to Semmering and marry a respectable citizen. If the stranger had been what he said, plain Herr Doktor Müller of Munich, he would no doubt have

accompanied Elena down the mountain, bade her good-by, written to her spinster aunts in Semmering, finally come on a visit and taken her back at last as Frau Doktor Müller.

Like Elena, he had gone mountain climbing to escape a life he hated as thoroughly as she hated the life in Semmering with the spinster aunts, and he had gone alone, hoping, like Elena, that something wonderful would happen. It was not the first time he had gone off like that, alone, in search of love and adventure, but until now he had never found what he sought. Being a romantic, he went on forever hoping.

When they had finished their lunch, they had come to know each other very well. Elena told him about the dullness of her life and about her dreams and ambitions, and he told her a long and ingenious story, wholly false, of his student's life in Munich. At last, late in the afternoon, they reached the foot of the mountain, Elena helping him over the rough places, and before he left her he called at the little *Gasthaus* where she was staying to present himself to the middle-aged gentleman whom the aunts had trusted to look after her.

Elena left with the others the next morning, knowing perhaps in her heart that she had not seen the last of Herr Doktor Müller; and sure enough, on the next day he turned up in the village where her party was staying.

He followed them along the valley and over mountains. There never was, I suppose, any barrier between them either of shyness or convention or fear. Elena managed to meet him secretly in the forest or at some little *Gasthaus* on the edge of a lake or a stream. They had been in love from the first moment they saw each other, and now they admitted it. Sometimes in the evening he came and brought a guitar and

sang for the little party like any bourgeois Bavarian suitor. The deception amused them both.

But the game of hide-and-seek up the long valley above Innsbruck came finally to an end. The young man was troubled, yet he was so much in love that there was no saving himself or the girl. The day before she was to go back to Semmering, he told her the truth—that he was not Herr Doktor Müller but a prince, and the only heir to the principality over which his uncle ruled.

10

IN a way, Elena was born out of her time as much as Ogden. If it had been a generation earlier, she would perhaps have become a morganatic wife or at least a mistress with a recognized position. If it had happened a generation later, after the war, he would have said, "To hell with it!" and married her; but it happened in a world which was uncertain and crumbling, a world in which royalty and even the aristocracy had begun to be aware of the perils threatening them, and so in decadence had become more rigid than in times when their position was more certain.

He told her the truth—that he could never marry her, that there was no heir to the principality save himself and that one day he would be forced to marry and produce heirs of his own. The time, he said, was not far off because his uncle was seventy and insisting that the succession should be assured before he died. You might say that he should have chucked everything and married her, but that is unjust to him, for you must remember that Hohenheim had been governed and cared for by his family for five hundred years. He told her all

this, but at the moment nothing mattered to either of them save the fact that they were in love.

So she never went back to Semmering. The evening before the rest of the party were to return, she left a note behind and took the night train across the border into Bavaria with Herr Doktor Müller. She wrote a note to the spinster aunts trying to explain to them what had happened but it was beyond their understanding, and they wrote to her only to tell her that she was disowned and they never wished to see her or hear from her again. It was the last time she ever heard from them, and she never again saw Semmering or any of the little party who had gone with her into the Tyrol. That was what she had meant when she said, "I have no home and my friends are lost—long ago."

She did not mind, I suppose. He took a small flat for her in Munich and she went on with her music, living quietly, almost secretly, never seeing anyone save "Herr Doktor Müller," who only came to the flat after dark. They never went out in Munich, but when he could get away from Hohenheim, they went off together into some remote place where no one would recognize him. That was how they came to that little town where I saw them on the balcony one morning.

Thus they lived year after year, Elena asking nothing of life save music and love and her dark good-looking Herr Müller. One year passed and then another and another, and the prince still managed to evade his promise to marry and settle down to breeding a family. But each year it grew more difficult, and each year the pressure became stronger. They never spoke of it to each other but the dread of that final moment was always there.

At length there was pressure not only from the old uncle—the ruling prince—but from the ministers, and there was trouble, too, among the people who had caught the infection of Socialism from neighboring states. It grew steadily worse until one day he gave his final promise. But he demanded a two-month holiday before he presented himself to the Princess of Saxe-Coburg who had grown impatient and humiliated waiting for him year after year.

He took Elena to Monte Carlo, and there they lived together for the first time openly—a wild, reckless life which was clouded always by the knowledge that each day, each hour, each minute was precious. Time slipped away like quicksilver until the morning of the last day arrived. They had agreed that they were never to speak of the parting but to treat it as though he were leaving on a short journey, and they had agreed, too, that once they were parted each was to behave as if the other had died.

In the end, it was Elena who kept her word and Toni who broke his.

She said good-by to him in the midst of all the flurry and gayety of the Café de Paris, and when he had gone, she went back again to the villa and, taking her trunks, left in a fiacre for the *pension* kept by the Italian woman. When she had paid a week's *pension* in advance, she drove off again in the same fiacre, after telling the proprietress she would return in a day or two.

The fiacre took her along the Corniche Road as far as the deep ravine just above Nice, and there she paid the driver and dismissed him, saying that she meant to go the rest of the way on foot. When he had gone, she walked along the barrier to the place which she had selected to throw herself over.

It was a magnificent starlit night, and when it came to the point of climbing over the wall to jump into the ravine, she found that she could not do it.

Alone, frightened and ashamed of her own cowardice, she threw herself down among the rocks beside the road. It was there that Ogden found her.

11

WHEN he had finished, he looked at me with a faint smile in his eyes, as if he would apologize for the vulgar melodrama of the story.

"You see," he said, "why I do not want the story to get about. I am saying simply that she is the daughter of a Viennese professor who is dead. That's all that is necessary."

Again for a moment I had the brotherly impulse to say that I had seen her once long ago in the Black Forest, but again something deep inside me told me that it was wiser to keep silent. That craftiness and deceit which an illicit love can raise in any man told me that it was better not to betray any interest in her whatever.

It was long after midnight when I left, knowing in my jealous heart that the moment I had gone he would go up the marble stairs to take his place at her side.

I did not sleep at all that night, and two days later I went away on my holiday, not willingly, for my only desire in life was to see her again, but because it seemed the only thing to do. I did not escape; her image went with me as it always had, only more vivid now and more changeable and fascinating since I had seen her in the role of a fashionable woman who was the wife of my cousin.

When I returned, I found that they had taken an apartment in the Waldorf-Astoria, which was only a five-minute walk from the big house, and that the house itself was already being torn apart to make the changes Ogden had planned. The whole inside, every trace, every memory of the house old Michael Denning had built was being destroyed. All that remained was the façade and the curving marble stairway.

The architect who did the job was an obscure little man whom no one had heard of in that day. Where Ogden had found him I do not know, but he passed over all the fashionable architects who built the monstrosities of the nineties, to find this eccentric little man who shared his own ideas of beauty and his own worship of the baroque style. Between them they took a house which was a horror filled with cubbyholes, heavy mahogany, gilt bamboo and verdure tapestry and made it into an Austrian baroque palace with a Georgian façade.

Ogden did it, I think, partly to please his adored Elena, but partly too because he really suffered from the ugliness of the old house. This new palace, all cream and yellow and peach color and gold, was, he felt, his real background. It was one of those strange things which happen in America—that the son of the buccaneer Michael Denning should find his background in a decadent style of seventeenth-century Austria.

So far as the world was concerned, whatever old Michael Denning had done was always “news.” His vitality, his recklessness, the breadth of his gestures made it so. And now his son became “news.” Both his wife and his new house were sensations in the New York of that day. When the house was finished Ogden gave a fabulous ball to which the guests

were invited in the costumes of seventeenth-century Austria so that he might have the satisfaction of seeing the picture complete and of living, for one night at least, in an age which he hated less than the one in which he found himself.

It was the first time New York society had seen the inside of the house. Old Michael's son avenged the snub the old man had received from the New York of his day. Everyone in the New York of Ogden's day came to the party and there were intrigues on the part of those who were not invited in order to get there. The party, the publicity, the sensation were all in a way triumphs for old Michael Denning; yet in the triumphs there was something dead, for the whole party, and indeed Ogden's whole position in the life of America, was rootless and decadent and without meaning.

12

THE ball served, but only incidentally, I think, in the mind of Ogden, to launch Elena. He believed, it is true, that she must be launched extravagantly like no ordinary woman. She had already made a small sensation, and after the ball she could have had what she liked from fashionable New York.

There were women who held out against her, pooh-poohing the extravagant opinions of her beauty and her charm, but they would have been helpless had she chosen to take up the challenge. The men, save for a handful of fops, would have been her slaves. There were perhaps other women in that world who were as beautiful but not one had her charm or her quality of smoldering brilliance. And she was a foreigner and exotic, and there was always about her an aura of mystery and indifference.

She could have had what she liked, but she turned her back on everything that was offered her. After one winter season she took the measure of that world into which Ogden had brought her, and by her standards she found it all pompous and childish and dull. She told me afterward that she found it a pretentious and empty world filled with people who spent their lives playing at living without ever having lived at all. There was nothing in it to rouse her from that lethargy which I felt in her the evening I met her as Ogden's wife.

For their second summer they went to Newport, although Ogden was already bored with America and longing to return to Europe, where he felt so much more at home. I think that in her heart she was afraid to go back and that she meant never to return. Toward the end of that summer she seemed to come to life, not as her old buoyant self, but hysterically, as someone frantic and desperate. She was rude to the women who could have helped her, rude even to women who meant only to be kind and generous to her, and when she came back to town I discovered that she had almost managed to cut herself off completely from the world which had come to Ogden's ball.

13

NEVERTHELESS, she went out a great deal more, only it was nearly always with people who were considered déclassé and rather scandalous—divorcées and women who openly had lovers. For a little time I was alarmed, thinking that perhaps after all I had been deceived and that she was only an ordinary wanton at heart. I thought, "Maybe she is just like those women—no better, no worse." Once I

dared to reproach her about her company but she only laughed at me.

Among them was a gay young woman named Kate Blakeley who had always been wild. She came from a good family and she had as much money as she needed to be completely independent, and long ago as a school girl she had chucked her reputation over the moon and gone out for a good time.

She was a small dark woman with lively black eyes and hearty laugh and a ribald sense of humor. She was utterly reckless, and her recklessness seemed to have a fascination for Elena. They became inseparable companions.

Ogden did not seem to mind the milieu Elena had chosen. Fashionable New York bored him as much as it bored Elena, and he was, I think, glad to be free of it. I think it did not matter to him what Elena did or whom she saw so long as she belonged to him; so long as he could show her to the world as the finest item in his great collection of beautiful things. He allowed her a good deal of freedom, and she never abused it by showing more attention to any one man than to another.

There were moments, nevertheless, when Ogden had terrible outbursts of jealousy and made scenes and accused her of infidelity. But these outbursts only seemed to be symptoms of madness, for once they were past he would fall on his knees and beg her to forgive him and promise never to repeat them. She accepted the scenes with a curious calm and indifference, and always forgave him, out of pity. He went on remaking the house, adding a new door or new furniture to this room or that. He was busy all day long, and at night he and Elena dined alone or with some of her fast friends.

At first I saw little of either of them, for I avoided seeing her because it only meant torture for me afterward. Ogden was always pressing me to dine with them or to go to the theater. Three times out of four I managed to make an excuse and escape going, but the fourth time it was necessary to go in order that the situation should not become noticeable. And then one night I discovered why it was that Ogden pressed me to see more of Elena. It was because he thought that she was safe with me.

That was bad enough, but on the same night I found myself alone for a moment with Elena, and she said, "Why do you always try to avoid coming here? Is it because you hate me?"

She looked at me with that same appraising, tantalizing look she had given me on the first evening as she turned to go up the stairs, and again it threw me into happiness, despair and confusion. I made some excuse about how hard I was working, but she only swept that aside disdainfully.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked. "I don't like to think," she added, "that I have broken up a lifelong friendship between two cousins."

Perhaps at that moment I should have come out into the open. I know now that I should have succeeded, for afterward she told me that that was what she had hoped. Perhaps I should have done so if Ogden had not returned at that very moment. I think she had suspected all along that I was in love with her, but at that moment she *knew* for the first time. When Ogden appeared, I turned scarlet and confused, filled with the knowledge that in my heart I no longer had any scruples and that I was willing to betray him at the first opportunity.

Three days later, I went to pay my weekly visit to poor old Uncle William, who was living now on the last of the money left him by old Michael Denning, in the Windsor Hotel. He was only sixty-five but he appeared much older. Unlike Michael Denning, he had lacked the physique and the vitality to survive his wild living. He could scarcely walk any longer, and Ogden and I made it a point of duty to visit him regularly, bringing him news.

Nothing gave him so much pleasure as Ogden's arrival accompanied by Elena. At the sight of her beauty the old rake would sit up in his wheel chair and become almost young again. He adored her.

I do not know why he chose to live at the Windsor Hotel; it was neither smart nor amusing nor cheap, although it did have about it a veiled air of rakishness. Despite the fact that most of its permanent tenants were middle-aged and elderly men and women, respectable and nondescript, one felt that "things went on there." On the ground floor there was a bar much frequented by stockbrokers and financiers and racing men. Except for Uncle William, I knew no one who lived in the hotel.

That afternoon, I remember, the old gentleman felt rather well and made one or two ribald jokes about Ogden, hinting that he was unworthy to fill the shoes of lover to such a magnificent creature as Elena.

"The old man—old Michael might have done it," he said, "even in his sixties. But not Ogden, with his la-di-da ways."

I left him at last and stepped out into Forty-sixth Street to walk home. At the door I ran into Kate Blakeley, looking dashing and smart and wicked in a fur hat with a dotted veil. Once I had nearly fallen in love with her, but in the midst of

my interest, the image of Elena had come between us and spoiled everything by making Kate seem a cheap little adventuress. Kate was good-hearted and never lacked suitors, so she forgave my sudden cooling off and we remained good friends.

She, too, was bound downtown, and together we walked along Fifth Avenue through the falling snow. I don't remember what we talked about save that she asked me whether I was dining that night with Ogden and Elena. When I told her I was not, she asked pertly, "What's the matter? I never see you there any more. Have you quarreled with Ogden?"

The question made me suspicious and put me on my guard, for I knew that Kate, like most women who lead free and easy lives, are forever doing missionary work, trying to lead others into the same paths. So I simply said, "No."

"Which means that it is none of my business," she said, with a laugh. "Well, anyway, it's too bad. I don't know what's come over you lately. You used to be good fun but you've been impossible for a long time."

"All right," I said, "but let's talk about somebody else."

"Elena, for instance?" she said.

"Elena? Yes. Why not?"

"She's not very happy, you know."

"I know very little about her state of mind."

"You could help by showing up more often."

I said that I thought she never noticed whether I was there or not, and when I said it, I did my damnedest not to let my voice betray the faintest emotion.

“Oh, yes, she does,” said Kate. “You know as well as I do that she isn’t in the least in love with Ogden. I don’t deny that she is fond of him, but sometimes she gets bored, and then it helps to have congenial friends about.”

I gathered my courage and asked, “What do you mean by that?”

Kate laughed. “I don’t mean anything, except that she’s doing her best to stick by the fort, and I think you might help her by showing up now and then. Otherwise, I don’t think she can hold out much longer.”

I asked her if Elena had said anything to make her believe she was unhappy, and Kate said that they’d never discussed the subject but that it didn’t require second sight to see that she was.

She said, “You’d better come tonight, all the same,” and with that she pertly bade me good night and turned into the Waldorf.

The rest of the way I walked alone, disturbed and excited by what Kate had said, wondering whether it was Elena who had asked her to speak to me. By the time I reached my own doorstep I had made a decision.

I went to Ogden’s house that night to dinner.

There were twenty people there, mostly belonging to Kate’s set—actresses, divorcées, racing men and men about town. There was a freedom, an abandon, a recklessness about the company and the conversation which seemed oddly out of place against the delicate background of the house, and somehow Ogden with his preciosity and Elena with her serenity seemed strange in such a background. I had the impression of an unhappy household which had brought in

this strange company because it was distracting, and so made the household forget its unhappiness.

I should not perhaps have been aware of it save for Kate's conversation. In the midst of all the noise and laughter Ogden and Elena, with that strange "stillness" on her, seemed aloof. The drinking, the questionable jokes, seemed to go on all about them without touching them at all. Elena sat almost opposite to me, for she always seated her tables in the Continental way with the hostess at the side.

As usual, I found myself watching her as discreetly as possible, and two or three times she caught me watching her and then something miraculous happened which had not happened before. In the exchange of glances there was a sudden understanding. She managed, somehow, to convey to me both the profundity of her unhappiness and the knowledge that I was in love with her. I had the feeling that she was very near to desperation and that beneath her serenity hysteria was welling up.

Watching Ogden, with no shame in my heart, I thought, "Now is my chance, only I must play the game so that he will never suspect." If his adoration of Elena had been the passion of a normal man, I should have been less fearful and less cautious, but there was in it something morbid and there was always that strange abnormal sensitiveness which made him divine things other people could not know. But on the other hand, I knew that he trusted me. And that was a great advantage.

After dinner Ogden ordered a big baize-covered table to be put up in the room which had been Michael Denning's library, and the party settled itself there to a game of *chemin de fer*. Not only had the china cuspidor been destroyed, the

whole room with its huge books and monstrous mahogany-and-leather furniture had ceased to exist. It had walls of peach color now, elaborately carved and gilded, with upholstery of silver and green.

It was a lovely room but unreal and removed from life, and more like a boudoir than a study. In it old Michael would have been like a bull in a china shop. It occurred to me again that Ogden had come slowly to hate the very memory of his father, and that he had chosen to destroy and remake this house rather than build a new one simply to demonstrate to himself his power to destroy what Michael had created.

14

ELENA said she would prefer not to play, and after we had watched a round or two I asked her if she would sing for me as she had done on that first evening three years before.

So we went into the drawing room and she sang for me again. She was dressed in black velvet and looked pale. Like most fascinating women, she was extremely changeable and there were moments when she appeared almost plain. Tonight, she was an Elena I had never seen before, beautiful as always, but in a different fashion, melancholy and strange.

When she had sung five or six songs, she suddenly let her hands fall into her lap and sat very still. She had come to wear more and more jewels, and the idea came to me that perhaps she wore them as a distraction from her unhappiness. She was a woman who should never have worn them. On her they seemed vulgar and barbaric.

There was a long peaceful silence, and then all at once I plunged. I do not know how I came to choose that moment, but suddenly I found myself saying the words. I said, “Do you remember Bad Münster?”

She turned quickly and looked at me with an expression almost of terror in her eyes. A shiver went through her and in a low voice she asked, “What do you know about Bad Münster?”

“It was there I saw you for the first time. Look at me and then think of Bad Münster and the little river and see if you can’t remember.”

She was silent for a moment, regarding me sadly, and then she said, “No, I don’t remember you, but then you see I went to Bad Münster so many times. Besides, I didn’t notice other people much then. I really never saw them.”

“Do you remember a boy who came upon you one day by the side of the river? You were sitting in the sunlight and he was asleep with his head in your lap and you smiled and put your finger to your lips so that I shouldn’t waken him.”

Almost at once I knew that I had made a false step. I do not know why I spoke of Toni as “he,” anonymously, save that it seemed to me that although I had never met him I knew him too well to use his title, and I felt that it was presumptuous to call him Toni. An expression of pain came into her eyes and suddenly she was weeping, but she managed to control herself enough to say, “Why, yes, I do remember now—a good-looking boy about nineteen or twenty. Was that you?”

“Yes, I fell in love with you almost on sight.” And then, quietly, I came and sat on the end of the bench beside her.

“You see, I’m in love with you still. That’s why I’ve come here so rarely. It made me suffer too much.”

She looked at me in astonishment. “Until lately I thought you hated me,” she said with a kind of wonder. “It always made me so sad because I thought you were so nice and so understanding and so alive. I always wanted to be friends, ever since that first night. Sometimes I’ve been very nearly in love with you.”

She had a frankness, or perhaps it was merely a simplicity, which I never found in any other woman, and the simplicity and directness had more power than the wiles and coquetry of any other woman I have ever met.

“You see,” she continued, “sometimes I’ve been so lonely. I wanted to find somebody who was alive and natural and honest. I don’t mean alive the way Kate is alive, but something quite different. It isn’t life with Kate. It’s a kind of illness that makes her go on and on until some day she’ll smash up. She’s got what I call the New York disease.”

It was odd how discerning she was, seeing something which I had never seen before. Perhaps, as a foreigner, it was easier for her. Afterward, when Kate did go to pieces, I knew she was right. In those days Kate and her little crowd were almost the only ones affected by the “New York” disease. But it spread and spread, until nowadays there aren’t many New Yorkers who have escaped it—that disease which gives you no rest, driving you to seek sensations, filling your veins with restlessness and your nerves with a horror of ever being alone. It is a disease which seems to infect the very air of Manhattan. Elena never had it, even for a day.

I took her hand and kissed it, and then, aware suddenly that I was being a fool, I sat up very straight, listening. I did not

mind any longer being a cad and making love to my cousin's wife in his own house. I did not mind taking advantage of his blind foolish trust in me. I was already far beyond such artificialities as the standards of a gentleman. I was simply a lover, willing to use any ruse or any weapon I could find.

She knew that I had suddenly become cautious, and with a shadow of contempt in her voice, she said, "You needn't mind Ogden. He won't come in. He loves gambling too well. He'll stay there until the last card is played. That's why he puts up with those people—because he can gamble with them." She looked at me slyly, and then said, "If you're afraid, we can go to my sitting room upstairs."

I did not know exactly what she meant, for I did not know then the full depths of her directness and simplicity, nor that prudishness or hypocrisy had nothing to do with her. I did not answer her, and so left the decision to her. She rose, and once again I kissed her hand. She must have known from the kiss how I was suffering; I think that it infected her somehow with something of my own blind passion.

15

SHE said, "You're trembling. I never knew you felt like that." It was odd, but I was aware of pity in her voice.

I followed her up the stairs.

It was an insane thing to do in Ogden's own house, but I never thought of that, and the thought of discovery never occurred to her, or if it occurred to her, she was by that time so unhappy that she no longer cared what happened. If the punishment had been death by flaying or by fire I do not think I could have stopped myself, and looking back now on

that evening, I would have no desire to do so, for if one turns away from life there is no value in living.

What she had said was true. Ogden never left the green-baize table and we were alone together for nearly two hours, but it was like a lifetime compressed into one breathless and incredible moment. I told her everything about myself and we talked of Bad Münster a little stiffly, without ever speaking of Toni, and we made plans as to how we were to go on deceiving Ogden. She was discreet, I think, only because she did not want to hurt him.

"He has been very good and generous to me, and he has so little in life—nothing but books and furniture and old doors." And she added, "You reproached me for taking Kate as a friend. She's the one to help us, don't you see? Kate will always lie and give me an excuse to get away."

For a moment I was again struck by a doubt. I wondered whether she had not chosen Kate and her friends long ago because some day they might be useful; but I said nothing.

"You could have had me almost at once," she said. "It would have been easy. I was so unhappy."

So I had lost all those precious hours and minutes and months trying to be an honorable fool. Suddenly the ecstasy was drained out of me, and I felt depressed and tired. I rose from her side and walked across the room to stand looking out of the window.

After a long silence she said, "I know. You are reproaching yourself. You needn't. You haven't betrayed Ogden."

I turned from the window in wonder and asked, "Why? How?"

“Because we have never lived together. He has never so much as touched me.” And suddenly it all became clear. I understood everything—Ogden’s strange behavior, his liking for exhibiting her; his growing hatred of his father and his desire to destroy his memory. I should have known it all along if I had not been a fool.

I left her then and went down to the party in the library, where I took a hand in the game. I told them that Elena had a headache and had retired, and at the news Ogden scarcely looked up from the game. We played until daylight, and after I came to the table Ogden won steadily, and I lost far more than I could afford, but I did not care. I scarcely knew what I was doing and doubled my stakes like a drunken man again and again.

Once Kate looked at me with a sharp twinkle in her black eyes. “You must have drunk a good deal to make you so reckless.” I was drunk, it is true, but drunk with ecstasy. Kate *knew*, perhaps. Certainly she suspected. But even that did not matter.

16

FROM that night began a long story of deceit and double-dealing, in the process of which my whole character became so changed that when I look back upon it, it is impossible for me to recognize myself. By nature I was a conventional, honorable fellow. But I found myself stealing my cousin’s wife, and in order to succeed in the theft I lived a lie day in and day out.

Success in business, success in life itself no longer meant anything to me. My family scarcely saw me. I no longer troubled to call on poor half-paralyzed Uncle William, shut

up in his rooms in the Windsor Hotel. I never went to the club. But I did go to the big brownstone house more and more often, refusing only when it was necessary to cover up what was going on, and Ogden seemed pleased that he and I were back again on the old basis of intimacy which we had known as boys.

Elena played her role better than I, for she had a control which never allowed her to betray herself by the slightest intonation. And all the time both of us were afraid, not of being discovered so much as of the effect that discovery would have upon Ogden's eccentric, unbalanced character.

We saw each other a part of every day without Ogden's even suspecting. In the beginning I was insatiable and begrudged every second she spent in the company of others. I took a small flat in West Thirty-fourth Street, not more than ten blocks from the brownstone house, and in a district where no one lived who was known to either of us. There we met, sometimes in the afternoon, now and then in the evening, and once, at a risk, we spent a whole week-end there together. Elena herself did the cooking and seemed again like the girl I had seen in the Black Forest.

For these meetings Kate was invaluable to us, for by now she was in on the secret and delighted that Elena had proved after all no better than herself. If Ogden inquired of Elena where she was going, she always replied that she had a rendezvous with Kate.

My passion might have burned itself out, save that somehow I was never able to possess Elena completely, and so the game was never finished. Some part of her escaped me, and of this I was aware even in our most intimate moments together. I knew that there was something which

she withheld, something which would have made our love perfect, which I was never able to reach. Once or twice I tried to discover why she kept up that strange reserve, but she only laughed and then grew sad and said that I wanted more from her than any woman was able to give.

Again and again I proposed that we chuck everything and run away together, letting Ogden go his own way. There were times when I grew sick with deceit and longed to cut ourselves free from it once and for all. Each time I saw Ogden, I felt remorse. But she would never agree to an elopement.

She would say, "Aren't we well off as we are? If we ran off it would ruin you, and knowing Ogden, I know he would never divorce me. What could we live on? You haven't enough to go on forever living in Capri or Florence or Monte Carlo. It isn't as if Ogden were really my husband and I had to submit to him."

She never told me, as she had told Ogden, that she had a small fortune settled on her by Toni so that he'd never have to think she was in poverty. She did not, I think, ever want to marry me, because in her heart she was always hoping that Toni would come back. Ogden did not matter, but being married to me would have been different. Sometimes, too, a suspicion came to me which now I am certain was the truth. She loved me in a way; of that there can be no doubt. But she never loved me passionately, with all her being, as I loved her.

17

THINK she loved me because in the past, even as a stranger, I had been distantly a part of all the happiness she had known

in that little watering place in the Black Forest. In a way, I was a symbol, a substitute for Toni; being a passionate woman, she had to have someone whom she could love. She was happier now that we were living together almost as man and wife, but the old Elena I had watched from a distance never returned. The “stillness” enveloped her always.

The odd thing was that as time went on Ogden’s passion for her seemed to increase, stimulated perhaps by the knowledge that I now admired her openly. At the same time, his hatred of his father seemed to approach the borders of madness. It was not only the old jealousy which he had had of his mother’s devotion to old Michael Denning; in his impotence he hated the whole legend of his father’s wild life.

At length he even asked Elena to return to him the pearls and the other jewels which Michael Denning had given his mother, telling her that they had become old-fashioned or were not splendid enough for her. He replaced them with much finer jewels, and the originals he had taken from their settings and sold one by one. The jewels were the last remaining concrete vestige of the old man’s existence, and after they were gone I think Ogden felt free.

Autumn turned to winter and winter to spring, and then suddenly, inexplicably, something happened to Elena. It was as if she had closed a door shutting me out. The first news I had of the change came one afternoon when I had a message from her by way of Kate saying that she could not meet me as usual at the flat because she was ill. I called at the house before dinner but she sent word down that she felt too ill to see anyone.

For two days I did not see her at all, and on the third day she came down the marble stairs looking lovelier than I had ever seen her. The “stillness” was gone, and in its place was a kind of radiance, yet when she spoke to me she seemed changed, aloof and cold. She begged me not to ask her to make a rendezvous until she felt less ill. She did not look in the least ill, and I complimented her on the color in her cheeks and the brightness in her eyes, but she said they came from fever.

I talked to her as rashly as I dared, for in my heart, without knowing why, I was terrified. I knew suddenly that now she had escaped me altogether. Even the part which belonged to me, she had withdrawn. The woman who sat there talking to me wasn’t the Elena I knew. It was some other person. It was Elena bewitched and changed. Nothing I could say, no eloquence, no pleading changed her, and presently when Ogden appeared she made an excuse to escape and went up to her room. It was the last time I ever saw her.

I sent extravagant baskets of flowers and fruits, which seemed to please Ogden, and on the next evening when I called at the house, he said she was feeling better and had gone to Red Bank for two or three days to stay with Kate, who had opened her house there. It seemed odd to me that Kate had not asked me, too, but with a sinking heart I decided that she had not invited me because Elena had asked her not to.

I had a cocktail with Ogden and refused dinner, saying I had an engagement, because I could not dine there alone with him when my heart was soaked in misery. When I left, I went straight to the Waldorf bar and began to drink. By four in the morning I was drunker than I have ever been in all my life,

and instead of going home, I went to the flat in West Thirty-fourth Street. I do not know how I managed to reach there alone, but I do remember that on climbing the stairs a wild hope rose in my heart that when I turned the key in the door and opened it I should find her there.

But the flat was dark and empty. I fell on the bed fully dressed, and presently I was asleep. It was evening of the next day when I wakened, and my first thought was that I must see Ogden at once and discover whether he had any news of her. It was horrible to waken there for the first time alone.

I dressed as quickly as possible and went out to have a cup of coffee in a restaurant near Broadway. It was there I had the first news of the Windsor fire. Everyone was talking about it. The waitress brought me a newspaper, and I read it for myself. There had been a number of people killed, some by the fire and some by jumping from the windows.

I thought at once of Great-uncle William, tied to his wheel chair. He lived on the seventh floor, and save for a miracle there could have been no chance of his escaping. For a moment I forgot even Elena and my own unhappiness. I thought, "Ogden will know. I must go to Ogden." I hailed a hansom cab and drove as fast as possible to the brownstone house.

There in the hall I found Ogden pacing up and down on the edge of hysteria. His face was ashen and his long lean hands were trembling.

He cried out, "Where have you been? I've been trying everywhere to find you—at home, at the office, everywhere. They told me you didn't come in at all last night."

For a moment I thought that at last he suspected me and that this was the cause of the agitation. I said, “I was out on the town. I was drunk. That’s why I didn’t come home.”

He looked at me with disgust, as if his fastidiousness had been outraged by the thought of me intoxicated, perhaps spending the night with some showgirl I had picked up. It was a curious look of revelation which showed me how infinitely remote from all living he had become, how completely and inhumanly he had been absorbed by “things.”

I asked, “What has happened to Uncle William?”

“That’s it! That’s it!” he cried. “It’s horrible. He’s dead, and they insist I must go to the morgue to identify him. I can’t do it alone. I can’t face it. You’ll have to go with me.”

“I’ll go myself, alone, if you like.”

But he would not have that, either. He was in the grip of some obsession that it was his duty to go.

After the first shock, the news of Uncle William’s death did not much affect me. He was an old man and chronically ill and bored and unhappy, and if he had not died horribly, death was probably a merciful release. And in my heart I was suffering at that moment what seemed worse to me than any death.

I wanted to know whether Ogden had had news of Elena and when she was coming back from Red Bank, so I said casually, “Have you told Elena?”

“No,” he said. “I didn’t want to upset her. She’s gone to Red Bank for a rest.”

“She’ll see it in the papers. That will be worse.” And suddenly an idea came to me. “I’ll do it,” I said. “Let me telegraph.”

"All right. You do it."

He had already rung for his hat and coat. I was excited again, for now at least I had an excuse to communicate with her. Somehow I would manage to let her know that I was thinking of her, tenderly, day and night.

Together we set out in his carriage for the morgue, and on the way I stopped at a telegraph office, where I spent ten minutes of uncertainty and unhappiness trying to compose a telegram which would convey to her my misery without annoying her. At last I wrote: *Uncle William desperately ill. Am yours always and forever.*

It was short. When she saw the papers she would guess the truth. And it was not compromising. She would *know*. In my heart I think I knew that although she would understand the limitless things I had tried to say in five words, it was likely that she no longer cared very much.

We drove the rest of the way in silence, Ogden still shaking with nerves, and I thinking of Elena. Once or twice he spoke of the fire. It had been a strange inexplicable conflagration, breaking out with terrible swiftness in the late afternoon, and lasting only a little while. Some of the people who had leaped from the windows might have been saved if they had kept their heads. Most of the victims died of suffocation.

18

AT the morgue there was an enormous crowd. Those who had come to identify relatives or friends were admitted one by one. To the very end I tried to persuade Ogden to

let me go in alone, but his determination had now become a kind of madness. He kept saying that he must “face it.”

Once inside, I begged the intern in charge to let us first see the bodies of those who had died of suffocation; that would be less horrible for Ogden than having to see those who had died from burns or from having leaped from the windows. I doubted that Uncle William had jumped. All the victims found above the third floor had been suffocated. Luckily, those in charge had already thought of all this, and the bodies of the burned and mutilated were kept apart.

The bodies lay on slabs in a long row, each covered with a sheet, and we followed the attendant as he moved from one slab to another, raising each sheet for a second that we might see the faces. Most of the dead were middle-aged and elderly people who had been living at the Windsor in retirement.

We had come nearly to the end of the line when the attendant lifted the sheet from the face of a young and handsome man. He was dark, and the pallor of death had given a sculptural quality to his face. I glanced at it quickly, meaning to go on to the next, but I was arrested by something, and suddenly I felt an actual physical pain at the pit of my stomach.

It was a strange unearthly experience, one of those things which happen so quickly that one seems to have lived through the same moment before in some other life. This was the face of a man whom I had seen but a few times and had never met, and yet in a way I had loved him because he had been young and happy and in love. I knew in that single terrifying moment that I had loved him in spite of my own jealousy. And in the same second I knew the whole story. I

knew what the end of it would be. I knew everything. The man on the slab was Toni!

I did not speak. I think I did not even breathe. The attendant had covered the face again and was drawing the sheet from the body on the next slab. He need not have troubled, for I knew already what lay beneath the sheet. I felt a sudden wild impulse to cry out, “Don’t! Don’t!” But it was too late. He had drawn the sheet away, and there before us, looking serene and lovely, lay Elena.

The shock seemed to clear my head, and the first thing of which I was aware was Ogden. I knew that I should have to keep control of myself. I could betray nothing. It was I who must support Ogden. I suppose acts of heroism are accomplished like that, automatically. You act, and think afterward.

I looked at him, and his face had gone whiter than those of the dead people on the slabs. He did not speak. He simply stood staring, as if fascinated, long after the attendant had covered her lovely face once more. I took his arm in a fierce grip and forced him into life and motion, compelling him to walk beside me, hypnotized and trembling, until we had finished what we came for. Two slabs farther on we found the body of Uncle William.

In the room beyond, I led Ogden to a chair, and as he collapsed into it, he said, “She must have been calling on Uncle William,” and then he fainted and slipped out of the chair on to the floor. In my heart I knew he did not believe what he said. He never believed it, though he tried to for the rest of his life.

AT home in the brownstone house he collapsed again, and s in the end it was I who had to make all the arrangements for the burials of Elena and poor old Uncle William. It was I who had to see the reporters and concoct a long fantastic story of Elena's devotion to Uncle William, in order to explain her presence in the hotel.

The newspapers vulgarized the story, making her an angel who met her death while on an errand of mercy. For days and weeks afterward there were photographs and stories in the paper of her beauty and her fabulous jewels.

The body of Toni was left on its slab, alone and unclaimed, long after Elena was buried, until it was identified at last by the proprietor of an obscure Broadway hotel who claimed it as the body of a man who had disappeared mysteriously from his establishment. He was registered there as Gerhardt Eckermann of Freiburg, Germany. A long time afterward I realized that the name Toni had taken was that of the fat little man who owned the hotel in Bad Münster. He had taken every precaution, abandoning even the name of Müller. There was no one in New York save myself who knew who he really was.

It would have been the romantic thing if the lovers had been buried side by side, but that wasn't possible. It was impossible for me to admit that I knew him, but with the utmost discretion I saw to it that he had good burial in a quiet corner of Greenlawn Cemetery. There was plenty of money for it. In the hotel safe there was more than two thousand dollars belonging to him without anyone to claim it. The police tried to trace him but got nowhere.

I think that all the duties and responsibilities I had thrust upon me in those first few days were good for me; they kept

me distracted and numbed the pain. It was only afterward that the agony began and I went to pieces. It was only then that I came to understand not only that Elena was gone forever, but that what I had suspected long before was true: she had loved me only because in some way I had become to her a part of all the happiness she had known in the Black Forest. In me she had tried, wildly perhaps and vainly, to regain what she had believed was lost forever. The moment Toni reappeared she forgot the existence of myself, of Ogden, of everyone in the world save him.

In his own country there was no alarm at first over his disappearance, because he had gone off in the same way many times before both as a young man and as husband of the Saxe-Coburg princess, to return after a fortnight or two. But this time the fortnight became a month and then two months, and presently they began a search for him. They succeeded in tracing him as far as Paris, where he seemed to have vanished.

For years the search continued until there was no longer any hope of finding him. He had done his duty. There were two small sons by the dull Saxe-Coburg princess, and so the succession was assured. He had kept his promise in a world of standards and conventions which was collapsing, and his sacrifice was all wasted, for in 1918 Hohenheim ceased to exist, and there was no need for an heir.

During the thirty-odd years which followed his disappearance, various impostors appeared from time to time claiming to be the lost ruler of Hohenheim, but each time their claims failed. I alone knew that he lay in a corner of Greenlawn Cemetery beneath a stone marked simply "Gerhardt Eckermann."

When Ogden came home from the funeral, he would see no one but me. I thought for a time that the collapse and the melancholy which settled upon him would pass and that he would return again to life, or at least that he would recover again his old interest in "things," but as the months passed, he grew more solitary and eccentric.

At the end of two years he dismissed all the servants save the man who had been with him since he was eighteen. He had the main door of the big house locked, and after that he went in and out by the servants' entrance after nightfall. He saw no one but me, whom he sent for from time to time in order that we might talk about Elena. I alone could console him, and for me there was no consolation, save from Kate who alone knew our secret, and as the years went by I lost her, too, for her life grew steadily wilder and more disorderly until at last she died of drugs and drink.

The lovely baroque house grew untidy, and on the occasions when I went there to see Ogden we dined in the library where they had played *chemin de fer*, the two of us alone, waited on by the single manservant, who grew old along with his master. We talked of Elena but never after that day at the morgue did we speak of the Windsor fire.

Ogden must have wondered who the man was whom she met there, for among the other dead there was no one whom he had ever seen. There is just a chance that he did know, an even slimmer chance that he knew the whole story. If that is true, he was a nobler man than I had ever believed him to be.

For nearly forty years I dined with him thus many times a year, and when we talked of Elena it was not of the dead Elena but of the living one, so alive, so beautiful, so reckless and mysterious. I, too, if my lips had not been sealed, would

have talked of her faithful heart, of the fidelity which survived even her own pitiful efforts to make a life for herself once she believed she would never again see Toni, which survived even the pitiful inadequacy of her love for me. But of all this I could not speak to Ogden.

In all the years I went there I never saw any room but the library. When Ogden died and the other rooms were opened, the furniture was found covered with dust and the lovely baroque ceilings festooned with cobwebs.

He added not one penny to the fortune Michael Denning had made so ruthlessly. Worse than that, he allowed the millions to dribble away until when he died there was nothing left. It may have been that he found pleasure in the destruction of the very fortune itself. He had failed at everything in life, but he was a "gentleman." Michael Denning had succeeded in making him that.

Now that I am old and all passion is spent, it seems to me that there was a kind of Greek quality in the whole story, as if the Furies themselves had been present throughout. Old Michael's plan of founding a dynasty came to a barren end within one generation, as if there was a curse on the fortune he had piled up so recklessly.

As for Elena, I think that she was one of those women who are born destined to a tragic end. The gods had given her too much of beauty, of intelligence, of passion—too much of life itself. Such bright creatures are too resplendent for this shoddy earth of ours. In the end she brought tragedy not only to herself but to all those concerned in her story: to Toni, who had defied the gods and tried to deny his very nature; to poor impotent Ogden for his presumption in marrying so dazzling

a creature; to myself for loving her and betraying my cousin and best friend.

When Ogden died, the house was sold and pulled down to make way for a glittering grown-up New York whose very existence he had continued to deny until the end; but the city, long before his death, had forgotten that he existed; it had nearly forgotten that there was ever such a buccaneer as Michael Denning. When the furniture, the doors, the marble stairway came to be sold, the sum they brought totaled more than the poor remnant of Michael Denning's great fortune, for the baroque style had become fashionable. The contents of those dreadful houses owned by the people who had mocked Ogden's taste had long since been thrown on the dust heap or sent to ornament the servants' hall belowstairs. One footstool from Ogden's house was worth more than all the bric-a-brac, the bad tapestries and the fake Italian Renaissance.

Now that it is all over there is only one thing in the whole story that I should have liked to see for myself, and that is the moment when Elena, in the brownstone house so barren of life, found among her letters one addressed in the handwriting she knew so well and loved so profoundly—the letter which told her that Toni had broken his word and come back after all. I should have liked to see that "stillness" leave her and the life rush back into the beautiful body and face when she knew that she was no longer a lonely foreigner, lost and forgotten in New York. I should have liked to see once more that look which was on her face the day I came upon them in the forest when she raised her finger to her lips.

Now that all the suffering is finished, I am glad that he came back. I am grateful for the ecstasy which it brought her

for a little time before she died. That is how much I loved her.

The brownstone house is gone now and already forgotten, but perhaps when you pass that corner again you will remember that it once stood there, and perhaps you will give a thought to the people who once lived in it—to old Michael Denning and my aunt Sarah, to Elena and poor Ogden, and perhaps even to me. All that remains of it is the marble stairway. At the sale it was bought by the architect who did the great hotel which stands there now, and when you enter the hotel and go down to the bar for a drink you will be walking down the same stairway up which Elena moved on that night when we were alone while the others played *chemin de fer* in the room belowstairs.

[The end of *New York Legend* by Louis Bromfield]