BITTER HONEY

Title: Bitter Honey
Date of first publication: 1935
Author: Francis Lillie Pollock (1876-1957)
Date first posted: May 31, 2024
Date last updated: May 31, 2024
Faded Page eBook #20240520

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

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive/Canadian Libraries.

BITTER HONEY

by

FRANCIS
POLLOCK

TORONTO
THOMAS NELSON & SONS, LTD.
91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST

FIRST PUBLISHED 1935

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

To
ETHEL

Bitter Honey

I

This yard, called the Cumberland yard after the farmer who owned the land, was usually the first of the four bee-yards to be packed for winter. When it was done Jerry always felt that the back was broken of this last heavy job of the season. He had worked alone there all the day before and all this forenoon, and another hour or two would finish it. Of the one hundred and twenty beehives in the apiary, most were now in the great brown winter packing-boxes, holding four hives each. Only a few stands remained to be packed, but now, though he had not worked very hard, Jerry felt tired and dispirited, thinking once more of how often he had done all this before, and of how little it had profited him. Except, of course, to make a living, but he wanted more than a living.

He sat down on an empty hive at the edge of the yard and took off his straw hat with the black silk-gauze veil. He had hardly needed the veil at all, for the bees were indifferent and tired like himself with the close of the season, and not inclined to sting. Jerry felt tired in every bone, and in his mind too, from the strain and labour and anxiety of the honey season. There was no wind, and the October sky was hazy and warm. The yard was close to the road, but it was entirely surrounded by trees except at the driveway entrance; and the frosted leaves were dropping all over the yard and on the hive-stands, brilliant leaves from the maples at the north end, and pale and lemon-coloured leaves from the birches and willows near the road; but the beeches still held their hard little russet leaves and their open clusters of nuts. Bees were flying sparsely, flying out of sheer habit to the frosted goldenrod and asters, crawling over the withered blossoms, and returning without disappointment to their hives.

Jerry lighted his pipe and smoked a little; and while he rested he tried to look at the bee-yard and see it as he knew it really must be. He had been reading books of mystical physics, and he tried to think of the yard as a space of black emptiness, a space of several more than three dimensions, without form or boundary or light or colour, inhabited only by clusters of electrical charges, not exactly real themselves, but the basis of reality. He liked to think of things like this, and try to feel what things were really like,

as he often tried to imagine how his own skeleton would look if divested of its flesh.

It was difficult to keep hold of this scientifically mystical vision. The apiary was too heavily charged with the memory of labour and anxiety. The big bee-yard was coloured and hazy and soft and real. The coloured leaves drifted down heavily without wind. The bees drifted past him, heavy and sluggish. Sometimes they alighted on his coat, on his hands, stopping to rest, too tired, too indifferent to think of stinging. They knew that the season of accumulation, of aggression was over. These were bees hatched since summer. They had never gathered any honey except perhaps a few ounces from the goldenrod, and they would never gather any except perhaps a few ounces from the early maples and willows next spring. They were the winter force, whose sole function was to keep the colony alive till spring, and to rear brood in March, young bees that in their turn would rear the working-force for the great honey-flows of June and July.

The Cumberland yard had done well that season; it had yielded over seven tons of clover honey. The Caledon yard had done a little better per colony, but it contained only seventy colonies. Jerry thought of the yard as it had looked in July, in the blazing heat, all the hives tiered with supers, high square white towers, some of them five or six feet high. They were boiling with bees from top to bottom, stuffed full of honeycombs, and when he pried the supers apart honey poured out in streams from casually built cells. But now all those supers had been taken off and the honey extracted from them, and the empty combs were stored in the workshop at Old Lowlands; and most of that working force was dead, and only the winter rear-guard of the season was left now, drifting slowly and sluggishly past him, from the hives to the frosted weeds of the pastures.

They seemed sluggish and contented; their function was merely to live. And as he sat resting and smoking in the warm air Jerry too felt sluggish and contented. But he knew that this was only the reaction from the heat and labour and torture of the honey season. He always felt like that in October. He resented the feeling and refused to surrender to it, for he did not think that life was worth anything if it meant nothing but living.

He put on his hat and bee-veil again, and relighted the smoker which had gone out. Only a few stands now remained to be packed. Each stand consisted of four hives, standing in pairs on a plank platform, facing two east and two west. A few guards crawled indifferently about the entrances. Jerry drove them inside with a puff of smoke, and pushed the four hives together into a solid block in the middle of the platform. He rolled up one of

the great winter cases which fitted accurately over the platform, set it down over the hives, and adjusted a wooden tunnel to give each colony its separate entrance to the outer air. Then he filled up the case with planer shavings, carrying them in a bushel basket from the storage boxes, packing in four inches of shavings all around the block of hives, piling eight inches on top. Over it all he placed the heavy board cover of the case, and he would not see the inside of those hives again till spring.

It did not take long to finish the yard. The last hive he packed had been the best colony of the apiary. He had taken two hundred and seventy pounds of honey from it. Before covering it out of sight he turned back the propolis cloth that covered the combs and looked in. The hive was filled from side to side with bees that surged slowly up from the combs as he uncovered them. A single bee rose into the air and stung him on the wrist, a trifling sting hardly penetrating the skin, a mere perfunctory gesture, and this was probably the last sting he would get that year.

Life was not worth anything unless it was something more than mere living. There was no occult value in mere existence, in abstract Being, though some people said there was. Jerry looked over the broad bee-yard, now holding only thirty dark-brown boxes instead of the one hundred and twenty white towers of the summer. Next summer they would be one hundred and twenty white towers again, if they wintered well, filled with a new generation of life, pursuing exactly the same purposes as the generation lately dead, indistinguishable from it. There was a great quantity of scattered outfit to be taken home from the yard—hive-covers, queen-excluders, escape-boards, odd frames, lumps of broken wax, stuff that never should have so accumulated at the yard, but which always did. Some of it was for repairing, some of it to be scrapped or turned into kindling-wood. Jerry wheeled it all out to the truck on the yard wheelbarrow and loaded it, afterwards putting the wheelbarrow aboard too. The radiator of the truck leaked a little. He inspected it, and filled it from a pool in the swamp below the bee-yard.

This would be the last day's work at the Cumberland yard. After a few weeks he would come out to see that all was right, and to contract the hive-entrances for cold weather. But he would not need to drive into the yard again.

He backed the truck out to the road, and shut the gate and locked it with a chain. Few people ever came down that back road, and the gravel was covered with fallen leaves. Bees drifted languidly across. But in a quarter of

a mile he came out upon a much more used road, and turned west toward the Caledon yard.

His helper, Roll Diarmid, had been packing the Caledon yard and should have finished by this time. Roll had only the apiary touring-car, and Jerry was to call there with the truck and pick up all the stuff that must be taken home.

He looked with interest at the fields as he drove, noticing the condition of the clover, of the fall wheat. It was a low, flat, Dutchy sort of country, lying between the two great lakes, between the warm Erie and the cold deep Huron. The currents of air from these two seas produced a heavy condensation of moisture. Even in rainless summers the pastures never quite dried up, and on summer nights a heavy wet fog steamed up from the rich earth. It was a grazing country, a country of butter and milk and cream and cheese, and therefore a clover country and therefore a bee country. Honey was almost as important a product as butter, and bee-keeping was well understood there as a commercial industry. There were in fact great apiarists, some with more than a thousand colonies of bees, with yards scattered over several townships, employing gangs of men, using fleets of cars, counting their production by tons and carloads. Jerry usually produced twenty tons of honey himself, but he was insignificant beside these great bee-masters.

Now it was mid-October, but the pastures were still green, and the cattle were still doing well on the grass. Belts of brilliant autumn woodland divided the landscape, undergrown with withered goldenrod. In the southern sky there was a long pearly shimmer that was Lake Erie, nine miles away, and Jerry observed all these things with the interest of long habit.

Roll was gone when he reached the Caledon yard, and, as he expected, the bees were all packed. Eighteen great brown boxes stood in the yard instead of seventy-two white hives. The bees were flying rather actively from the winter entrances, for the sun was out more brightly. They were a little cross, too, and Jerry had to put on his veil when he entered the yard to look over the packing and see if anything had been overlooked. Roll must have irritated them, handling the hives too roughly as he packed them; and Roll generally did that, handling the bees roughly and stirring them up, for he liked to work fast and could get through far more work in a day than Jerry could.

A good deal of equipment was stacked here, too, for the truck to take, and Jerry loaded it aboard. The yard stood fifty yards from the road, under a grove of maples in a corner of the pasture, fenced with a couple of strands of

barbed wire to keep cattle out. Jerry drove back to the road, and started toward Old Lowlands, six miles away.

He drove the truck slowly, not to damage the fragile articles he carried. The sun was warm now, the sky turning all hazy blue, unfortunately, for the country needed rain. Dust rose from the pallid stubble where the plough-teams plodded. The new catch of clover looked none too good. They always needed rain in the fall and never got it, except when they got too much. The farmers always said that the fall wheat and clover were doing no good and would be no good in the spring, but there always were crops of wheat and clover and honey. Probably farming had always been like that. Jerry knew nothing of farming except what he had involuntarily learned from associating with farmers during these years at Old Lowlands, but he was inclined to think it the most futile and depressing of human activities. There was no money in it; there was nothing in it at all, unless you knew how to do nothing else, or unless you were a sort of mystic, and enjoyed sunrise and sunset and a certain modicum of liberty; but if anybody had the brain and the spirit for these things he would not be a farmer. Jerry hardly looked at sunsets any longer except to prognosticate the weather. He had used to look at them with pleasure and literary appreciation, but now he did not think of them. They had become a part of himself; as he regarded the vast fields of blooming clover, like a Persian carpet in green and pink and crimson, exactly for their value in tons of honey.

But now the honey was gathered; the work was over, and now before him loomed the months of winter when there was nothing to do, except to read or think or write. He was tired of reading, tired of thinking, not that he had done much of either in the last five months. Impossible to spend another winter at Old Lowlands, in the house where he lived all alone, and he knew now that he would never be able to write anything valuable as he had once imagined; and he could no longer find any amusement in writing prose or verse which nobody would ever want to read.

The fields rolled by, interminable pastures, with infrequent ploughland. The whole country was going back to grass, he thought, and the grass was getting killed out by goldenrod. There was no money in farming; it wasn't worth while to take care of the land. Land was worth nothing. Anybody who wanted ten acres around Old Lowlands could have it for little or nothing. Life was nothing unless it meant more than living. Life was not a solid; it was only a container. Jerry thought again of going to the city for the winter, but the idea was not very attractive. He knew hardly anybody there now but Edgar Lloyd. He had lost all his former friends. He was no longer a

newspaper man, a city man, but a countryman, a bee-man. And Edgar Lloyd was an incalculable person, sometimes exciting, generally intolerable.

He thought of going south for the winter. A great many of the big bee-keepers did that, driving their cars to Miami or New Orleans. It was just as cheap as to stay at home and burn coal. What they did during the winter Jerry couldn't guess; he supposed they fished and bathed. It seemed hardly worth travelling 1500 miles for that. But one might have a bee-ranch in Louisiana. There was good honey territory there, and he might be able to take off a crop of honey in the spring before it was time to go north again. It would be something to fill up the winter.

What a confession of failure! He realized all that and accepted it, for he had thought of it many times before. He realized it but he couldn't accept it, though he could not change it. He had been at Old Lowlands too long. The first houses of the village appeared before him. From a distance the village was all blue and old grey, autumn leaves and weathered brick and unpainted boards. The village was falling into decay, and now held hardly two hundred people. Once it had been the only Lowlands, but the railroad passing three miles to the north had drained its life away. A new town had grown up at Lowlands Station, and the old village was gradually melting away, gradually melting back into the original farm land, slowly going back to nature.

A car or two, a team or two stood along the street. Women swept fallen leaves from the sidewalk; there was a smell and smoke of burning leaves, and men on ladders were picking apples in the orchards behind and between the houses. All the buildings were unpainted, unrepaired, sinking back to nature. All but the Cumberland house, which he presently passed, standing at the head of its ninety acres, the Cumberland home farm. That was the house which the first Cumberlands had built, when the family settled all over that county, almost a hundred years ago. Cumberlands and their descendants and connections still occupied a great part of the district. The old house had been repaired and modernized when Richard Cumberland came back there to die. It was the only house in the village with a bathroom, running water, telephone and call-bells. Jerry looked at the house with something of the awe proper to a mausoleum, though he himself probably entered the house oftener than anybody else. Richard Cumberland had no friends; he denied his relatives; he saw nobody. Perhaps, Jerry thought, the old man might even then be looking at him through those white-curtained upper windows. Richard Cumberland had been a great figure in his time, a great lawyer, a great gambler, a man of good fortunes, as the French say; and now he sat paralyzed from the waist down, but alive from the neck up. In

imagination Jerry saw him as he had so often seen him, a grey grim formidable figure in his wheeled chair in the grey hospital-like room, spending his time in reading detective stories and drinking Irish whisky, waiting for the second death.

Old Lowlands dozed in the autumn sun. Jerry turned the truck around the corner, past the post office store, past the butcher shop. Two old men sat on a bench by the sidewalk. There was a faint clinking of tools from the blacksmith shop and garage; and the soft maple leaves continued to fall on the strip of cement sidewalk, lemon-coloured and spotted.

Jerry's central plant, his factory, his workshop was an old apple-evaporator building at the edge of the village. He had bought it for next to nothing, and had altered it from time to time. As he drove in he saw the light car that they used for yard work. Roll had come back, then; he must have had his dinner, and come down to the shop to work. You could always depend on Roll, though he wasn't always likeable.

There was a sound of movement inside the building. The place was still full of the rich, sweet odour of honey and wax from the supers of emptied combs. Roll was there, sorting the supers and piling them away. Iona Horton was there, too, lustrous and pretty, in a pink gingham dress, washing down the windows that were smeary and sticky with the droppings of live bees that had been brought in with the extracting combs. She probably had seen the car and come over from home because she knew Roll was here, Jerry thought. But Roll did not seem to be paying her the least attention, sorting out the supers of empty combs while Iona scrubbed the glass. He came out to the doorway.

'Got through at the Cumberland, Jerry? I finished all up at the Caledon. I see you've brought back the stuff. I thought I might make a start at the River yard, if you got back in time.'

He went out and looked at the load on the truck. Roll Diarmid was somewhere under twenty-five, and he had worked every summer with Jerry for the last five years. He wore a silk shirt and new Oxfords. He liked nice clothes when he was not doing dirty work. In the busy season he wore khaki and overalls. He was built on an athlete's proportions, heavy and powerful, and with a trifle of modelling his heavy handsome face would have had the stupid beauty of a Greek god. He was an expert bee-man. He was also a clever motor mechanic, and he kept Jerry's three cars in order at a minimum expense. In the winters he often worked as an assistant mechanic at the big

garage at Lowlands Station, where the highway was kept open and long-distance cars went through all winter.

He began to unload the truck, carrying the supers indoors with the zinc excluders and the honey-boards, leaving outside the stuff to be scrapped or repaired or repainted. He could be trusted to sort them out. Jerry went into the building, looked about, and sat down on an upturned hive-body and lighted his pipe.

He felt tired and languid again. For weeks during the heavy season he had never been really rested, and it struck him that he must be getting too old for this rushing job. He didn't know what he would have done without Roll. He looked at Iona, washing the windows. She had brought a bucket of hot water from her home across the road, and she was polishing the dirty glass bright with soap and coal oil. He hadn't asked her to do that, but he would keep count of her time and see that she was paid. He employed her a good deal during the honey season in the extracting plant, cleaning up the messy floors, helping to put up honey from the tanks into the tins, packing, crating. She had even learned to uncap honey and to tend the extractor.

Now the crop was all off, the honey was all shipped, save about a thousand pounds in small tins reserved for local sales. The great room was piled nearly full with the white supers of combs, emptied now of their honey. The work-bench was still littered with tools, stained smokers, veils, carpentering tools, hive tools, bits of wood and wire and zinc, dropped hurriedly, and never put away. The great white shape in a corner, corded up in canvas, was the extractor; just outside in the lean-to was the gasolene engine that drove it. The tanks, uncapping machinery, knives, heaters had been cleaned and stored away on the upper floors.

It had been a lot of work, but next year's living had been earned, and something more. Jerry felt tired and relaxed to the bone; it would take him a month to get rested. Worse, he felt the impending emptiness of the winter, when there was nothing to do but read and think. He was tired of reading; he was sick of enormous, aimless reading. And he was sick of his untrained, aimless thinking which nevertheless held him prisoner. He felt shut up in a transparent impenetrable membrane of thinking, a sphere of celluloid, that kept him from contact with reality. It gave at his touch, but it wouldn't break. It held him away from life, leaving him nothing but to live.

Other people did not seem to be like that, shut up in an elastic egg of thought, like a chicken that could not hatch. He considered Edgar Lloyd, the

reporter, the gambler, the cynical philosopher. Lloyd knew what he wanted. He meant to make a million on the market, and he despised the simple life.

'What'll you do when you've made it?' Jerry had asked him, with great curiosity.

'I don't know what I'll do,' Lloyd said. 'That's the point of having a million. You don't need to have a programme. Maybe I won't do anything. But I think I'll go to Seville or Palermo, somewhere where there's a decent climate, with a lot of French and German poetry and novels and French brandy and sit there till I rot.'

Jerry was hardened to the simple life, but the extreme simplicity of Lloyd's ideal staggered him.

'Come down with me to Old Lowlands and you can do all that on much less than a million dollars,' he said.

'I've no use for village existence. I want to be in contact with life,' Lloyd replied contemptuously.

And Jerry thought of Richard Cumberland, anaesthetizing what remained of his life with detective stories and whisky. If ever a man had been in contact with life it was old Richard.

Iona washing the windows in her pink sleeveless dress, looked round at Jerry. Her cropped dark hair curled moistly about her forehead. He liked to look at her, she was so wholesome and fresh. Heavy-haired, dark and sweet, she was like a big sunflower, like a dark peony, like a roll of fresh butter. She turned her head and smiled at him.

'Work's almost through,' she said.

She liked him, he knew, and he liked to look at her, but he wouldn't do more than look. She was Roll's girl. It was one of those rural attachments, something less than engagements, that might go on for years. Besides, he reflected, she probably considered him an old man. He had grey streaks in his hair; he was really almost old enough to be her father. She probably regarded him as an elderly uncle.

Roll finished unloading the truck and came in.

'I think I'll make a start at the River yard,' he said. 'There's three hours yet. Might as well be doing something.'

'Go ahead, Roll,' said Jerry, and in a few minutes he heard the jar and explosion of the truck's starting. Iona stopped washing, and looked through

the glass as the machine backed and turned and went past the window out of the gate.

'Don't do any more, Iona,' Jerry said wearily. 'No use washing those windows now. They'll be dirty again before spring.'

Iona murmured something about liking to leave things clean, but she ceased to work, and leaned back against the work-bench, littered with apiary tools.

'Well, it's all over,' she said. 'It hasn't been a bad season, has it?'

Hands behind her on the bench, she leaned back, looking at him with soft grey eyes, and her breasts swelled out of the pink gingham as she leaned back. She knew exactly how good a season it had been. She had helped to put up the honey, and she knew exactly how many tons had been shipped, though she didn't know the price it was bringing. Yes, it was all over; nothing now but to melt up and mould and ship the beeswax, and to lay away the truck and the cars, and to finish the packing. Then he would make his brew of hydromel for next year. He thought there were hardly fifty bottles left. Then there would be nothing but the emptiness of the winter.

Sweet and fresh, leaning back against the bench, Iona radiated light and heat. Jerry wondered vaguely why the whole was not equal to the sum of its parts, as mathematics said it should be. For this hour was not disagreeable, nor the last hour, nor yesterday, nor had there been any specially painful hours in the whole of the year; and yet things seemed to be getting so they would have to be changed radically to be endurable at all. So he wondered why the whole of life was not equal to the sum of its days.

Serene and sweet in her pink dress, Iona continued to look at him gently like a friendly animal. Probably she was thinking of Roll. Jerry, thinking of the winter, felt a dead wave of resentful anger.

'Don't do any more work, Iona,' he said sharply. 'At least, finish what you're doing, and then I'll settle with you. Have you kept track of your time?'

Iona's eyes turned sullen and insolent. She stared at him insolently, and then turned away to her bucket and continued to wash the windows.

Let her wash if she wanted to, Jerry thought. He felt that he ought to be doing something himself. He got up and stacked away a number of empty hives, cast some rubbish outdoors, went and looked into the lean-to where, besides the engine, there was an enormous litter of odd materials—pieces of lumber, of two-by-fours, pots of paint, car parts and pieces of wood and

metal—things that had been heaped there because they might some time be useful. All this stuff should be sorted out, most of it scrapped. He was looking at the pile of junk when he caught a glimpse of a figure passing the window, a woman's figure. He heard a knocking at the doorjamb, and then a voice.

'Is Mr. Mertens here?'

Somebody to buy a tin of honey, he thought, and turned to the door. But he saw at once that this was a stranger, not one of the village women. A tourist, probably. A young woman, or not so very young, dark and intelligent-looking—undoubtedly a motor tourist wanting to buy real country honey, he thought, taking in the smooth perfection of her brown costume. But her tan shoes were dusty, and there was no car at the gate.

'Yes,' he said. 'I'm Mertens. Won't you come in?'

She stepped inside the door. Her eyes fell on Iona in her pink gingham. She looked Iona up and down quickly, and then looked back at Jerry.

'What a sweet smell! So this is where you make your honey?'

She didn't want to buy honey after all, Jerry thought with disgust, but he said:

'Well, we hardly make it here. We're just putting things away after the season. If you're interested . . .'

'It's awfully interesting,' said the visitor. 'But really, you know, I only came in to find out—to ask you where Mr. Richard Cumberland lives.'

Jerry was amazed.

'Anybody could tell you that, if you had asked. It's just around the corner of the village.'

'I wanted to see him, you know. I came from Toronto this morning to see him.'

She wasn't really so self-possessed as she had seemed at first. She felt in her little leather bag for her handkerchief, took it out, touched her lips with it, and rolled it up tight in her fingers.

'Don't you know Mr. Cumberland doesn't see anybody?'

'I heard it was hard to see him. But I really want to see him. I think he'd see me. I'm his niece.'

Jerry almost laughed. Richard Cumberland must have had about a hundred nieces and nephews, to the third and fourth degree, and he never saw any of them.

'You are a Miss Cumberland, then?'

'No, my name is Lancaster—Edith Lancaster.' She felt again in her bag as if looking for a card and did not find it. 'I really must see him,' she said hurriedly. 'I was told—they told me that you were the only person who had the *entrée*. So I came to you.'

She poured out her story all at once. She had driven over from Lowlands Station and gone to old Richard's house. But there a young man had refused to let her in, or even to take up her name.

'That was Ernie. A cousin of yours,' said Jerry. 'He's paid to keep people out.'

But Ernie, perhaps relenting, had advised her to see Jerry Mertens. So she had gone to Jerry's house, finding no one there, and then had been directed to his workshop.

'I suppose I do see him more than anybody,' Jerry said. 'I often take him books. But I haven't the *entrée*. I wouldn't dare take anybody in with me. I wouldn't have the right, and it wouldn't be any use anyhow, for he wouldn't see anybody, not even a niece.'

He looked at her carefully. She wasn't so young—maybe near thirty. She looked dark and quick and intelligent. Her eyes were a bluish brown, a real pansy colour. She looked dark and throbbing, not radiant like Iona—and he looked around for Iona. But she was not in sight. She must have slipped up the stairway to the upper floor.

'I'm sorry, then,' said Miss Lancaster, quietly.

'It's a shame that you should come so far for nothing,' Jerry said, and he turned the matter over dubiously in his mind. 'I'll try what I can do, if you like. But there really isn't a ghost of a chance. Have you ever seen him?'

'Yes, years ago. Before his accident.'

'And I never saw him before it. I wish I had. Shall we go? I've a car here, but it's only a few yards.'

'I'd much rather walk.'

They walked up the road to the beginning of the sidewalk, and then on the sidewalk to the village corner. A big car was getting gas at the service

station. Two or three farmers' cars stood in front of the store. Fallen leaves covered the sidewalk. The village was all purple and blue and orange, the last flare of the year, dying down into the extinction of winter.

The shrubbery in front of the Cumberland house was clipped close. The lawn was mown. There were no flowers, everything was clipped short. The front door was never opened; cobwebs had grown thickly over its sill, and the downstairs windows were heavily blinded. Jerry went down the drive to the side door, and even before he could knock a tall weedy youth came out, fair-faced and pimply, wearing a white jacket like a waiter.

'Hello, Ernie!' Jerry said. 'This is Miss Lancaster. She's a niece of Mr. Cumberland. She was here just now, wasn't she? And you wouldn't let her in. I think she ought to see him.'

'Now you know just how it is, Mr. Mertens,' Jerry expostulated. 'You know I can't take anybody up. He won't see anybody. I durstn't risk it. If I made him mad . . .'

'I'm not asking you to take anybody up,' Jerry said in a bullying tone. He knew that you had to take a high hand with Ernie. 'I just want you to let Mr. Cumberland know that his niece is here. Take her card up. Good heavens! you take his letters up to him, don't you?'

Miss Lancaster had produced a visiting card from her bag, and a small sealed envelope, which Jerry handed to Ernie.

Ernie looked at them helplessly.

'I can't take this up to him, Mr. Mertens. He won't look at it.'

'How do you know he won't? You wouldn't keep his letters from him, would you? Miss Lancaster has never been here before. She's come all the way from Toronto to see him.'

Uneasy and tortured, Ernie fingered the papers.

'All right—I'll tell him that you insisted.' He went indoors and upstairs.

Jerry and Miss Lancaster were left standing on the side veranda. The gravel drive was raked smooth, though cars seldom entered it. Four apple trees laden with fruit bent over it. Beyond was a row of cherry trees next the fence, a close board fence with a large hole broken in it, communicating with the next yard, where the Stratfords lived. At the rear end of the house was the kitchen. The door opened slightly and a head came out, a sallow face capped with coarse black hair. The oblique eyes surveyed them, then withdrew.

It was Ah Fong, the Chinese cook, Jerry explained. The only Chinese cook, probably, in the whole township, and an object of almost superstitious interest to the village.

'And he lives here alone, with only this cook and this boy?'

Jerry explained in an undertone that Richard had chosen out Ernie from all his nephews, nobody knew why. He had sent the boy to the city for an intensive training in valeting, nursing, and the correct serving of meals. Ernie got $20 a week, and if he stayed with Richard to his death, Ernie would inherit the house and the home farm, worth a good $10,000. If he failed to give satisfaction he would get nothing, and was liable to discharge at any moment. Probably it wasn't an easy job. Old Richard wouldn't be an easy master.

'He's only to get the farm? But Uncle Richard must be a very rich man?'

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. He had heard that matter discussed interminably in the village.

'They say so. I know nothing at all about it . . .'

Ernie came out to the veranda again.

'He says for you to write to him.'

'He won't see Miss Lancaster?'

'Sure he won't see her,' said Ernie triumphantly. 'I told you he wouldn't see her. He said, "Tell her to write to me." And he says to you,' turning to Jerry, 'that he wants you to bring him them books, if you've got them.'

'I'll bring them later this afternoon.'

Jerry walked away with Miss Lancaster.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I know you didn't want to do it, and it put you in an awkward position.'

'But I didn't do anything at all and nobody was hurt.'

In his heart he knew that he could have insisted on taking Miss Lancaster up, and both Ernie and old Richard would have put up with it. He felt half guilty for not having done it.

'In fact, I hardly really hoped to see him,' she said. 'Now I'll go back to town.'

'How did you get here from the station?'

‘I came over with the mail carrier. I suppose I can get a taxi back.’

‘There aren’t any taxis in Old Lowlands. You might get a car at the garage—but no, I’ll drive you back. It’ll be over an hour though, before there’s a train for Toronto.’

‘I can wait at the station.’

‘There’s no comfortable place there to wait. You might, if you would like to . . .’ he hesitated, ‘wait at my house, you know. There’ll be nobody there. I could give you something to read, or a cup of tea, if you’d like it.’

‘Thank you,’ she said sedately. ‘I don’t think I care about any tea. You’re busy at your workshop. I might wait there a little, mightn’t I? I really like to see how you do your honey.’

They turned down from the village corner.

‘What a beautiful place!’ Edith Lancaster said.

‘Yes,’ Jerry thought, and he attempted to say in part what he thought. It was beautiful in the autumn, like red and blue flames dying down into the grey and white of winter. Then in the spring it was hideous, all mud and slime and frost, piles of ashes and tin cans and old newspapers and dung, all the sediment of the winter, gradually washed away by rain and wind; and then the spring covering up all the debris with green and pink; and then the summer when all the village was dusty green and smothered with flowering weeds, concentrating down into the red and orange and blue of autumn, dying down into the grey emptiness of winter. Of course it was beautiful, if you looked at it that way. But Jerry said that he had no use for beauty.

When they reached the shop again he looked about for Iona, but she was not in the building; she must have gone home. Jerry showed Miss Lancaster the extracting plant, and how they uncapped the full honeycombs and sent them through the machine and melted the wax cappings, and how the honey was put up in tanks, and then in smaller containers for shipment. He tried to tell her how the large crops were secured, and how the bees were induced to store six times as much honey as their natural course of life would require. She listened with an appearance of great interest, but Jerry knew from previous experiences, that she did not understand a word of it.

‘And you like it—this sort of life?’ she said, sitting in the broken-backed chair that Jerry used when he sometimes rested.

‘No, I don’t like it at all,’ Jerry said, after some consideration. ‘It’s a horrible life.’

‘You’re a pessimist, then?’

‘No, I’m an optimist. I think there must be somewhere a much finer sort of life than I’ve ever got at yet.’ He looked at Miss Lancaster leaning back in the chair, dark and soft, with eyes that seemed penetrating—he couldn’t tell how deep.

‘I know all about you,’ she said presently. ‘Edgar Lloyd has told me all about you.’

‘You know Edgar Lloyd?’

‘Everybody knows Edgar Lloyd.’

Jerry was amazed. Lloyd was a woman hater, denying them even the rudiments of intelligence. He knew no women. Further, Lloyd despised Jerry and his whole manner of life.

‘I wonder what Lloyd told you?’

‘He told me a good deal. He said that he would rather talk with you than with any man he knows.’

Jerry was still further staggered. Lloyd would talk interminably to anybody about anything; he talked about the theory of art to stockbrokers, and about the short interest in steel to clergymen. It was news that he cared for his audience, or that he was even more than half-conscious of it. Lloyd talked solely to relieve his own mind.

‘He told me about your writing.’

‘I don’t write,’ said Jerry, annoyed.

‘I think you are one of those writers who think too little of themselves.’

‘There are no such writers,’ Jerry said, now really annoyed. ‘I’m no writer. I’m a bee-man.’

‘And he showed me one of your books—*Tiger Lily*.’

‘Did you read it?’

‘No. I couldn’t.’

Jerry laughed. He was amazed that Lloyd should have spoken of him, should have thought of him, should have possessed his book. Lloyd’s image suddenly filled his mind warmly, and he wished he could see him. Last August Lloyd had come down to Old Lowlands for a week-end, without any warning, bringing several books of new poetry and three bottles of whisky.

For three days and two nights they had done nothing but absorb the poetry, which was not of much account, and the whisky, and more than two dozen quarts of Jerry's mead. It put the apiary work back a good week, for it took Jerry three days to recover.

'Has he shown you any of his translations of French poets?'

'No. What time is it?'

Jerry looked to see.

'Just good time to catch the train. We'll drive over.'

He had thought of taking his closed car from his house garage, but the yard touring-car which Roll had left was good enough. Anything was good enough for that short distance, and he felt irritated and savage, he hardly knew why.

Edith continued to talk softly as they drove. She lived in Toronto; she was a librarian at one of the branches of the public library; but Jerry hardly listened to her talk. He rattled over the three miles in a few minutes. Lowlands Station, the new Lowlands appeared. For a small town, it was the neatest and most thriving in western Ontario. Its main street was paved, and formed in fact part of the great international motor highway. There were many great garages and red service stations, and all the curb was lined with parked cars. There were lawyers, doctors, dentists, chain stores, a public library, and a movie theatre where they got the latest films almost as soon as in St. Stephens. Flowers bloomed about the neat brick houses, and all the lawns were smoothly trimmed, and well-dressed people promenaded the sidewalks. There was nothing ugly anywhere in Lowlands Station, nor anything lovely. There were no very rich, no very poor people, no crime, no drunkenness, no prostitution, no religion, no infidelity, no vice, no virtue. There was never any disorder or subversive thinking; there was no thinking of any sort. As nearly as could be attained, it was like the kingdom of heaven. It was Jerry's railway shipping point, and he could shop better there; but he went there as little as possible, preferring Old Lowlands, the dissolute village, melting slowly back into the soil.

They were nicely in time for the train, and had only a few minutes to wait.

'You're going to see him this afternoon?' she asked.

'Yes, I have a package of books for him. I should have taken them yesterday.'

‘I’m going to see him, you know. I’ll come back. Next time I’ll get in.’

‘I hope so. Let me know when you’re coming, and I’ll meet your train.’

She looked at him, smiling softly.

‘You come up to town sometimes, don’t you? Come in and see me at my library. Perhaps there’ll be something there to interest you—some books.’

He let her go with irritation, with relief. He drove back to Old Lowlands, automatically noting as he passed the condition of the clover. Astonishing that Lloyd should have thought of him, he thought. He drove down to his own house, to get old Richard’s books, which he should have delivered yesterday.

His house was a grey rough-cast cottage at the edge of the village, with nearly half an acre of land and a small orchard. This was where he had lived alone, through these six years that had passed so swiftly and unprofitably. This was where he had established his first bee-yard, expecting it to lead to great things. He had bought the property cheaply, and could sell it now for more than he had paid, though he had depreciated it with his improvements, cutting three of the ground-floor rooms into one large one.

He opened the door, never locked, and entered this large room. It was grey-walled, hung with a number of pictures that had been given him by painters he had known when he was a newspaper man. The brown-painted bookshelves which he had built himself held several hundred books. English books and yellow French books, which had once constituted the very food of his life; but lately he had ceased to care for them. He had outgrown them, or else fallen behind them. There was a great table on trestles which he had also built himself, holding a typewriter and a litter of dusty papers. There was a large padded chair, several hard chairs, another table, a gramophone, a huge coal stove, cold now, a litter of newspapers on the floor. Jerry passed through this room, through the adjoining kitchen, and went out by the back door.

The rear of the house was surrounded with flowers. Jerry liked flowers, but he had neither the skill nor the time to care for them, so he planted flowers that could take care of themselves, hollyhocks, sunflowers, poppies, goldenglow, nasturtiums. Frost had not yet touched them, and they were in their late summer splendour. Jerry passed through without looking at them, and went to the gate in the fence that split the yard in two. This fence was covered heavily with grape vines, now laden with fruit. They were small blue sour grapes, but they made good wine; and Jerry usually pressed out ten

gallons of juice every autumn. Opening the gate, he looked into the home bee-yard.

There were forty-six colonies here among the apple trees. This was the original yard which he had established with such expectations of a new and generous and fruitful life, and it had ended in no more than mere living, an existence enclosed in an unbreakable eggshell of thought, removed from life.

This would be the next yard to be packed. Jerry looked it over expertly, counted the number of winter cases and the amount of packing material. He would have to have a load of planer shavings, and would have to send Roll to Lowlands Station for it. The bees were flying slowly, gently, the winter force conserving their energies to live through the winter.

He went back to the house, got out the express package and unwrapped Richard Cumberland's books. There were three detective stories in English, two in French in grey paper covers, one in German, and two in what might be Dutch or Danish—he did not know. But all languages seemed alike to old Richard, and Jerry would have a chance to look over them when Richard had read them. He piled them together, and swept together some of the papers on the typewriter table. There were old letters, old envelopes, the notes for an article he was going to write for an apicultural journal—all the debris of the summer which he had not had time to put away.

Packets of manuscript in rubber bands were in a set of shelves at the back of the table. He had not looked at them for months, for a year. Looking at them, he thought again of Edith Lancaster, with irritation, with regret. She was so dark, so soft, so like a flower, like a slightly faded pansy, like a slightly crushed flower; and she must be intelligent, since she hadn't been able to read his book.

He pulled out a sheaf of the typewritten papers and shuffled over the dusty sheets, glancing at what came to his eyes:

> *The deep sky was ever blue and shining like a hollow shell, without cloud and without illusion; and Earth had given over her dreaming and her mystery of fire—*

Jerry read it, able to smile now, without illusion. He remembered how he had written it, in one of those first winters at Old Lowlands, a bitter winter. The blizzard rattled the windows and the big stove glowed red-hot, while he wrote his poetical prose, playing Strauss and Beethoven on the gramophone, and drinking the harsh Lake Erie wine.

That had been a good winter, one of the best times he had ever had in his life, because he thought he was doing something fine, something of importance. He knew better now. Those prose poems were rather good, rather ingenious, but they didn't mean anything. He thought of Keats' dictum with contempt. Keats didn't know anything. He thought of the equation that, according to the physicists, expresses the whole meaning of the universe:

$$qp - pq = \frac{(V - 1)h}{2\pi}$$

Of course it depended on the values you assigned to p and q. They were arbitrary values; there were no such things as absolute values. But the physicists were showing a tendency to recoil from the positive into metaphysics again. Jerry couldn't follow them there. A thing was demonstrable or it wasn't; and if it wasn't you should be able to say why it wasn't; and if you couldn't do that you should be able to say why you couldn't. Then you would get somewhere, or anyhow find out where you were standing. His eye fell again on the dusty script:

> *—and day and night flowed over with an equal rhythm, without illusion and without regret.*

It didn't mean anything at all.

> *—and it seemed to me that life might flow with an equal rhythm, without regret and without return. Daphne walked beside me in the orchard . . .*

With an excited, an extravagant value given to p and q there was no saying what sort of an equation you might make out of life. He put the detective stories in his car and went to take them to old Richard.

He drove up the gravelled way and stopped at the side door, where he had come with Edith. A girl in a pale green dress came suddenly out of the house and fled toward the hole in the back fence.

'Hello Louie!' Jerry called.

She turned her head to him with a wide, jovial grin, but didn't stop, diving through the fence. Jerry had known Louie Stratford for years, for six years, from a little dark unruly child. Six wasted years, he thought. But not wasted for Louie, now plump and nubile, all silk stockings and flimsy dress, with big rolling eyes, swelling curves, a big Kewpie doll, without any ideas nor any need of any. She grinned broadly at Jerry, seductively, as she disappeared through the fence into her own premises.

'Hello Ernie! I've brought the books for your uncle.'

Ernie had lounged out of the house in his white coat, looking as if he had no idea that Louie had just been there.

'All right, Mr. Mertens. I guess he's expecting you.'

Ernie seemed to have forgotten Miss Lancaster's visit. Jerry, a little uncertain, did not speak of it either, but took the parcel of books from his car.

'How is he to-day, Ernie?'

'Just about the same as ever. Seems like he never gets any better or any worse,' said Ernie dispiritedly.

They both glanced at the white-curtained windows above. Up there sat old Richard Cumberland, who had been a great man in his day. Now, dead from the waist down, he sat in a wheeled chair, spending his days in reading crime stories, his evenings in drinking Irish whisky, and his nights—God only knew what nights such a man could spend. Perhaps he slept like a drunken baby.

'What does he do all day, Ernie? When he's alone?'

'I dunno. I don't go in unless he rings. Mostly he reads. Sometimes he just sits and looks out of the window. But there ain't much to see, is there?'

Beyond the dusty spruces the road lay dusty and empty, bluish amber in the autumn. What was it in winter? There wasn't much to see, but that didn't matter, for old Richard had already seen everything worth seeing.

'What did the old coon want to go flying for, at his age? Why, he must be close on seventy?' the village people said when they heard of the airplane accident.

But they didn't know Richard Cumberland. He liked to go high and fast. He always took the air service when he could, and he had never been in an

accident before. But this time he was the only passenger who came out of the crash alive—if you could call that living.

'All right, Ernie. I'll go up,' Jerry said.

Carrying the books, he went through the side door and forward along the hall to the stairs. The whole lower part of the house smelt closed-up, dusty and disused. At the head of the stairs he tapped at the door. He heard a sort of grunt from within, and he entered the room.

The room was just as usual, a great room made of almost the whole upper floor of the house, with a polished floor, no rugs, hardly any furniture, grey walls with no pictures on them, like a severe sort of hospital. A low wood fire burned in the grate. There was a small silver clock on the mantel. There were no books in the room, hardly anything but two chairs and a desk, built high to accommodate Richard's high wheeled chair.

Richard Cumberland sat in the wheeled chair, dressed as always in a freshly-pressed grey suit, with a fresh collar and shining shoes. He looked heavy, stocky and still formidable. His iron grey hair was still thick. His square face was pouchy and lined and unhealthy; his eyes were dead. He looked—and this was the fact—as if death were upon him. But he looked at Jerry out of those dead eyes with a glance that was still profound and penetrating.

'Good afternoon, Mertens.'

He seemed, like Ernie, to have forgotten his niece's visit. Probably he had paid no attention to it.

'I've brought you the last lot of books, sir. I hope there's something good.'

Richard looked at the pile of crime stories placed on his desk with the air of a gourmet inspecting a dubious dish. There wasn't much chance that they would be any good. Jerry looked at him with intense curiosity, with the awe that he always felt on approaching this magnificent ruin.

For more than two years now Jerry had been bringing him detective stories, and sitting with him for an hour or two a week. Richard had a standing order with Toronto and New York booksellers for the best new crime stories in any language. They came to Jerry's address, and he carried them to old Richard who read them, without ever making any comment on them whatever, but returned the books to Jerry, who read some of them in such languages as he could make out. Afterwards he passed them to the

public library at Lowlands Station, which was rapidly accumulating the finest collection of criminal literature in the world.

During the last two years Jerry had sat and talked with old Richard almost weekly, with long interpolated silences, with nothing to say, or things that could not be said. Drunkard as he was, he never offered Jerry a drink, only an invariable cigar. They talked together like strangers, of local affairs, of the political or business situation, or with a little logic-chopping philosophy. Richard liked to split a hair into eight pieces. They never came close together, and yet Jerry had come to feel more kinship with the old lawyer than with anybody he knew.

Richard was the only one of the Cumberlands who had ever attained any eminence. He had taken his law course in Toronto, but almost immediately had gone to Detroit and qualified for practice at the Michigan bar. He was always for the defence, and it became known that a case was as good as gained if Richard Cumberland was for it. Juries prepared themselves to be hypnotized even before he spoke. He would defend a gangster whom he knew to be guilty and get him off, out of sheer exhibitionism of technique, not expecting to be paid anything; and in a serious way, charging enormous fees, he took the cases of millionaire murderers, of thieving bank presidents, using the law as a fencer uses a sword. More than any judge, he held the powers of life and death, and he used them lightly, believing in nothing, as a duellist uses his sword.

All that, however, was a long time ago. Even his reputation was almost forgotten. Dead, to all practical purposes, he sat there in Old Lowlands; and Jerry always listened to him with a strained expectation. He was so much more dead than alive that he seemed always likely to speak with something of the authority of the other world. But he never did.

‘This Dutch book looks good,’ said Richard, who had been sniffing at the pile of books. ‘Curious thing, that the northern European nations, the Dutch and Swedes and Germans, where they have the least crime, are able to write the best crime stories. No good murder story has ever come out of Chicago, that I know of.’

‘The French,’ Jerry suggested.

‘Sometimes—sometimes,’ Richard admitted. ‘With their natural instinct for logic the French ought to write the best detective stories of all. For a detective story is merely a crossword puzzle, a chess problem. But they almost always drag in a sexual interest, and when they introduce a woman they are lost. The French are the most sentimental people in Europe, but, by

an instinct of self-preservation, they have cut off a quite large area of human life which they bar entirely to sentiment of any sort. We call it the erotic.'

Richard leaned back in his chair, looking weary. He really looked very old. Twice a month a specialist came from town to see him, but it is improbable that he ever followed any of the specialist's directions.

'Cigars on the mantel,' he said curtly.

Long silences always punctuated Jerry's visits in this room. They had nothing to say to one another, yet Jerry had come to feel that there was somehow a sort of communion.

'Why don't you write a novel, Mertens?'

'I'm not a writer. I'm a bee-man.'

'You haven't always been a bee-man.'

'No, I was a newspaper man for a while. But I wasn't any good at it.'

'Are you always going to be a bee-man?'

'Apparently so.'

Richard looked at him with dead, penetrating eyes.

'Have you seen the Howard-Elliott offer?'

Of course Jerry had seen it. Everybody had seen it, who ever looked at the Sunday literary supplements. The Howard-Elliott company, an energetic English publishing concern with branches in New York and everywhere else, had offered a cash prize of $5,000 for the best novel dealing with rural life, preferably in the British dominions. Besides the prize, the winning novel would draw 15 per cent royalty on all sales, and as the sales were sure to be large, the total reward would probably amount to much over $10,000. There was a time when Jerry would have attempted it. But now he knew himself better.

'I couldn't write a novel,' he said. 'If I could, I wouldn't want to write a rural novel. And if I did write a rural novel I wouldn't want to write it about this place, and this is the only rural place I know anything about.'

Richard still said nothing, gazing at him with dead, sarcastic eyes. Jerry was astonished, for this was the first time that the old lawyer had ever shown any interest in Jerry's doings, or even any apparent knowledge that Jerry existed at all outside this room.

‘What I mean is,’ said Jerry, nettled by that dead gaze, ‘that I can’t find any quality to the life here. No particular good or evil quality—no flavour at all. Of course the people here are good-natured and easy-going. I like them. But this isn’t really rural life. These people aren’t farmers. They farm, of course. They’ve always farmed; they know nothing else to do. But they aren’t rooted to the soil, like a real peasant. The boys leave the farm and get jobs in Toronto or Detroit in the motor shops or the chain stores. The parents would do the same if they could get jobs. They don’t love the land. They don’t feel any kinship with the soil nor with the animals. Their pleasure is to drive into St. Stephen’s of a Saturday night and go to the movies.’

‘Why not?’ said old Richard.

‘Of course,’ said Jerry, ‘the peasant at all times would have liked to do such things if he could. But he couldn’t, and so he became a peasant and developed a distinctive peasant culture. Our farmers never developed any sort of culture and never will.

‘Partly, perhaps,’ Jerry went on, warming to the subject which he had turned over in his mind a great deal, ‘partly it’s due to the original conditions of life hereabouts. The early pioneers in the Great Lakes region had few exciting adventures. There were hardly ever any hostile Indians, and no very dangerous wild animals. They worked tremendously hard, of course, cutting down trees and pulling up stumps, so hard that they may have weakened all their subsequent stock; but that was only a labourer’s labour. They suffered hardships, and they died of exposure and unknown infections and dirt diseases, but that was only a sort of slum mortality. They lost their minds in the woods, they lost their souls. Most of these settlers were Scotch and Irish, brimful of traditions and superstitions, and they lost them all. There are no traditions around the Great Lakes. There aren’t any stories of romance or outrage. There isn’t a ghost or a haunted house that I know of within a hundred miles. These people no longer have imagination enough to be superstitious.

‘You are about to say,’ continued Jerry, exasperated at old Richard’s sarcastic silence, ‘that there’s rich humanity everywhere if one has the wit to see it. But my point is that the richness of humanity has been all squeezed out of rural life in eastern America. Perhaps the pioneers worked so excessively that they devitalized all their descendants. They fought and drank. Now we have had to close the saloons; our people can’t stand liquor. There aren’t any more barn dances or shouting revivals or sleighing frolics. The idea now of a good time is to motor into town or to Lowlands Station and eat ice-cream and go to the show. They don’t know how to amuse

themselves. These expensive amusements are ruining them. The farmer is coming to think, naturally and rightly, that he ought to get as much comfort and amusement per hour of work as the town mechanic. But the business won't stand it. So the young are leaving the farms, and the farms are steadily going broke. The country is going back to grass, back to pasture, out of cultivation. I can't see any help for it. If we had a real farmer class, who would accept a different state of mind from the townsman, a different standard for everything, the situation might be saved. But we are here about equidistant from Detroit, Toronto, and Buffalo. The people read the Sunday newspapers of all these cities, get their goods through the mail-order, get the town life through the radio, and are proud of knowing the newest Broadway, slang. This isn't a rural state. It's suburban, hesitating between two worlds.'

Jerry thought of Roll Diarmid, with his silk shirt and new Oxfords. He knew all the latest slang and the faces and histories of all the movie actresses; and Jerry thought of Lowlands Station growing into a live town, and of the old village, melting slowly back into the primeval slime.

'You seem to be describing an extraordinarily novel and interesting state of things,' said old Richard coldly.

'Of course it's novel; there has never been anything of the sort before. It may be interesting, but it doesn't interest me,' Jerry returned.

'You're seeing it too close and you've been looking at it too long. Go away and come back, and you'll be surprised.'

'Where—to Detroit? To Toronto?'

'No, I mean a change. Go to Munich.'

'Couldn't afford it.'

'What would you do if you had an independent income?' Richard asked abruptly, after a silence.

Was the old man going to offer to endow him? Jerry thought with amusement; and Edgar Lloyd's programme came to his mind.

'I don't know what I'd do,' he said, quoting. 'Very likely I wouldn't do anything at all. That's the point of having an income—you don't have to have a programme.'

Suppose Richard were to offer him $5,000 a year for life, which probably he could well afford to do! Jerry actually couldn't at the moment think of anything better than Lloyd's programme of the simple life. But the

old lawyer studied him for some seconds with his corpse-like penetrating eyes, and turned away to look at the pile of detective stories.

'If you see Ernie as you go out, tell him to come up,' he said.

Jerry went out, as usual without any leavetaking, and gave Ernie the message.

Left alone, Richard Cumberland sat without moving, without looking again at the detective stories. He heard Jerry's car drive away. The silver clock on the mantel said ten minutes to five, and he never drank before five o'clock. He thought of Jerry without affection, without respect, without contempt. Young Mertens was one of those men a little too good for their immediate station, but not quite good enough for anything else. For a moment he had really had the idea of providing Jerry with an income for a year or two, out of pure experimental interest, just to see what he would do with it. He did really take an interest in Jerry Mertens, he hardly knew why, except that for some years Jerry had constituted almost his whole contact with human life. What would he do with a year of endowed leisure? Would he write a couple of crime stories? Though he had not mentioned it, Richard had read Jerry's *Tiger Lily*, and thought it as good as the average sensational novel but no better. You had to be a lot better to be any good at all, and if Jerry had ever been going to do anything he would have done something long before this. Suppose you put him in Vienna or Biarritz—no, Old Lowlands was just as good for him.

As the clock-hand touched the hour, Ernie appeared in the room, soft on felt shoes, carrying a tray with an unopened bottle of Irish whisky, a siphon of soda, a plate of caviare sandwiches. With a bartender's skill he turned the bottle upside-down, shook it, drew the cork, and poured a good two inches of whisky into the tumbler, filling it from the siphon.

'All right, sir? Dinner at seven, as usual? Very good, sir.'

'God damn you, Ernie! Don't say "sir" so much.'

'Sorry, sir. I'll try to remember.'

Richard Cumberland sipped his drink. This was the moment he looked forward to throughout the day, throughout the night—this moment of the first drink. The pain of life dulled under the anaesthetic.

Ernie had left the room. Richard despised his nephew with all his heart, and that was partly why he had selected him to be his valet, his nurse, his body-servant. Ernie was strong and willing, like a slave, willing to be trampled on; and whenever Richard Cumberland found anybody willing to

be trampled on he trampled on him, knowing that that was right and fit. And Ernie would be well paid for it.

He swallowed his drink with a dying sigh of relief. His will could now let go. He poured another, and sipped it more slowly. A philosopher, he thought, might have called him the ideally happy man. He had no troubles whatever; he enjoyed the immunity of the dead. He had no troubles either financial or domestic, and his health gave him no concern whatever. All that ever troubled him was the spectre of himself, that still unlaid ghost of Richard Cumberland, the great lawyer, the great gambler, the man whom women had loved.

He finished the drink and poured another dose of the sharp smoky spirit. That card, that note sent up to-day had disturbed him a little—not much. People thought him rich. He had really been rich at times. Wealthy clients had given him tips on the market. Once, he remembered, he had had a bank balance of $800,000. But it hadn't lasted; he had put it back into the game again. He ought to have made more money, in the wild bear markets he had seen. For he was always bearish, he always thought that everything was going to the bad, that things were as bad as possible and certain to get worse. For that was his experience of life. But he hadn't backed his judgment when he should. Then for a long time Rachel had taken his mind off the market, off his legal work, off everything, and had put it into what was a ghost now, a phantom, nothing realizable, only pain.

Everybody thought he was a rich man. He smiled thinly; he knew well what Old Lowlands was thinking. When he gathered himself together after his accident he found that he had rather less than $150,000. With the greater part of that sum he had bought an annuity for life, and as his expectation of life was exceedingly small he was able to get excellent terms. Most of the rest was set aside for a particular purpose. Ernie would get the home farm and the old house and any current cash. His will had long been properly drawn up and placed in security.

Well, Rachael's daughter would have all she reasonably needed. As the smoky spirit penetrated his brain he attained the liberation he had awaited through the whole twenty-four hours. Strange things began to boil up from his subconsciousness. He dared now to remember himself, to think of Richard Cumberland who had been a great man in his day. Crowded court-rooms, men's lives had hung on his words. It had been a game with him, for it did not really matter to him whether the man was hanged or set free. But he had robbed the gallows of more men than anybody living, they said; and this was a satisfaction to him, for he had no belief whatever in human

justice. He had cleared many guilty embezzlers, and had no scruples about it; he had cleared bandits and bank robbers and murderers, and was glad of it, for any man who had the nerve to make war on society ought to be given a sporting chance.

It had been a great game, yet he wasn't really interested in it. He couldn't imagine why he had taken up the law. But it was a game that he could play well, though he didn't take it seriously. He had had no sort of life, he thought. He had hardly ever done the things he really wanted to do, except when he wrote his little book on the Dutch dramatists. He had always been interested in the theatre; and it occurred to him that perhaps, after all, he had always been theatrical himself, playing in a cast that included a real murderer and a real hangman.

Well, he would never again see that multitude of faces turned toward him with hope or terror; he would never again have that sensation of holding a man's life in the hollow of his hand. He would never fly again; he would never know women again, nor would he wish to. Ernie came in, silent on soft shoes, carrying a tray.

'Dinner, sir. Seven o'clock.'

He placed a wide polished board across the arms of Richard's chair, spread a cloth, and placed a plate of asparagus soup.

'Take it away,' said Richard. 'What's Fong thinking of? You know I never eat thick soup. What else have you got?'

'Poulet en casserole, sir. Mashed potatoes, creamed carrots. Then a salad.'

'I don't want it.'

'Sorry, sir. It's what you ordered this forenoon.'

'Bring me some chicken and the other stuff. No salad.'

Ernie brought them, lightly, deftly, and Richard ate. It was a pity to put heavy stuff into one's stomach, he thought, into one's soul. Spirits were better. Still it seemed necessary to eat. Richard ate the chicken, and afterwards Ernie brought an apple meringue.

'Take it away.'

Ernie brought in a coffee-pot, and placed it on an electric plate to keep it hot. He set out a bottle of cognac and a small glass. Whatever his faults,

Richard thought, Ernie had the gift of making good coffee, and he poured and sipped the black dose, strong almost as the forty-year brandy.

Whisky was a depressing sort of liquor after all, he thought, drinking the cognac. His inside felt warmer now, toned up and strengthened, and he even dared to think calmly of Rachel Stevens. She would have had no future, she was coming to nothing—that was what he told himself. If he had not picked her up in Detroit she never would have come to anything. She would have played one-night stands all over the country, and would probably have married the leading man. But it seemed to him that she had genius. She had a little of Jewish blood, and it seemed to him that she might turn out a second great Rachel, a second Bernhardt, for she was only a child and had never had any proper training; she had nothing but her native fire. He was willing to pay for the training. He took her out of her stock company and sent her to New York, and for a year he went over almost monthly to see her. She did well at the dramatic school; she justified his expectations. He took her to Europe for a whole summer, letting his law practise go by the board. And then—she had been pushed too fast, he supposed—she was put into a metropolitan part that was too much for her; and she had failed, or at any rate had not done as well as was expected of her; and that had broken her heart. And then, later, by some mismanagement, she had had a baby, and she thought it had spoiled her beauty. And then the drowning accident on the Long Island shore—he never knew whether that had been an accident or not.

He never allowed himself to think of it except in such alcoholized hours as this, when he dared to remember Rachel as she had been, all fire and sweetness, soft and dark, like a dark pansy with a heart of gold and fire.

He filled the liqueur glass and emptied it, and filled it again. Jerry was no good, he thought; he would never come to anything. He might be a fourth-rate writer, but the world was full of fourth-rate writers. He was best as a bee-man. Still, he ought to be given a chance. He ought to go away for a year, to Vienna, to Mexico, to Shanghai. Yet Richard didn't want him to go, for Jerry's visits had become his sole connection with human life.

But he didn't want any connection with human life; he had had more than enough of human life. Rachel's daughter was alive, but he hadn't seen her since she was a child, and he didn't want to see her now. For a long time he had provided her with $500 a year, which he had later increased to $1000, and then to a little more, though he understood that she had some profession by which she could earn a living. He didn't want to see her. She would have to write to him. And yet he knew that he would have to see her, though he

dreaded it. For she might remind him of her mother, or she might not, and he didn't know which would be worse.

Strange things boiled up from Richard's suppressed memories as he sat emptying and refilling the tiny glass. Days in crowded court-rooms, nights of witty, drunken dinners with artists and judges and governors, days when he watched the flowing ticker tape, winning a thousand dollars a minute, days when he flew through the high air, nights when innumerable women had caressed him, and he had almost loved some of them, days and nights with Rachel Stevens when it had been all fire and sweetness. And ashes at the last, and a burying-ground.

In some strange way he felt that it was no burying-ground. Dizzily he thought of Rachel's daughter, whom he dreaded to see. He felt dizzy and strong. He was alive, and he had more money than he knew what to do with; he had an illusion of vitality. 'I will arise and go now,' he thought, remembering something that he had read in the days when he used to read verse. But when he tried to arise he found himself paralysed. His feet were paralysed; his legs were dead. He looked at the silver clock on the mantel, and its hands seemed to swing dizzily. He could not tell what time it was. He wheeled his chair to the desk and pressed the electric call.

Ernie came immediately, silent on soft shoes.

'I'll go to bed,' Richard said with some difficulty.

Ernie wheeled him through the door into his bedroom, took off his coat and shoes and collar. He washed his face and hands and presented a chamber-pot. Then with great skill and muscular strength he undressed him completely, got him into pyjamas and laid him on the sheets.

Placed thus prone, Richard felt discomforted. The walls swerved violently around him. He lifted his head a little and vomited over the side of the bed.

'God damn you, Ernie!' he said weakly, lying back again.

Quickly Ernie sponged up the mess. He wiped Richard's face, and standing at the head of the bed he looked down on his charge with calm contempt.

'Anything else, sir?'

Richard did not answer, lying with closed eyes. He felt weak, weak and empty, as if he were about to die. But he was used to feeling like that, and thought he would be able to sleep now. After a moment, Ernie turned out the

light and left the bedroom. In the large room he screened the fire, gathered up the bottle, the coffee things, the tray, turned out the light and went downstairs.

The kitchen was empty. A line of light showed under Ah Fong's door, but the Chinaman would not come out again, and anyhow he and Ernie were tacit allies.

Ernie poured himself a drink of cognac and locked up the bottle. Then he went out to the rear of the house. It was a clear mellow night, a little frost in the air, autumnal, but with something of the thrill of spring. He went to the broken fence at the rear of the yard and tapped gently on the boards.

'Louie! O Louie!' he called softly.

Like a pale moth in the darkness, the green dress flitted through the hole in the fence.

II

That year the autumn drew out long and late. Warm slow rains fell. The pastures lasted green, and there were mushrooms in the fields to the end of October. Even dandelions began to bloom again, scattered golden spots attracting the bees, though there was no honey now in their blossoms. The autumn-sown wheat grew rich and rank, and the clover grew and spread, presaging a good honey crop for the next year.

The bees were all packed for winter now, and Roll had gone to take a winter job at the big garage at Lowlands Station. Jerry had melted up his beeswax and shipped four hundred pounds of it. He had pressed his wine, and brewed his next year's supply of mead, maturing it in barrels, to be bottled later in the winter. The truck was laid up now, and the apiary car, leaving only the coupé that he used for his personal driving.

Once more Jerry tried to adjust himself to the emptiness of the off season. It seemed unnatural not to be out early in the car, out all day at the yards, handling heavy weights in the heat. But there was nothing any more to do. On mild days he worked a little at the shop, repairing and painting the outfit, but it grew too cold for that. He drove around to all the bee-yards looking them over, adjusting the entrances to the small size needed for winter. The sheltering woods were leafless and thin now, and the yards looked cold and exposed, with rarely a bee flying from the winter cases.

Once Jerry had expected this to be the beginning of the live season, of the real season, when he could think and write and not be swamped with physical fatigue. So he had thought, and so he had read, and so he had endeavoured to write. He had always felt that if he could have leisure, quiet, freedom from financial worry, he could do something noteworthy, something great. Now he had all that he could have desired—entire solitude, entire leisure for six months, enough money to see him through till next season, and beyond that. But now he discovered that he could not write and did not even know how to think.

During his first winter at Old Lowlands he wrote fifty pages of a novel, and then destroyed it. He tried to think of another, without success. Unfortunately, he could always tell a poor thing when he saw it. He was determined not to write any more of the sensational thrillers with which he had started, like *Tiger Lily*. He would do something better, or nothing at all.

The winter went by with surprising rapidity, and the spring came, and the bee season opened, and there was no longer any time for writing or thinking.

This second season he increased his outfit considerably, establishing out-yards, making up more hives, becoming a real commercial honey producer, with apiaries placed about the country where the clover looked most promising. He had established the Cumberland yard that year, with thirty colonies in it, and, taking one year with another, it had been his best yard.

Looking back now, all those summers blended in a common colour, though they had all been unlike, in the weather, in the flow of honey. But there were always the first anxious days of the spring unpacking, and the first inspection to see how the bees had wintered, how many were dead or queenless, whether they had sufficient honey-stores. Then the long anxious expectation through the dandelion and orchard-bloom period, while the colonies were building up to their full strength for the main harvest. Then the hot days in clover-bloom, when the bee-yard roared like a factory, audible two hundred yards away, and a single colony might store twenty pounds of honey in one day. Then the swarming fever, when the tall hives had to be taken apart, hundreds of combs looked over, hundreds of pounds of honey lifted down and put back, to prevent the swarm from leaving.

Then there were intervals of cool windy weather when there was no honey in the clover blossoms, and the disappointed bees were like devils, stinging everything that came near, trying to rob one another's hives. The bee-yard was a savage place in those days, but there was always something urgent to be done, and he had to do it under a cloud of smoke, half-suffocated himself.

Then it would turn hot and moist again and the honey-flow recommenced, and the bees grew gentle again, forgetting everything in honey-gathering. He could scrape up a handful of bees in his palm without being stung. The supers piled up, filling up with honey, making the bee-yard a city of white towers. They had to be taken down, taken apart, almost weekly, looking for the queens, for indications of swarming, so that Jerry came home at night too tired to do more than limp from his car to his doorstep.

Then he would bring up a bottle of his home-brewed honey-beer and a lump of bread and cheese, and consume them, sitting on the back doorstep. These seemed to have been the best moments of his life. He was dead tired; his brain was entirely numb, incapable of thought, but his senses were extremely alert. He had done a good day's work. The roar of the bee-yard

still sounded in his ears, and he was glad to be quit of it. As the mild alcohol and the nutriment crept through his veins, he had a relaxed sense of calm, of extreme content. He sat drinking his beer and looking across the orchard, over the grape vines, unconsciously noting the signs of the sunset. To-morrow would be another fine day, another heavy day. It grew dusk at last, and he roused himself, cooked bacon and eggs or some such simple dish, smoked a little and tried to read the morning paper. But by nine o'clock he generally went to bed, and when he closed his eyes in the dark he could still see masses of bees seething over the combs.

During these months of anxiety and labour the world of books, of thought, seemed very remote and unreal. Then the honey was taken off and extracted and shipped, the bees packed, and there was nothing more to do. Jerry's digestion and his nerves suffered with the sudden change. For days on end he sat and smoked and read, bringing home books from the public libraries at Lowlands Station and St. Stephen's, modern novels and poetry, reading them by dozens beside the great coal stove. He read them with amazement, with stupefaction. They were so clever, so wise, so brilliant that they made him sick. He seemed to feel his sanity going, for it was not possible that these books were really as good as they seemed to be. It must be something wrong with his own mind. Yet he could not help feeling that Virginia Woolf was a better writer than Jane Austen, that Masefield was a better poet than Byron, that Aldous Huxley was at least as good as Wycherley. Of course it wasn't so; his mind was wrong. But these moderns dealt with the things of his own life, with the matter of his own thoughts. They were so personal, so intimate, that they were like a personal flattery, a personal attack. Never in the world would he be able to write like that, he realized. He would never be clever enough.

The solitude of that second winter was too much to stand. He went up to the city, and he had hardly arrived before he was sorry he had come. Toronto was iron and stone; the lake was wild, the sky was like iron, and a bitter wind swept the streets. He took a lodging at a price that he could afford, and ate at the cheap restaurants, seeing nobody he knew. He used to know plenty of people casually; he met them sometimes on King Street, but they did not see him and he did not stop them. He did not even go up to the office of the newspaper where he used to work, for he did not want to hear them say that they heard that he had gone into chicken-farming, and was he writing anything now?

He would have liked to see Carlton Maitland, the book reviewer of the *Week*; but Maitland had left the paper, and nobody knew what he was doing.

He did call at the *Express* office to see Edgar Lloyd, but he found him at a bad moment. Lloyd was playing Chicago May wheat on a five-cent margin with a stop-loss order, and the market was going against him. Consequently he was even more irritable, more blasphemous, more contemptuous than usual. But he kept Jerry for two hours and would not let him go, talking about the condition of the commodity markets, in the elaborate Cambridge accent which he always intensified in times of stress.

Jerry did not want to see Lloyd again. He saw nobody, sitting in his room and reading books from the Public Library. Every night he went to some theatre or some concert, or boxing match or hockey game. He went about the winter-bound city, intensely solitary, thinking of literature, reading poetry, his mind swimming with artificial colour and music, intensely unhappy. He might as well be in Old Lowlands. In a state of acute mental indigestion he returned to Old Lowlands, where he found the snow drifted deep against the door of his cottage, and the inside smelt airless, and was colder even than outdoors. The stove was cold; everything in the house was frozen solid that could be frozen, and the dirty dishes of his last breakfast still stood on the table. He continued to read novels; and the winter passed; and then the bee season opened again, and there was no longer any time for reading or thinking.

Remembering them now, all these winters seemed to blend together—an impression of too much reading and not enough exercise, of distress in his stomach, of nights when he could not sleep from a sense of the wasteful passing of his life. Life was nothing unless it was more than mere living, he thought; but he did not know what to do, since he could not write, nor even read with intelligence, and the bee-work lasted only half the year and was anyway only a means to an end. He went up to the city and came back again, having got no good from it. All those winters seemed alike now, except that winter when he had written his prose poems. That had been different.

It had been an unusually cold and snowy winter. For weeks no motors were able to travel the country roads, and even the great power-driven snow-ploughs on the highway could hardly keep it open for cars. Looking from his window, Jerry saw the dry snow blowing like smoke from the eaves of the houses, and tall swirls of it drifting over the fields. Sometimes the wind blew a hurricane and snow-drifts piled yards high; and sometimes the sun blazed down on the white surface in an icy ecstasy, blinding, impossible to face. No cars went past, but sleighs creaked by, jingling in the zero air, the drivers heavily muffled in old furs.

Jerry had plenty of time to observe the weather. He had all the time in the world. There was nothing whatever to do except to stoke the big stove and prepare his food. He had always desired leisure, and now he had it; and he began to realize the great universal principle that you can never have enough of anything without getting too much of it.

In the summer, in the busy season, Jerry took one or two meals a day with his nearest neighbour, Mrs. Ford; but in the winter he prepared his own meals. He lived largely on stews, which he had learned to concoct in a great many forms, with peppers and garlic and different sorts of meat and every vegetable he could get—ollas, ragouts, goulashes—and he invented a good many new ones that were not in the cook-books. He never grew tired of these foods, and he drank his own mead, or the strong Lake Erie wine which he bought by the keg at the government liquor store for little more than the price of beer.

That hard winter, long remembered for its depth of snow and its cold, was one of the best times he had ever had in his life. He was writing his prose poems, and he really believed that he was creating something unique, something of permanent beauty. In the morning he got up late, stoked up the fire and dug the snow away from the door. While the fire was burning up he went to the post office for his mail and his Toronto morning paper, and came back for coffee and a very light breakfast. After eating, he sat in his disorderly and rather frowsty living-room, reading his paper, smoking, falling into a half-dreamy, half-excited condition, thinking of what he had written the night before,

> '*In those days I sought to mould my life into a form of art that should be an expression of victory over my destiny and my desire.*'

Well, he could smile at it now, but he had had a good time that winter. He believed that nobody in the world had ever written such prose poems before, not Poe, not Baudelaire, not Mallarmé. He wrote nearly enough of them to make a small book, writing them mostly at night, playing Beethoven and Strauss and Wagner on the gramophone, drinking the strong native wine till he was dizzy, while the great stove glowed and the blizzard rattled the windows. It was certainly the best time he had had in his life.

Then the bee season opened, and there was no time for thought or music or poetry, and he had to stop drinking. During those rushing months of sweating and anxiety and heavy lifting the world of reading and writing grew very remote and unreal. In fact, this flurry of fantastic writing

represented the last spasms of his long delusion that he could write. Once cooled off, he perceived quite clearly that he had produced some pretty passages, some interesting rhythms, sometimes even a sentence of real beauty: but it didn't mean anything; and, taking it all together, it was not worth thinking of.

And he ceased to think of it. He made the great renunciation of his ambitions without any pain, even with a sense of relief. He would never again have to distress himself with the necessity of producing a work of genius. He ceased to read poetry. He read Oppenheim and Van Dine, Rider Haggard and Zane Grey and Edgar Wallace with immense pleasure and a sense of liberation. He could now read what he liked, and was free to like anything, and he decided that he liked *She* better than any book in the world.

He had hardly remembered his prose poems for years, until Edith Lancaster stirred up something in his mind.

Tiring of melodramatic literature, Jerry turned to the melodrama of science, without any special training, looking for short cuts to the mystery of his life. He read, in great books which he could only partially understand, about electrons and protons and neutrons, which appeared to be, in their last analysis, hardly more than mental abstractions, and he looked at photographs of the luminous trails of these ambiguities, which must have been like the photographs which adroit amateurs were able to take of ghosts. He read of relativity, of the time-dimension, of astronomy, of gaseous suns as big as the whole solar system, of masses, velocities and spaces so enormous that they seemed meaningless, and probably really were so. Desirous of knowing more, he thought of rubbing up his mathematics, but after studying algebra for a week he realized the vastness of his own ignorance. This was a form of mysticism, of metaphysics, expressed in chalk on a blackboard, not a matter of addition and subtraction. He thought he gained a faint glimmer of what the astro-physicists were after, in this most highly abstract system of thought which man has ever evolved; and he studied the mystical mathematical equations which were said to contain the whole secret of the universe.

It made Jerry think of the vast system constructed by the medieval scholastic philosophers. They had erected an edifice of thought, which, moving inevitably from one proposition to another, comprised the solution of every problem of the universe, of matter and spirit, of God and man, and of every problem of human conduct, and had based it firmly on the unquestionable laws of human thought. It had never been demolished; it still

held good. But mankind had simply lost interest in it, had gone away and left it. It was an impregnable citadel without a garrison.

And Jerry wondered whether this huge edifice of mathematical thought might not eventually come to be similarly forsaken. It was irrefutable, it was impregnable; but it might be abandoned as no longer of any interest to a generation which attacked the problem from some totally different angle. He did not know; he knew that he was not capable even of having an opinion; he merely wondered.

It was an attempt to fill up the emptiness, which seemed not so much in himself as around him. He never talked of such things to Richard Cumberland. Richard was interested in literature, in aesthetics, in a sort of dry metaphysics, because these were unrealities, mere games of skill, like the law, not to be taken seriously. But he had no interest whatever in the new theories of space and time and matter, lumping them all together in his general contempt for human intelligence when it sought to take itself seriously.

Then the emptiness of the winter broke up in the violent stresses of the summer, and melodrama and mathematics seemed equally remote. But through it all he had a sense of being entirely dissevered from life, unless in those evening moments when, dead tired, he sat on his doorstep, drinking his beer, thinking of the morrow's work, with the roar of the bee-yard still sounding in his ears.

All these summers and winters, all this thinking and working, blurred together in Jerry's mind as he loitered in the warm autumn, not knowing what to do, except to potter at his workshop, or drive in to Lowlands Station or St. Stephens to the library or the Government liquor store. He was still dazed and fatigued with the rush of the season. It was incredible not to have pressing work to do. But he had harvested his crop, and now he could only pick the apples from his trees, store vegetables for the winter, gather, if he wanted them, nuts and mushrooms.

In that late, summery autumn mushrooms lasted unusually late, and Jerry frequently gathered them, less because he liked to eat them than for the sport of hunting them. He had a favourite hunting ground about four miles from Old Lowlands, an immense pasture where steers or horses always grazed. There was a belt of woodland on the south edge, and there was a small hut there, used as a camp by wood-cutters several years before. It was no longer used and was falling to pieces, containing only a few armfuls of hay and

some rusty agricultural implements that had been placed there for shelter and then forgotten.

At a distance Jerry found a herd of red and white steers at graze. He came out from the woods with a small basket on his arm, and saw two figures emerge from the ruined hut and separate quickly, passing around either side. When he came closer he recognized Louie Stratford, in a pink dress and no hat. She looked flushed and upset, and her thick black hair palpitated on her head with the vitality of a savage. She saw Jerry, and gave him a wide, seductive smile. Ernie Cumberland came around from the other side of the hut, carrying a large basket.

'Gathering mushrooms, Ernie?'

'Got a few. They're getting scarce now—getting too late,' Ernie said. He was an expert mushroom hunter, and his uncle liked mushrooms.

Jerry showed his basket, not very full.

'You're only getting the white ones,' Ernie said, 'Do you ever pick the Fairy Ring?' They're good mushrooms. And there's the Orange Flow and the Ink-Cap. But they mostly grow in the woods.'

'I only pick the common kind,' Jerry said. I'm not an expert.'

'Well, you stick to the white, thick-stemmed sort and you'll be all right. Look at this,' and he exhibited a long-stemmed white mushroom set aside in a corner of his basket.

'See this one? I picked it for fun. That's the Deadly Agaric, what they call the Destroying Angel. Eat this, and no doctor can save you. There's no antidote for it.'

Louie came up and looked fascinated at the Destroying Angel, and Jerry also gazed at it, with the interest evoked by a concentrated form of death.

'How do you recognize it?' Jerry asked.

'Easy enough,' Ernie said contemptuously. 'The gills are white, see, instead of pink, and they never change colour. Then the stem is hollow and long.' He threw out the poison mushroom, looked at a moment, and stamped his foot on it. Old Richard liked mushrooms, Jerry thought; he wondered how he would like this one.

'Have you found any mushrooms, Louie?' Jerry asked, noting Louie's appearance of having been rumpled and disarranged. Louie giggled and looked at Ernie.

‘Louie can’t tell one kind from another. I have to watch what she picks,’ Ernie said.

‘I don’t care about the mushrooms. I never eat them. I just like to gather them,’ said Louie, with a sudden wide sensual gesture that seemed to embrace the pale, damp fungi and the autumnal field, and the herd of grazing cattle. Ernie looked at her contemptuously.

‘Your friend got in to see the old man after all,’ he remarked to Jerry.

‘Who?’ Jerry said, startled.

‘That dame from Toronto. Said she was his niece.’

‘Has she been here again?’

‘Sure she has. Uncle Richard said I was to let her up, and she went up and stayed the best part of an hour.’

‘I’m glad of it. Your uncle would be the better for seeing more people.’

‘I reckon so,’ said Ernie, with a sort of evil indifference. ‘Who’s this Miss Lancaster?’

‘His niece, as you say. I don’t know her at all.’

‘I’ll go on,’ Jerry continued, after a moment. ‘Are you going up this side of the field? I’ll take the other side, then. Good luck!’

He proceeded up the western side of the great pasture, but did not find many mushrooms. As Ernie said, they were getting scarce. He came up to the herd of steers, and the great, gentle creatures moved aside to let him pass, and then slowly trailed after him, looking at him with interest, shy, but very glad of some human interest in their lives.

Edith Lancaster had been here again, and she had not let him know. Yet there was no great reason why she should have informed him; and yet there seemed every reason why she should. She knew nothing of him except through Edgar Lloyd, and Lloyd had always exhibited the lowest possible opinion of Jerry and of his whole manner of life. And Jerry held the same opinion of Lloyd; but it seemed that Lloyd knew Edith Lancaster with some intimacy.

She simply hadn’t wanted to see him. And now it seemed to Jerry more than ever that he was dissociated from life. He thought of Louie, soft and palpitating like a lump of live liver. He thought of Iona, sweet and fresh as fresh butter; and he thought of Edith Lancaster, dark and flowerlike, like a slightly crushed pansy, like a pansy slightly past its prime. But he thought of

these women involuntarily and without interest, for he knew that they had nothing to tell him.

He thought instead of something that he had been reading in an English book:

> ‘My external sensations (said F. H. Bradley) are no less private to me than are my thoughts and feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside—and every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it.’

Wet snow fell, and then frost. The mushroom season was definitely over. One sunny day the bees flew in myriads, evacuating their faeces, and probably they would not fly again till the January thaw. Snow fell, a thin dry snow, driving on an east wind, piling up, and not melting this time.

Jerry put his car away, blocking up the wheels and storing the battery. There was no use in his trying to run a car all through the winter, for the little he needed it, and with the bad roads, and battery and engine and radiator trouble. But the laying up of the car always meant the definite beginning of the dead season.

He saw Richard Cumberland again, but the old man did not mention the recent visit of his niece, and Jerry did not remind him of it. Winter closed in. Jerry locked his workshop, put away all his tools. There was nothing any longer to do except to live; and, unable to face the emptiness of that, Jerry closed his cottage and went to Toronto.

III

He had planned to stay a day, a week, or a month, as he might feel like it; but he had hardly got there before he began to wonder why he had come at all. No snow had fallen in Toronto, or it had all been cleared away, and the streets were grey and grim and hard like granite, and the sky like grey iron, and a bitter wind came down from the northern lakes. Paper, garbage, and dust blew down the streets. All the people looked cold and wretched and discouraged. The city was too familiar to be interesting and not big enough to be impressive. It was merely bleak and cheerless.

He went to the inexpensive hotel where he usually stayed, and went out to a movie, had dinner, and went to another movie. He really couldn't imagine why he had come. There was nobody in Toronto he wanted to see, nothing he wanted to do; and he slept badly that night from the unfamiliar bed and the unaccustomed noises from the street.

In the morning he felt tired and depressed, and was still sorry that he had come. Still, he felt it necessary to come up to town two or three times a year, and this was as good a time as any. He went to the Public Library and looked at two or three books which he had read about in the reviews, and took two of them back to his hotel. But he did not feel like reading. He might as well be in Old Lowlands, merely to sit in a room and read.

The wind had gone down during the night. It was milder, and the sun shone a little. Jerry went out to the east end of the city, to the offices of the bee-keepers' co-operative organization, and the manager told him that honey prices were rising a little. Jerry went through the vast warehouses, where nearly the whole honey business of Ontario was centred. Millions of pounds of honey were stored there at that time. They were loading a car for Montreal and Liverpool. As the trucks of cases went down Jerry suddenly noticed his own name and number on one of them. It gave him a start, to see his honey suddenly reappear in this cold and financial environment. The blazing bee-yard, the white towers alive with heat and fierce sweetness were very remote.

On his way back he bought two bottles of brandy and two of whisky to take home for his winter supply. It would have to last through the winter, for he could not afford to buy spirits at the Liquor Commission's prices. He left the bottles at his hotel, and lunched there, and then thought of trying to find Edgar Lloyd. He telephoned the *Express* office, but Lloyd had not come in.

Then yielding at last, he took a car to the west end of the city, to the Beauchamp branch library.

It was a recently established branch, with a classic front of stucco pillars. Inside, there were book stacks all down one side of the room. At the other side were several desks for librarians. Jerry recognized Edith Lancaster at the desk marked ‘Incoming Books’.

A number of people were bringing in books. There was a line at the desk. Jerry loitered about the bookshelves till the line had cleared, and then went and stopped in front of the desk.

Miss Lancaster did not notice him. She was bent over the desk, stamping cardboard slips and transferring them from one pile to another. Jerry looked down on the top of her head, with dark glossy hair, beautifully waved, and he could see down the back of her neck, under her dress. She had pretty hands, he noticed, handling the pencil and the rubber stamp deftly; and then she looked up mechanically, expecting an in-coming book.

Not seeing the book, she raised her eyes higher to Jerry’s face, looked a moment, astonished, and then stood up and held out her hand over the desk.

‘Mr. Mertens! For a minute I couldn’t realize . . .’

They exchanged mechanical courtesies.

‘When did you come up? . . . Only yesterday? . . . I hope you’ll be in town some time . . . Not long? . . . It was nice of you to come out and see our library . . .’ Jerry said he used the Central Library mostly. He came out to see if she were here. ‘. . . That was nice of you. Have you seen Uncle Richard lately?’

This question checked the mechanical courtesies like a lump of ice dropped into boiling water.

‘I saw him last week,’ said Jerry. ‘He seemed just as usual. I was sorry,’ he added, ‘not to have seen you when you came down.’

‘You knew I’d been there?’

‘Everybody knows when anybody comes to Old Lowlands. Besides, Ernie told me.’

‘What did Uncle Richard say?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Didn’t he speak of me?’

‘Not a word.’

She hesitated, looking straight at him. Two women entered bringing in books.

‘How long will you be in the city?’ she asked quickly.

‘I think I’ll go back to-morrow or next day.’

Again she seemed to hesitate on the point of saying something.

‘But you’ll be up again. I’ll see you again, surely.’

The women were waiting their turn at the desk. Jerry passed on and went over to the shelves. More women came in with books. Miss Lancaster was busy, stamping, marking, returning cards. Jerry went out, glancing back from the doorway.

She did not look at him. He went out and waited for a street-car, disappointed and chilled. He had intended to ask her to lunch with him, for she must have to lunch somewhere; but now he was glad he hadn’t. He got off the car near the centre of the city and walked aimlessly down Bay Street. Great numbers of people passed him hurrying, but none of them knew him or spoke to him, and he did not want to speak to any of them. Better to go home to-morrow, he thought. He knew a great many people in the city, casually, but he did not feel that he could get on with any of them now. He was done with the city. He was a countryman now, yet he couldn’t stand the country. This tenuous transparent membrane that enclosed him prevented him from ever coming into contact with life, like a chicken that could not break out of its shell.

Yet he encountered on King Street one figure that he knew, that immediately recollected him. That big figure with a slight swagger, that square, heavy, powerful face with the grey moustache, and the rather shabby fur overcoat—he recognized it at once for Arthur York Front, the Canadian Homer. And Front, who never forgot anybody who might by any chance be useful to him, stopped Jerry and asked him what he was writing now, and what paper he was working on.

Arthur York Front was a western man, one of the few living men who had actually shot buffaloes and fought Indians. He was the Canadian Homer, and he was writing the history of Canada in a blank verse epic, interspersed with lyrics. Six volumes of this work had already been published. Patriotism could not deny him, and the University had given him an honorary degree. He had a great dusty studio room down-town, full of bearskins, buffalo robes, snowshoes, rifles, totem-poles, moose-heads, where he gave

periodical parties. He was nearly eighty now, but still virile. He had himself photographed in aeroplanes, in racing cars, on snowshoes, carrying a rifle, in a canoe, in nothing at all. He let it be understood that he was still capable of enormous amorous exploits, and this seemed, at least in part, to be really true. The newspapers interviewed him perfunctorily, terribly bored with his epic, his athletics, his superannuated erotics; but he was unquestionably a public figure. Hordes of flappers followed him, dazzled by his flatteries, his epic, his gallantries, his immoral reputation.

Jerry said that he was on no paper now, that he was chicken-farming in the country, and he escaped as soon as he could from this almost extinct monster. And the poet gladly let him go, for he had no use for anybody who was not likely to be of use to him.

Arthur York Front was confined in no eggshell of thought. He was open to life on all sides. Perhaps he had the right of it, Jerry thought, remembering the vast dingy studio room, full of implements of war and sport, where the aged poet lived almost in penury, writing his epic, existing largely on loans, since his royalties were hardly enough for his rent and liquor.

Certainly it was not through Edith Lancaster that he would ever get in touch with life. Obviously she hadn't wanted to see him. He had been a fool to go out to her library. Jerry looked at the people on the street as he passed them. Solitary living had made him sensitive to human faces. He saw men and women whose faces attracted him; but they passed and disappeared. He would never know them. It was this bee-keeping, this solitude of life and work, he thought, that had made him abnormal, had put him across the current, instead of being in harmony with it. But the physicists said that things existed only by virtue of their tensions. He remembered the tensor formula that represented all material existence:

$$G_{MV} - \tfrac{1}{2}\, 8_{MV}\, G$$

Comforted by being able to recollect this incantation, he tried to see the street as it really was—an empty, dark and soundless space, spotted with electric charges, which produced the illusion of light and heat, of noise and movement and thinking and reading.

Late that afternoon he went up to the *Express* office, to find Edgar Lloyd after all. This was not the paper he had worked on, but he used to know its offices as well as his own. The *Express* offices were on the third floor of a huge, old-fashioned, dingy building, like a building of Dickens' London. Visitors lost themselves on that floor. It was full of unexpected rooms and corridors, some of them still inhabited by ancient literary or artistic satellites of the paper, some of them full of old files, boxes of cuts, broken furniture, all the debris of fifty years. It was permeated with a smell of printers' ink, damp paper, sour tobacco and decayed events.

But Jerry knew his way well, and at the entrance to the city room he asked for Edgar Lloyd. Lloyd hadn't come in yet, but the girl let him through, with some reluctance, and Jerry went to the small room that Lloyd had to himself, adjoining the financial room, and sat down and smoked.

Lloyd's desk had nothing on it but cigarette ashes and a pile of yellow copy paper beside the typewriter. The city room was on the other side. It was brilliant with lights and noisy with typewriters. The reporters were all in, and writing their afternoon stories. Jerry knew plenty of men in that room. He knew Macdonald, the city editor, very well, and he might have gone in and chatted with him, but he shrank from meeting any of them. He had lived too long in solitude to meet people casually. He could not talk to them unless he had had a couple of drinks, and then he was apt to talk too much and far too seriously. All these incessant small contacts dulled the sharp edge of life, he meditated. But Lloyd was not a dulling surface. He was a whetstone when he was not a millstone.

He had thought of taking Lloyd out to dinner, but Lloyd did not come in; and at last Jerry, growing very hungry, went out and ate a small meal, such as would not negative another meal later. Probably Lloyd had not dined yet. He never seemed to think of food, fasting for long periods without inconvenience, and then when food presented itself he would devour it in great quantities, indifferent to what it might be.

But when Jerry came back from his meal he found Lloyd sitting at his typewriter desk and going over a sheaf of pencil notes. He glanced at Jerry without surprise, though it was almost a year since he had seen him.

'Hello, Jerry! How's the chicken farm?' he said, looking at Jerry with his usual indifference and contempt.

'Hello, Lloyd! How's the market? Did you hit it right to-day?'

‘The market?’ repeated Lloyd, as if he had hardly heard of any such thing. ‘The market was on the bum. I’m not interested in the market just now. I’m not playing anything. I’ve got something here that I was going to show you.’

He felt in his pocket and took out a great number of typewritten papers, and began to sort these over. As always, he looked slim and handsome, dark, with a small black moustache. Jerry had never seen him otherwise than perfectly dressed. Even now, after a long day among the brokerage offices his trousers had a knife-like crease, his coat set to perfection, his collar and cuffs were immaculate. His voice still had some of the rich Cambridge accent which he had brought to Canada eight years before, and had not entirely lost.

He rolled a cigarette rapidly, licked it and put it in his mouth.

‘I don’t suppose you’ll like this, Jerry,’ he said venomously. ‘Not your line at all. Do you know anything of Paul d’Arras? I find him quite extraordinary. I translated this out of a small French magazine. I’m afraid I haven’t quite reproduced the quality of it.’

He began to read from the paper in a chanting, almost reverential voice:

> ‘Through the vast purple curtains’ fold and fall
> No daylight ever pierces to the room
> Where giant bronzes brood like dreams of doom
> In the deep grow from crimson tapers tall.
> Most delicate and most fantastical. . . .’

The office-boy came to the door and called Lloyd to the financial editor’s desk. Lloyd was always producing little poems like this, translations (so he said) from minor French or Italian poets whom nobody else had ever heard of. Jerry believed that these poets existed only in Lloyd’s imagination. In a few minutes he came back with several clippings stuck on a sheet of copy-paper. In silence he sat down and put a sheet in his typewriter.

‘Suppose we go out and eat when you finish that, Lloyd,’ Jerry suggested, feeling hungry again.

Gazing at his clippings, Lloyd did not answer.

‘Do you know a librarian at the Beauchamp branch, Lloyd? A dark girl, named . . . .’

‘No,’ said Lloyd, typing rapidly.

‘She said she knew you.’

Lloyd did not answer. He wrote his copy, cut up portions of the newspaper clippings and pasted them on another sheet, typewrote a little more, and went away with the copy. Coming back he looked at Jerry as if astonished to see him still there.

'Did you read the rest of it, Jerry? A bit Baudelairian, of course, and that's a mere museum quality now. But I think he really has something of the quality of Baudelaire, something of that hard dark polish, that bleak glitter like black iron. Of course, diabolism is dead now, and we've no longer any interest in litanies to Satan, and we've no longer anything even left to blaspheme. It greatly cramps the modern artist, and I think that is chiefly why we have so little good modern poetry. Where would Shelley have been without his atheism, or Tennyson without his belief? Or Browning without his optimism, or James Thompson without his pessimism? Or Dickens without his love of humanity, or Swift without his hatred of it? These are, properly speaking, the gases with which we charge our cylinders, and many of them are really explosive. Do you know anything about the scholastic philosophy, Jerry? I hear it's being revived now at Cambridge, in the neo-Thomism. We really must have the gas, of one sort or another; and so I look for a revival of even Baudelairism some day, and it seems to me that Paul d'Arras. . . .'

'Do you know one of the librarians at the Beauchamp branch, Lloyd, named Miss Lancaster?'

'No, I don't know any of the librarians,' Lloyd replied, used to being interrupted. 'Oh, you mean Edith Lancaster. Yes, I know her. At least, I've been there.'

'At her library?'

'No, where she lives. She has people there of an evening, and a first-class free lunch. She used to be in newspaper work, on the *Star*.'

'What did she write?'

'I don't know. Bedtime stories. Now, I was going to say about Paul d'Arras. . . .'

'What's she like, Lloyd? Is she intelligent?'

'Intelligent? Edith Lancaster? I should think it highly improbable,' said Lloyd acridly.

'But why?'

Lloyd fixed his eyes heavily on Jerry, seeming to ponder.

‘You ask me if Edith Lancaster is an intelligent woman, Jerry, but you know as well as I do that there’s no such thing. There are sometimes clever women—women whose minds are so quick and bright that they reflect back your own thought to you almost before you can utter it. They send it back slightly distorted, so it seems original, and so you think highly of their minds, which is what was intended. But an intelligent woman—no, there’s no such thing.’

‘How about going out to eat, Lloyd?’

‘Come out with me and we’ll have something presently.’

Lloyd was called to the telephone. He stayed in the box for a long time, and must have got something important, for he went at once to the financial room, and then came back and wrote another sheet of copy. He sat back then and rolled a cigarette, looking abstractedly at Jerry, evidently continuing the current of thought that had continued to flow in his mind in spite of all these interruptions.

‘It seems to me that Paul d’Arras. . .’

Undertaking an elaborate analysis of the whole modern philosophy of art and poetry, he came round at last to Arthur Rimbaud, who, it appeared, had been the real focus of his mind all the while. With an excellent French accent he quoted extensively from the *Bateau Ivre*, and even from the *Saison d’Enfer*. He rolled cigarettes continuously, and yet smoked them even faster than he rolled them. The floor, the desk were all strewn with ashes and smouldering butts. He gazed at Jerry abstractedly, probably not even seeing him, entirely rapt in what he was saying; and Jerry knew that he was capable of talking like this all night, perhaps all the next day, perhaps for several days and nights. Nobody knew how long Lloyd’s endurance would last, for everybody else succumbed first.

Sinking slowly into a stupor, Jerry ceased to be aware of what was being said. Suddenly surprised by silence, he found that Lloyd had stopped talking. He was putting on his hat and overcoat.

‘Come along with me, Jerry. We’ll go out and eat.’

Still in a partial daze, Jerry went with him downstairs to the street. He expected that they would go to some neighbouring restaurant, but Lloyd took him on board a north-bound car. All the way Lloyd was extraordinarily silent. They got out, walked a short distance, and entered a building like an apartment house. Some sort of newspaper club, Jerry thought. They went up in the elevator, along a corridor, and Jerry pushed a door button.

‘What’s this place, Lloyd?’

‘Why, I thought you said you wanted to meet Edith Lancaster. This is her place. This is where we eat.’

‘Not me!’

Jerry turned in a panic. He was too late. The elevator had gone down, and Miss Lancaster herself opened the door.

Jerry realized in a flash that he had been brought to an intellectual gathering. He saw a large room with divans and chairs, an open fire at the farther end, pictures, books. Two fat elderly women sat on a couch, with a fat elderly man between them. Leaning against the mantel was a stocky young man talking to a girl in a red dress. Everybody wore evening clothes. Jerry had seen such things before, and he perceived at once that the artistic atmosphere was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

‘I’m not coming in,’ he said hurriedly. ‘Lloyd brought me—I didn’t know where he was bringing me.’

‘But I hope you’re not disappointed,’ Edith said sweetly. ‘Come in for just a moment anyway.’

Jerry had always avoided intellectual gatherings even when he lived in town, and now he was painfully conscious of his rumpled tweed suit. But Miss Lancaster seemed to have expected him, and she led him at once, without introducing him to anyone, to a corner where she had a sort of buffet lunch.

He immediately perceived her genius as a hostess. On a table were piled platters of sandwiches, not only thin cucumber and pimento sandwiches, but good rounds of bread with thick slices of beef and ham. There were plates of pickles, relishes, smoked fish, strong cheese in large cubes, buns, biscuits. A great coffee-pot stood on an electric plate, and there was a bottle of Scotch and one of rye, and a great number of the shining metal caps of beer bottles. Lloyd was already there, and without being asked he had opened a bottle of beer for himself and had already eaten two sandwiches. Possibly it was the first time he had eaten that day. It looked like it.

‘I’m so glad Mr. Lloyd brought you,’ said Edith, handing him foods. ‘I asked him to bring you to see me the first time you were in town. I was going to ask you myself at the library, but you had gone before I had a chance.’

He would scarcely have known her, now in a lacy sort of black evening dress that fell in black points about her silken ankles. Even her face no longer looked pansy-like, but rather like a dark and exotic flower invented by some exquisite artist.

'Do you know any of these people?' she said. 'The gentleman on the sofa is Professor Chose who has written a book about something. The man at the mantel is our great Canadian painter of icebergs. The ladies are musical, one of them a great Bach singer. I'll introduce you to them if you like.'

'I wish you'd let me go home first and put on some clothes,' Jerry said.

'You are very well as you are,' said Edith, looking him over kindly. 'Later perhaps some other people whom you know will come in.'

'Jerry and I have been talking all the evening about Arthur Rimbaud,' Lloyd said over their shoulders, eating sandwiches voraciously. 'It seems to both of us . . .'

'I would have looked you up when I was at Old Lowlands,' said Edith without paying him any attention. 'But you had been so kind to me when I was there before . . .'

'That you thought you had best repay me by an unkindness,' Jerry said, trying to strike the required note. 'I came up to town principally to see you.'

'Yes, I expected you would,' Edith said. 'At least, I expected . . .'

The bell jingled softly. Edith opened the door, and Jerry was amazed to see Carlton Maitland—Maitland, who never went anywhere. He was not in evening clothes, but he wore a dark suit, and he looked less saturnine than usual, much less like a bankrupt Satan. Still more surprising, he had a girl with him, a very young girl, with a close crop of auburn curly hair, freckled and not exactly pretty, but with a sort of wild beauty. She looked shy and excited, probably believing herself to be in a high-tensioned artistic circle and her dilated eyes turned continually and involuntarily toward Maitland.

Maitland had sat down at some distance and accepted a drink of whisky, taking it strong. He saw Jerry and nodded to him, but did not get up. Lloyd thrust a handful of smoked herrings to Jerry over his shoulder.

'You're not eating anything, Jerry. Have some more beer. I've just opened another bottle.'

Jerry went over to Carlton Maitland.

‘I’ve been wanting to see you,’ he said. ‘I called at the *Week* office.’

Maitland was cordial enough, but reserved.

‘I’m off the *Week*,’ he said. ‘I’m doing some private work.’

‘Could you lunch some day? I’ll ring you up.’

‘That would be delightful. But I’m going out of town. I hardly know when I’ll be back. Drop me a line, will you?’

Jerry turned away, repulsed and hurt. Carlton Maitland was perhaps the only man in Toronto whom he really liked and respected without reservations. He glanced at the brilliant and shy child who had come with him, and went back to Lloyd.

‘This is too high-toned for me. I’m going,’ he said.

Miss Lancaster did not urge him to stay longer.

‘Will you be in town long?’ she asked.

‘I think I’ll go back to-morrow.’

‘You’ll be seeing Uncle Richard. I’d like to know how he is. You might write me. You know, he talked a great deal about you.’

‘Surely not.’

‘He thinks a great deal about you.’ She looked at Jerry closely. ‘Be sure to let me know if—well, anything about him.’

‘Won’t you be down in Old Lowlands again?’

‘Probably not for a long time. But you’ll be back in town.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Jerry heavily. ‘What’s the use?’

‘I don’t know,’ she returned, looking at him kindly. ‘But you might find it pleasant.’

Lloyd followed him out, still eating a sandwich.

‘Where are you going now, Jerry? I don’t have to be back at the office before nine o’clock. There’s the whole night left. Where are you staying? Have you got anything to drink at your room?’

They went to Jerry’s hotel and up to his room. Reluctantly Jerry produced one of his bottles of brandy, noticing that it was after eleven o’clock. Lloyd gazed at the bottle and glasses with abstraction, as if these articles were unfamiliar to him; he was thinking of what he was about to say.

He poured himself a quarter-tumblerful, swallowed it and poured himself another. His eyes brightened.

'It's very seldom that I get a chance to talk to anybody who understands what I'm saying, Jerry,' he said. From his pocket he produced another beef sandwich which he had brought away with him. 'Now these Romantics—we know that they're no good; they're quite discredited now. And the Classicists—they're equally no good, and if they're not so discredited it's only because we never think of them at all. And if you try to hit the median line, the golden mean, you merely get on a dead centre, which shows that Aristotle is no good. We need a new set of standards; but in the meantime the only thing is either to fall so far behind the procession that you become unique, or else to shoot so far in front of it, if you can—of course they'll overtake you in the end, but you have a run for your money while it lasts. . . .'

'What do you think of May wheat, Lloyd?'

'I'm altogether bearish on wheat. I think all the commodity markets are overdone. As I was saying, I think the super-post futurists are in the right of it, painting their pictures in squares and triangles, to represent both time and space, and sticking brass pins and bits of wood on the canvas to represent the attributes of eternity. They're trying for a different set of standards, but of course this is really literature, and not painting in any proper sense of the word. . . .'

Lying back in his chair, sipping brandy, Jerry let Lloyd's phrases flow over him, thinking of Edith Lancaster, so dark and caressing in her black lacy dress. He thought of the rising price of honey. The hot bee-yard seemed very remote now. It might be pleasant to come up to town again, she said, but he wasn't looking for pleasantness; he wanted contact with life. Just now he felt an illusion of having that very thing, but it was only an illusion of the alcohol. He knew all about that. Edgar Lloyd's phrases continued to flow past and over him, and he looked at the man, wondering. Lloyd was a journalist, a gambler, a man immersed in the hottest sort of life. Why was he trying to crawl into an eggshell of thought, which, the first thing he knew, would seal over and imprison him for ever?

'. . . but these super realists find themselves in the dark, Jerry. There's no guiding light. They don't know which way to go. They claim to write according to their natures, but it's obvious that most of them don't understand their nature. It takes a good deal of knowing. And some of them try to brighten up things by the use of obscene words. I've no objection to

that. The more obscenity the better, I think. But we must be on our guard. For an obscene word in the middle of the page lights up the whole chapter with a lurid light. It impresses you; you never forget it. But that is not a legitimate literary effect. I don't believe this bottle has anything more in it, Jerry. You haven't anything to eat, have you?'

With less reluctance than at first, Jerry opened his second bottle of the winter provision, and rang downstairs for sandwiches. Lloyd swallowed a large drink, attacked a sandwich, and his eyes brightened again.

'Of course, erotic literature is not at all important in itself,' he continued with renewed animation, 'except perhaps to the very young, or to the very old, who may find it aphrodisiac. . . .'

Lying back in his chair, drinking brandy, Jerry let the talk flow over him. Once well started like this, Lloyd never stopped, and you couldn't get rid of him. As a life prisoner no longer counts the days, so Jerry no longer counted the hours. He had wanted to see Lloyd, to hear him talk, and again he realized the great vital principle, that you can never get enough of anything without getting too much of it.

Rolling and smoking cigarettes rapidly, Lloyd poured and swallowed draughts of brandy, still talking. The room was dense with smoke. Lying back in his chair, Jerry dimly remembered remote hot days of summer, when the hot honey ran out in streams as he prised the beehives asunder. It was a poor business, he thought. He would have to get out of it. He had the brains for something better. He might get Lloyd to show him how to make money on the market. He found himself attempting to recite passages from his own prose poems, but Lloyd did not listen to him. He opened one of the bottles of whisky.

Towards four o'clock Jerry passed out. He fell into a leaden slumber, an unconsciousness like death. Unaware of what time had passed, he opened his eyes again and saw a pale dawn leaking through the curtains, mixing with the electric light and smoke. Edgar Lloyd still sat at the table; the whisky bottle was almost empty, and he seemed to be reciting poetry to himself in an undertone with an expression of religious rapture.

He stopped reciting. He bent over and took off his shoes. He took off his collar and coat and vest, and disappeared into the bathroom, and there was a great noise of rushing water. Weary and sick, with a swimming head and a wild stomach, Jerry heaved himself up from the couch by degrees.

Lloyd must have heard the movement. He came out from the bathroom, entirely naked and dripping. His face looked drawn and grey, but his voice was as steady as ever. Leaving wet footprints on the rug, he went over to Jerry.

'You are quite right, Jerry,' he said, though for hours Jerry had not said anything. 'The universe is a hideous affair. Yet it is also a most admirable thing—the supreme effort of human art. For man has created it as a mask to hide the truth, to conceal the ultimate reality, which must be far more horrible than we have allowed ourself to imagine. Our civilization is an attempt to systematize savagery; love is our attempt to idealize the unmentionable; and poetry, like liquor, is an attempt to rack the whole of reality out of shape, and sometimes it is even partly successful. If all men were to become poets, or be drunk simultaneously, the laws of nature would be suspended; and perhaps the universe as we know it would cease to exist.'

He looked at the bottle. He put its neck to his mouth and drank. There was not much in it. He approached more closely to Jerry, and extended a wet arm over him with an hieratic gesture.

' "But ye, keep ye on earth
Your lips from over-speech," '

he intoned solemnly.

' "Loud words and longing are so little worth,
And the end is hard to reach,
And silence after evil things is good,
For—for—
For words divide and rend,
But silence is most noble to the end." '

He looked down at Jerry with paternal, priestly admonition, and went back to the bathroom. There was a great noise of splashing. But Jerry could not rise nor speak. Desiring only silence and darkness, he sank back on the couch. When he awoke again Lloyd was gone. Full daylight came through the window.

Shakily he undressed, thought of going to bed, but took a hot bath and a cold rub after it. It was nearly nine o'clock. He could not think of breakfast, but he went downstairs and out into the street, and presently took a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.

He seemed perfectly sober now, and his head did not ache, but felt unnaturally clear. All his vital processes felt speeded up, all his senses strung

to unnatural tension. The frosty cold of the street struck him like hot needles; the bright sun hurt his eyes. Everything he saw around him, the movement of the streets, seemed unusual, significant and vital. Lines of poetry went like crashes of lightning through his brain.

He wandered about the streets for some time. He felt like a ghost moving, liquid and impalpable, among the swarming living, or else like a single living being moving strangely among a cloud of ghosts. Without intending it, he found himself on a west-bound street car. Without knowing how he had got there, he found himself in front of the Beauchamp branch library.

There was a tall mirror in the entrance-hall and he saw himself. He looked pale and unnatural; probably he looked drunk. There was nobody in the library; it was too early; but he saw Edith at her desk.

He approached and stood in front of her. She looked up in surprise, and then in still greater surprise, and her face slowly flushed.

She said nothing; and Jerry, appalled at the thought of what he might have been going to say to her, turned and fled from the building.

IV

Jerry went back to Old Lowlands the next day. It had snowed heavily, sleighs were running, and he had difficulty in getting his door open with the drift against it. It was cold inside, colder than outdoors, frozen and airless. He felt as if he had been away for weeks. Everything was exactly as he had left them the morning he went away; and the last book he had been reading lay on the floor beside his chair.

Shivering, he cleaned out the ashes and clinkers from the big stove and started a fire. While it burned up he went to the store, and bought bread, milk and meat and got his accumulated mail. There was a package of detective stories for old Richard.

While the house was growing warm, he looked at his car in the garage, finding it undisturbed. It was still too cold to sit down in the house, and he went to look at his workshop. It also was just as he had left it. It was icy cold, and the big room was so full of piled supers and equipment that the windows hardly lighted it. There was a clinging smell of cold beeswax, of dead bees, of stale honey. Shreds of withered clover and goldenrod clung to the white boxes. He took out a comb and accidentally dropped it, and the wax, brittle with the cold, burst into fragments and dust. Yet in the summer he could have thrown it across the yard without breaking it. Everything was all right, but nothing is so desolate as a honey workshop in winter. He put out more poison for the mice and went away.

Next day he took the books to Richard Cumberland. It was cold and snowing a fine powdery snow, and the village looked deserted. There was no Louie about the rear of the house this time, but there was a well-marked track through the snow to the hole in the fence. Ernie took him up, Ernie in his white coat, looking just as usual, and old Richard looked just as usual too, sitting in his wheeled chair, looking out at the driving snow.

Richard looked at the books, all in English this time, without much interest, and leaned his head back on the chair. He looked intolerably weary, Jerry thought; much older, and not so well.

‘You’ve been up to town,’ he said.

Ernie would have told him, but of course everybody in the village knew that Jerry had gone to town.

‘Find anything interesting there?’

‘I read a few new books, and sat up all night listening to a financial man explain the philosophy of art. I saw your niece, Miss Lancaster.’

‘What was she doing?’

‘Entertaining a number of highly intellectual people, it appeared. I didn’t stay long.’

Richard turned his dead eyes slowly upon Jerry.

‘You ought to see more of intellectual society, Mertens. It would improve your mind.’

‘Thanks. I’m afraid that would be impossible,’ Jerry returned with equal irony. ‘Your niece seems to be a very intelligent woman. Don’t you think so?’ he persisted, wondering if he would get Lloyd’s answer.

‘I have never in my life inquired whether a woman was intelligent or not,’ Richard answered, shifting in his chair a little. ‘And now, less than ever. The question seems irrelevant. And as for my niece,’ he gazed again ironically at Jerry, ‘I really have no ideas whatever about her. You see, I have so many nieces.’

He motioned toward the mantel. Jerry took a cigar from the box, and there was a considerable silence.

‘I hear there is a revival of the scholastic philosophy at Cambridge,’ Jerry said at last, trying to think of something. ‘Neo-Thomism—St. Thomas brought up to date.’

‘I should have expected it,’ Richard returned. ‘All things are being made new, as say the Scriptures, since we have no longer the power to create anything really new. St. Thomas is very interesting; his metaphysic is quite perfect. After reading his proof of the existence of God nobody could ever doubt it, or take any further interest in the matter.’

This was the sort of talk that old Richard liked, when he liked any. Jerry wished that he could hear him conversing with Edgar Lloyd. But Richard wouldn’t have conversed. He would have sat silent, fixing Lloyd with those penetrating dead eyes, until Lloyd—but no—nothing could check Lloyd’s impetus when he once got fairly started.

But Richard wasn’t interested in neo-Thomism. He let his head sink back. He glanced at the mantel clock. It was almost five. Jerry arose to go.

‘Are you going to the city again soon?’

‘I don’t think so.’

He met Ernie in the lower hall.

‘Your uncle doesn’t seem nearly so well. The winter must be hard on him,’ he remarked.

‘Think so?’ said Ernie, brightening. ‘I hadn’t noticed it myself, but then I see him every day.’

Left alone, Richard gazed through the window at the darkening snowstorm, at something very far away. He roused himself and looked at the clock. It was three minutes after five. He rolled himself to the table and rang the bell angrily. But at that very moment Ernie came in.

‘God damn you, Ernie! Don’t you see what time it is?’

‘Sorry, sir. Mr. Mertens was here.’

Ernie wheeled a little table beside him, and placed on it a bottle of Irish whisky, a glass, a syphon of soda and a plate of biscuits. Richard poured himself the drink and swallowed it with a sigh. His will at last could let go.

Jerry obtained a five-gallon keg of the strong Lake Erie wine from St. Stephens, and settled himself for the winter. He did not mean to go to Toronto again. With his car laid up he had no access to any public library, but he tried to re-read his own books, and could find hardly anything that appealed to him any more. Yet these were all picked books, books that had once made the very core of his thought. He had lived in Old Lowlands too long.

For days and days he hardly spoke to anybody except for a casual word in the shops or on the street. He knew all the village people and all the farmers, and liked them well enough; but he was never much in contact with them. At first they had been inclined to antagonism; they thought he was a city man, not their sort; and he never went to church nor to the young people’s church societies, the only social centres of the village. But by degrees they had got used to him, and called him ‘Jerry’, and accepted him as one of themselves, whose living, like theirs, depended on the luck of the land and the weather. But never could quite get used to them. He liked to talk to the farmers at the barn or in the fields or stopping on the road, in their natural environment, outdoors, where they were natural. But not inside their houses.

In January there was a warm spell, a great thaw, and one sunny day the bees flew, their cleansing flight, dropping their yellow faeces all over the

snow. The yard roared like summer for an hour or two. Almost every bee in the hives must have gone out. Then the activity ceased and the bees went back to their hives, all but a few thousand which had fallen on the snow and were too chilled to get up again. The snow was all strewn with the little blackened bodies. But these were old bees which would not have survived the winter anyway, and it was better for them to die outside the hive than in it.

For exercise he walked to the distant yards, to the Cumberland and the River yard, and found everything undisturbed. The roofs of the winter cases were piled with snow. Snow and ice had gathered on the fronts, except where the warm breath from the entrance had kept it clear. Kneeling with his nose at the entrance-hole, Jerry could smell a faint, sweet, waxy odour. When he tapped on the wood there was a faint humming response from within.

There was nothing whatever to do; the bees were wintering well. Jerry would have liked to do some carpentering at his shop, but it was too deadly cold in that building to stay more than a few minutes. He grew tired of tramping over the snowy roads merely for exercise. There were no winter sports at Old Lowlands. There was no ice for skating: the country was too level for skis. There was no shooting except a few jack-rabbits, shy and hard to hit. He went out two or three times with his gun but got nothing.

By degrees he almost gave up going out at all, except to the store and the post office, sitting all day in his over-heated room, drinking the wine and the honey mead; but the drinks no longer excited him to write prose poems. He was getting to the age, he thought, when he ought to spend the rest of his life in reading the traditional Horace, or, at the least, Pope and Addison.

He had no taste in literature, he knew by this time. The best books he generally couldn't stand. He couldn't read Racine nor Goethe, nor Spenser nor Jane Austen nor Trollope, nor even George Meredith, and he felt no inclination to tackle the great Elizabethans again. He didn't have to. He wasn't going to be a man of letters, and he was under no compulsion to have any critical standards or to like anything that he didn't like.

Apart from adventure stories, what he liked was these new poets and novelists who wrote of common life with a cold poignancy, so personal and intimate that it seemed a reflection from his own mind. Women were sometimes like that, Edgar Lloyd had said, so quick and bright that they could reflect your thought almost before you could utter it. But intelligent—no. So, perhaps, with the books.

Jerry had never known any women who could reflect his mind like that. Certainly Edith Lancaster couldn't do it. He had never known any of those great women, wise and witty and beautiful who were the inspiration of men of genius, nor had he ever received any authentic indication of such women now living. It had been his misfortune, for they existed, or all the books were liars. Edith Lancaster certainly wasn't one of them; and he reflected sadly that in his life he had hardly known any women whom he could take at all seriously, except in a physical or emotional way. It had been his bad luck.

Yet he thought of Edith Lancaster frequently. She was now almost the only woman he knew in the city, though once there had been plenty. Now that the honey work was over, he scarcely ever saw Iona Horton, save now and then at the store or on the village street. Once she asked him if he had heard from Roll. Roll was working in a big garage at Lowlands Station, and Jerry hadn't heard from him.

He couldn't find anything he much cared to read; he couldn't write; he had nothing to do. He drank a great deal of wine, and sitting alone for days he turned this thing called life over and over in his hands, this fragile, translucent object like an eggshell, so slippery to handle, so impossible to break into.

It seemed the longest winter he had ever spent. He determined to go south next winter and try to start another bee-ranch there. He wouldn't attempt another winter like this.

Late in February he closed his cottage and went to Toronto.

This time he took a large furnished room well down-town, for he meant to stay more than a few days. It was nearly a week before he attempted to see Edith Lancaster. He went to her library, but went at a bad moment. The room was full of people, books returning and books going out. He was only able to have a word with her at her desk.

'I was wondering if you were coming back. How long have you been in town?'

'A day or two. Can you come out to lunch with me?'

She shook her head. The library was under-staffed, and the girls weren't allowed to go out to lunch. They made tea in a room at the rear. Several women approached the desk.

'Come to see me to-morrow night. That's my weekly evening.'

'Not this week. Make it next week,' Jerry said.

He wasn't going there again in day-time tweeds. But he found that he could no longer put on the evening coat he had had so many years. Old Lowlands had broadened his chest more than two inches. But he wasn't going to buy a new one. He procured a dark lounge suit that would be useful anywhere, and he went to Edith's evening.

Seldom had he suffered as much. A dozen people were there, neither Maitland nor Lloyd, and he knew none of them. They talked dully of things of which he knew nothing and had no interest in, particularly a large, florid voluble woman who was, it appeared, important in child welfare work. Jerry drank beer and ate sandwiches and said nothing, and as soon as he could he went away.

'You don't like my party,' Edith said to him at the door.

'I've lived too long in the country for parties.'

'I'm afraid you struck a bad night. Last Saturday night you'd have enjoyed it.' She hesitated a moment. 'To-morrow's Sunday, isn't it? From ten to one on Sunday is the peacefulest time of the whole week, unless you go to church. Will you come and breakfast with me?'

'I will. What time?'

'Say half-past ten. I don't get up early on Sunday.'

Accustomed to getting up before seven, Jerry ate a good plate of bacon and fried eggs before going to Edith's breakfast. It was a mild, sunny morning, and the deep quiet of a British Sabbath enveloped the city. All the shops were closed; there were no Sunday newspapers; there were no trucks running; there was no business; you could not buy a cigar. Even the street-cars ran less frequently, and apparently less noisily than on week-days.

Men and women in silk hats and fur coats, carrying handsomely bound prayer-books, proceeded along the streets toward the churches. Handsome motors passed quietly, letting out their passengers in front of the churches, with Bibles and morocco-bound prayer-books.

There was no roar of traffic; and in the stillness Jerry heard the sweet chime of the cathedral for the half hour, playing Handel's plaintive air:

In every hour
Be Thou our guide
And by Thy power
No foot shall slide.

Then the city hall clock struck with a heavy boom. It told him that he was late. But when he reached Edith's apartment he seemed, if anything, to be early. There was a fresh fire in the grate, and a small table laid with white, but no breakfast. Edith met him in a gorgeous coolie coat of cubist designs of red and black, and apparently little underneath it. She wore red slippers, and her dark hair was smoothly waved, and she looked about five years younger.

'You're late,' she said. 'That's good, for I overslept myself. Sit down here and let me alone for five minutes and we'll have something to eat.'

Jerry sat on the couch by the window and smoked cigarettes. Out beyond he heard the sound of an egg-beater, and there was a smell of coffee. The sun shone through the window; it was thawing. The bees might fly to-day. Edith was right; the Sunday morning was the peacefulest time of the week. From the window he could see the bare branches of the soft maple trees along the street. Their buds were swelling already. In no time the bees would be getting pollen from them; and then the willows; and then the dandelions, which opened the season. It would be no time at all. Outside the street seemed dead, except for the church-goers. The church chimes rang sweetly again for a quarter to eleven.

Edith brought in a pale yellow omelette on a platter, then the coffee-pot, put slices of bread in the electric toaster and turned on the current. They sat at the table, and she cut the omelette. This was really the peacefulest hour of the week, he thought. The omelette was good, full of bits of ham and savoury herbs. Edith understood cooking, and she understood the importance of eating. She ate a good breakfast herself, and they finished the omelette and a great deal of toast and pineapple marmalade and all the coffee. She went out and made more coffee. She asked him if he had read this and that, had seen so and so. He had read the books, but he had not seen the plays. He had been too much in the country.

'Then tell me what you have been doing in the country. Attending to your bees, I suppose?'

'Not in the winter time. Reading mathematics, mostly.'

'Mathematics! What for?'

'It appears that the meaning of life can be expressed in mathematical symbols better than any other way. God geometrizes, you know.'

Edith hadn't any ideas on this point. She poured him some more coffee, lighted a cigarette and passed him the box, leaning back in her high-backed

chair. Her wide sleeves fell back to her shoulders as she clasped her hands behind her head.

'I'm sorry you had such a dull time the other evening. Generally I have it much better. That child welfare woman was too awful for words, but I didn't know what she was like when I asked her to come.'

'It was a lovely evening,' said Jerry. He got up and went to the window almost behind Edith's chair, and looked out with his knee on the window-seat. Deep Sabbath peace held the city, and Jerry felt at peace, warm with eggs and coffee. The sun shone sweetly on the soft maples, that would soon be yielding honey and pollen. In the room it was warm and quiet and sunny, with a Sabbath languor, full of the smell of cigarette smoke and coffee. It was amazing, he thought, how intimate he already felt with her, though he knew her hardly at all.

'No, it wasn't a lovely evening. It was one of my failures. I sometimes have them. But not very often. Nobody in Toronto can get together the people I do. I've worked hard for it.'

Heavens! he thought. To work hard for this—to get together a group of dull people to eat her sandwiches and drink her beer!

'Do you think it's worth while?'

'You might as well be dead as not live.'

'You seem to have a wonderful life. Don't you like your library work?'

'I detest it. I've never done anything that I really wanted in all my life.'

Jerry looked down at her, surprised. He had fancied that nobody but himself ever felt like that. She was lying languidly back in the chair, her head thrown back, looking almost upward at him, with one bare arm curled over the chair-top. He bent down, removed the cigarette from her mouth, and kissed her gently.

She did not return the kiss. She merely ignored it. He replaced the cigarette in her lips. She continued to smoke it, looking up at him indifferently, as if she had not noticed anything.

Irritated, Jerry removed the cigarette again, and kissed her again, much more violently, at the same time placing his hand on her breast. Through the thin silk he felt the soft swell of her breast under his palm, and he felt the beating of her heart, beating quietly, unhurried. She did not resent it nor resist, but looked up at him with an indifferent passivity that amounted almost to antagonism.

‘You think this is the way?’ she said.

‘No, I see it isn’t,’ said Jerry, removing his hand.

He gave her back her cigarette and she continued to smoke without any sign of emotion. Jerry felt defeated and crushed, but greatly interested, and he observed her with increased attention. She knocked off the ash.

‘And now,’ she said, ‘you might tell me what you have really been doing at Old Lowlands.’

Jerry went back to his chair at the other side of the table, and tried to tell her. She didn’t seem greatly interested. He knew that he had blundered with her. But it didn’t matter much. He was bound to blunder with her some time, and it might as well be now. There were always people with whom one blundered as if by a fatality, inevitably, perpetually. He had better not see Edith Lancaster again. When he went away she invited him for her next Saturday evening, but he did not go.

Instead, he sat up most of that night with Edgar Lloyd, who was back in the market again, and very bearish on May wheat, which had just come on the board. It was rising, but Lloyd said this was a false movement, a mere gambling turn, and the higher it went the harder it would fall. He was waiting for the psychological moment to sell, and he urged Jerry to put his money into it; and Jerry did think seriously of doing so, but he waited for the psychological moment.

Lloyd took him to one of Arthur York Front’s parties, which were periodic and celebrated. At midnight the big studio room, dusty and unkempt, hung with weapons and furs and relics of history, was crowded with young people. The Canadian Homer liked them young. Pianists working in shifts played incessant jazz; the centre of the floor was crowded with dancers. At the farther end of the room Front himself sat like a Silenus, with a keg of beer on one side of him and a keg of wine on the other. Close by was a table containing glasses and great metal-capped tankards, and platters of sliced rye bread, strong cheese, smoked fish, pickles and garlic sausages. Everybody had a tankard or a tumbler and they set them down anywhere, on anything. The room was full of them, so that any moment anybody could put out his hand and find a half-empty goblet.

The room was blue with smoke. There was a roar of jazz, of laughter, of talking, of dancing. There were no celebrities present; Arthur York Front wanted to be the only celebrity himself; and he looked like one, massive and formidable, jovial and grim at once, in a frightfully shabby evening suit.

Most of the guests were young, especially the women. The Canadian Homer liked them young. But Jerry presently recognized several men he used to know, and in the glow of the drinks he found them as good fellows as ever. He took their telephone numbers and promised to ring them up. From time to time Front left his place to take one of the girls into a room aside, to show her, he said, some of his rarest curiosities. Other couples also drifted into side rooms. Jerry fox-trotted with a girl. He couldn't dance well, but that didn't matter. Nobody danced well, squeezing their partners very close, and shuffling and eddying about to the crashing piano. He caught a glimpse of Lloyd, who was not dancing but with a glass of beer and a huge piece of bread and cheese was talking earnestly to another man, perhaps about French poetry, perhaps about May wheat.

The poet tapped another keg of beer. This was much better fun than Edith Lancaster's parties, Jerry thought. There were only two sorts of successful parties, he thought—either a little group of three or four men with something to drink and a lot of wild talk about poetry and philosophy; or else a madhouse circus like this. Between the two you fell into a dead centre, and that showed that Aristotle was no good, as Lloyd said.

Jerry was already beginning to feel a little drunk, not so much with the liquor as with the general exuberance. A young Chinese Communist sat down beside him and gave him a great deal of interesting, if true, information about the Red republics of Mongolia. China was presently going to explode like a bomb from within, and sweep capitalistic civilization out of Asia. He danced with an Italian-looking girl who explained to him her views on homo-sexuality. A young man, very drunk, overheard her and cut in, quoting Whitman. He didn't last very long. Sitting on a sofa, another girl questioned Jerry about his love-life, and seemed to indicate that she would be willing to enlarge it. She was a slim, dark, excitable-looking slip of a thing; and it occurred to Jerry that it was only with dark-eyed women that he had ever been able to get on any sort of relations. He had blue eyes himself, and he began to wonder whether this pigmentation was the symbol of some spiritual quality. He reached out for a drink, and, not finding one, he went to the keg.

When he came back another girl sat heavily down beside him, said simply 'Oh dear!' cuddled up on his shoulder and went to sleep. He hadn't been able to see the colour of her eyes, but her hair was dark. He put her down gently on the cushions. Lloyd came over to him.

'This wine is pretty rotten,' he said. 'There's a fellow over here with a bottle of Scotch, but we don't want Front to see it.'

Jerry had some of the Scotch. Rotten as the wine was, the keg was finished, and the poet had to open another. The uproar, the laughter, the dancing seemed to increase. Somebody kissed Jerry, but he never found out who it was.

A tango banged out on the piano, loud and strong, but only for a bar or two. It was a new hand on the keyboard. Then the dance music broke off, and the pianist began to play something so grave and sweet, so sweet and cold that the dancing and the drinking and the laughing stopped all at once. Coldly, slowly the piano notes dropped, beautiful and severe as a mathematical formula, poignant and cold. One of Clerk Maxwell's equations would be like this, Jerry thought, if it were permitted to burst into the full flower of its meaning. Slowly, coldly, it seemed to recite a formula of truth and beauty, in an inflexible mathematical setting. It was perfect; it was so because it could not be otherwise. God geometrizes, Jerry thought, and this must be how He does it.

The icy ecstasy came to an end. The pianist, a dark slender boy, slipped off the piano seat. There was a dead silence for about ten seconds, and then a storm of clapping. The musician bowed and bowed again, smiling, to the incessant clapping, shook his head, and went to the beer-keg. A South American, Jerry heard, an Argentine, a piano teacher, having a hard time to get along.

People began to go away. Jerry was amazed to find that it was five o'clock. Cars were coming up before the house. A young man at the telephone was calling taxis for those unable to call for themselves. All the couches were strewn with inanimate figures of both sexes. The Chinese Communist, who had a car, offered to drive Jerry home.

Lloyd caught at his arm.

'Where are you going, Jerry? There's quite a lot of the night left yet. . .'

But Jerry escaped him. He was transported home, he hardly knew how, and went to bed without completely undressing.

Next morning he found a great many telephone numbers in his notebook, but he had not the slightest idea whom he had promised to ring up. One absurd detail of the party after another recurred hazily in his mind. That was the sort of a party that had some stuff in it, he thought, greatly amused. It was the best time he had had since the war.

He remembered the old-time studio parties in New York, when he was making his first success as a writer of thrillers. There was less music then,

less noise and dancing, but the liquor was a great deal better. There was more money going. All the serial writers, the special writers, the commercial artists were blowing in money. That had been a good time too, until the war cut it short.

He did not go to Edith Lancaster's next evening, but he telephoned her, and called one mid-week evening to see her. He found a man there already, a young Englishman named Telford Smith, whom he had already casually met. Smith had tried to learn fruit-ranching in the west, and then had done some newspaper work in Winnipeg, and now was irregularly connected with some newspaper in Toronto. He was friendly and had a jolly public-school manner, but he seemed to have settled himself for the evening, and Jerry stayed only half an hour. When he was leaving, Edith asked him to come to breakfast with her the next Sunday morning.

There was no mild Sabbath quiet that morning. A high wind blew, with flurries of rain and sleet. Winter was almost over, but spring seemed far away. The sleet drove spattering against Edith's windows, but the fire burned warmly and the table had yellow daffodils on it, and she gave him a glass of grape-fruit juice strong with gin, and then liver and bacon and toast and strawberry jam. She didn't wear the coolie coat that morning, but an orange and black kimono like a futuristic sunflower.

Jerry had half expected to find Telford Smith at the breakfast, but he wasn't there. Jerry was determined to make no blunders this time, and they sat in front of the fire, talking and smoking, while the rain and sleet beat on the glass, freezing as it fell, coating all the houses and telegraph poles and wires with a glittering film. Few church-goers were in sight, and you couldn't hear the chimes; and during that forenoon while they sat sedately by the fire like a domestic couple, she told Jerry a good deal about herself.

There were several Sunday breakfasts after that. By degrees and in snatches she told Jerry a good deal about her life. Her parents were dead; she had no family. It appeared that she had some small income, but not enough to live on with any comfort. So at first she had learned stenography like everybody else, and somehow she had managed to get an appointment for a year to a Canadian government office in London. She had been in Paris and Brussels and Amsterdam. Afterwards she mentioned different casual jobs. She had been the paid secretary of a women's club in Halifax; had been interested in a tea-room in Montreal. She had done a little newspaper work as a most minor assistant on a women's page, and afterwards, along with another girl, she had opened a gift shop in Toronto; but this, he gathered, had

been a disaster. Finally she had taken a library training course, and secured this position at the Beauchamp branch.

She didn't like it. She was planning to go to live in Europe, in London for choice. She didn't say how she expected this move to be financed.

'That's where you ought to be, Jerry. It's criminal for a man like you to bury himself in the country.'

Jerry laughed in the way that irritated her.

'I'm no victim of the great European illusion. I was so once. I used to read Henry James, and I thought there was no possibility of real living outside Paris or Rome. But I've got over all that. Life is much the same everywhere, once you get over the initial novelty of the language and local customs.'

'What you say is nonsense,' she said. 'The people of Maine are different from the Mexicans; the Norse are different from the Sicilians.'

'No, I think they're at bottom much the same,' he insisted.

'At bottom? But can you get to the bottom? Anyhow, there are far more people interested in literature and art and philosophy in Paris than in Old Lowlands.'

'No. I fancy about the same, proportionately. There are two in Old Lowlands—your uncle and myself—about one per cent of the population. I don't think there's a greater percentage in Paris.'

'That's mere sophistry. You can collect a thousand people in Paris who are interested . . .'

'I'm not much interested in literature or art myself, if it comes to that,' said Jerry.

'You're not? Then what are you interested in?'

Jerry considered it. He really didn't know what he was much interested in. Probably he was more interested in his bees than anything. And in adventure stories, and in the new mathematical explanation of the universe—if he could only understand it.

He told her about his bees, and about his manner of living. He irritated her intensely.

'And you've lived like that for all these years? You poor boy!' she exclaimed with dreadful compassion.

‘It hasn’t been such a bad life,’ Jerry said. Old Lowlands and the bee-yards seemed very remote and unreal now. He told her how much money he made.

‘But you couldn’t possibly live on that!’

‘I can hardly spend it. In fact, I put money in the bank every year and I’ve got a few bonds. I run three motors, one of them rather good, and I have a house and books and all the liquor I want and I could go south every winter and still keep within my income. Lots of bee-men do that. It’s not a bad life.’

‘Oh yes. I suppose living in the country is cheap,’ she said with unveiled contempt.

Jerry knew well what she meant. It was a cheap life in the country and he was a cheap man, without the instincts of a gentleman. The men she knew, the artists and journalists and advertising men would have died rather than live as Jerry lived. Their whole self-respect, their position in society, depended on the tailors they chose, their restaurants, their addresses. They would have rather perished than live in the cheap rooms Jerry used, wear the cheap clothes he bought, go to the Chinese restaurants where he obtained regular and quite good meals. They would have clung to their apartment till they were put out; they would have borrowed to the last of their credit, would have lived on loans, submitted to every humiliation and disgrace, perhaps even dishonesty, rather than abandon the standards of a gentleman. Every man has his own sort of pride, Jerry thought.

Lloyd thought that May wheat had reached its ultimate top. On his advice Jerry sold five thousand bushels short, at a low margin which Lloyd obtained for him through a friendly broker. Lloyd’s judgment was good. Wheat began to fall almost at once, rallied a little, fell, rallied, fell. Jerry saw a profit of about $500 and took it, closing his trade, and earning Lloyd’s contempt for his lack of courage. Lloyd himself held on, and the wheat still went down, while Lloyd pyramided. It went about ten cents lower and Lloyd had a paper profit of nearly $4,000, all reinvested. Then it turned about and began to climb. The $4,000 was wiped out, but by cleverly catching a soft spot Lloyd managed to get out with only a trifling loss. He was not at all depressed, for this had happened to him so often that he was used to it.

‘You ought to write something, Jerry,’ Edith said.

This Sunday morning, instead of staying indoors they had walked out to the park and sat down on a bench. It was quiet and mild, with the true

Sunday hush. Spring was really at hand; the grass was growing green, and the park gardeners had been preparing the flower beds. But there was a sharp little breath in the air, and warm coats were needed.

Edith spoke as if she didn't know that he had ever written anything, though she had tried to read one of his books. She had been telling him about Telford Smith, the young English newspaper man. Smith was writing a rural novel for the Howard-Elliott prize. Of course he didn't really expect to win it. He had shown some of the manuscript to Edith.

'Was it any good?'

'I thought it was wonderful. Why don't you write something, Jerry?'

'I'm not a writer. I'm a bee-man,' Jerry said, tired of repeating this formula.

He irritated her intensely, and he knew it. They had talked of books a great deal. She had read Proust and Gide and Cocteau and Joyce and Lawrence and T. S. Eliot, all the high explosives of modern literature. But these huge armour-piercing projectiles seemed to have gone through her without exploding, leaving only a vague uneasiness. She thought Telford Smith's story was wonderful. Jerry felt sure that he could write a far better story than Smith, if he had a mind to. But he hadn't the mind.

'What does Uncle Richard think you ought to do?'

'Richard Cumberland? My dear, he doesn't care a curse what anybody does, except that I think he might take an intellectual pleasure in seeing a man make a fool of himself. I think he did suggest that I go away somewhere, to Havana or Siam, just so that I could come back to Old Lowlands with a fresh eye.'

'Why don't you do it?'

'I haven't the price. Richard asked me, I remember, what I would do if I had an independent income.'

'What did you tell him?'

'I said I didn't know. I probably wouldn't do anything. Really, for a moment, I thought he was going to offer to endow me.'

'He could very well afford it. I'm surprised that he hasn't.'

She was silent for some moments, as if thinking hard, looking absently at the muddy green of the spring grass.

‘Jerry,’ she said, ‘Uncle Richard can’t last much longer.’

‘I thought that the last time I saw him.’

‘He’s a very wealthy man, you know. Ernie gets the house and the home farm. But besides that there must be several hundred thousand dollars.’

‘I have no sort of idea.’ Jerry glanced at Edith and laughed. ‘But if you think he’s likely to leave any of that to me you’re much in error. I know him better than that. And besides, he probably hasn’t got nearly as much as you think.’

‘Of course, for my part, I’m not counting on anything, as a niece,’ Edith said. ‘But it seems that you’re his closest friend.’

‘He has no friends, near or close. He might possibly leave me a hundred dollars. Perhaps I’ll be an executor, but probably only a pall-bearer.’

He did not like trying on dead men’s shoes, especially before the man was dead. Certainly he would have liked to get $50,000 from old Richard’s estate. He would have been willing to do a good deal to get it, a good deal of work, a good deal of cadging and sycophancy, for such things are all in the way of ordinary life. He would have been willing to lie a good deal for $50,000 cash, for he recognized that he hadn’t the instincts of a gentleman. But he knew perfectly well that old Richard wasn’t going to leave him anything.

As the month advanced he grew restless, and took to watching the sky and the weather as he did in the country. It grew steadily warmer, warm rain and sun, and then cold rain and sun again. The soft maple buds over the street broke into brown feathery blossoms. From the sidewalk he could see bees at work among them.

He spent another night with Edgar Lloyd, and then gave up his room and went back to Old Lowlands without seeing Edith again.

Old Lowlands was struggling out of the winter. Here and there in sheltered corners there were still small dirty piles of snow, but elsewhere was nothing but mud. The gardens were wastes of dead stalks and wet clay, with small green weed-tips sprouting. The roads and the back yards were full of rubbish, great piles of ashes, torn old newspapers, tin cans, dung, debris, all the sediment of the winter. All the people looked pale and run-down, still wrapped in heavy faded coats. Every morning the earth was stony with frost, and sticky with mud at midday. Still there were teams in the fields; spring ploughing had started on the lighter soils. Maple sap was

running, and Jerry got a gallon of fresh syrup. Cold sun, mud, rain, faint growth, like a world beginning all over again.

His house, garage and workshop were all just as he had left them, cold as the tomb inside and heavy with the shut-up air. He put the battery back in his car, had it oiled and greased, and drove around to all the bee-yards. The roads were rough and muddy. The bees were flying just a little, carrying in water, a sign of plentiful brood-rearing. At the edges of muddy pools the bees were gathered in numbers, sucking up the dirty water to carry back to their hives. A strong colony needed half a pint of water a day. A little pollen was coming in too, small brown balls on the bees' hind legs, probably from the willows. He did not disturb the colonies, for there was no hurry about unpacking them, and they were best let alone; but it was evident that there was not much winter loss.

He opened up the workshop and let the spring air come in, for it was colder inside than outdoors. He kept on his overcoat while he glanced over the supplies, the truck, the engine. There was still a cold stale smell of clover and wax and honey. While he was there Iona Horton came across the road from her house. She looked rather pallid and run-down, like everybody else in the village.

'How have you been, Iona? How's Roll?'

She said she hadn't seen much of him. He was still at the big garage and in no hurry to come back, for he was earning more money than Jerry could afford to pay him. And Jerry was in no hurry for him to come back, wishing to delay wages as long as possible.

'Roll was over here two Sundays ago and looked through the shop,' she informed him. 'I think he went out to some of the yards too. How have the bees wintered?'

'Very well, so far as I've seen.'

She asked him if he had had a good time in town, told him the news of the village, and asked again when he expected to have Roll back. She shivered with the cold of the building, and went home.

Roll must have heard that Jerry was home, for he came over the next Sunday. He said that he would rather stay at the garage a little longer, if Jerry didn't need him. He took the truck down from its blocks, got a grease-gun and went over it, and then drove it to the garage for air and oil and gas. He got the yard touring-car out also, and asked if he might have it for the week-end for a little joyriding. Jerry happened to be on the main highway

the next Saturday afternoon and recognized his yard car with Roll in it, and a small, dark girl, vivacious-faced, moving rapidly toward St. Stephens.

They didn't notice him, and Jerry didn't care. It wasn't his business how Roll amused himself, and even if it had been he would hardly have meddled. But he wondered if Iona knew about the black-haired girl.

The willows were coming into bloom now and the different sorts of maple. The air was still rather too cold for the blossoms to secrete much honey, but the bees began to carry in pollen enormously, pouring into the hive-entrances with brown balls on their legs. These bees were still mostly the winter force, the same bees he had seen last October. It rained and grew warmer. The maples began to yield a little honey, only a little, but really the first honey of the year. For several days the apiary was in an excited and happy state, with bees drifting down and falling heavy laden with honey at the entrances. Jerry unpacked the home yard behind his house, and then was sorry, for the next day it turned cold, and two inches of wet snow fell. But the snow melted and it turned warmer. Again the willows and the maples yielded honey, and tulips and narcissi began to bud in the gardens. Men burned off the dead grass; the air was full of smoke, and the wreck of ashes and dirty tin cans began to be cleared off in the village. Jerry began to unpack the River yard, without sending for Roll.

Toronto and the books and the drinking and gambling began to seem very remote and unreal. Edith Lancaster seemed unreal and remote. She wasn't his sort at all. He was not in love with her. He could not imagine love except along with mental sympathy and friendship, and Edith never reflected his mind. He had hardly even any physical desire for her, except as he might have for anybody. Yet he thought of her often, with some tenderness and irritation, because she was the only woman of his class whom he knew at all intimately now.

And Edith thought of him with irritation and tenderness. He irritated her intensely. He wasn't her sort at all. He had none of the instincts of a gentleman. He was a writer, yet he seemed now content to sink into a squalid existence like a peasant. Yet she could pull him out of all that, she thought, if there were only money enough. But Jerry seemed to have no initiative, no energy, not like Telford Smith.

She thought of him with intense irritation and tenderness. He wasn't a gentleman; his clothes showed it. He wasn't anything that she liked, and she despised his manner of living. Yet she clung to him because he was just now the only man with whom she had any emotional relationship. Once there had

been plenty, but she was getting old. She looked at herself in the mirror with intense suspicion and dread. She had the nightmare of the woman who is growing old and who is not loved.

He had put his hand on her breast; he had kissed her. She had remained impassive; she had not resented it. But he had never done that again, and she was angry with him.

She had the nightmare of the woman who is alone and growing old and without enough money to live as she would wish. She had a nightmare of growing old like the superior librarians where she worked, grey-haired women, crushed and gentle, spending the rest of their lives in stamping cards and moving books from one shelf to another.

Lying awake between midnight and morning she thought of such things, and how she was alone and poor, with no help for it. Sometimes, especially at certain times of the month, she thought wildly that she would give herself to Jerry on any terms, to escape being so alone. But in the morning she felt differently about it.

The weather grew steadily warmer. The maples yielded well. Scraping away the packing of shavings, Jerry looked into the tops of the colonies and found them full of bees from side to side. Warm rain fell. Almost instantly the dandelions began to show yellow spots on all the southward slopes. Jerry began to unpack the Cumberland yard, and sent word to Roll that the season had opened.

V

After all, Jerry unpacked the whole apiary himself. Roll wanted to stay a little longer at the garage where he was earning more than Jerry could afford to pay him; and Jerry was willing to let him stay. Roll borrowed the yard car again for the Sunday, but Jerry didn't ask him about the little black-haired girl.

So Jerry began to unpack, the first heavy, steady work of the season. The bees had wintered well. Of the 420 colonies put away, only 18 were dead. About 20 more were rather weak. Some of them would probably succumb, but most of them would live and build up for the honey season. More still would doubtless be found queenless when they were inspected, but it was impossible to inspect them now.

He took off the heavy cover of the winter case and shovelled the planer shavings away from the tops of the four hives. Then he tipped off the case itself, and rolled it away to a corner of the yard, to stay there till next autumn. He gathered up the loose packing that had tumbled down from the sides of the hives, moved the hives out to the four corners of their platform, and put on the white summer covers. Little by little, the yard began to look like a bee-yard again, groups of white hives instead of rows of great brown boxes.

When he had adjusted each hive he peeled back the top cloth and looked in. Most of the hives were full of bees from side to side, strong colonies, ready to store a big crop if the clover yielded and if they could be kept from swarming.

Unpacking was faster work than packing. The weather stayed fine, excepting a couple of days of light rain, and he finished all the yards within two weeks. Now there was a pause again, for it was not safe to attempt to take out combs or examine the condition of the bees till there was honey coming in. Robbing might be started and queens killed.

The next source of honey would be the dandelions. Honey comes in waves of bloom, with pauses between. The first important wave is the dandelion, followed closely by orchard bloom. The dandelion honey indeed is dark and bitterish, not saleable, and it must not be mixed with the white honey from the clovers. But usually there is little of it left in the hives by

clover-bloom, for the bees use it up almost as fast as they gather it, for wax-making and for the heavy spring brood-rearing.

Next come the clovers—first the small wild white Dutch clover in the pastures, yielding the earliest honey, but very sensitive to atmospheric conditions, and not yielding at all unless the moisture and the temperature are right. Then the alsike clover comes in bloom, but this is usually cut early for hay; and then the yellow sweet clover, or melilotus, also cut for hay; and then the white sweet clover, which lasts longer and usually yields the bulk of the crop.

After that there is buckwheat, dark and strong honey which must be kept apart from the clover; and then the autumn flowers, asters and golden rod; but their honey is left with the bees for winter supplies. Even the buckwheat honey was seldom extracted in Jerry's district, for there was never enough of it for a crop, and it was more useful for the winter hoard.

Scattered dandelions had been blooming for a week, in very sheltered spots, but not enough of them for the bees to notice. Cool weather set in again, with rains and light frosts, holding the dandelions back, holding back the fruit-bloom. The cherry and plum trees were budded and ready to burst, but the cool weather held them. But the bees were not suffering. They had plenty of honey to feed the multiplying brood, and the colonies were growing stronger daily with the hatching of new bees.

Jerry, however, suffered in this interval of anxiety. If the dandelions should fail it might be necessary to feed the bees, and feeding never has the effect of a natural honey-flow. He worked at the shop, sorting and painting and repairing supplies, to put in the time. He went the rounds of the yards every day, but had nothing else to do. Once he took Iona with him in the car. Everything now hung in suspense, waiting the season.

Nervous with the anxiety of it, Jerry tried again to think of writing a sensational story, worth more than the best honey crop he could expect. He still felt the atmosphere of the city winter, of the drinking and the gambling and the wild talk; and he thought of his first years in New York, when he had imagined himself to be at the outset of a career.

As a reporter in Toronto he had never been any good and had hated the work. In his spare time he had written a short novel, a thriller, which he sent to a New York story magazine, and got $800 for it.

Instantly he threw up his job and went to New York, with ideas for more thrillers, ten, twenty, any number of them. He could make a lot of money,

and he was going to write poems besides. Even then Greenwich Village was growing too expensive and advertised, and he kept out of it, eating cheaply at restaurants that still later became famous. Through some introductions, he fell into a strange and new sort of Bohemia, a fantastic underworld of literature and art, of writers whose books were never reviewed, were unknown to the cultured, but who drew immense incomes, writers who wrote two or three novels at once, writing fiction with the speed and accuracy of a carpenter driving nails. There were editors and owners of publications which Jerry had never heard of, which nobody had ever heard of so far as he knew, but which had enormous circulations, and commanded high advertising rates. They were all rolling in money, or appeared to be. There were artists who talked of Picasso and Renoir at great length, but who drew magazine covers at $500 apiece. There were journalists of every description, Sunday special writers, sporting writers, fashion writers, writers who had no speciality but said they got special rates, women who wrote prize-fight stories, and men who conducted domestic columns. They all drew large salaries; they all oozed money; they blew it in. They were playing the races, playing the market, playing poker, even playing policy, and buying tickets on illegal European lotteries. Somebody was always winning and celebrating on it.

There were wild studio parties, highbrow parties where semi-famous poets read their new poems while everybody drank heavily of Scotch high-balls; poker parties lasting through a whole week-end. And the horde of women camp-followers—girls of unnatural beauty, wearing amazing dresses, most of them artists, mostly claiming some sort of connection with the stage, for the films were not then important. They talked art, literature, and sport with equal facility. And there were a few elderly, disillusioned men, dryly enjoying the show, with whom Jerry talked sometimes with a sense of relief.

It had been great fun, much better than Arthur York Front's party, and Edith Lancaster with her evenings had never seen anything like it. But Jerry had never been able to enter fully into the fun. For one thing, he could not afford it. He was not making $10 or $20 a day like these commercial artists. Most of his first $800 went before he knew where it had gone, and he did not know how to live on loans and promises. He knew nobody well enough to ask for fifty dollars, though plenty of men whom he scarcely knew asked him for a ten till the week-end. But Jerry had the country caution about money, and it was a nightmare to him to think of running short. But he sold another thriller for $1,500 and the editor was cordial and ready to take more, and he was able to get $1,800 for the next.

That was his *Tiger Lily*, which he had worked over and over, trying to make it fit for successful book publication. Without much difficulty he got a publisher to issue it as a book. Its sale was less than 1,000 copies, and he drew royalties of about $150.

Still, it had been great fun, and he made enough money to carry him on. But he was disappointed. None of these people knew nor cared anything about literature, about poetry, about the new French movement, which had excited Jerry wildly. They knew nothing but what had been written and printed yesterday, and nothing about any language but American. Jerry had expected a whirl of cosmos-literary effects, and he was disappointed.

But he learned something. He learned how to write commercial fiction without thinking about it, and how to write three novels at once. He had three under way, and one of them just completed when the war broke out.

Suddenly the stock market closed in a panic. All his friends were broke. Publishers' contracts were cancelled right and left. All the journalists were desperately trying to get commissions to go to the war front for their papers. The war could not last more than three months. Other more adventurous spirits were going north to enlist with the Canadian forces, in a desperate hurry, since the war would be over by Christmas. Still more adventurous spirits, but saying less about it, were trying to get to Holland or Norway, to join the German forces. The mob of beautiful girls melted away.

Jerry took his completed novel to his editor. He had expected to get $1,200 for it at least, but the editor reluctantly agreed to give him $800, and said that he couldn't take anything more till things looked more settled.

Carried away by the torrent, Jerry tried to work on his two unfinished thrillers. It wasn't much use. Probably he would get nothing for them if he finished them. Nearly all the men he knew had disappeared, somehow into the war. Jerry cared little about the war; yet it seemed a sort of adventure which no adventurous spirit should avoid; and he went back to Canada and enlisted in an artillery unit.

His military career was not glorious. At the training camp he got a smashed foot from an ammunition lorry, and spent a considerable time in hospital. Returning to training, he got pneumonia, and was again in hospital. He was sent to England with his contingent, and in camp there he got a second attack of pneumonia, which was serious this time. When he was convalescent they sent him back to Canada. There was a question of discharging him with a pension, for his lungs seemed affected; but in the end

they put him in a military office in Ottawa to do clerical work, and there he stayed till the end of the war.

But it was this that had made him a bee-man. One of his associates in the regimental office was the son of a great apiarist. He talked about bee-keeping to Jerry and in times of leave they went to visit a large bee-keeper not far out of the city. Here Jerry first saw hives opened, saw bees handled, saw them managed on a large scale, and he became infected with the 'bee fever'. He knew that he would have to earn a living after his discharge, and it would have to be some outdoor work, for his lungs were still weak, and he might go into consumption.

Well, Old Lowlands had cured him of all that. He had almost forgotten that old terror of tuberculosis. He was robust now, with a greatly increased chest-expansion, and he could work all day at lifting heavy weights, except that when he was over-tired his injured foot still pained him. And Old Lowlands had cured him of the idea that he might be a genius.

He was no genius, but he had a good trade, like any mechanic, at writing commercial fiction. He had always thought of taking it up again. A couple of good thrillers would bring in more money than a whole year's honey crop. He had defended his mode of life to Edith, but he knew that it was no sort of life; and he grew periodically terrified at the idea of sinking deeper into the slime of Old Lowlands, that decaying village sinking slowly back into the primal earth.

But now he felt no sort of desire to write thrillers. He dug out the manuscripts of the two unfinished stories which he had been writing in New York before the war, and he was amazed at their crudity, their flatness. He had actually been paid money for such things! He undertook to read his *Tiger Lily*, which was so old now that it was new to him again, and he was again appalled. No wonder Edith couldn't read it! He couldn't read it himself.

Then the weather turned suddenly warm, after a heavy rain. The dandelions opened profusely in a single night, and there was a roar from the bee-yards.

There was no more time for thinking or writing. At once Jerry telephoned to Roll that the season had opened, and Roll came over, rather sulky, looked at the bees, and agreed to start work the next day.

Jerry started work at the home yard, while Roll began at the Caledon. Honey was coming in fast. All the roadsides were growing yellow with the

dandelions. The pastures grew to look, at a distance, like sheets of gold. The bees poured in, heavy with honey, or laden with yellow balls of dandelion pollen. All through the yard he could smell the strong, bitterish smell of the dandelion honey. In the excitement of this first real honey-flow, the yard roared like a great mill.

The bees were easy to handle now. Jerry blew a little smoke over the entrance, and took off the hive-cover. The brown bees surged up over the tops of the exposed combs, but not angrily, and a light puff from the smoker drove them down. He loosened the glued frames with his steel hive-tool. It was pleasant to handle the bees again, and the hot hive-smell of honey and wax was pleasant. The bees were gentle, wholly absorbed in their work, not inclined to sting.

He took out one frame of comb after another, sheets of honeycomb with old pale sealed honey at the top, and fresh open cells of new dandelion honey. All the combs were covered with a froth of crawling bees. Towards the middle and the bottom of the comb were the cells of brood, biscuit-coloured sealed cells at the outside, then open cells containing unsealed larvae like little white worms, and then cells containing nothing but eggs, a tiny white speck at the bottom of each cell. A good queen, he thought, laying her eggs in concentric circles, never missing a cell.

On the seventh comb he saw the queen herself, surrounded by her guard of attendants. She was long and brown, dragging her slender chocolate-coloured body over the comb. She did not seem to mind being lifted out of the hive, and she continued to crawl over the comb, looking into each cell to see if she had already laid in it. She found one not occupied, and she backed her long abdomen into it, and laid an egg.

Jerry waited till she had finished, and then picked up the queen and clipped her wings with a pair of fine scissors. He put her back on the comb. That queen would not fly out with a swarm. He put the comb back in the hive, closed the hive, and marked its front with a great ‘C’ in blue chalk, meaning that the queen had been clipped that spring. Where he found queens that had been clipped the previous year he marked them with a red ‘C’, as old queens, which would probably need to be replaced.

It was hot and the whole yard smelt sweet and bitter with the dandelion honey. Jerry wore a white duck suit for the first time that year. He always wore white in the summer bee-yards, for bees dislike dark colours; and he could not endure the idea of the pale khaki overalls that Roll wore during the heavy season.

Light or dark, he would hardly have been stung that day. The eager bees poured through the hive-entrances, thinking neither of stinging nor of robbing, rapt in a happy enthusiasm of honey-gathering. Yet in all probability these insects were neither happy nor enthusiastic. They were most likely mere mechanisms, reacting to the stimulus of the proffered honey. Jerry began again to think of behaviourism. He thought again that the individual bees were no more than detached cells, and that the real animal was the colony itself. The bees seemed to have little individual life of themselves, but the colony had a powerful life, a powerful common consciousness. Two or three bees shut in a box, provided with honey and water, will die very soon, unable to bear separation from the colony. The bees knew each other's minds, else how could they work together in the darkness of the hive, performing the most complicated operations with microscopic exactness, though a bee cannot see in the dark. Caught out at night, bees are utterly blind and lost. They will not even attempt to fly. But in the inky darkness of the hive they perform their complex and mysterious operations without hesitation or error.

Such speculations drifted through half of Jerry's mind, while his other half was very intent on the work. This May work was the easy, pleasant season. The bees were gentle, there were no great weights of honey to lift, and the queens could be found easily. Whenever Jerry found a colony well filling its hive, he added a super, a second story of combs, which the bees would at once occupy and fill with honey and brood. When he found any colony rather short of honey he marked it, and afterwards gave it combs of honey from colonies that had it to spare; for the dandelion flow could not be trusted. He found two or three colonies that had lost their queens, and were in a hopeless and dejected state. He knew them immediately he took off the cover, by the distressed roar they set up; and these he united with colonies weak in bees but having a good queen.

It was pleasant, slow work, for he did not hurry. To examine the ten combs in a hive, find the queen, estimate the strength of the colony in bees and brood and honey, and give them what they might need took some time. Eight or ten colonies to the hour was good work. Jerry took two days for the home yard, and more than four days for the big Cumberland yard. Roll had finished with the Caledon yard, and was working at the River, when the weather broke up.

Jerry went over to help him, for he had not finished clipping the queens, but it was impossible to handle the bees. Dandelions still covered the pastures with yellow, but it was chill and windy and there was no honey in

the blossoms. The disappointed bees were ferocious, boiling out fiercely at the opening of the hive, and robbers prowled about all the hives, seeking to steal honey. One of the weak colonies was overpowered and entirely robbed out, leaving only a pile of slaughtered bees and a set of torn and mangled empty combs. To try to interfere with the hives would only set up more fighting; they had to give it up.

Slowly the cold wave passed. The weather grew warm again. The orchards broke into flower, all white and pink and perfume, and the trees roared with bees. It was possible again to go on with the yard work. Then, for some obscure reason, the apple-bloom ceased to yield honey. There would be a poor apple crop. The bees went back to the dandelions, but these were almost over.

Pale balls of fluff began to replace the golden blossoms. Almost in a night the golden pastures turned pale, turned to a misty white all over the ground, where the blossoms had turned to fluffy silken clocks. It was the end of the dandelions, and the end of the fruit-bloom too, for the winter apples yielded a little and then perished. The first wave of the honey-season was over.

Still, it had not been so bad. All the colonies had enough honey-stores now, and almost all the hives were three-storied, some four-storied, strong in bees, boiling with energy. Already there were odd heads of alsike and white clover blooming in sheltered places along the roadsides.

Everything was set for the main honey-flow. Roll and Jerry hauled truck-loads of supplies to all the yards, empty combs, spare hive-bodies, frames of foundation, excluders, covers and bottom boards, nucleus-boxes for queen-rearing, and stacked them ready for the rush.

Still the honey-flow held off. It rained in torrents for two days, and then a cold wind set in. The last apple petals were blown off in wet flakes on the grass, though the early apples were already set in small green lumps. The bare woodlands were thick and fresh with green. Oats were being seeded, potatoes being planted, and the gardens were already sprouting. Lowlands village was green over the dirt of the winter, and brilliant tulips and hyacinths blossomed around all the houses.

Still the clover held back. It was impossible again to handle the bees. Roll borrowed the yard car again, for there was nothing to do, and for two days Jerry did not see him. There was a cold drizzle, then clearing, then cold again. There was nothing to do but watch the thermometer.

A package of books arrived for old Richard, and Jerry took them to him, but he did not stay long. His whole mind now was on the weather, on the season, and he felt incapable of the dry repartee of intellectual logic-chopping—of anything that comprised Richard Cumberland's residue of life.

He could not think of anything but the weather. There was something inimical to the honey-secretion this year. He had seen it before. Sometimes throughout the summer the fields would be full of clover blossoms, but with no honey in them.

In the middle of one night the weather changed. In the morning the wind blew softly from the south, and there was a softness in the air. Wild white clover opened that morning. The bees were out early, flying over the pastures, but not finding any honey. But that afternoon there was really clover honey coming in, not very much, but still unmistakable. The guards were taken off the hive-entrances; the temper of the apiary changed.

Jerry kept a hive on a platform-scale behind his house, an average colony, so far as he could judge. He recorded its gain or loss every evening. It had gained ten pounds on the dandelions, but ever since it had been steadily going down, as the bees used up their honey in brood-rearing. But this day it came up a little. The scale showed a gain of two pounds.

This was nothing, of course, compared to the real honey-flows. The honey came from the wild white clover, and this is the very best, but there is seldom very much of it. Jerry drove out to the River yard, and to the Caledon yard, where Roll was trying to work, and found nothing coming in. Either there was no clover in that district, or it was not yielding.

But the weather grew warmer. The hay fields of alsike clover grew mottled with pink, and then suddenly spread crimson and white and pink like an immense Persian carpet. There was honey now, but still not much. The clover was not yielding right. The scale hive was hardly more than holding its own.

Then a breathless hot wave came over, with thunder in the air, and the clover really yielded. For an electrical tension always stimulates the secretion of nectar. Honey seemed to pour in that afternoon, and by night the scale hive had gained five pounds. At the same rate for all the yards, Jerry must be richer by almost a ton of honey for the day.

Next morning the heavy honey-flow was resumed. There was a thunder-storm impending, and shortly before noon it broke. It rained in torrents,

cleared at sunset, but the next day was bright and cool. The bees got nothing, and were savage.

The hay began to be cut before the cool spell ended. The gorgeous fields of blossoming alsike were levelled, piled in rows, carted away. The bees flew mournfully over the clipped meadows, astonished to find no blooming there. It was the end of the second wave of the honey season.

But the yellow sweet clover was now in bud, soon to bloom. Now there was an interval again. Nothing could be done in the yards for the bees were too fierce to handle; and the bee-keepers were anxious and strained, waiting for the culmination of so much anxiety and preparation. It was now a matter of a few weeks. There would be a crop or not, depending on the weather, on the wind, on the electrical condition of the atmosphere.

Jerry could not read, he could not write. He looked at the yards, driving his car all day, or muddled about the workshop. He drank heavily of his honey mead. By nights he could not sleep. Between midnight and dawn, lying awake, he cursed his life and his folly at having entered it. He had no friends, he was making no money, he had no prospects for anything better. Edgar Lloyd at least was aiming at something important. He slept a little towards dawn, and awoke with a start to read the thermometer and prognosticate the signs of the weather.

Every year there had been this intense strain and anxiety. But there had almost always been a crop. Once since Jerry had been at Old Lowlands the honey season had failed completely; twice the crop had been half of normal.

A warm gentle rain fell, and it cleared, and the clover began to yield again, only a little, hardly enough to affect the scale hive, yet the bees could be handled through the middle of the day. At this time Roll reported the first swarming-cells, and Jerry found some the next day.

It was the first indication of swarming. This slow, dragging honey-flow was the worst possible thing for swarming, for the crowded colonies of bees seem to start swarming-cells in the lack of any other outlet for their energies.

The cells had just been started. At the lower edge of a comb were four or five small waxen cups, and a queen's egg in the bottom of each. These were incipient queen-cells. Within a few days these would be built out into great peanut-shaped projections each with its embryo queen afloat in royal jelly. They would be closed and sealed in a week, and then the colony would swarm, taking the old queen with them, unless she were clipped.

Most of the queens were clipped, but not all of them. For the present Jerry contented himself with destroying all the queen-cells he could find. Probably the bees would immediately start more. From now on, it would be his business to see that every colony was gone through systematically every ten days.

Honey continued to come in lightly. The scale hive was gaining about two pounds a day. More supers of empty combs were put on, to discourage swarming. Jerry worked every day now, and long hours, and slept heavily at night. He worked the home yard and the Cumberland yard mostly, and Roll worked at the River and the Caledon and the Smith yards. They seldom worked together. A man has to know his own bees, must know each colony personally, its history, and its character. He must remember the peculiarities of each, and by way of record of what he has been doing there were marks of all sorts on the hives, chalk marks on the sides, bits of wood or stones placed in certain positions on the covers to indicate some condition of the interior of the colony. Jerry and Roll had each his own system of markings, and if either had gone into the other's yard he would have been puzzled, not knowing what to do.

In spite of Jerry's vigilance, two swarms came off at the Cumberland yard. But the queens were clipped, and the bees roared about uncertainly in the air for some minutes, settled on a bough, and then began to drift back to their hive to look for their queen. The queen had been hopping about on the grass, trying to fly, and Jerry ruthlessly pinched her head off. Now the swarm would have to wait till a fresh queen-cell hatched; and Jerry destroyed all their cells but one. The bees would not swarm with no queen-cell left in the hive.

He began to start queen-mating nuclei, working at all the yards, for Roll was no good at this work. A good supply of spare queens was essential, for making up new colonies, for supplying colonies with failing queens, or where queens had been lost. He could find plenty of queen-cells now, and he took a frame or two of brood, with all its mass of clustering bees, and put them into a new hive, with a queen-cell almost ready to hatch. Within a few weeks, each of these nuclei would be a miniature colony with a laying queen.

It rained with a strong south wind, and cleared off warmer. The yellow sweet clover came out suddenly. Two days later the scale hive gained six pounds, then eight, with a hot wave coming on. It grew blisteringly hot, the right weather for sweet clover to yield. The next afternoon Jerry left the bee-yard almost sick with heat. Combs held in the sun for a minute melted down

into wax. That day the scale hive gained ten pounds, and at night the bees clustered out in great masses on the fronts of their hives. Twenty thousand bees hung there like a dead mass on every hive-front and there was a heavy roaring from the inside, where the night force was shifting and evaporating the fresh nectar.

The hot wave lasted three days, and broke up in wind and rain. But the scale hive had gained twenty-eight pounds, and more supers of combs had to be given to all the colonies. Then the yellow clover began to be cut for hay. The yellow disappeared by degrees. The scale hive ceased to gain.

The break in the honey-flow came at a bad time. There were innumerable queen-cells in the hives, many of which Jerry had been preserving for his queen-nuclei, reserving them till they were on the point of hatching. If they were allowed to hatch in the hives there would be a swarm. It was almost impossible to handle the bees then, but the cells had to be looked after.

No honey was coming in, and the bees were like devils. In this emergency Roll and Jerry worked together. While Jerry drove in the guards with smoke at the entrance, Roll heaved off the supers, and they looked rapidly over the combs, two or three dozen of them piled on the ground, covered with dazed angry bees, while the fighting force buzzed in the air, against their gauze veils, stung their hands and arms. When the stinging got too bad Jerry put on gloves, but Roll stoically endured it. Instant decisions had to be made—whether to kill the queen, and leave a cell, or cut out all the cells, or shake all the colony into a new hive—all on the instant, with the whole honey crop of the colony depending on the decision.

It was a hard day, and when they drove away a swarm of bees followed the open car down the road, stinging so that they dared not take off their veils for almost a quarter of a mile.

But the white sweet clover was on the point of bloom. It came slowly into blossom, the chief honey-yielder of the season. The fields were already growing greenish-white with bloom, yet it yielded grudgingly. The scale hive crept up at four or five pounds a day. It was too cool, sunny and cool and windy. It was what holiday-makers called ideal weather, but Jerry cursed it as vile weather, for what he wanted then was heat.

But there was enough honey coming in every day so that the bees were easy to handle, and the work was well in order. It was getting heavy work now. To go through a colony meant taking down several supers heavy with honey. A filled super might weigh eighty pounds. There were not many of

these yet, but there were some, and all the super-boxes now were heavy with brood and fresh honey; and all these had to be taken down, taken apart, looked through, to find swarming signs, to find if the queens were there and still laying, to find if the colony were growing crowded and needed more combs.

From a rapid look over all the yards, Jerry estimated that he already had about 15,000 pounds of white honey. It was not much; it was a third of a crop. Unless he got twice as much it would be a failure. He had already purchased sixty-pound honey-tins to hold twenty tons. It seemed likely to be enough.

The honey-flow accelerated a little, under warmer weather. Roll and Jerry put on more supers. All the supers were taken away from the shop by this time, and stacked ready for use at the yards. Iona came over and swept out the great empty room, and washed and scrubbed the sticky honey and wax from the floor.

At all the yards the hives were growing into white towers now, some of them four or five stories high, as high as a man could well reach. They were not all full of honey, but they were heavy to lift down. Much of their honey was still unsealed nectar, thin like water, still being worked over by the bees. All night this work went on; and when Jerry went behind his house before bed-time he could hear the deep, sullen roar from the hives, where the workers were boiling down the honey and sealing it over.

On very hot nights the white hive-fronts were covered with dark masses of clustering bees, hanging there all night, lest too much crowding should melt down the combs. From time to time, changing shifts, bees came out to the air, while others went inside to work. Hundreds of bees stood in the hive-entrance, heads down, claws dug into the floor, rapidly vibrating their wings to produce a ventilating draught throughout the hive.

It really looked as if the weather was working up into a honey-flow. Roll began to be enthusiastic and optimistic, and told Jerry he had better send for more containers. One day the scale hive gained twelve pounds.

The clover was yielding well, but still he had hardly half a crop on the hives. The weather was working up to heat, but Jerry dreaded a storm. The honey-flow always broke up finally in a tempest of thunder and wind and rain, with a cool wave after it, and the clover-bloom never amounted to much again.

But the scale hive gained a little more every day. All day Jerry toiled at the bee-yards, mostly at the home and the Cumberland yards, sometimes helping a little at the Smith yard, where he was running a great number of queen-nuclei, intending to increase the colonies. He lifted off the heavy supers of honey, set them down, heaved them back again. The bees had glued all these supers together, and built odd bits of comb between them, filling these with honey; and when the supers were pried apart the broken combs poured out honey, hot and white, thin and clear as water, spilling on the ground.

During this rush of work Jerry carried a lunch with him, and stayed at the yard from eight in the morning to the end of the day. Usually the honey-flow ceased before six o'clock, and it grew hard to handle the bees. He drove home slowly, glad of the rest and of the coolness of the car, glad to be rid of the choking gauze bee-veil. When he got home he was too tired to put his car away in the garage, almost too tired to get out and open his own door. He went stiffly to the cellar and brought up a quart of his honey-beer and a slice of bread and cheese. Sitting on the back steps, he drank this last autumn brew of hydromel, strong and frothing, and ate bread and cheese, and his weariness melted into a pleasant languor; and he sat there a long time, while the sun went down, feeling languid and content, without an idea in his head.

Afterwards he got up with an effort and went into the house, and cooked himself ham and eggs or some such easy dish. He tried to glance at his mail, at the morning paper. The twilight lasted long at that season. It was hardly quite dark at nine o'clock, and Jerry often went to bed without lighting a lamp. Usually he went to sleep at once; but sometimes he was too tired to sleep, and he rolled about wretchedly till almost dawn, and then got up feeling unable to face the day. But the work had to be done, and, once in the yard with the smoker going, there was a fierce stimulus about it that drove away his weariness.

A rainy day would have meant a holiday, but it did not rain, and he did not want it to. The honey-flow strengthened, with a hot wave coming on. The scale hive gained, nine pounds, then eleven pounds, then ten pounds again. All the clover-bloom was at its height. It was the crisis of the season. The right weather just then was worth $200 a day. With the right weather the whole apiary might gather a carload of honey, fifteen tons, within a week.

So far, Jerry thought he already had a carload. Roll became optimistic, thought that there was another carload coming. But Jerry did not order any more honey-tins, watching the weather. He feared the weather, feared a

storm. So far the sky was cloudless, hot and dry, too dry. Moisture was needed, and Jerry would have liked a little rain, but he dreaded a thundering storm and the break-up of the honey-flow.

The Cumberland yard was enclosed by woods and shut in from any breeze. It was stifling hot there. Overhead the bees roared in their coming and going. A scrap of exposed beeswax melted immediately in the sun. The metal roofs of the hives were too hot for the bare hand. From time to time Jerry went out to the road and drank heavily from the pail of oatmeal-water that he carried in his car. He drank a good gallon of this mixture every day. He carried a thermos-bottle of icy-cold water, but did not dare to use it except to rinse his mouth. He put up his veil, smoked for a few minutes, and then went back to the roaring bee-yard.

His back ached with lifting and shifting the heavy boxes, and he was almost as wet with sweat as if he had been in the river. His white duck clothes were smeared with honey and wax and soot from the smoker; but these things were natural and he did not think of them.

He was taking down one of his best colonies when he heard a motor horn on the road. This colony was in six stories now, almost as high as Jerry's head, and must have contained 300 pounds of honey. There were queen-cells in it, incipient swarming-cells, with only an egg in them, but the queen was not clipped.

Jerry had to decide instantly what to do, standing with all the combs out on the grass, and he determined not to kill the queen, but to give her a chance. He destroyed all the queen-cells and set out a fresh set of empty brood combs. Then he had to find the queen to put her on these combs. He knew roughly where she probably was, but he could not find her. The motor horn sounded again, imperiously, right outside his driveway, and when he glanced back he saw that a car had stopped right behind his own.

Somebody wanting to speak to him, or perhaps some motor tourist thinking he could buy some honey at the bee-yard. Jerry couldn't stop to speak to anybody then, with the great hive all taken to pieces. He found the queen, in a cluster of frightened bees, and clipped her and put her on the new set of combs, and then a queen-excluder to keep her there, and then a fresh set of empty combs, and then all their old combs piled on top. That ought to give them room enough. That ought to check their swarming idea. He had forgotten the strange car, till it blew its horn again.

Annoyed and impatient, he went out to the road, carrying the fuming smoker. It was a small, smart, closed coupé, and through the glass

windscreen he was astounded to see the face of Edith Lancaster. A young man was at the wheel. Edith opened the door and put her head out.

'How are you, Jerry? They told us at the village we might find you here.'

Jerry took off his veil and looked at her. He had almost forgotten her. He looked at her with amazement, as if she had come from some other world. The young man got out, smiling and holding out his hand, and Jerry presently recognized him as Telford Smith, the English newspaper man—yes, the man who Edith had said was writing a novel for some prize.

'Of course. I'm always here. Or at one of the bee-yards,' Jerry said.

With the numbing roar of the bee-yard still in his ears, Jerry looked at them in childish surprise. They looked so fresh, so cool, so unhurried. He grew conscious of his own stained and sweaty condition, soaked with honey and smoker-grease.

'However did you get here, Edith? Have you motored from Toronto?'

'Of course not. I'm staying at Erie Point.'

Erie Point was the lake summer resort, six miles from Old Lowlands. Everybody who could afford it went to Erie Point for the summer. Jerry gazed at her, still confused. What was she doing at Erie Point? She looked sweet and cool and pansy-like.

'Are you on holidays?'

'Telford's taking his holidays. Me, I'm out of a job.'

'You've left the library?'

'Yes. That was only temporary. I'll tell you all about it.'

'We really came over to get you to go back with us,' Smith said.

'We'll dine and dance and maybe bathe in the lake. It's hot enough, and delightful by moonlight,' said Edith.

'And we'll bring you back whenever you like,' said Smith cordially.

Jerry was astounded.

'God, I couldn't leave now,' he said. 'This is just the critical point of the whole season. Every minute is important.'

'Well, you've got a man to do the work, haven't you?' Edith said.

Smith walked past the car and looked in at the excited apiary. The air was full of bees like a storm of sleet. The swift heavy roar of the wings was

prodigious. On a good day like this the yard could be heard nearly a quarter of a mile away.

'I've got a man—yes,' Jerry said. 'But there's work for four men just now. Look at the yard. Would you like to come in and see it?'

Smith advanced a little farther. He was handsome and young and athletic, and beautifully dressed in light grey tweeds and a silk shirt, with his sleeves rolled up, and a gorgeous tie. He looked prosperous and happy. Jerry looked at him with animosity.

'Come in and see the yard. Wouldn't you like to see a hive taken apart? The bees aren't stinging much to-day.'

'Thanks, awfully!' Smith was almost going to risk it, but he didn't quite have the nerve. He looked at Jerry, laughing.

'It looks frightfully interesting. I'd like to look at it some other time. But how about coming back with us? We'll drive you, or you can take your own car.'

'I haven't seen you for a long time, Jerry,' Edith put in. 'I've a lot of things to tell you.'

'My God, Edith, I'd like to go!' Jerry said. 'But you must see that I can't possibly get away now.'

'It isn't quite so important as all that, is it?' Edith said contemptuously. 'Can't your man finish up the day for you?'

'He's about ten miles from here, and up to his neck in work himself.'

'Oh, come on, Jerry. You know you could come if you wanted to.'

'It's almost three o'clock. The day's nearly over, anyway. We'll bring you back, and a bit of change will do you good,' said Smith genially.

'You don't understand the pressure just now . . .' Jerry tried to argue.

'Oh, cut out the excuses, Jerry. You're not such a slave as you pretend. If you don't want to come with us, say so.'

'But I would like to come. I mean, I don't want to lose all the rest of the day. I've so much to do. I'd like to go, if I could possibly spare the time.'

'You've got all the time there is,' Edith said coldly. 'You always said that you were a free man, free to work or not as you liked. But never mind. We'll go back. We've been taking up your time.'

‘Another time then, when you’re not so busy,’ Smith said, still delightfully genial, getting into the car.

‘Yes—sure. Are you going to be long at the Point, Edith?’

‘A few weeks, I expect.’

They sat in the smart little car, looking so smooth and unruffled and wealthy, though Smith was only a very inferior newspaper man, and Edith had no particular means of support that he knew of, since she had lost her library job. He felt sore and indignant; he would have liked to spend the evening with her, but he had no time or energy for flirtations now, and she ought to know it.

‘I saw Uncle Richard the other day, Jerry,’ she called. ‘He wants to see you.’

The car started, backed out, and went away, cool and easy; and Jerry relighted the smoker, which had gone out, and went back to the roar and the hurry and the pouring honey and the sticky bee-glue of the tempestuous apiary.

These city people had no sense of realities, he thought. They expected him to give up the rest of his day, to dine and drink and dance and bathe and swap gossip, and he would get to bed after midnight, partly drunk, and be good for nothing the next day.

But why had Edith Lancaster come to Erie Point? And why had Telford Smith come there, the newspaper man, the would-be novelist, to that inland watering-place, that provincial imitation of an Atlantic City? Perhaps Smith had finished his novel and was waiting for the decision. Well, Telford Smith didn’t look the man to write a great rural novel.

Within five minutes the memory of these people had passed from Jerry like a cloud. The next row of hives had to be gone through. Some of them already had been put right, and were marked with chalk. Others, many of the high towers, had to be taken down, the queen found, put down under an excluder, the combs sorted, the brood estimated, more combs added—the handling of a ton of weight every fifteen minutes. He quite forgot Edith Lancaster and Telford Smith, heaving off the heavy boxes. He was tired, smeared with honey and bee-glue, and it was growing late. But the honey-flow lasted late, and he stayed with it, till the light fell low, and it was hard to see the tiny white eggs in the bottoms of the cells.

The bees were coming home; they were growing hard to handle; he would have to stop. He wiped his tools and shook out the fire from the

smoker. Tired out, he sat down on an empty hive at the edge of the yard and lighted his pipe.

The sunlight was not burning now, but level and yellow. The bees were still coming in, more of them than ever, but they were not going out now. They were not coming like a storm of sleet but slow and heavy, like a fall of snow, like the end of a snowstorm when the big flakes fall heavily and slowly. Slowly, heavily, they drifted down in the low light, dropping heavy with honey at the entrances of their hives, crawling in. All the bees were coming home now, none going out, and there was no roar in the yard now; but the bees came down silently, sliding down by their own weight. Dreamy and dazed with weariness, Jerry watched them coming home. His mind relaxed into pure sensation, without any thought. The bees, the bee-yard were pure sensation, pure emotion. The light was lower, more amber now. The bees were coming more rarely now. In a weary, dreamy state Jerry watched the drifting bees in the mellow light growing toward sunset; and in a deadened way he knew that this was one of the moments of life that had value.

Why, and what value? It was because he was not thinking; and immediately he began to think about it, and the mellow spell was broken. But his brain was numbed with the toxins of fatigue. Stiffly and wearily he got up, gathered his tools together, and went home.

Dimly he often remembered this evening, and he did not regret that he had not gone to Erie Point.

He wrote to Edith, however, at Erie Point, though he did not know where she might be staying. He got no answer. From Ernie he heard that old Richard had received several visits from his niece lately; but Jerry had no time then to visit the old counsellor.

One day the scale hive gained seventeen pounds, and sixteen the next day. It was almost a record, but then it went back. The white towers were filling up fast. There must be already nearly 20,000 pounds of honey; yet Jerry hesitated to order more containers, not trusting the honey-flow. But more supers of combs were going to be needed, and there were all the mating-nuclei with young queens, needing more space. Jerry sorted out all the broken, moth-eaten and discarded combs he had and hauled them to the yards. After that, it would be necessary to put up fresh wax foundation.

Thunderstorms drifted over in the north, but no storm came. Empty combs were almost exhausted. Jerry had not given any orders to Roll, but

Roll knew the conditions as well as Jerry; and one afternoon he found Roll and Iona busy at the shop with foundation sheets and empty frames.

It had rained a little, and the bees were unmanageable. Wax was melting over the oil stove, and the room was full of the rich, sweet smell. Roll was adjusting and tightening the wires in the frames, while Iona fastened in the sheets of wax foundation with melted wax. Iona was wearing a pink sleeveless dress; her dark hair was moist and curly; her lips were parted, and she put out the tip of a pink tongue in mental concentration as she painted the liquid wax over the sheets of comb foundation.

Roll said something to her, laughing, and she looked up with a quick, grateful smile. They seemed to be having a good time, and Jerry left them alone.

For three days more the clover honey poured in. Jerry telegraphed for tin containers for another ten tons, but another consideration began to arise.

'Have you seen any buckwheat down your way, Roll?'

Yes, Roll had seen several fields, a long way yet from blooming. The buckwheat yields a heavy, dark, strong honey, spoiling the clover honey. In its purity it has some value, but there was never enough in Jerry's district to make a crop. It had to be kept clear of the commercial honey; and as soon as the buckwheat began to yield the clover honey would have to be taken off and extracted.

Still there was no danger, for the buckwheat was nowhere near bloom. Most of it was just above the ground, green triangular leaves like bean-plants; yet a hot spell might bring it on quickly.

But even if the buckwheat bloomed at once, the bees are slow to desert their accustomed pastures for strange blossoms. There was no danger from the buckwheat yet, and the clover continued to yield, not heavily, a dragging flow, averaging five pounds a day. The work grew to a continual slow drudgery. Every morning Jerry met Roll at the shop, and they prognosticated the weather and settled upon the day's work. Jerry grew weary of it, tired in mind and muscle. He thought he had a crop already, but he couldn't tell till the honey was taken off. He would be glad to see any change—either a rushing, tremendous honey-flow, as might happen, or the break-up of the whole season. Anyway it was a matter of a little while. Another two weeks must end it.

He came home from the Smith yard for supplies he needed, and was going back in a hurry, driving the truck, when a car hooted at him to stop on

the corner. He saw Edith Lancaster alone in a smart small coupé, and she was signalling at him. He pulled up and went back to her.

'Still busy, Jerry?' she said.

'Of course,' said Jerry. He looked at her with annoyance. She was luminous, silken and summery, and Jerry was in his yard clothes, sticky and sweaty and blackened.

'I've just been to see Uncle Richard.'

'How is he?'

'Just the same as usual. He asked me why you hadn't been to see him.'

'I've some books for him. I should have gone, but I've had no time. I can't dress and pay visits, not at this season.'

Edith looked him up and down, satirically.

'When are you going to have any time, then? Damn it, Jerry! why do you neglect all your interests for a few pounds of honey? I've a good deal to talk to you about. Go and see Uncle Richard. It would be worth your while. And you might come and see me. That might be worth your while too.'

'So I will. I'm sorry, Edith—I mean, I couldn't just now,' Jerry said helplessly. But Edith had pressed her starter and the car roared and moved.

She stopped again within a few feet and beckoned to him imperiously, and he followed her.

'I forgot to tell you, Jerry. Telford Smith has won the prize.'

'What prize?'

At the moment Jerry couldn't remember anything about it.

'Why, the great prize. The rural novel.'

'Oh yes—the $5,000. Good for him!'

'It'll be a great deal more than $5,000 before it's done. Serial rights and translations, and then he'll have a sequel to it.'

'I'm very glad,' Jerry said. 'Have you read the book?'

'I've read part of the proofs. It's wonderful.'

She went on without stopping again, and Jerry drove on to his bee-yard, full of the annoyance and uneasiness which a meeting with this woman always gave him. So Smith had won the big prize! Some one had to win it,

but Smith didn't seem the man to write a great rural novel, of country conditions in the new worlds. A Hardy might do it. No, it would need a greater than Hardy, for North America or Australia, where there were no established traditions, no rules, no ancient background. Nothing but raw soil and new growth.

Smith didn't seem the man for that, but probably his book was pretty good, as books went. Edith said it was wonderful, but she didn't know anything about books; and besides he knew that she had said it to annoy him.

He wasn't annoyed, and he would like to read the book, when he had time. He had no time now even to think about Telford Smith, nor about Edith. Yet she remained on his mind, and he knew that he was on hers. They had established a spiritual relationship, as the theologians say, perhaps from the time when he had put his hand on her breast—which needed to be consummated or it would torture them both. In the leisure of the winter he had sometimes desired her—not now. He had no time to think of her now, in the crisis of the honey-flow.

The great rushing honey-flow seemed about to come. It was the right weather for clover. The scale hive was increasing its rate of gain, twice up to fifteen pounds in a day. But Roll reported that the bees were doing poorly at the River yard. The clover was not yielding well there.

Almost in a torpor of fatigue, Jerry laboured daily. Great pillars of smoky-pearl cloud arose in the north and drifted, obscuring the sun. Away in the north there seemed to be showers, but here were only distant reverberations of thunder, and the weather stayed electrical, hot and dry.

It grew intensely hot, too hot for the bees to fly. They hung out on the hive-fronts in masses, in gallons. A few combs actually melted down in hives most exposed to the sun, spilling the honey. But the bees immediately licked it up again and replaced it.

The swarming trouble was nearly over now, but he had a swarm come off at the Cumberland yard, from a colony that he had thought safe. The queen was clipped; the swarm would come back. But it did not come back. It circled about in the air for some time and then went straight away across the woods.

They must have destroyed their old queen and managed to hatch a new one. If so, another swarm would go out next day. It did not really matter

greatly if they did swarm now, for the colony had almost finished its work, but Jerry hated to see 20,000 of his bees abscond away from him.

He went through the hive, examining all the combs, and, as he expected he found them queenless, with no young brood, but with a queen-cell that had recently hatched, and several more large queen-cells plainly on the point of hatching. Even as he looked at them, one of them opened, opening the tip like the lid of a coffee-pot, and an active young queen crawled out and dropped down among the bees.

Well, they had a queen now, at any rate. Jerry destroyed all the rest of the cells, and put the hive together. That colony would not swarm a second time, with only one queen and no chance of rearing another.

But there were others that he suspected might be in the same condition. He took another to pieces, and then another, but found nothing wrong. It was hot and tense. Electricity was in the air. It was ideal honey weather. White thunder-pillars piled up in the west and drifted away to the north, with a distant rumbling.

The clover was pouring out its nectar; the apiary ought to gain more than two tons that day. It was so hot in the bee-yard that when he laid down the steel hive-tool in the sun it burned his fingers. His white clothes were clinging wet; sweat poured down his face under the bee-veil; and from time to time, dizzy with fatigue and almost heat-stricken, he went back to his car and drank deeply from the bucket of tepid oatmeal-water.

The bees were so absorbed in work that they hardly tried to sting. When he took a hive to pieces the bees continued to pour in and out their entrance, indifferent to the disturbance. Carrying fresh sets of combs, and supers and tools, Jerry hurried panting from one end of the bee-yard to the other.

As intent as the bees, he had not looked at the sky; but all at once he noticed that the sun no longer shone. The west was piling up with cloud, not the white electrical clouds, but masses of grey-black, coming up fast. The bees stopped going out. They stopped and turned back. The returning bees hurried to get inside. Driving and black, the sky suddenly threatened.

Still Jerry did not think it would amount to anything. It had threatened often before and cleared again, and he was too busy to attend to the whims of the weather. He tried to open another hive, but the bees surged out at him furiously. A drop of rain splashed on a hive-cover.

He looked up and saw a storm of bees in the air, a torrent of bees. The sky was darkened with them. They came pouring down like a torrent, a vast

dark vortex pouring into the yard, then splitting up to the individual hives. All the bees in the yard were coming home. Loaded or not, they were rushing home all at once from the threat of the sky. They piled in heaps at the hive-entrances, crowding to get in. Jerry would not have believed there were so many bees in the apiary.

Startled himself, he covered up the hive he had opened. A heavy gust of wind swept the trees, and there was a violent burst of thunder. The sky was all black. He had no more than time to gather up his tools, to cover the work-box, when a gust of rain drove across the yard.

He ran back to the car, pulling off his hat and veil. Rain poured on the roof as he got in; the windshield streamed. He saw the yard through a blur of water and wind. Wind swept over in violent gusts. The trees were all streaming and tossing in the gale; the yard was all a steely-wet blur of leaves wildly tossing. 'This is the end!' he thought. The wind was driving fierce and cold from the north. The white hives streamed with water, and the tormented beech-leaves writhed, twisted upside-down, streaming bright in the rain.

It was all a blur of tossing greenery and wild wind and streaming rain. This was the break-up of the season. He had been expecting it. 'This is the end! This is the last!' he thought with a sort of exultation, looking out at the tossing tree-tops in the steely squall.

The honey-flow almost always broke up like this in a tempest of wind and rain. It never resumed, not to amount to anything, no matter how the weather righted. Thunder crashed, but distantly. The violence of the squall slackened, passing over. The rain poured heavily for a while, then fell to a cold drizzle. It thundered far in the north, and the wind blew cold and strong.

When the rain subsided he went back to the yard to see if anything had been overlooked. Many bees crawled miserably in the wet grass, but they would all find their way home. The honey-flow was over. He looked at the tall wet towers of white supers. In a little while they would be taken down, their honey extracted, the combs stored away for winter.

'This is the last! This is the end of it!' he thought, and he was glad of it.

VI

The wind still blew, but the rain subsided to a drizzle. He backed the car out and drove home through a muddy road. Roll was at the shop when he got there. Roll had been at the River yard, and, having only the curtainless open car, he was soaked and cold, and inclined to be ill-tempered.

'This is the end of it,' he said. 'The flow never picks up again, not at this time of the summer.'

'Yes, sure it's the end,' Jerry said.

'You don't seem to care. We haven't got a crop.'

'No, I don't care. I'm tired of it. We've got crop enough for me. You'd better go home and change your clothes, Roll. You're soaked.'

Roll grunted contemptuously. He wouldn't change his clothes, not for any wet or cold. He was the rustic stock, the tough stock, that ignores wet or cold or wounds or discomfort.

'The honey isn't ready to come off,' he said. 'And there's quite a lot of buckwheat coming on, down my way.'

'It won't yield for another week. That'll give the honey time to ripen. We can't do anything just now, unless we get the extracting outfit set up.'

Roll looked at the big extractor, still shrouded in canvas, and went out and glanced at the engine in the lean-to.

'I think the engine's all right. I'll get her started. I'd like to have the yard car this afternoon. You won't be needing it.'

'Sure,' said Jerry.

Roll did change his clothes, however, for after dinner Jerry saw him driving the yard car towards Lowlands Station, and he was in his best suit, and wearing a stiff collar.

It was still drizzling a little, and chilly. August might have been March or October. Jerry began to look over the workshop and the extracting equipment. There was really plenty for Roll to do, but Jerry much preferred to do it alone.

He did not touch the extractor, for it needed two men to place it and line it up to the engine. But he set up the timber stands for the honey tanks, and

he brought down the tanks from the upper floor, great half-ton galvanized containers. They were dusty and still a little sticky from last year, and would have to be washed out. He brought down the oil stove, and put a boiler of water to heat. He also brought down the capping-melter, another great heavy affair; and he brought down the bee-escape boards that had been stored since last summer.

He began to sort them out, for many of them needed repairs. These escape-boards, used for taking away the honey without any bees, were merely thin boards of the same size as the top of a hive. They had a small hole in the middle fitted with a bee-escape, a delicate affair of hair-like steel springs, so that a bee could pass through it but could not come back.

This board was to be placed under the honey supers. Finding themselves shut off from the queen and the main colony, the bees in the supers tried to get back, and went down one by one through the springs. In a day or two the super would be entirely clear of bees and could be taken away.

The boards were crusted with wax and burr-comb and sticky propolis that needed to be scraped away. This should have been done last autumn, but as usual it had been neglected.

Jerry scraped and sorted, while the fine rain drove against the windows, like October instead of August. It would soon be October. The season was over. There would be no more clover honey, no more swarming, and Jerry felt glad of it.

Iona Horton came across the road, wrapped in a rain-coat, sparkling with freshness. Damp and energetic she dived through the door and threw off the wet coat.

‘What do you think of this, Jerry? Is this the break-up?’

‘It’s the end of the honey-flow, Iona. There won’t be any more to amount to anything.’

She looked around as if expecting to see Roll.

‘Are you setting up the tanks? I’d better wash them out.’

‘If you like. There’s some water almost hot enough. If you like, your time can start from to-day.’

Iona turned on him a curious, half provocative, half hostile glance from her dark eyes. Jerry had been accustomed to pay her a sort of retaining fee all through the extracting season merely to be ready to work at any time; and

in addition a rate of twenty cents an hour when she was actually working. It was good pay. Men on the farms got no more, and Iona knew it.

She looked into the now steaming boiler, and began to get out buckets and wash-cloths. She poured a bucketful of hot water into a tank, and, stooping deep into it, she began to scrub it out in a cloud of steam.

While she washed the tanks Jerry scraped the boards, scraping the caked beeswax into a box. Wax was worth almost the price of butter; he might collect two or three dollars' worth. He had a cheese-paring sort of mind, he thought. He hadn't the instincts of a gentleman. Roll had them, for he cut out and scattered lumps of wasted wax all over his yards; but, to be sure, it wasn't his wax.

The cold rain pattered on the windows. The room was warm and steamy, with the collected heat of the last few days. Jerry felt tired out. The excitement of the flurry of the storm and the shut-up of the season was over. His muscles and bones felt full of the accumulated fatigue of the season, that it would take weeks to get rid of. Yet the really heavy work of the season was just starting, the work of getting the honey in, the heavy, almost unskilled labour of taking the honey from the yards, hauling it home, extracting it, packing it, shipping it. Nearly 30,000 pounds, he thought.

It was no great crop. Probably, after all expenses, he might have $1,500. But that would be enough to last till another crop; for he was a cheap man and willing to live in a cheap way.

'How's the crop going to be?' said Iona.

'Not as good as last year.'

Edith despised his way, and probably she was right. So would all the high-spending commercial writers despise it, except that they might imagine a sort of romance about it. There wasn't any romance. It was just a labourer's sort of life. It was no sort of life at all, or suited only for a tough young fellow like Roll, without education or ambitions, only muscle. But now it had become the only life that Jerry could live. He had stayed in Old Lowlands too long, in that ancient village that was sinking back into nature, going back to the soil.

'When can we start extracting, do you think?'

'We can't begin to take honey off till the weather changes.'

'I think it'll clear by morning,' Iona said, looking expertly out the window. 'But it'll probably stay cool.'

The rain did cease, and the next day was cool, sunny and windy. The bees were hardly flying at all. Nothing could be done. It was important to leave the honey in the hives as long as possible, to have it thoroughly ripened, and anyhow it would have been difficult to take it off in this uneasy weather.

Roll came back the next morning, conferred with Jerry, and they moved the great extractor out into its place, and lined its belt with the pulley to the engine. Roll oiled and greased the bearings, put oil and gasolene into the engine and started it. Everything was ready for extracting, but they had to wait for the honey.

Jerry spent a day or two of miserable idling and muddling about. He did not know where Roll was. Then a package of books arrived for Richard Cumberland, and Jerry carried them to him.

He found Ernie and Louie sitting together on the side veranda, Ernie in his usual white waiter's coat, and Louie in a dress of dandelion yellow. Her look startled him. He had known her since childhood; he still thought of her as a child. She looked tall and magnified now, like a great dark flower. She was like a great double poppy bursting with its seed-pod; and almost unconsciously Jerry half envied Ernie.

'How's your uncle, Ernie? Can I go up?'

'Sure. He's been looking for you. He's about the same as ever. Some days he seems a little better,' Ernie said with discouragement.

'I'm getting rather weary of detective stories,' Richard said.

He looked weary with everything. Shaved and smoothed, his clothes neat and creased, he was a wonderful tribute to Ernie's activities as a valet. But he looked pallid and haggard, his eyes dead and leaden.

A low fire burned in the grate. The silver clock ticked on the mantel, ticking off the none too many minutes. Jerry laid the new books on the desk.

'I wonder if these are any good, Mertens?' Richard said. 'I haven't read all of the last you brought. Isn't there anything to read but detective stories?'

'Plenty,' said Jerry. 'You might try the classics—Jane Austen and Smollett. Or there are moderns. Why not try Galsworthy, who unites the ancient and modern qualities? Or Marcel Proust, or James Joyce or Aldous Huxley, all of whom have a tremendous kick, as it is said.'

'I have no theories about literature. It is a subject of which I know nothing,' the old lawyer said. 'I don't know what is good, but I know what I

like. I have already read Jane Austen, and I find her a small and malicious bitch behind her stiff screen, but not so dull as some think. Galsworthy is very respectable, but I do not care for modern history. I have not made up my mind yet to read Joyce. As for Aldous Huxley, that modern Bunyan, I am not really interested in theories of morality, even when inverted.'

Jerry was astounded. When had old Richard ever read Huxley? When had he heard of Joyce?

'I like Zane Grey,' he said candidly.

'Well, so do I—a little of him,' Richard admitted. 'One always likes to read of people being shot, if it is properly described. Homer wrote largely of such things. Are there no North American Homers, in this land of new and unregulated passions?'

'It is really surprising,' said Jerry, trying to pull himself up to the mark, 'that literature has made no more progress than it has. Chemistry, painting, agriculture, foot-racing have admittedly gone far in advance of the past, and these are highly technical matters, requiring long training. But everybody can write, and all speech is a sort of form of literature, and everybody has paper and ink, or at least a lead pencil. And all the materials of great literature are lying about, known to everybody, needing nothing more than a trick of the pen. Yet it is disputable whether Masefield's 'Dauber' is as good a poem of the sea as the Odyssey; or whether the 'Shropshire Lad' is as good as Lucretius; or whether Eugene O'Neill in *Electra* is as good as Sophocles. I think myself that they probably are just as good, and certainly they are much more digestible to our modern stomachs. Yet the matter is disputable; and it seems to me that we should clearly, in two thousand years, have surpassed the ancients in our writing as much as in the speed of our racehorses, or in the skill of our boxers.'

When Jerry tried to talk with this literary smartness to Richard Cumberland he was always sure of attention. But Richard said merely:

'What honey crop are you getting this year, Mertens?'

'Honey?' said Jerry, astounded. 'Not a great crop. It may make fifteen tons. Net about $1,400, at the outside.'

'This farming sort of life isn't fit for you, Mertens,' said Richard with cold kindness.

'It's the only life I'm fit for. What is the *optima vita*?'

'What have you been doing lately?'

‘The honey season is over. I’ve been attending to the queen rearing nuclei.’

‘Tell me about them.’

Jerry told him how, when a hive of bees found itself without a queen it immediately began to rear other queens, rearing them from eggs or young larvae naturally destined to become worker bees. But these embryos were heavily fed on royal jelly, that marvellous substance that changed the nature of life. It produced an insect with a different anatomy from the worker, with different eyes, wings, digestive organs, with an entirely different set of instincts. It was the sex developer.

‘What is this royal jelly? How would it affect human beings?’ Richard asked.

It was something like sour cream, Jerry said. He had often tasted it. A tablespoonful of it was said to produce dizziness and headache. He could not guess what a wineglassful would do. Nobody had ever taken so much, that he knew of.

‘It might be worth trying,’ Richard observed. ‘Does the queen live entirely on this stuff?’

Jerry explained that after being mated the queen got no more of it. She was fed honey, given from the tongues of her bees, for she would not usually take honey from the cells. She then laid eggs. She wished to do nothing but lay eggs. It was her only life. The workers guarded her as their own lives. If she died they refused to accept a substitute queen, preferring to rear one for themselves. It was possible indeed to introduce a new queen, but only by great adroitness and special precautions.

‘The queen seems to have no intelligence whatever,’ Jerry finished. ‘She seems to be merely a sexual mechanism. We have evolved beyond that—perhaps.’

Richard looked at him with grey eyes, clouded as if he looked from the shroud of death, as if he looked from beyond the tomb. He looked heavy with the omnipotence of nothingness. Jerry gazed into those clouded, impenetrable eyes.

‘Perhaps we have evolved beyond that,’ Jerry added. ‘What do we look for in our females—intelligence, or only a sexual mechanism? Or what?’

‘God knows!’ said Richard heavily.

‘Yes, and we all know,’ said Jerry. ‘We are looking for the combination of the spirit and the flesh, for Artemis and Aphrodite, for the creature with a man’s wisdom and a woman’s heart. I mean like those traditional great women . . .’

‘You are speaking of the Egerias and the Aspasias,’ Richard interrupted. ‘No doubt there have been, and are such women. But such a great woman needs a great man in order to manifest herself.’

‘But a great man does not need a mirror,’ Jerry said, thinking of Edgar Lloyd’s dictum.

Richard of course did not recognize the allusion, and said no more. Neither did Jerry, realizing that he had spoken foolishly, for neither he nor, any man looked for any such woman as he had described. And why should he speak of women to the old lawyer, who knew nothing of women?

Richard sighed uneasily and glanced at the clock. It was just past five. Jerry got up to go.

‘Wait a moment, Mertens.’ Richard stopped him. ‘You’ll have a drink with me?’

Jerry was astounded; he stammered and hesitated.

‘Do you know that you are the only person to whom I have ever offered a drink since I have been here?’

‘So I imagined,’ Jerry said. ‘Ill be glad to take it.’

Richard pressed the electric button. Almost immediately Ernie appeared with the tray.

‘Ernie has the finest instincts of the servant that I ever saw,’ Richard observed. ‘You see he has brought two tumblers. And you might have thought that he has been waiting just outside the door, but I am convinced that he came all the way from the kitchen after hearing the bell.’

Quite impassive under these contemptuous compliments, Ernie opened the bottle of Irish, offered it first to his master and then to Jerry. Ernie operated the siphon, flicked up something smartly with a napkin, and went out.

Jerry also went out after swallowing his drink, amazed at the old lawyer’s sudden friendliness. He continued to think of women when he went back to his shop and tried to make further preparations for handling the honey crop. He was amazed, as he had often been before, at the

disproportionate attention that men gave to this subject of women. Such an exaggerated importance was ascribed to affairs of sex that a eunuch even of immense intellect could be regarded as merely ridiculous, while a brainless Don Juan or Casanova was secretly the ideal of almost everybody. It was Nature's compulsion, of course, but it ought to be discounted by intelligence.

Still, he thought about women, that familiar, and yet, it is said, incomprehensible half of humanity. It was said that the mental processes of women were incomprehensible to men, supposing that they had any, which was freely doubted. Jerry did not believe a word of all this. He thought that women were essentially the same as men. A woman did not think quite so much as a man, perhaps, but she was obliged to think in much the same way, when she thought at all. The mystery was man-made. It was the suppressions and the repressions that had created a mystery where no mystery was. And then he thought about Edith Lancaster, who, he thought, was no mystery at all.

And he began to wonder whether she might not have been right about her uncle. For the first time Jerry began to think that perhaps old Richard really did intend to leave him something in his will. Perhaps he had even mentioned such an intention to Edith. If he should, it would be some considerable sum, anywhere from $10,000 to $50,000, for Richard was not the man to do things in a niggardly way. Jerry began to think of what he could do with fifty thousand.

First, he could give up bee-keeping. No more anxiety about the season, no more sweating and heaving of heavy weights in the poisonous hot yards. Yes, it was strange and queer to think of life without the bees, without the intense interest in the sky and the wind and the meadow bloom. But he would get used to it.

He would have all his time for reading and thinking and writing. No, not writing; he was cured of that. But he might amuse himself by writing verses and pay for their printing himself. He might even print his prose poems. He had friends in Toronto who would review them well. He might attain a small local celebrity if he wanted such a thing. But he didn't. He wouldn't be able to stay in Old Lowlands. He would feel a fool to live there as an outsider, without any bees, without any stake in the community, without any risk in the wind and the weather, the storm and the soil. Jerry didn't want to live anywhere as a tourist, a summer visitor, an outsider.

He thought of the foreign places of which he had dreamed, of places where he could sit with friends at a café table, drinking wine, listening to the music of Scriabin and Stravinsky, talking of poetry and philosophy, without jealousy and without acrimony.

Edith would go there with him, if he wanted her. Married or not, she would go with him if he had $50,000, he was certain. But he didn't want her.

Yes, for a day and a night, perhaps. For a week, but not for a year; still less for life. Neither of them was a mirror that could reflect back one another's thought.

From these fantasies Jerry roused himself, laughing. It was highly improbable that Richard Cumberland would bequeath him anything. Perhaps $100, to buy books. Perhaps at the outside, $1,000 to be spent on a ticket for a round-the-world cruise. That was just the sort of thing old Richard would recommend.

The chilly and wet spell passed over. It grew warm. The clover still bloomed, and there was a little honey being gathered, just enough so that the bees could be handled. But the scale hive stood still, neither gaining nor losing.

Jerry and Roll were watching the fields of buckwheat. None of it yet seemed advanced enough to be dangerous, but warm weather would bring its bloom very fast. Much of the honey in the hives now was still unripened, but the first supers put on, holding the oldest honey, could be taken off.

They went first to the River yard, where the honey seemed most advanced, taking a load of bee-escape boards. The bees were flying; there was a little honey coming in; there was no trouble in opening the hives.

Usually the oldest super was on the top of the stack, for fresh supers were generally put on underneath. Some colonies had four or five supers, piled as high as one's head, while others had no more than one. There had been a great variation in the work of different colonies that year.

This was a job needing two men for rapid work. Jerry smoked the bees at the entrance a little, took off the cover and smoked the bees down. Roll pried up the super and lifted it off. While he held it, Jerry quickly put on the escape-board, and Roll set the super back on top.

The bees were quiet, and it did not take long to go through the yard. They had about two dozen escape-boards left over, and they took these to the Caledon yard and put them on.

It was necessary to wait now for a day or two till the bees should be all out of the supers. Roll brought in two nuclei, or very weak colonies, and placed them back of the extracting building, to receive the bees that were bound to be brought in on the combs. The weather turned hot, yet there was no honey-flow. It was the right weather for the clover, but the honey-flow had been killed.

Jerry muddled about the big empty extracting-room that day, finding nothing to do, and thinking how much he would miss all this sort of thing if he had to leave it. There was no money in it; it was no sort of life at all, but he had grown into it. Winter was coming again, when there would be nothing to do but read and drink. It wasn't so bad in the summer, when he was stupefied all the time with heavy labour.

He didn't want to go to Toronto again. He would spend the winter days in reading poetry and drinking wine, till he went to bed stupefied with literature and alcohol, to sleep heavily till another morning. Looking at it clearly, perhaps that was the best human life possible—to remain constantly stupefied with either labour, literature, or liquor. But who could face such a life, looking at it clearly?

But, Jerry suddenly realized, that was how all mankind lived. It was the only way they could support life at all.

He went with Roll in the truck to bring in the honey, which should now be clear of bees. It was a fine, warm morning, and when they reached the River yard they found things by no means quiet.

The air was full of flying bees, though certainly no honey was being gathered. Bees, robber scouts, were nosing and prowling at all the entrances and at all the cracks between the supers where they could smell the honey within. Great clusters of guards were massed at every entrance; and a cloud of bees hovered around one or two colonies, alighting and crawling under the cover and coming out again.

Roll swore violently. What had happened was clear. The supers on these hives had been robbed out. Some tiny opening had admitted the robbers, and as the native bees had mostly gone down through the bee-escape there was no defence.

It was hardly worth while even looking to see, but Jerry raised the cover. A cloud of robbers buzzed out. The combs were emptied, cleaned out, gnawed down. A pile of wax scraps and dead bees lay on the escape-board.

The honey was not exactly lost, for it was still somewhere in the yard, but this robbing had so stirred up and excited the bees that it was going to be difficult to take off the rest of the supers. Yet the yard should be cleared now, to let the fever quiet down.

'Got to do it quick, if we don't want trouble,' Roll said, calmly.

First he smoked all the hive-entrances indiscriminately, to quell the fighting bees as much as possible. Then, beginning at the far end, they uncovered the first two hives, and Roll heaved off the supers, set them on the wheelbarrow and wheeled them to the truck. Each of these supers contained eight heavy white combs of honey, pearly white and sealed over, and would yield fully sixty pounds of liquid honey apiece.

Meanwhile Jerry took off the escape-board and covered the hive again, and smoked the next pair of hives.

For a few colonies the work went easily enough. The bees did not comprehend what was going on, and the supers were taken off and piled on the truck without trouble. After that, scouting bees discovered the honey on the truck and began to carry it away. A fresh swarm again attacked the supers that had been robbed out, remembering where they had found plunder before. Finding nothing left, they pounced in a heavy attack on the next hive, and a lively fight started at the entrance.

The ton truck would not carry more than forty supers without danger of breaking the springs, and Roll drove home with this load. Jerry remained at the yard and gathered up the escape-boards, sticky with spilled honey. Bees were swarming over them already, and he piled them away in a remote corner. The wheelbarrow was alive with bees. He brought water and washed it, but still the bees clung to it, quite maddened by the faintest odour of honey.

Roll came back with the truck. Bees had been waiting about the driveway for it, and they pounded on it as soon as it came in. But Roll had washed it clean, and had brought a great canvas wagon-cover saturated with water to cover the load. But Jerry was doubtful.

'I don't believe we can take the rest of it,' he said.

Roll glanced calmly over the fighting bee-yard.

'Just as you say,' he replied. 'Can't make things any worse than they are now, and all these colonies are strong enough to defend themselves. They won't get robbed out.'

They cleared the yard, but left it in a state of terrible uproar. The truck was clouded with bees, trying to get under the wet canvas. They even crawled up through holes in the truck platform. Every colony was fighting and being fought, and knots of writhing bees clung upon every drop of spilled honey or broken bit of comb on the ground. But they did not sting badly; they were too intent on plundering.

In spite of precaution, the boxes on the truck were full of bees, bees that belonged there and robber bees. A few hundred yards from the apiary they stopped and uncovered the load, to let the bees go out. Some of them did go out, but a great many remained on the combs of honey and came in to the shop. The jolting ride had taken all the animation out of them, however, and they were huddled in frightened clusters, and made only a loud distressed humming when they were unloaded and stacked by the uncapping-box.

It was then too late to start any extracting that day, and besides all these bees would have to be given time to leave the combs and fly to the windows. The apiarists were tired, nervous, and considerably stung. Roll disappeared, and Jerry, after waiting about for some time, in the lack of anything to do, drove out to the Caledon yard to see how things might be.

He found everything quiet. There had been no robbing, and the bees were hardly flying. Coming home by another route, he perceived a broad patch of white in a field some distance back from the road, and not more than half a mile from the bee-yard.

He stopped, climbed over the fence, and went to look at it. It was buckwheat, as he thought. It had only come in bloom a day or two, and that was why they had not discovered it sooner. The patch was not more than five acres, but it would be enough to spoil a great deal of clover honey. No bees were flying over it but buckwheat never yields in the afternoon. It might yield next morning. Anyhow, the honey would have to be taken off that yard at once.

The next morning Jerry went over to his shop about nine o'clock and found Roll and Iona already there. They were getting ready to extract. Iona had brought a quantity of boiling water from home to fill the water-jacket of the uncapping-box and for the boiler of the steam knife. The oil stove burned under the box, but the water was not yet hot enough to melt wax.

At the top of each window hung a great cluster of bees, a gallon or so of bees, hanging moveless like a swarm. These were the bees brought in the day before, and they were chilled with the night. Roll brushed them off into a bucket. They fell heavily like ripe fruit, without attempting to fly; and he

carried them out and poured them on the ground in front of the weak colonies behind the building. They stirred and struggled, and gradually moved gladly into the hives.

The uncapping-knife began to jet steam from its hot point. Roll started the engine experimentally, stopped it and made some adjustments. There was a stack of supers beside the uncapping-box, quite clear of bees now. Jerry took out a comb, and, resting its end on the cross-bar over the melter, sliced off its outer surface with a sweep of the hot knife. He opened the other side of the comb in the same way and handed it to Iona, who put it in the extractor.

The sliced-off wax and honey fell into the hot box, slowly melted, and began to trickle down through the gate into the separating-can. A great deal of the honey was cut off with the wax cappings, and it went down hot to be melted, and to separate as the wax cooled.

Jerry uncapped seven more combs, enough to fill the extractor, and Roll started the engine again. The reel turned, gathering speed, hummed till it was a revolving blur. They all looked into the machine. The thick honey could be seen flying out in drops and threads, striking the side of the extractor, running down. When one side of the set of combs seemed emptied, Roll put on the brake, reversed the reel, and extracted the other sides.

Jerry proceeded to uncap a fresh set. The first day of extracting seldom accomplished much. Something always went wrong, in spite of all previous preparation. The rubber steam tube of the knife presently clogged, and then split. It had to be taken off and a new tube substituted. A little later the engine stopped, and cranking would not start it again. Roll went into the lean-to and cleaned the combustion chamber. Work started again, but it was almost noon. There were two or three hundred pounds of honey in the reservoir of the extractor, and Jerry drew it off in pails, and poured it through a wire-cloth strainer into one of the tanks. It was good honey, thick and clear, with the fresh perfume that it loses within a few weeks.

There were a good many bees in the room, that had not been carried out. They crawled on the floor, buzzed on the windows or hummed mournfully across the room. They were not disposed to sting; their whole thought was of escape. Yet when they became entangled in one’s clothing or hair they did sting in sheer panic. Jerry thought he was stung almost as much in the extracting-room as in the bee-yards. It was always his ideal to bring in the honey without any bees whatever, and this could be done by careful

management, but there was always an emergency, a hurry or a blunder, so that plenty of bees were brought in after all.

Roll did not care how many bees were in the room. And Iona did not seem to mind them, merely brushing them from her stockings or her hair occasionally.

With frequent stoppages, they managed to extract less than a thousand pounds by the middle of the afternoon. It was not half a normal day's output, but things would go smoother and faster after the start.

Between four and five o'clock Jerry left Roll and Iona to finish the afternoon, and he went with the truck to the Caledon yard to bring in the honey. He was anxious about the buckwheat he had seen, and he took with him enough escape-boards for the yard, if they should prove necessary.

He found the yard still quiet, and the bees settling down for evening. The ground was smooth and hard so that he could drive the truck right into the middle of the yard, and he unloaded the escape-boards, and began to take off the honey.

There were still a good many bees on the super combs, but they would have to come with the honey. He loaded the first super on the truck, then pried off the tight escape-board, exposing the crowded colony, and sent down a blast of smoke. Immediately he smelt the strong, rich odour of buckwheat honey.

They had been getting it, after all. He sniffed at the super he had removed, but could not detect it. But they had certainly been working on buckwheat, and would work more next morning. Escapes would have to be put on the rest of the hives at once, and all the honey taken off, regardless of whether it was quite sealed over or not.

He was glad he had brought the escape-boards. The bees were quiet, and he did not think it would take long to put them on.

But nearly a hundred supers had to be so treated, weighing over three tons, and that weight takes some time to shift. Working alone, too, Jerry had to lift off the supers laboriously, set them down, adjust the escape-board, and then put the supers back, covering the top most carefully for fear of robbing.

It took a long time, lifting, stooping, smoking the bees, heaving the heavy honey-boxes up and down. His back ached; time passed; the sun grew low. But finally he had the yard safe from the dark honey. The bees could not carry anything up through the bee-escapes.

Still he had to load the honey he had come to bring, and he regretted that he had not brought Roll with him. He thought of putting it off till next morning, but that would break up all the morning's extracting. He could do it now, and it would not take long.

He rested a few minutes, but twilight was drawing close. Then wearily he began to take off the eighty-pound supers, put them on the wheelbarrow, and load them on the truck.

There was no trouble with the bees. They had ceased to fly. A good many bees were still in the supers, but they would have to come in. Stupid with fatigue, he continued to load and wheel the heavy supers in the warm late light. Then as he heaved one of the heavy boxes up to the truck platform he gasped with pain and almost let it drop. But he got it up, and then sat down, doubled up, on the sticky wheelbarrow.

He had wrenched his back, strained the muscles, the injury that all the weight-lifting workers dread. He sat doubled up for some time, unable to straighten his back, hardly able to breathe without a piercing pain.

But the honey had to be loaded now, and, like all the weight-lifting workers, he got on his feet and went back to the job.

There were only fifteen more supers to load. He might have left them to the morrow, but he wanted to finish. He tried to favour his back-muscles as much as he could, but it was not much. He cursed and groaned, sliding the supers to the barrow, wheeling them over the rough ground, and hoisting them on the truck. He left the escape-boards and excluders anywhere, just where they lay. He couldn't pick them up. But he got all the honey aboard, and turned the truck around and drove homewards.

Sitting back in the cushioned seat his back did not hurt, and he grew rested. But the rest made his muscles stiff, and when he got out at Old Lowlands they hurt worse than ever.

There was a strange car at his shop. He did not know it, but it was standing far back in the driveway, and nobody was in it. He did not know why it was there and he did not care. The shop was deserted. He unlocked the door, and began to unload the honey.

Unloading was heavier than loading, for the supers had to be put in through the door, and afterwards arranged and stacked up in piles to save space. Jerry got five or six inside, and then somebody appeared beside him in the twilight.

'You're late, Jerry. What's the matter? Did you have engine trouble?'

‘Nothing, Iona. I stopped to put on the rest of the escapes. Buckwheat’s been coming in. Where’s Roll. I’d like to get him.’

‘Roll’s gone home. What’s the matter?’

‘No, it’s all right. I strained my back, lifting the honey. It’ll be all right in the morning.’

Iona looked anxious. She knew all about those strained backs. They took a long time to be all right again.

‘Don’t be a fool, Jerry. Come on, I’ll help you unload. Then you go home and rub some liniment on your back and rest or you’ll be laid up for a week. Roll and I can extract to-morrow.’

Jerry protested feebly, but he let Iona help him lift the supers from the truck and slide them into the building. She had almost the muscle of a man. They did not attempt to stack the boxes up, but left them spread about the floor. Roll could pile them to-morrow.

‘Thank you, Iona. I really don’t believe I could have got the load off without you.’

He got into the truck seat painfully. Iona came up to him, solicitous and sticky. They were both sticky, smeared all over with honey. Jerry was only dimly aware of her, opulent and close to him; but all he wanted then was rest.

‘Don’t come in the morning, Jerry. Roll and I can start everything.’

‘I’ll be all right in the morning, Iona.’

She watched him off, anxiously. She knew all about these strained backs. Jerry knew all about them too: he had had them before, and it generally took days to get over them. It was tough luck to get it, just when the heavy work of extracting was started.

He felt too sick and tired to care. He could take a whole week off, if he wanted to, regardless of whether he got any honey or not. It was nobody’s business but his own. He really believed he would do it. But just then all he wanted was to get home, to have a bottle of strong beer and a piece of cheese and go to bed with a hot water-bottle under his sore back.

He left the truck by his door; he wasn’t going to put it away that night. He limped to the door and opened it. It was dark in the house, but a human figure arose out of the darkness.

‘Oh Jerry! Where have you been? I’ve been waiting for you. I was just about to go away.’

Amazed, Jerry slowly realized her.

‘Good Lord, Edith! How did you get here? How did—why didn’t you light the lamp?’

‘I didn’t want a light. Oh, Jerry!’

She assumed form and warmth, close to him. Still dazed with fatigue, Jerry put his arms around her, almost mechanically, and she melted up to him in a liquid surrender.

‘I’ve been kept late at the yard—later than I ever was. I’ve had a heavy day. I had no idea you were here. Did Telford Smith bring you over?’

‘Of course not, Jerry. I drove myself. I looked for you here, and then I went to your shop, and you weren’t there. So I left my car there, and came back here to wait for you. I wanted to see you.’

‘That was right, Edith. You’re at home here.’

He kissed her again, and then lighted the lamp and drew down all the blinds. He couldn’t imagine why she had come. He didn’t want to see her—not to-night. He would have given anything to send her away.

‘It was lovely of you to come, Edith. I’m sorry I was so late. I haven’t been as late as this all summer, and it was bad luck that it happened to-night. Let’s have some beer, Edith. I want you to taste my honey-brew. It’s an old English recipe for mead—almost a lost art.’

Still bent half double, he stumbled down to the cellar and brought up several bottles. A pint or two of that strong stuff would put him right, he thought. The strong mead foamed out, amber and potent, a year now in the bottle. Edith drank a small glass, and praised it, and Jerry finished the bottle, and began to feel better.

He went into his bedroom and washed the wax and bee-glue from his hands, and put on a clean collar and tie. He came out, trying to stand upright, setting his teeth together against the pain in his back. Edith came to him and stroked his hair.

‘You poor boy! You’re tired out. I thought you might give me some supper.’

‘You bet I will, Edith, if there’s anything to eat. Don’t look out in the kitchen, for God’s sake! Everything’s in an awful mess.’

Jerry had been getting his dinner with Mrs. Ford, and only his breakfast and supper at home, and he knew that the kitchen was piled with all sorts of dirty dishes and remnants of food and pots and pans.

He made a sudden movement, and dropped in a chair, doubled up, gasping with the pain across his loins.

'What is it, Jerry? You're not sick?'

'Not a bit. Only tired, and I got a cramp in my back. I'll be all right in a minute.'

An amorous and active woman hates nothing so much as a tired man. Jerry knew it well, and tried to collect himself. He wished in vain that he had a bottle of spirits. All he had was the honey-beer. He opened another bottle.

'Have you seen your uncle, Edith?'

'I saw him this afternoon. He would hardly speak to me.'

'What time did you see him?'

'Just after five.'

Jerry was amazed that she had been let in to see him at all at that hour, the sacred hour, the hour when old Richard started to drink.

'What did he say?'

'Nothing much. He was brutal to me. Never mind what he said.'

She sat down on the couch. Jerry sat down beside her, and she laid her hot cheek against his.

'It doesn't matter what he said, Jerry. I don't think I'll ever see him again. I came straight to you. But you weren't here.'

'I'm sorry, Edith. I won't fail you again. I'll always be here when you want me.'

Jerry felt better. The beer and the rest and the excitement of Edith's contact made him feel better. In each other's arms they rocked forward and back on the soft couch, almost falling together on the cushions. Jerry began to be glad that Edith had come—but if it had only been any other night!

'You won't leave me now, will you, Edith?'

She squeezed him a little closer, then extricated herself and jumped up. She ruffled up his damp hair.

‘Aren’t we going to have anything to eat? I’ll get the supper for us both, if there’s anything here to eat. I’m starving.’

‘Sure, there’s always something to eat.’

He got up, with a twinge that made him gasp, and went to look. There wasn’t very much. His meals had been scrappy lately. But there was bacon, a basket of eggs, cold boiled potatoes, jam and butter and bread, and, of course, honey.

‘I’m afraid I haven’t got much. There’s milk and tea, and I could run over to the butcher’s and get steak.’

‘No, here’s all that we could want. You lie down and rest, Jerry, and I’ll get it all ready. How do you light this oil stove?’

Jerry lighted the oil stove for her, and went back to the couch. He opened another bottle of honey-beer. Propped up on the cushions his back hardly hurt at all; it was only when he moved that it made him gasp. He drank his beer restfully. Edith fluttered about the room, laying the table, asking Jerry where to find the forks and spoons, and coming every now and then to pat his cheek, to stroke his head.

Jerry lay back at ease, drinking his beer. His back did not hurt now, and the acute weariness had gone out of him. He looked with pleasure at Edith. If she would go to Vienna with him it wouldn’t be so bad. When he had rested a little more and had something to eat, he thought he would be all right.

He wondered what had brought this change over Edith, what Uncle Richard had said to her. Probably she would tell him. He didn’t want to puzzle his brain with such matters then. He felt heavy with the accumulated fatigue of heavy weeks. He continued to drink his beer, quieting his nerves, feeling happy and delighted.

He heard the bacon beginning to sizzle. He opened another bottle, feeling that he had not had quite enough. He wanted liquor, but he was not hungry. He gulped down the strong brew. He didn’t care about bacon. The beer killed his appetite. He felt relaxed now, free from pain, in a happy, collapsed state. He shut his eyes. Just to lie with his eyes shut before supper would do him good, but he didn’t want to go to sleep.

When his eyes opened, the bacon sizzled no longer. There was no sound in the room. The lamp burned bright, and it was all quiet. He started up, remembering and half dazed.

Edith was not there. The table was laid for supper, and the plates appeared as if Edith had eaten her bacon and eggs and jam. Jerry's portion was carefully covered with an inverted plate to keep it hot; but it was stone-cold now, and the teapot was also cold. He looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes after eleven, and Edith's hat and coat were gone.

Edith was gone. He forgot the pain in his back. He ran out to the truck, still in the driveway, and raced to the shop where Edith had left her car.

There was an electric light close to his gate. His workshop loomed dark, with the scattered piles of odd bee-supplies around it. Edith's car was gone.

She had gone home, back to Erie Point. He had slept away his opportunity. He thought for an instant of driving after her. But she was there, was probably in bed by this time, and he didn't even know at what hotel or boarding-house she was staying.

Humiliated and ashamed, more furious with himself than he had ever felt in his life, Jerry drove home. He looked with rage at the cold supper table. He didn't want to eat. The pain in his back felt worse than ever. He didn't want anything. He felt crippled and worn-out, like an old man. He went to bed, rubbed liniment on his back as far around as he could reach, and put a hot water-bottle under his sore spine.

VII

He did not sleep well, tormented with nervous and mental misery, as well as with physical pain. He could not place himself with any comfort in bed; he could neither lie straight nor crooked. But towards morning he did sleep heavily, and when he woke it was half-past eight.

The sun was shining brilliantly through his window; the air was warm. His first thought was that the buckwheat would be yielding that morning. He half rose, and fell back with the pain gripping him across the loins, and then he remembered the horror of the previous evening.

With painful efforts he slid himself out of bed and got his clothes on. He went into the living-room, still dim with drawn blinds; he looked at the table, with Edith's dirty plate, at his own supper still covered up, and at the empty beer bottles. There Edith had waited until, tired and disgusted, she had gone away and left him in a beery sleep.

He pulled up the blinds and looked at the thermometer from sheer force of habit. It was nearly sixty: it was going to be warm. The buckwheat would certainly yield, and it was a good thing that he had put on all those escape-boards. If Edith had only come to him at any other time! She should have known that he had no energy for dalliance in the honey season.

He went out to the yard and looked at the bees. They were flying a little, languidly, for it was yet early. He came back and made some coffee. He did not want to eat, but he felt empty, for he had had no supper. He ate the cold scraps of bacon that Edith had cooked. He then felt like something more, and he fried three eggs, and cut a fresh comb of honey. Now that he was moving, his back felt better, but he was no better in his mind. He was tortured with shame and guilt; he felt as if he had committed an unpardonable sin, instead of having been almost miraculously prevented from committing one.

He could not stay in the house. He got into the truck and drove, almost by instinct, to his shop. At the gateway he could hear the pounding of the engine. Extracting was going on. Roll and Iona were at work, and he could let them work. They knew how to do it, and he could trust them to go on. Jerry didn't want to go in, to see the honey coming out. He was sick of honey, and anyway he couldn't do anything. He couldn't lift any weights.

Roll would probably have paid no attention to a strained back. He would have gone on working, grimly, stoically, no matter how much it hurt, no matter how much it might affect his future health. All the farmers worked like that; they worked with worse than that. They worked with infected and bleeding wounds; they worked strapped up in bandages; they worked with death on them. They had to, to get the work done. They said they worked the pain out; and sometimes they did, and sometimes they crippled themselves for life. Roll prided himself on working like that. But it seemed to Jerry that there was nothing admirable, but something beastly and inhuman in that degree of stoicism.

He sat in the stopped truck, in front of his shop. Perhaps Roll and Iona saw him through the window. But he did not want to go in. He drove home instead. He knew that it was most unwise, but he changed his clothes, took out the coupé instead of the truck and started towards Erie Point.

It was wrong and unwise. The only thing was to let the business cool with time. But he couldn't wait. He had to do something to regain his self-respect.

He didn't know where she was staying at the Point, but that lake resort was not very large. He inquired at four hotels and three boarding-houses, and located her at last. But they told him that Miss Lancaster was not in. She had breakfasted early, and gone out in her car. They did not know which way she had gone.

The only certainty was that she had not gone to Old Lowlands. Jerry thought that she might have taken the Lake Road, the scenic route, that skirted the beach for many miles. She might have gone out to sit in the sun by the lake, wishing to be alone, for she was probably just as angry and humiliated as Jerry himself.

He drove down the Lake Road for a long way, looking for a car drawn up beside the road. But there was no car, and he was rather relieved. After six or eight miles he turned around and came back. He would not have known what to say to her if he had found her.

He turned back toward Old Lowlands, taking a zig-zag route through the side-roads, careless of how he went, and in no hurry to get anywhere. A rough, poorish country here, sandy soil and poor farm buildings, a district of poor farmers, growing buckwheat and potatoes, and sometimes a little tobacco where the light soil happened to be fertile enough. There wasn't much clover. Jerry in his preoccupation noted the fields of buckwheat, of tobacco, and thought they were doing poorly.

He came to a wide woodland, good timber of beech and maple, bordering an immense pasture field, with many steers grazing on it. Close to the woodland was a dilapidated hut. This was a place he knew; it was his favourite mushroom field; and he remembered how last autumn he had met Ernie Cumberland and his Louie here, and how they had bolted out of the hut. It was too early now for many mushrooms, but Jerry stopped to look—to look for something to occupy his mind.

Across the road was a great buckwheat field, all white with bloom. He went to look at it. It had no odour, and no bees were flying over it. The buckwheat was not yielding after all, he thought with relief.

He went into the great pasture field and walked about, but he found no mushrooms. Goldenrod was growing up green everywhere, through the dry grass of last season. There was hardly anything but dry grass and green goldenrod. The whole country was going back into goldenrod, he thought once more, back into weeds, back into the earth, back into forms of life useless to man. There were not men enough left to control the growth, or there was something else that they preferred to do. It hardly paid any more even to pasture cattle on the land; and Jerry wondered what it would come to in the end, when it no longer paid to pasture cattle or to grow any grain.

He looked into the old hut. Its floor was gone, and its window and its door, leaving mere openings. The floor was heaped with grass, drifted leaves, twigs. A broken plough rusted in one corner and there were other shapeless ruins of agricultural implements about the place, stored there at one time and never taken away. Birds' nests were in the roof, and the bunks were full of rotted rags and ancient hay.

A great log lay by the door, as if it had been put there for a seat, and Jerry sat down on it. He took off his coat, and turned his back to the full heat of the sun. The warmth was comforting; and the herd of steers, becoming aware of him, began to drift down toward the hut, interested, and grateful for his presence.

It was a good thing that he had not found Edith, he thought now. They could have nothing whatever to say to one another, except sharp words. She must be as angry, as humiliated as he was, perhaps even more so. For she had certainly meant to stay the night with him; he knew it, and she knew that he knew it. Short of an absolute physical rape there was nothing now that could restore their self-respect. A rape would probably make both of them feel better. But he hoped that he would never see her again.

They had somehow got into what theologians call a spiritual relationship, established from that day when he had put his hand on her breast. He wondered again why a casual contact of the epidermis and still more of the mucous membranes should establish a spiritual relationship, difficult to break, and some said impossible to break at all. Nothing now short of rape could put them back into normal, human relations.

He wondered why this should be so, and the problem led him into metaphysical speculation, as most problems did. But he put it out of his mind. Time would solve and cure it.

He thought of the bees, of the honey streaming out at his extracting-plant. But he felt weary and sick of the bees. It had been a blunder to take up bee-keeping. He had done nothing all his life but make blunders. It was a blunder to have left New York, a worse blunder to have enlisted, and the worst of all was to have dug himself into the slough of Old Lowlands, that village sinking back into the soil, into the primeval slime.

He was stuck there now and he couldn't help it, but he wouldn't say sour grapes. He knew there were plenty of better sorts of life, but he would never be able to reach them.

Still, it was a sort of life he had deliberately chosen, and which he could endure, and that was more than many men could say. But he wasn't quite fitted to it. He wasn't a very good bee-man, not as good as his helper Roll. He had the skill, but he didn't have the strength and the indifferent endurance. Roll would have worked all Jerry's apiary alone, and half as much more, working alone, working like a horse, like a robot, thinking nothing of philosophy or of the *optima vita*, but solely of getting a crop of honey and selling it. And Jerry thought of Iona, so cool and pink, like a great hollyhock, like a full-blown peony.

And he thought smartingly of Edith Lancaster, so soft and dark, sweet perhaps, but he would never know whether she was sweet or not. He couldn't sit there any longer. He got up and went out to his car, feeling better in his back for the sun bath.

He drove slowly back to Old Lowlands. Passing his shop, he heard the steady throb-throb-throb-pause of the engine, but he didn't stop. He didn't care to see the honey coming out.

He went home. Last night's supper was still on the table. He cleared it away, washed the plates and the beer bottles. But he couldn't stay in that room, and he went out to the orchard to look at the bees.

It was warm now, and they were flying, sluggishly, as in early spring. Plainly they were getting no honey—a little pollen perhaps, and water for the brood. Crowds of guards lounged about the entrances, but there was no fighting. No bee attacked him as he walked among the hives. There was a crop of honey in this yard, nearly two tons, he guessed, and it could be left to the last, for there was no buckwheat anywhere near the village.

He sat under the apple trees for a long time, resting, and watching his bees, and finally went into the house to get something to eat. He ate it, drank a bottle of beer, and went to see Richard Cumberland.

Edith had been to see him just before she came to Jerry. Something that Richard had said to her had made her come to Jerry in a new mood, and Jerry was curious to know what it had been.

Ernie received him, Ernie looking pale, pimply, a little worried.

'How is he to-day, Ernie?'

'Why, just about the same. A little brighter, maybe—or maybe just sort of cross. That dame from town was in to see him yesterday—his niece, she says she is.'

'Did it do him good?'

'Seems like it did,' said Ernie, depressed.

Richard had been genial and friendly lately. To-day he was sitting as usual in his wheeled chair in the strong light from the window, clean and shaven and well-dressed, with the Toronto morning paper on his knee, but at the first glance Jerry saw that he wasn't genial.

'Well, Mertens!' he said, slightly sneeringly, 'what have you been doing to-day? Fighting the bees?'

Jerry was sore and sensitive in mind and body, and he stiffened himself at Richard's tone.

'It happens that I've not been doing anything at all to-day. That's the advantage of my work—I can take a day off any time, or a month, if I care to pay the cost.'

'Well, what's the cost?' Richard demanded contemptuously. 'How much are you getting for your work?'

'About a labouring man's wages.'

‘Good enough, I’d think.’ Richard lowered at him sarcastically, inimically. ‘What have you got to complain about?’

‘I’m not complaining.’

There was a considerable silence. Richard did not ask him to take a cigar from the mantel. Jerry could not stand the atmosphere. Careless of being rude, he got up to go.

‘Sit down,’ said Richard gruffly. ‘Where are you going? I saw my niece yesterday.’

‘What niece?’ Jerry inquired, on his guard.

‘Miss Lancaster.’

‘What did she say?’

‘I don’t think we had what you could call conversation. She spoke of you. She had read one of your books. She didn’t think it was much good.’

‘Then she expressed a very general opinion.’

‘She said she was going to see you later.’

‘Yes, I saw her.’

‘I hope she gave you a good time.’

‘Not particularly.’

The old man gazed at him sarcastically, penetratingly, as if he knew exactly what had happened.

‘She doesn’t think much of your bee-keeping business.’

‘So she has often told me.’

‘Why do you stick at it?’

‘It gives me plenty of time.’

‘Time for what?’

‘For thinking, sir.’

This momentarily plugged Richard’s sarcasm.

‘Thinking is, of course, a sacrosanct process,’ he said at last, ‘regardless of its object. In some countries, I have heard, the contemplation of the navel is considered extremely meritorious.’

Helpless and sore, Jerry listened. He couldn't bandy words with the old lawyer, not to-day.

'You're not going, Mertens? Very well, if you're busy. I couldn't read the last lot of books you brought. Ernie has them. You can turn them over to the library, or read them yourself.'

Jerry went out. As he turned at the door he saw old Richard looking after him strangely, harsh and hard, and yet somehow concerned. If he had only known it, this was the last time he was to see the old counsellor more than one-tenth alive.

VIII

If he had known it he would not have cared. He thought he never wanted to see Richard Cumberland again. He was sick of the old drunkard, sick of that dead man who could neither live nor be buried.

Nor did he ever want to see Edith Lancaster again, nor Edgar Lloyd nor Telford Smith. He did not want to see anybody again. He drove slowly through the withering street of Old Lowlands. The leaves were beginning to fall already, though there had been no frost, the lemon-yellow leaves of the soft maples falling heavily on the deserted street. This was where he belonged, he thought. This was the life he had naturally come to.

He went to his workshop. The engine was still thudding, blowing its blue exhaust through the wall into the tall grass. He opened the door and went in.

A gust of hot, steamy, honey-laden air struck him in the face. The engine and the extractor shook the building. Extracting was proceeding at full blast. Stripped to his undershirt, Roll was uncapping over the hot box. A pile of wax cappings lay in the box, melting, swimming down from the hot plate, to run into the separating-can.

The room was stifling with honey and steam, reeking with hot water and wax and honey. Iona tended the extractor, leaning over the great can with her hand on the clutch, watching the combs. She also streamed with perspiration. Her arms and neck were bare and her hair clung in sticky curls around her forehead.

Roll and Iona did not appear to be talking together, and conversation was almost impossible in that rattle of machinery. Iona put on the brake and reversed the extractor; the machine roared up into high speed again. She looked up and saw Jerry.

He nodded to her, and stood aside, not to interfere with the work. The extractor whirled. Roll uncapped combs, cutting great slabs of white honey into the box, with blue steam spurting from the tip of his knife. Iona threw out the clutch, stopped the reel, and began to take out the emptied combs.

‘How’s your back, Jerry?’ she cried.

‘It’s getting better. I’ll turn in and help directly.’

‘You don’t need to,’ Roll said. ‘We’re getting on fine. We’ve turned out over 1,200 pounds already. You take a rest.’

Roll was unusually genial. This was the sort of work he liked, a straight, heavy job, where you did not have to stop to think.

They had been doing it well. One of the big tanks was full of honey, and the next was filling up. Roll drew off buckets of warm honey from the machine, and poured them through the wire strainer into the tank. The surface of the honey was froth, scum, dead and half-dead bees, and particles of wax; but all that would come away in the skimming.

The floor was slippery with spilled honey. Like bringing in no bees, the ideal was to spill no honey, but somebody always upset a pail or let the honey-gate overflow, and there was always the drip from the uncapped combs. The plank flooring was as slippery as ice, and there was half-melted wax mixed with it, and half-dead bees crawled everywhere. There was still a cluster of bees at the top of each window, hanging like a swarm. Most of them had been taken out to the backyard nuclei, but some still clung there, and lumps of them occasionally dropped off and crawled about the floor.

The big room was cloudy with steam, from the uncapping-knife and the valve of the capping-melter, hot and steamy and full of fumes from the engine. It was heavy with the smell of honey and melting beeswax. Molten wax ran down from the piled cappings, cooling and mixing with the honey in the can. Bees crawled everywhere, sticky and half drowned in honey. Iona brushed them continually from her arms and her stockings.

Nobody spoke. The room vibrated with the machinery and reeked with the fumes of the hot honey and wax. Without looking up, Roll uncapped steadily. The hot knife sliced off slabs of honey and wax from the combs, and he placed them in the draining box where Iona could reach them when she loaded the extractor again.

Jerry sat down in a chair, in the rear, watching them. They were doing well; the honey was coming out; he wasn’t needed at all. He thought of going home, but he had nothing there to do.

Roll drew off more buckets of honey from the machine, warm and pallid, mixed with bits of fresh wax. The second half-ton tank was filling up. A great gap had been made in the pile of full supers, and now the emptied supers stood piled ten high, ready to be stored.

Jerry sat back in his chair, smoking. His back felt better. It made him feel better to watch the work going on, to see the honey coming out, nobody

speaking, all intent on the work. But after a while he got up.

'I can uncap now,' he said to Roll. 'Suppose you take the truck and bring in all the rest of the honey that's ready to take off.'

Roll nodded agreeably, washed his sticky hands and arms, and went out to get the truck, while Jerry took his place at the uncapping-box.

Iona asked him anxiously if he felt able to do it, and he said he did, though his back still made him gasp at any quick movement, and he would rather have gone home. He did not feel like work that day, but he dreaded to go home, for he had nothing to do there—except to think.

So he uncapped combs steadily. The great white slabs of wax and honey fell away from the hot knife. Half-drowned bees stung him on the fingers. In this routine work, in the heat and roaring he achieved a sort of dull satisfaction. Mechanically he uncapped, timing himself with the extractor. When he had uncapped four combs Iona reversed the machine. When he had uncapped four more she stopped it, took out the eight emptied combs and put in eight fresh ones. After every two dozen combs Jerry drew off several buckets of honey from the extractor and poured them into the tank.

The tank grew full. They covered it, and moved the strainer to the next tank. Iona hardly spoke, tending the extractor. She seemed heavy and depressed, but she couldn't be very tired, for it was light work that she was doing, and she was very strong. Bees hummed mournfully across the room, trying to get out.

Towards five o'clock Roll came back with a load of honey, and a good many bees with it. Jerry stopped the engine, and tried to help him unload; but his back was still too sensitive, and Roll had to unload them himself.

Jerry emptied the last honey from the extractor into the tank, scraped out the last slush of melted wax and honey from the uncapping-box, and left it to harden. Iona drew off the hot water from the jacket of the uncapping-box and washed up the floor with it. There were too many crawling bees on the floor to use a scrub-cloth, and she used a mop.

In another long and very hard day they extracted enough honey to fill the rest of the tanks. Now there was a pause, while the honey cleared, and all the particles of wax and dirt and dead bees rose to the top, to be skimmed off. This would take a couple of days. On the first day Jerry and Roll put on bee-escapes to get off as much honey as possible. The next day Roll took the yard car and disappeared, without asking any permission.

He did not come back at all next day, and Jerry was annoyed. There was no work in particular, but Roll was supposed to report for duty every morning while he was on wages. But Roll had taken to going to Lowlands Station whenever he had a chance and could get a car; and Jerry had already heard plenty of talk of how Roll was always seen with the little dark girl, who was the daughter of a railway engineer.

It was none of Jerry's business, but he wondered whether Iona had heard the talk.

They cleared the extracting-room for packing honey, washed the floor carefully, and pushed back the capping-melter and the empty supers against the wall. Iona skimmed the tanks carefully, taking off an incredible amount of froth and bits of wax, and the honey now showed a smooth, dark surface. The square sixty-pound tins were all stored on the upper floor, and Jerry brought down a hundred of them.

Roll came in, rather sullen and on the defensive.

'Where have you been with the yard car?' Jerry asked him.

'There wasn't anything to do here, was there?' Roll said. 'Yesterday I went out to the Caledon yard and looked it over. There's enough honey coming in now to handle the bees. Better see if they're all right for winter stores and queens.'

'We're going to put up honey to-day,' Jerry said.

'Well, do you want me to stay here? There won't be any too many days left when we can handle the bees. Just as you say.'

Roll had always assumed that irresponsible and superior tone when he felt bad-tempered. He was ready to leave it all to the boss, with an undisguised air that the boss didn't know anything. It was quite true, however, that they would have to begin to think of winter, and see that the hives were heavy enough with honey and that they all had queens; and it was true, as Roll said, that there might not be too many days when this work could be done. Anyhow, Jerry didn't want Roll around in that temper.

'All right. Go through the yard,' he said curtly. 'See that you do it thoroughly, for we probably won't go through them again this year. Yes, and come back by three o'clock,' he added. 'You can carry out the cases of honey and stack them up.'

Carrying out the hundreds of cases of sixty-pound tins and stacking them in the lean-to, ready for shipment, was the back-breaking part of putting up

the honey. But Jerry wasn't going to do it himself, when he was paying a man for the heavy jobs. He cleared all the rubbish out of the lean-to, and swept the floor, a heavy cement floor that could carry any weight of honey.

Roll went away to the yard, and Jerry and Iona proceeded to draw off the contents of the tanks into the tins. It was easy work, for the most part. They each sat on a low stool in front of the tank with a pile of empty tins at hand, and one under the gate. The pale, thick honey flowed out. Each tin was on a balanced platform, and when the balance tripped, the gate was closed; the tin was full. Jerry moved the tins aside, sealed them up in their cartons and stamped each with his name and Co-operative number.

It was quiet, steady work; the room seemed strangely quiet without the rattle of the machinery, Iona worked with him, saying almost nothing, looking tired and depressed, so that Jerry finally said:

'Don't bother with any more of this, Iona. There isn't much more to do. I can finish it.'

'I'm not tired,' Iona said, bending over the thick, straw-coloured stream of honey.

They spilled a good deal of honey. It seemed really impossible to handle honey without spilling it. It dripped from the gates; a tin or two was allowed to overflow. The floor grew slippery again, choked with casually-placed honey-tins, waiting for Roll to come and put them in place.

Roll did not come at three o'clock. They finished the tanks, tilting each one up to drain into a bucket. Iona said she wanted to finish. Her dark hair was damp and sticky and her bare arms and neck were all damp and sticky with honey and perspiration.

When the last tank was emptied Jerry went home, leaving Iona to lock the building; but he came back in half an hour. Roll had not turned up again, but Iona was still there. She was washing up the floor. She had brought hot water from home, and she was cleaning everything up.

'For heaven's sake! Iona, what are you doing? What's the use. It'll be as sticky as ever to-morrow night.'

'It won't be quite so sticky, Jerry. I wanted to leave everything clean.'

She was squatting on the floor, with buckets of hot water and wet swabs. She continued to scrub.

'Please don't bother, Iona. It doesn't matter.'

She stood up, wet and sticky with dirty water and wax and honey. Her dark hair curled damply over her flushed forehead, and she looked more than ever like a full-blown peony. She looked at Jerry, and then looked vaguely into the tanks, and then she turned to Jerry again with dreadful despairing eyes.

‘Oh, Jerry, what’s the matter with Roll?’

‘I don’t know, Iona. Nothing’s the matter. He’ll be all right.’

But he knew that Roll too was despairing and wretched in his mind. And Iona knew it, and she cast off what Jerry said.

‘Never mind, Iona. It’ll be all right.’

He moved up to her and put his arms around her, for he thought she was going to collapse. She lay back into his arms. She shut her eyes and seemed to melt down. Jerry kissed her, a gentle and sympathetic kiss, and then another kiss that seemed to have something suddenly thrilling in it.

Iona clung to him, and then she turned her head away, and lay back on his shoulder, her eyes closed. Then with a start she squirmed out of his arms.

‘Wait, Iona! I’ll tell you . . .’

She flung herself away, groping for her hat that lay on the work table.

‘Listen, Iona! Don’t worry about Roll. I’ll tell you. . . .’

She turned upon him a strange, tortured, unrecognizable face. She found her hat, crammed it on her head, and went out without saying a word. From the window Jerry saw her cross the road and disappear into her own house. Jerry was wretched; he didn’t know what was the matter with her. He didn’t know what he had done to upset Iona, and he didn’t know how to comfort her about Roll.

He knew well what was the matter with Roll. Roll was obviously tormented and upset in his mind, and perhaps he needed comfort himself. Anyhow, he was hard to work with.

Next morning they brought in more honey and put on more bee-escapes, and again in the afternoon; and the next morning they extracted. Next day they hauled more honey from the yards, and so a regular routine developed. They brought in honey enough to fill the tanks, extracted it, put on more escapes while they waited for the tanks to settle, then drew off the honey into tins, and extracted more.

Iona did not help any more with the extracting, but she came over every evening and washed up the floor, and sometimes helped to fill the tins. She was quite herself again, good-natured with Roll, and never seemed to remember her queer break-down when she had cried on Jerry's shoulder.

The extracting dragged on through one week after another. At the rate of even a ton a day they should have finished it in a fortnight, but there were always unexpected delays. For two days it rained, making it impossible to bring in honey. Then the Toronto office telegraphed an order for a truckload of 8,000 pounds to be dispatched at once, and there was a hurry to order the big truck from St. Stephens, and to get it loaded. Another truckload was sent a few days later, and the great pile of cartons in the lean-to shrank down.

Jerry had almost forgotten his strained back. Day after day the heavy work went on, the heavy lifting, the roar of the extracting machinery, the steam and heat, the sticky mess. Whenever there was a respite, Roll or Jerry looked over the yards. The weather had turned warm again; the goldenrod was in bloom now, and yielding a little honey. Plenty of buckwheat was in bloom, but the bees did not frequent it. Buckwheat was not yielding much that year, and their fears had been unnecessary.

The honey was almost in now, and after another day's extracting they trucked in the last of the supers. The bee-yards were clear now. Instead of the white towers, there were only low white boxes in groups of four, crammed with bees, most of them heavy with honey, ready for winter.

It was all but over. The season of excitement and dread was over, and Jerry was glad to see the end of it. The excitement was gone now. He knew what he was going to get. It was not a high crop. There would not be much over 30,000 pounds. With a little difference in the weather at the right time he would have got perhaps thirty tons. Still, he would be able to draw over $1,000 advance on his shipments, with more to come later, perhaps as much more, according to the way the honey markets should go in the fall and winter.

It was plenty. Even $1,000 would give him all he wanted at Old Lowlands for another year, for he was a cheap man and willing to live in a squalid way.

About this time Jerry received at the post office a thick packet resembling a book. It turned out, in fact, to be a set of page proofs of a book called *Beverley Park*. He was puzzled by it, until he discovered Telford Smith's name printed as the author and then he understood. It was Smith's

prize-winning novel. Edith must have sent it, and it was, in fact, her handwriting on the addressed wrapper.

It happened to be a day of leisure, when they were waiting for the last tanks to clear. Jerry read the proofs straight through, at first with amazement and incredulity, and then with amusement, and finally with delighted interest and admiration.

Beverley Park was described as a tract of about 500 acres, vaguely in the neighbourhood of Toronto. It was owned by Colonel Beverley, whose grandfather had received it as a grant from the Crown. Colonel Beverley was a farmer; he lived on his land like a gentleman. Every morning he mounted his horse and rode over his fields to supervise his labourers. He was described as living on the product of his lands, and was swamped with debts and mortgages, but he bred racehorses and preserved pheasants. He had a gamekeeper. Returning from his work in the afternoon he had tea served on the lawn, frequently attended by the local doctor and the vicar, and the tea was served by a comic butler, an ancient English retainer.

There was, of course, a sentimental dog, who played a great part. The Colonel had two sons, both Oxford men. One had been killed in the war; the other had come home, crippled and bitter and Fascist. He had a daughter also, who sometimes rode astride and smoked cigarettes. She had contracted an attachment beneath her, with the son of the village sweet-shop keeper. This plebeian was now an engineer in the government service. A great hydro-electric development was under way upon a river that crossed the Colonel's land, and part of the land was going to be expropriated. The plebeian suitor, by bad luck, was exactly in charge of the building of the big dams and the waterways.

When he had got this far Jerry grasped the idea of the thing. He knew exactly how it was going to turn out. He read the last few pages, and saw that he was right. Then he settled down to read the rest of the book with great satisfaction, knowing that he was going to be pleased, interested and not unduly moved, just as if it had been Wallace or Walpole or Hutchinson.

It was an agricultural novel, but Smith had evaded his ignorance of agriculture by ignoring it. He had created a setting as fantastic as *Alice in Wonderland*, a rural feudal state that had never existed in North America, nor could hardly have existed in England in the last fifty years. In this imaginary setting he had placed a story composed of all the elements of popular books since the invention of printing.

He had plenty of modern elements in it too. His characters said ‘damn’ quite freely; his heroine smoked occasional cigarettes; there was a good deal about engineering, as well as about shooting, flying and racing. The hero and heroine stayed out nearly a whole night under a pine tree, but in a state of innocence and mutual reverence, conversing in mystical and poetical terms.

This escapade, however, was discovered by the crippled Fascist brother, who called the hero a damned cad, and cut him over the face with a riding-crop. But the hero would not retaliate, and afterwards saved the brother’s life.

All turned out well in the end, of course. And Smith wrote well, with a sort of newspaper cleverness. He had a good eye for scenery; he knew nothing about farming, but he could describe the fields, and he evidently knew much about horses. The description of the running of the King’s Plate at the Woodbine track, where the Colonel’s horse almost came in the money, was a finely spirited piece of work.

It was a bully good book of its sort. Jerry was willing to hand it to Telford Smith. It deserved the prize; it was almost as surely as possible going to be a best seller. Jerry knew that he could never have written anything one half so clever himself.

It was exactly what was wanted. For the English readers would like it, liking to think that Canada was like that. The Americans would like it, liking to think of Canada as a picturesque feudal appendage of the British Crown. The Canadian readers—but the sale of books in Canada is so small that it did not matter what they would think; and anyway Canada always liked what New York and London liked.

Jerry began to have a great admiration for Telford Smith. The book was too clever a fabric to have been accidental. Smith must have concocted it with a wise appreciation of his public, probably roaring with laughter as he wrote it. A man like that would go far. Jerry was sorry now that he had not cultivated Telford Smith’s acquaintance. He hoped that he might see him again, and they might talk together of *Beverley Park*. Smith would surely not keep up the pious fraud with a man who was in a small way a brother practitioner. At any rate, they might exchange solemn winks, like two augurs.

Jerry was surprised that he had heard nothing of the prize award, but he had hardly glanced at his newspapers for many weeks. He looked over the piles of back numbers. In the Saturday literary section he found plenty about

Telford Smith, with photographs of Telford Smith, in evening dress, in tweeds, in a bathing suit, with a tennis racket, with a gun, with a horse. The papers said that his book, already in the press, was a quite new view of Canadian rural life, and a wide and humanistic survey of life in general. It had been rushed into type at once, and arrangements were being made for foreign translations. Already Telford Smith was preparing a sequel to the book.

He would probably make $20,000 out of it, apart from the prize money, the papers said, as the last word of praise.

Probably he would, and Jerry sincerely hoped he would. He liked a clever and conscious buccaneer. Jerry would certainly have written the book for much less than $20,000, if he could. But he wouldn't have written any sequel.

He was grateful to Edith for sending him the proofs. He wanted to return them, but he didn't know where Edith was. She might be back in Toronto, or she might still be at Erie Point. So he kept them by him, for the present.

The last honey was extracted and shipped. The big room was scrubbed and clean now, already beginning to be piled full of the winter storage. The weather was still warm and moist, but the weather did not matter any more. A little honey was coming in from the goldenrod and asters, not much, just enough to keep the bees quiet; but the hives now had been opened for the last time. They were all amply provided with winter honey, and waited now only to be packed.

The buckwheat had hardly yielded honey at all, and now the fields were all cut, leaving the blood-red stubble. All the waste fields now were orange and yellow with the different sorts of goldenrod, mixed with the royal purple and white of the late asters. All the lowlands were like rainbows, a swirl of colour, orange and purple, yellow and white, useless, a flowering of noxious weeds, spoiled for pasture or cultivation, and not even yielding much honey. The whole country was going back to yellow and purple, Jerry thought, back to magnificent weeds, of no use to anybody.

The bees flew a little, gathering a little honey towards the middle of the day. They flew indifferently, bringing a little honey, a little pollen, and water. Not much pollen was needed now for brood-rearing, for the queens had almost ceased to lay. The bees flying now were the winter force, who would never see the great honey-flows, but whose whole function was to keep the colony alive till spring.

It was yet too early to pack the bees, and Jerry gathered his grapes from the trellis-fence behind the house, and pressed his wine. He filled a 20-gallon cask, and left it to work, to be bottled in six months. He brewed his honey-beer, filling two 40-gallon barrels, and this would be bottled within six weeks.

This was the rich time of the year, the fruitful time before the cold. All the country was rich and running over with fruits, with vegetables, with foods and meats of all sorts, soon to be checked by the frost. The orchards were laden with apples, red and green and russet. Buyers from the city bought up the fruit at a dollar a barrel, but they would take only the pick of the apples, the export grade. The rest were left on the trees or on the ground. The farmers filled their cellars. They sold second grade fruit to foreign men for ten cents a bushel, and these men sold them in the city for 25 cents a peck basket. They sold in wagon-loads, by weight, to the cider mills and the evaporator factories, at a price not worth the hauling. Apples could not be given away, nor pears, and the hogs and calves were turned into the orchards to clean them up.

The tobacco was being hurriedly cut, lest frost should nip it. The last peaches were still on the trees; the city market was glutted, and the peach trucks went through the small towns, selling peaches off the truck at a dollar a bushel. Frost was coming, when everything would be ruined.

All the housewives were preserving peaches, putting down jam and pickles and catsup. There was a surplus of everything, and winter was coming. Nothing could be given away, for everybody had everything, or got it in exchange from a neighbour for something else. The gardens were full of cabbages, onions, carrots, beets, every sort of vegetable, and tomatoes hanging red and thick on the earth, and numberless green tomatoes that would never ripen now. There were red peppers and green peppers, citrons and squashes and pumpkins, and late melons and innumerable cucumbers of all sizes.

People gave these things away, or exchanged them. Jerry traded honey for all his winter stock of root vegetables. He put honey in the village store and got a credit for groceries, and another credit at the butcher’s. He even traded honey for gasolene at the garage, and got a little-used tyre for twenty pounds of beeswax. He sold several thousand pounds of honey in lots of from five to a hundred pounds, to the village people and the farmers, for their winter supplies, and he got cash for this.

The sugar beets were being dug and shipped, and carloads were going out every day from the railway station to the sugar factory. Sugar beets, spilled from wagons, strewed the roads. Potatoes and turnips were being dug, stored, sold, and shipped.

The country was full of young roosters, ready for roasting, and spring ducks and geese. These could hardly be sold for what it cost to feed them. People ate them, and looked genial and fattened. But in Toronto, and even at St. Stephens, ten miles away, all such poultry and produce sold in the shops for exorbitant prices.

The beech trees and the walnut trees were full of nuts, not yet quite mature. Plenty of nuts foretold a hard winter. The black and grey squirrels were busy in the trees, though the stubble fields rich with spilled wheat and oats gave them more food than they could use. Huge flocks of blackbirds, congregating for the flight south, settled in these fields fattening for winter, and so did the rabbits and the quail. All the wild creatures were fat and happy, revelling in the enormous profusion of food.

Light frosts came at night, but not enough to damage anything. Forest leaves began to colour a little and to drop. Warm rains fell, and the weather grew milder. There were plenty of mushrooms in the pastures now, mostly the white field mushroom, the staple mushroom that all the world ate; but there were also many different mushrooms in the woods; but Jerry was not sure about these forest mushrooms and never gathered them. He did not really care much about eating these mushrooms, and he did not know how to cook them properly, but he liked gathering them, and he gave away quarts to all the people he knew. He gave away a great many pails of honey too, and slabs of comb, and people gave him eggs in return and cream and fresh pork from a pig-killing. Jerry carried gifts wherever he went, and he always got something back, and it seemed to him that this was the ideal way to conduct the business of life.

He carried two or three quarts of mushrooms to the Cumberland house. Old Richard liked mushrooms, he knew, and it was rather on his conscience that he had not gone back to see the old lawyer. But he had not felt that he wanted to see him, though his irritation had evaporated.

Ernie met him at the door, looking nervous and pale, not like himself. Ernie shook his head at the basket of mushrooms.

‘Got more in the house now than we can eat. Thanks all the same. You’d better give them to somebody else. I was out this morning, picking.’

‘Did you get many?’

‘More than I can use. It’s a great year for mushrooms. You can find them anywhere. Last fall I could look all day and not get a quart.’

‘How’s your uncle, Ernie?’

‘Do you want to see him?’

‘No, not just now.’

‘He don’t seem quite so well as usual. He don’t eat much. He orders something special for dinner, and then damns me when I bring it.’

‘What can you expect, Ernie? He’s getting pretty well worn down. I don’t see how he can go on much longer, as he is.’

‘Well, that’s what I used to think,’ Ernie said, with no hope in his voice. ‘But now I dunno. He’s awful tough.’

‘I’ll come again,’ Jerry said, going away.

‘He was asking for you, wondering why you hadn’t been in.’

‘Tell him I’ll be in very soon. Busy time now, you know, getting ready for winter.’

It was true, as Ernie said, that they had plenty of mushrooms, and that he had been out that morning, and Louie with him though he did not say so. Ernie knew all about mushrooms, loving both to hunt them and to eat them. He knew all the sorts, not only the common field variety, but the queer fungi from the woods that would make delicious dishes if they were cooked right. He knew the dark morels of spring, and the scaly mushroom, and the great white forest mushroom that sometimes weighs a pound, and the white puff-balls that are sliced and broiled like steaks. He knew the scarlet-cap that intoxicates, and the blue-cap, and the ink-cap that melts into ink if not gathered fresh, and the fairy ring mushroom, and the deadly poisonous mushrooms that were scattered among the others, like spots of death, but were easily recognizable, like the great pallid Stinkhorn. Jerry had often noticed this beautiful fungus, and had admired its magnificent botanical name—*phallus impudicus*. It was a great white cone, but veiled in the most delicate lace, not really impudic at all, and deadly poisonous, but possessing such an intolerable odour that nobody would ever gather it.

Then there was the deadly white amanita in the fields, much resembling the edible white mushroom, but easily distinguished by an expert. Ernie

knew them all, and there was no danger of being poisoned by any mushrooms that Ernie gathered.

Ernie had gone out that morning, and Louie with him, early in the forenoon, before the sun could turn the mushrooms brown. Louie did not seem to enjoy it. She looked pale and unhappy, though she was visibly plumper, broadening out, and she dragged herself wretchedly over the pasture grass not looking much for mushrooms. Ernie followed her, looking almost equally unhappy, but now and then picking a mushroom and putting it in his basket.

'What do you want me to do, Louie?'

Louie kicked aimlessly into the dry grass, and then sat down on a small knoll and began to cry. She cried with her mouth distorted and her eyes screwed up like a baby, and her rich colour had coarsened, and Ernie did not think she looked pretty any more.

'Don't start crying, Louie, for Christ's sake!'

'I guess I got something to cry about. It don't matter to you, does it?'

'Sure it does, Louie. What do you want me to do? I'll do anything I can.'

He sat down beside her and tried to put his arm around her, but she shook him off.

'You know what I want. I want us to be married.'

Ernie kicked at the grass himself, looking wretched but stubborn.

'Got to be reasonable, Louie. It's as much for you as it is for me. See, if I get married I lose my job, and I lose all I'm to get in Uncle Richard's will—the house and the home farm, and money too, likely. Ten thousand dollars anyway. We can't lose that. You'd be losing it as much as me. He can't last another year—maybe not six months. I don't believe he'll live through the winter. Can't we hold out till he dies?'

Louie cried viciously, 'All right for you to talk about holding out. But what about me? Where'll I be in six months? I'm scared every day that my mother'll notice something.'

Ernie scowled and sulked, wretched and tortured.

'But don't you see, if we get married I lose my job. I lose everything I've got to look for. What'd we live on?'

'I don't care what we'd live on.'

After a minute, Louie went on.

'What I've been thinking is, why can't we get married secret? Go to St. Stephens, maybe. Keep it quiet. Nobody needs to know.'

'God, Louie! You know that we couldn't keep it quiet in a place like this. Everybody would know, in no time. Even if we went to Toronto for it. And besides, if we did, and then—when anything happens, you know, it would all have to come out, and then it would look worse than ever.'

'Well, what are you going to do, then?'

Ernie thought and thought, and had no answer.

'You got me into this, Ernie, and now you've got to get me out of it. I'll tell you this right now—if you don't fix it up someway to marry me within a month, I'm going to go straight to your uncle and tell him all about it.'

For God's sake, Louie! Don't think of doing any such thing! You'll ruin us both.'

'No, you don't want to be ruined! But I'm ruined already. I'm through!'

'But do you know what Uncle Richard would do? He'd give you some money, maybe a hundred dollars, maybe five hundred. Then he'd cut me off, and he'd likely leave all he's got to Jerry Mertens, or maybe to that niece of his that comes here from Toronto.'

'I don't care who he leaves it to.'

'Yes, but it's coming to us, Louie. We've got to have it.'

'Yes, but—O Ernie, what are we going to do?'

He put his arm around her again, and she leaned against him, turning to him this time, weeping and clinging to him. He was her worst enemy, but she had nobody but him to comfort her, and she was fond of him.'

'Don't be scared, Louie. You'll get out of it all right. Come on, let's find some mushrooms. We'll be all right for a while yet.'

He kissed her wet face, and she wiped her eyes and got up, sobbing and choking like a child, and walked docilely after him.

Ernie picked up the mushrooms, the broad white plaques, the small round buttons, picking them out of the deep tangled grasses. He recognized and avoided the deadly-white, the thin-stemmed amanita. He filled the basket, far more than enough for the mushroom omelette that old Richard

loved, cooked by the Chinaman with red and green peppers, tomatoes and chicken.

‘Don’t worry, Louie. I won’t let you get into trouble.’

‘O Ernie, why doesn’t that old man die?’

But Ernie didn’t know, though he had thought a great deal about it.

IX

Frost fell again, white frosts so that the world looked in the morning as if it had snowed. But the white vanished in vapour in the sun. It was warm again; yet the world looked as if necromantic, resurrected, alive again, but waiting for the second death. The woods turned brilliant orange and crimson, and the leaves fell, silently, without wind, in the faded sunshine.

The goldenrod yellow had all turned to white fluff, though the purple asters still held their royal colour. But there was no honey in them, and the bees had almost ceased to fly. It was the definite end of the bee season. Jerry could hardly realize it, though it had always been like this. First the anxiety and the eagerness and uncertainty of the dandelions, and then the clover, a month of torture and labour and sweetness, ending in a tempest of wind and rain. Then the heavy, messy labour of taking off the crop. It had always been like that—interminable and intolerable while it lasted, and then seeming to have been no time at all.

It was still rather too early to pack the bees. Roll put the truck away, blocking up the wheels in the lean-to, and storing the battery. There was nothing for Roll to do now. He came down every morning to see Jerry and talk a few minutes with him, and then he borrowed the yard car and went away. In the end Jerry told him to keep the car as long as he wanted it, if he would grind the valves and adjust the carburettor, and store the car away before winter.

There were still plenty of mushrooms, and Jerry gathered them for amusement, carrying a gun for the rabbits that he frequently kicked up. He did not much care for either rabbits or mushrooms, and he left his spoil at the garage, where he knew that he would get favours in return. As he came back around the corner he came suddenly upon Edith Lancaster, just getting into her car.

He stopped short. He didn't want to speak to her. But she had seen him, and she hailed him without any embarrassment.

'Hello, Jerry! Have you been picking mushrooms? So have I, only I couldn't find many.'

She showed him a small basket with about a dozen mushrooms in it.

‘You don’t know the right places to look. Do you really want some mushrooms? I’ve just left about a peck at the garage. I’ll get them for you.’

‘No, I don’t really want them. I just like to pick them.’

They looked one another in the face. Edith looked friendly and unembarrassed, with a hard, defiant friendliness; but in Jerry’s mind was nothing but the memory of that night when she had cooked the bacon.

‘Of course I didn’t know where to look. I looked just anywhere. I wish you’d tell me a good place.’

‘I could show you plenty of good places.’

Perturbed, hostile, embarrassed, he looked at her. He had expected never to see her again. She was marvellously pretty, in a dark-gold blouse, with nothing on her dark rich hair.

‘I’ll show you where to find plenty of mushrooms. Are you still at Erie Point?’

‘I’m going back to Toronto within a few days.’

‘Thanks for the proofs of Telford Smith’s book. I’d have sent them back to you if I’d known where you were.’

‘Did you read them? I didn’t suppose you’d have time. You’re always so busy—or sick.’

‘Of course I read them. I found the book amazing.’

‘I think so too,’ Edith said. ‘It’s going to be a great success. He’s in New York now, arranging about the sequel, and about translation rights. He’s going to get $5,000 advance on the sequel even before he’s written a word of it, and a twenty per cent royalty when it’s published.’

‘I’m delighted,’ Jerry said warmly, and he really was delighted to hear it. He liked a genial and successful buccaneer.

‘I’d like to meet Smith again. He is a man of a most adroit mind. Anyway, I’ll return you the proofs, Edith.’

‘There’s no hurry. It doesn’t really matter anyway, for those proofs were only the duplicate set. The book itself will be out almost at once. They want to have a long autumn season.’

She looked at him with smooth, hard friendliness, and he looked at her with the old admiration, the old irritation. She looked so smooth and graceful, sitting behind the wheel; and he thought of those Sunday

breakfasts in Toronto, and of the evening when she had cooked bacon for him. There was something coming to him yet, he thought, but he did not think that he would ever get it.

'If you want mushrooms I can show you where to find them. Do you really like mushrooms?'

'I like to gather them. I can cook them to perfection, too.'

'Maybe you will cook some for me.'

She looked at him, hard and impenetrable.

'We must get some first.'

'Well, I'll show you where to get them, Edith. We can get as many as you want. Will you come with me, or meet me—say, to-morrow afternoon?'

'Where?'

'The best mushroom field I know is about three miles south from here, and half a mile west. It's a great pasture, with an old woodcutter's hut standing near the road. I don't suppose you know the place.'

Yes. Edith knew it. She had noticed the old hut in the great pasture.

'We'll find lots of mushrooms there. Could you meet me there early in the afternoon—say two o'clock?'

'Not so early. I couldn't possibly come before four.'

'Four o'clock, then.'

'I'll try to come. You might bring Telford Smith's proofs with you. We can talk them over.'

She drove away, and Jerry went back to his shop, where he expected to meet Roll. They were to discuss the winter packing, and whether there was enough material. Jerry thought that a load of fresh planer shavings would probably be needed, to be hauled from Lowlands Station. But Roll was not there.

Roll did not come, though Jerry waited for an hour, busying himself at putting the shop in order. Roll did not turn up the next morning either. He did not have a car; the yard car was standing back of the shop; so he could not have gone far away.

Jerry went over to ask Iona. She had not seen him, and looked rather startled. Jerry telephoned Roll's home. His family were farmers, living a

mile north of the village. But they had supposed that Roll was working for Jerry, and they did not know where he was.

Jerry had no doubt that Roll was at Lowlands Station, and he was irritated. He never minded Roll taking a day off in slack times, for he often worked far over hours when things were busy. But he couldn't absent himself like this for two days without notice, not if he wanted to keep his job.

Jerry finally drove out to the River yard, to look over the packing materials. The air was soft and warm, but heavy with autumn. Dead leaves were drifting down all over the yard. The bees were quiet, crawling about the entrances, flying a little, bringing nothing in. The scrawled chalk markings on the hives had all disappeared, washed out by the rain. All the weak colonies, and the little mating-nuclei had been united down. Nothing was left but the powerful colonies, full of bees and heavy with honey, that would live through the winter, and breed up a new working force for the next year.

Jerry looked over the yard, examined the winter cases, and cemented up leaky covers. There wasn't much to do, and he didn't feel like doing much. The yard seemed dead now, after the hot violence of the summer time.

He went back to the village. Still Roll had not appeared. Jerry went home, had dinner, changed his clothes, preparing to meet Edith at four o'clock.

But still there were hours to wait. He went to the shop, half expecting to find Roll. The great building was clean and silent now. The engine was closed down, the radiator drained, the cylinder greased. The extractor was back in its corner, corded up in canvas, and the tanks and the capping-melter and the strainers and knives and all the equipment put away on the upper floor. Most of the supers of combs were still piled in a huge stack outside the door, and they must soon be brought in.

Nervous and uneasy, he pottered about, unable to work. He was rather sorry that he had arranged to meet Edith again. It couldn't do any good. Far better that they should let it drop, never meet again, forget one another; since they could have nothing to say to one another, and never did have anything. And now all they could say must be something that would hurt.

However, he had promised, and he must meet her. About half-past three he drove down to the familiar field. The old woodcutter's hut was still there.

Nobody was there; nothing but the great herd of steers grazing back of the ruined hut.

He left his car by the road, climbed through the fence, and looked casually about for mushrooms. He saw plenty, but he did not pick any of them, waiting for Edith. He looked into the hut. He cleared out the rubbish from the bunk, and refilled it with fresh dry grass, laughing at himself.

It was after four o'clock. He walked up the field a little way, and saw plenty of mushrooms. Edith could have all she wanted, if it was mushrooms that she wanted. The steers watched him from a distance, greatly interested and pleased, and they gradually congregated and followed slowly after him. But when he went back to the hut and sat down on the log they lost interest, and resumed their grazing, though not moving very far away.

It was after five o'clock when her car came down the road, and stopped behind his own. He went out to meet her. He had had some thought of kissing her, but he didn't try.

She looked all dressed up. She wore a dress of golden brown and black, with gold-coloured stockings, and a little close hat trimmed with bronze; but she wasn't soft; not like a pansy now, but hard and brilliant like a dahlia. Evidently she had got herself up with great care, and she met him quite frankly and genially, without the slightest show of embarrassment.

'Sorry if I'm late,' she said. 'I couldn't get away any sooner. Have you been getting any mushrooms?'

'There are plenty, but I haven't picked them. I saved them for you. Have you brought a basket?'

She had a tiny, ornamental wicker receptacle.

'That won't go far. We can gather a bushel if you like. I've several baskets in my car, peck baskets.'

'Oh, I don't want so many. I wouldn't know what to do with them. I'd only give them away. But I'm going back to town, and this will be my last chance to get any.'

'When are you going?'

'In a day or two. I'm not quite sure.'

He helped her through the wire fence, and they walked slowly up the field, overgrown with half-dry grasses, and the half-dry goldenrod crested with pallid fluff. Mushrooms were everywhere, struggling up through the

tangled grass. Edith exclaimed with surprise. She had never seen so many mushrooms before. They filled her tiny basket at once, and Jerry emptied it into his large one. The steers noticed their movements, and began to drift slowly after them, watching them with interest. Edith was alarmed.

'Won't they hurt us?'

'Not at all. They're only curious and interested. They're extremely sociable creatures. They love human company, and they don't get much of it, so they're delighted to see us. If you would stand perfectly still they would come up very slowly and timidly and gather close around you and probably they would then lick you all over, if you would let them. Just because they like you.'

'I don't think I'll let them. They look as if they might run over us.'

'So they might, if they got the idea. They're so big and heavy that they could run right over us without noticing it. But they wouldn't do such a thing, unless they got into a panic and went clean out of their heads.'

'I hope they don't get into a panic,' said Edith, looking uneasily at the steers that were trailing after them. 'What might send them off their heads?'

'Well, if a strange dog came into the field they'd probably stampede after it—the ancestral fear of the wolf, you know. Or the smell of blood—that drives them quite wild. If one of these steers happened to gash itself badly on the barbed wire they might get to horning one another, and the whole herd go completely insane. Horses are like that too—they can't bear the smell of blood.'

Edith shuddered.

'I wish you'd drive them away.'

Jerry threw a stone at the nearest steer. It struck with a resounding thump on his leathern hide. The steer looked with wide eyes at Jerry, not hurt, but grieved and puzzled, not understanding at all. Jerry threw more stones and shouted. The herd broke away, scared, galloped wildly for a hundred yards, then faced about, stared for a little while, and fell to grazing again.

Edith and Jerry walked together up the mushroom field. Golden brown and cool, she walked beside him, picking the mushrooms he pointed out to her. She didn't know anything about mushrooms, and he stopped her just as she was about to gather a poisonous one. And Jerry was quite cool himself, by this time, and he laughed again as he thought of the bunk he had filled

with soft hay. Edith wasn't seductive now, but she was irritating, and she meant to be so.

'Don't you think Telford Smith's book is a great novel?'

'I've got the set of proofs in my car. I'm awfully glad you thought to send them to me.'

'Well, isn't it a great novel?'

'I think it's a great imaginative effort.'

'What do you mean?' Edith asked, suspiciously.

'Well, it's supposed to be a picture of Canadian rural life. Smith has placed a sort of eighteenth-century English landscape in Ontario, near one of the big cities. Colonel Beverley is distinctly stated to be a farmer living on his land. He rides horseback over his fields, he breeds fast horses, he has pheasant-shoots; he owns a sort of feudal village. What Smith describes has never existed anywhere in North America, and I don't believe he ever saw it operating even in England. The plot of his story is an ingenious sentimental fake. No, it isn't a great novel, and I feel sure that Smith doesn't think so. I take him to be much too clever a man.'

Edith grew hot.

'You think he hasn't described a reality? Now I can tell you that there is almost just such an estate existing, not far from Toronto, where Smith got his material.'

'Who owns the estate? Is it a city man?'

'It's a Toronto corporation lawyer, and he runs the farm scientifically, and like an English gentleman too.'

'I wonder how much it costs him,' Jerry said. 'Of course there are any number of gentlemen's estates around all the big cities, owned by rich men who like to play at farming. Do any of them make any profit out of the land?'

'I don't know what they make. They're not peasants, of course. What do you know about farming? You're not a farmer.'

'No, but I'm mixed up with the farmers all the time, and I know all about their troubles. I know something about farming. I know something about hogs. Hogs are the only profitable branch of farming nowadays, but Colonel Beverley didn't have any hogs. Look at this pasture, and the cattle on it. That's farming. Most of these steers are finished animals, ready for

beef. There's enough meat in each one to supply a small family for a year. They've been tended for two or three years, housed and fed all winter, and kept clean; and a man knows nothing about farming who has never cleaned out a cow-stable on a cold morning. These steers will bring the farmer perhaps $40 apiece, on an average. That farmer can't ride about on a fine horse, observing his labourers.'

'I don't know anything about cattle,' said Edith, very superior. 'But Telford Smith has studied the subject thoroughly. He has worked on a farm himself, which you never did.'

Jerry was sick of talking about Telford Smith.

'Have it as you like,' he said. 'Of course the book is merely a sentimental, unreal, amusing story.'

'It will probably bring in $20,000. Don't you wish you could write anything like that?'

'Yes, I do,' Jerry said. 'I'd gladly write such a book, if I could, for about a quarter of $20,000. But I wouldn't call it a good book.'

So they walked and wrangled, trying to hurt one another. They forgot to pick mushrooms. The steers watched them at a distance, and then, forgetting their repulse, began to drift slowly after them again.

'It's getting late. I must go back,' Edith said. 'My foot hurts. My shoe doesn't fit; and we've got more mushrooms than I want.'

So they walked slowly back to the hut. Edith sat down wearily on the big log, where Jerry had warmed his sore back. She slipped her shoe off and rubbed her instep. She was wearing silly high-heeled shoes.

The sun had gone down behind a great cloud-bank in the west. It was going to rain to-morrow, Jerry thought; but this wouldn't matter now, except that he had thought of starting to pack some of the bees, and he couldn't pack in even the lightest rain. The shavings and sawdust had to be kept dry.

He sat down beside Edith on the great log. He was glad he wouldn't see her again. She didn't know anything. She had no capacity to know anything, and, fortunately, she didn't want to know anything. She really thought that *Beverley Park* was a great book. He sat close beside her and massaged her foot.

'It hurts,' Edith said plaintively. 'I think I must have strained my ankle a little.'

Jerry massaged her ankle, and her calf, up as far as the knee.

'That's delicious,' Edith said. 'There's nothing so nice in the world as to have one's feet and ankles massaged. That's enough now, Jerry. I must go home.'

She looked up at him, suddenly limp and wretched.

'What's the matter with you, Edith?' Jerry said brutally.

'Oh, Jerry, please don't!' Edith said. 'You're the hardest person to get on with I ever saw. And I'm going away to-morrow.'

'Don't go, Edith. Come back with me.'

She seemed suddenly wilted and forlorn. She let her head fall against his shoulder.

Jerry drew her close to him, in the creeping dusk. The low sky was streaked with cloudy amber and yellow—wet weather to-morrow. She leaned against him, pliable. He kissed her, and if she did not respond she did not resist. He put his hand on her breast, slipping it inside the golden blouse, to revive the spiritual relationship.

'No—no, Jerry!' she murmured.

'No, Jerry, no! Not here!' she exclaimed, as he proceeded still further. She jumped up, breaking away from him.

With one shoe still off, she ran away, running around the corner of the hut, and Jerry ran after her. She screamed with laughter as she ran, and she ran wonderfully fast. He chased her twice around the hut, and then, still laughing wildly, she dived through the dark doorway.

Jerry dived after her. It seemed pitchy-dark. He collided with her, seized her in his arms. They both tripped over something, and fell together into the litter of the floor.

Jerry had thought there was something coming to him, and he now got it.

But after a few dizzy moments he realized that Edith was not responsive.

She did not speak, she did not respond to his kisses.

'Edith! Edith!' he said.

She did not answer. She had given a sharp cry, like pain, as she fell. She would not answer him nor respond. Jerry half raised himself. Something hot and wet was on him, and a queer smell, hot and alarming. It was pitchy-dark

where they lay together in the rubbish. Something sticky and hot was on his hands and on his legs. He got a match out of his pocket and struck it.

Edith's eyes were shut, and she looked white and motionless in the match-flare, and the dead hay was flooded with something black and wet.

Scared, he struck another match, at the risk of burning up the hut. It flared and quenched in the blood. It was blood, an alarming quantity of blood, and Edith was still and white and bleeding.

He had no more matches. But there was a flashlight in his car. He rushed out through the dusk. The steers were crowding around the hut. In the electric spot-light he saw Edith white and apparently unconscious, and all the dry hay around her soaked with blood.

It seemed an appalling welter of blood. Throwing the light about, he found the cause of it. Edith had fallen upon some broken agricultural implement, the end of a broken hay-mower, and the sharp triangular cutters had driven into her back and hips. Her golden dress was all soaked with blood. He tried gently to lift her. But she screamed at the movement. Blood seemed to flow so copiously that he was afraid to move her.

Still, he had to do something. He looked at her in the white electric spot, shut-eyed and wizened, as if she were dead already. If he could lift her off those cruel points, and put her in his car, take her to the doctor. But he couldn't put her in his one-seated car. Nor could he put her in her own car, also one-seated. But the doctor at Lowlands had a big car.

Yes, but by the time he could fetch the doctor she would certainly be dead. Nobody could survive that terrible loss of blood.

'Edith!' he spoke close to her face. 'Edith! I'm going to get help. I'm going to bring a doctor. Try to stand it till I get back. Edith!'

She did not seem to hear him. She did not answer, only a hard moaning. He ran out to his car. The steers had gathered all around the hut, and they bellowed at him as he went out.

He drove fast to Old Lowlands through the twilight, through the village, around the corner, and up to the doctor's house.

There was no light in the surgery window. The garage stood open, and the doctor's car was gone. The doctor was out.

He got out of the car to inquire, and in the light of the electric lamp at the corner he saw that his trousers were all undone and soaked with blood.

He adjusted them hurriedly, and hesitated, frightened. A neighbour whom he knew came by, and Jerry stepped back into the shadow and spoke to him.

'Yes, the doctor's gone out into the country—I think out to Davis's place where they're expecting a baby. No telling when he'll be back.'

Jerry got back into his car and drove away, anywhere. He did not know where he went, but by some instinct he came back to the gate of his workshop. There the building stood, dark, heavy with all his labour. He stopped and got out. The nearest electric light illumined his blood-stained clothing, and he saw that his hands were black with blood, and he realized that this blood was damning.

He was sure now that Edith was dying. Nobody could lose so much blood and live, unless with instant medical attention; and he could get none. It was his fault—even if not his fault. There would be an inquest, and he would be charged. He was not guilty of Edith's death, but he was partly guilty. Legally he would be entirely guilty, not only of murder but of rape. Medical evidence could establish that.

Canadian justice is swift and stern. It was a matter of quick conviction and death. He felt the rope around his neck. That light-hearted, vindictive game had turned suddenly deadly. He thought of Edith's wild laughter as she darted into the dark hut. She had been quite ready for something, but not for death.

He stood by his car, trying to think. He had not the slightest chance of his life, he knew for certain, if Edith died. And he thought she was probably dead already. Not the slightest chance, if they caught him.

But with his car he might be a hundred miles away before morning—two hundred miles before Edith's body was discovered. But he had no money. He could not get money till the banks opened.

He did not know what to do. Panic drove him to drive—anywhere.' A shadow flitted up the roadway. Jerry started, sick with fright.

'Oh, Jerry! Is that you? Do you know what's become of Roll?'

It was Iona, wrapped up in a sort of dark cloak. She came into the light.

'Have you seen Roll, Jerry?'

'No,' Jerry answered stupidly. He could hardly remember who Roll was, nor what he might have to do with him.

'No—I don't know. What about Roll?' he said.

‘He sent me word this morning that he was going to Detroit and he wasn’t coming back. Do you know anything about it, Jerry?’

‘Detroit? No,’ Jerry said dully. Detroit! Perhaps that was where he should be going himself.

‘What’s the matter with you, Jerry?’

She came forward and looked at him.

‘What’s that on your clothes? It’s blood. What’s happened? You’re covered with blood. You’ve had an accident.’

‘No. I haven’t been in an accident.’

‘Then what’s happened?’

He looked at Iona in the queer light, and broke out:

‘I’ve killed her.’

‘Killed who?’

She gazed at him in the queer light, half in the shadow of the great honey workshop.

‘That woman from Toronto?’

Dazed, Jerry said nothing.

‘Did you run her down? How did you kill her? Is she dead?’

‘I don’t know!’ Jerry mumbled, totally dazed and helpless.

‘Where is she? You can’t leave her like that. You’ll be arrested. You know if you killed her, don’t you?’

‘She must be dead,’ Jerry muttered.

‘God damn you, Jerry! What’s the matter with you? Do you want to be hanged?’

She seized him by the coat and shook him.

‘Why don’t you go for the doctor? Do you know she’s dead?’

‘The doctor’s out. I couldn’t get him. And I couldn’t carry her in my small car. She must be dead by this time, Iona. She’s bled to death. I’d better strike for Detroit.’

Iona leaned her head almost faintingly against the side of the car, and then recovered herself.

‘Come on, Jerry! If you don’t know whether she’s dead or not you can’t leave her. We’ll go and get her.’

‘I can’t put her in this car. The doctor’s not at home.’

‘He’ll be back in half an hour. I know where he went—only half way to the Station. If you can’t put her in the car—where’s your truck?’

‘Here, in the shop. Laid up, with the battery out.’

‘Well, come along, anyway. Where is she?’

Subdued, helpless, Jerry drove with Iona down the dark road, over the dark turning and up to the old hut.

Like a dark lump, Edith’s car still stood by the roadside, and inside the fence there was a great roaring, a bellowing and rushing of a herd of animals, dim in the dark.

‘What’s in there? What’s the matter with all the cattle?’ Iona exclaimed.

But Jerry knew at once what was the matter with the steers.

The herd surged around the hut, bellowing, horning one another, dashing away in groups, returning to collide with one another. Several steers were down, moaning and bleeding, while the rest of the herd charged insanely over them.

‘Is she in there? What’s the matter with the cattle?’ Iona cried.

She was in there, and Jerry knew well what was the matter with the cattle. It was like a horrible dream. It was the smell of blood from the hut, the smell of so much blood, where Edith must have bled to death by this time.

Jerry jumped out of the car and over the fence. A fierce rush of cattle met him. He whirled back and over the fence again, almost overwhelmed.

‘You can’t go in there. She can’t be there!’ Iona cried.

No, he couldn’t go in there, Jerry realized, gathering himself up. The great herd would trample him to death. Yet he must go in now, to bring out Edith’s body.

But he had to stop at the wire fence. The herd roared insanely around the hut, fighting and struggling, gone entirely insane. He approached the fence again, turning his flashlight on them. They swerved away from the glare, and then surged back again.

Iona cried, ‘Throw fire at them.’

Jerry lighted a wisp of dry grass, and the steers recoiled. The grass pasture was all dry, and it would burn off at a touch. Jerry thrust his bunch of flame into a tuft of grass, and it caught alight and spread.

He started more small fires all along the fence. They blazed up and the flame rolled burning and smoking over the field. In a few minutes there was a line of low, leaping flame in the dusk and a great cloud of smoke. Scared by the smoke, which drowned all other odours, the steers drew back. Invaded by a new panic, they rushed away, bellowing, towards the other end of the field. Away out of sight, behind the dusk and smoke, they roared and bellowed.

Jerry ran across the burnt grass, leaping through the flame. The fire was so light that it hardly scorched his clothing. He ran through it, to the hut, plunged inside with a flashlight, and saw Edith still lying on the blackened hay.

He could not think now of sparing her. He lifted her violently away from the steel points, and carried her out. She moaned faintly. She was still alive, and the violent effusion of blood seemed to have stopped.

Iona helped to get her into the car. Half reclining in the seat, she held Edith in her arms, both of them stretched out half horizontally, Edith’s blood staining Iona’s dress. Jerry took the wheel, and drove back to Old Lowlands.

The doctor was there when they arrived. They carried Edith from the car, and laid her on the oil-cloth-covered couch in the surgery. The doctor snipped away her golden, bloody dress with a pair of large shears, and Jerry was asked to stay outside.

The doctor came out presently, and went to the telephone, calling the hospital at St. Stephen’s. After a long time he came back and looked curiously at Jerry, observing his disorganized and blood-stained clothing.

‘How did this happen?’ he asked.

‘So far as I can make out, she tripped and fell on the knife of a broken mowing-machine, or some such thing,’ Jerry said.

The doctor, who knew Jerry well, continued to look at him speculatively.

‘She must have hit on something hard too. There’s quite a lump on the back of her head. Bit of a concussion, maybe. I’ve sent for the ambulance from town. I can’t treat her here. I can’t even examine her properly. It’s

likely she'll have to have a blood transfusion. I don't think anything vital has been touched, but she's lost a lot of blood, and she's pretty weak.'

'She isn't going to die?'

'Oh no, I don't think she's likely to die,' the doctor said.

X

Richard turned the tiny glass of brandy in his fingers, and sipped it without much satisfaction. He thought it didn't have the right taste; yet it was the same old cognac, guaranteed by the Ontario government, that he had been accustomed to drink every night. But no sort of liquor seemed to have the same bite any longer.

He knew perfectly that nothing but liquor had kept him alive, or willing to live, during these past years. This short, stimulated life of the evening was all he had.

Yet this was the case of much of mankind, he thought; except that they spent their days in some painful effort, instead, like himself, in sick inertia.

Then there was the strong gin and lemon in the morning, that enabled him to eat a little, and then he sat in his wheeled chair all day, occupying his mind with detective stories.

He had no quarrel with this sort of life. It was the normal life of man, a daily weariness, excited with a little false melodrama, drugged with alcohol, to avoid the thought of impending death.

He did indeed talk sometimes with young Mertens, who did not come often enough. For a long time Jerry Mertens had been almost his sole link with external life. Now and again Richard had thought of offering Jerry a regular salary, two or three thousand a year, anything he wanted, just to stay with him, to talk occasionally, to be a sort of liaison officer with life.

He had never suggested it. He was too proud to offer it, and Jerry would have been too proud to refuse it, he judged. And if Jerry had accepted such a position, Richard would have ceased to esteem him. Jerry would have become another valet like Ernie, who had the spirit of a slave, and was properly treated like one.

Richard felt physically uncomfortable, yet he could not think of anything to account for it in what he had lately eaten or drunk. For his lunch he had had a dish of curried eggs, surrounded with fried mushrooms. He had not eaten much of the eggs, but most of the mushrooms, which he greatly liked. Ernie had said that this would be about the last of the field mushrooms. Winter was coming again. For his dinner he had taken hardly more than a little soup, sending away the fricasseed duck and the salad. Ernie could eat

them, and probably the Chinaman too. The Chinese liked duck, he had heard. But he didn't know what the Chinaman ate, and in fact, he had not set eyes on Ah Fong for years, and would not have known him if he had seen him.

Ernie could eat the duck and the salad and dessert. Ernie probably conducted quiet parties on the lower floor with the dark little Stratford girl from across the back fence. Richard knew all about the Stratford girl, and cared nothing. So long as Ernie was alert and efficient, he cared nothing about Ernie's amusements.

He thought of ordering Ernie to telephone to Jerry Mertens to come in for the evening. It was the first time he had ever thought of such a thing. He would have liked someone to stay with him, and talk, for he didn't care to drink that night.

Of course Jerry would come, if he were sent for, but he would be amazed, and old Richard's pride refused the idea. He did not need anybody to sit with him, not even Edith.

He could not get Edith anyway, for he understood that she was in hospital, hurt in an accident. But not seriously. A motor accident, he thought, and Jerry Mertens had been somehow involved in it. Richard thought with the utmost cynicism of the probable relations of Edith and Jerry. Whatever these relations might be, it would be almost certainly for the worse, for both of them. But if Edith had been killed, he would have had to alter his will.

It must be close to $40,000 by this time, with interest, this fund he had piled up for Edith's benefit. If he left it to Jerry, what would he do with it? Probably nothing.

He swallowed the glass of aged brandy and poured another, but it seemed to do him no good. He would have to change his drink, he thought. He pressed the electric button, and instantly Ernie appeared, white-coated, pale-faced, as if he had been waiting outside the door. He looked at his uncle with nervous and pale curiosity.

'Is there any champagne in the cellar?'

Ernie thought there was, though it had not been touched for a long time.

'Bring up a bottle.'

'Yes, sir. A small bottle?'

'God damn you, Ernie! Won't you ever learn anything!'

Ernie came back quite quickly with a quart bottle, and a wide champagne glass. He opened the bottle clumsily, not much used to champagne. The pale wine frothed out.

'Not that glass, Ernie. The tumbler.'

Richard poured himself two inches of brandy in the tumbler, and filled it up with the pale, foaming wine. The King's peg! He tasted it. This seemed a drink with some vitality in it. Ernie was still watching him closely, with that air of nervous curiosity.

'That'll do.'

Ernie went out, soft on his slippers.

Richard gulped down the tumbler of powerful, fizzing liquor, he who never drank liquor fast, but he felt little the better for it. The champagne sickened him. He tried another dose of neat brandy. He felt a sickness, a sensation of terrible uneasiness, a sort of physical terror, and cramps in his bowels. He called Ernie, and was taken to the closet adjoining the bathroom, but it did not do him much good.

'Take away the wine,' he said gruffly, when he was back in his wheeled chair again.

Ernie would drink it himself, no doubt, perhaps with the little dark girl from over the fence. Richard didn't care what Ernie did. Ernie was an enemy, and he had known it all along; but he had always been able to keep Ernie in his proper place—till now. He had a strange sense of physical terror, something dark and cold arising from the depths of him, and he wished that he could have sent for Jerry Mertens. They could have talked philosophy together, and drunk brandy, and then perhaps he could have slept.

He would have to change his drink, he thought. He had an uneasiness in his belly, a sort of terror in his brain. Perhaps he should give up alcohol altogether. He might try morphia or cocaine. Dangerous drugs, but not dangerous for him. They might get him through another year or two, and for longer than that—God! no longer than that!

Still, he tried to sip the brandy. Instead of lifting him, it depressed him. The drink fell like a weight into him, stupefying. He lay back into his chair and dozed painfully, starting awake, and then dozing again. He awoke at last with a wrenching pain in his bowels.

He gasped, doubled up. But the spasm passed. It had not been such a very severe pain, but it had seemed to grip and cramp all his vitals. The silver clock on the mantel said a quarter to eleven. He must have been dozing for hours.

It was past his time to go to bed. He wished to go to bed, for in the course of the night the attack would wear off. He could not think what had caused it, unless, possibly, the mushrooms at lunch.

As if in answer to his surmise, the pain came back, acute enough this time, tearing him. He endured it, and waited. Within a few minutes it recurred, worse than before. He sat stoically, clutching the arms of his chair, till it subsided a little, and then he rang the electric call.

Ernie entered instantly, as if he had been waiting just outside the door. He met old Richard's eyes. Ernie was erect and stiff, facing his master with a mighty effort. His face was pallid, his eyes staring.

'Bring me up the rest of the dish of mushrooms I had at noon,' Richard commanded.

Ernie disappeared. Ernie would have to eat the rest of that dish of mushrooms, or take the consequences. Ernie came back.

'Sorry, sir. The rest of the dish was thrown out.'

He faced his master, determined and pallid. Richard, had seen plenty of men look like that in the dock.

'Gad, Ernie! I never thought you'd have the nerve,' he said, not without some admiration, looking at his nephew.

'But you won't get away with it,' he added.

He wheeled the chair to the high desk, and took up his fountain pen, and a sheet of paper. What was the date? He could not remember. He would leave that to the witnesses. There would have to be two witnesses.

'Telephone to the doctor to come at once,' he ordered. 'And tell him to bring another man, anybody will do. And get Jerry Mertens here.'

Ernie went out and down the stairs. The telephone was in the lower hall.

Richard wrote painfully:

'I revoke any previous will and testament. I devise and bequeath . . .'

What was the proper form? Lawyer as he was, he did not know how to draw up a will. He had hardly ever done any conveyancing business. But a

simple statement of his intention was all that was necessary.

'I devise and bequeath to Jeremiah Mertens, Bee-keeper, of the village of Old Lowlands, all my. . . .'

The tearing pain drove through his vitals again, so that he fell forward with his head on the desk, dropping the fountain pen. It rolled away on the floor. When he was able to lift his head again, he saw Ernie in the room.

'Did you telephone as I told you?'

'Sorry—I can't telephone now. The Central's closed,' Ernie said.

This was true. The rural telephone central offices closed at ten o'clock.

'Then go around to the doctor's office yourself, and get a man to come from the garage, and get Jerry Mertens. And hand me up that fountain pen.'

But Ernie did not move. He faced old Richard, and Richard faced him.

'Do as I say, Ernie, and I'll save your neck. God damn you, Ernie, what do you know about the law? You served these mushrooms to me. You gathered them. You benefit by my will as it stands. As sure as death, the coroner will charge you, and the jury will bring you in guilty. You've got the noose around your neck now. Do you want to save yourself or not?'

It came to Richard Cumberland that he was making his last forensic appeal for the defence. But he didn't have his old fire. He glared at Ernie.

'You'll hang, as sure as hell. Do you want to hang? Do what I tell you now, and I'll save your life.'

Ernie stepped forward and put his foot hard down on the fountain pen. It burst with a gush of ink on the floor. Then he turned and fled from the room.

Richard turned to the desk again. There must be a jar of ink there, a lead pencil, something to write with. Something to write his last will and his accusation. But there was no pencil, and the inkstand was dry.

The agony came over him again, burning through his bowels. He vomited over the arm of the chair. Then his bowels burst out of control, but he hardly knew it.

Pain swept through him in waves, coming and going, rising and falling, not so sharp now, but deeper and more shaking, turning and churning the very sources of his life. He lost all count of time, or of anything outside himself. He did not think of death; he was dull and hardly aware of

anything. Then the tearing strain subsided. He was able to catch his breath, able to recover his mind a little.

He saw the half-written paper on his desk. If he had a pencil, if he had the broken pen on the floor, he might be able to finish and sign it. Ernie couldn't get away with this.

For years he had not tried to pick anything from the floor. He steered the chair to the place, and tried to bend himself downwards. He couldn't reach it. And then the tearing pain began to work through his bowels again. He slipped out of the chair, and fell on the floor in a heap, in the midst of his own filth.

In hardly less distress, and in far more terror, Ernie heard the sound of his fall from the hallway below. There was a long silence then.

Ernie ventured up the stairs, and looked into the room, and then entered and stood over his uncle. Richard did not seem conscious of anything. Ernie gathered him up and dragged him to the bedroom, took off his clothes, and partly washed him off. Richard groaned several times, but did not speak. Ernie well knew the action of the deadly amanita, and he knew the old man would hardly be conscious again. He went out and called the doctor, and Jerry Mertens.

Jerry reached the house only a minute or two behind the doctor. Richard Cumberland was lying covered up in bed, his eyes closed, breathing harshly, and groaning a little. There was a terrible stench in the place. Ernie looked pale and scared, as was only natural.

The doctor looked him over and asked Ernie a few questions. The boy admitted readily that it must be mushroom poisoning. Richard ate a great many mushrooms when they were in season, and the doctor had seen such cases before. There was nothing to do but to alleviate some of the pain, and the doctor began to prepare a hypodermic.

Yet old Richard opened his eyes. They were agonized and dull, but there was a force of will in them yet. He seemed to want to speak. Jerry leaned over his face.

'Will . . . will . . .' Jerry thought he heard.

'Will I what? What is it you want, Mr. Cumberland?'

'My will . . . I want . . .'

'He seems to want to make a will,' Jerry said to the doctor. 'Could he dictate anything, do you think?'

‘Impossible. He couldn’t. If he could, it wouldn’t be any good. He’s not capable of making a will.’

‘Rest a bit,’ said Jerry into the old man’s ear. ‘We’ll see to everything you want. Don’t think about it now.’

The old counsellor’s eyes looked greyly into Jerry’s, looking now from beyond the limits of life.

‘God damn you, Ernie!’ he murmured.

The doctor inserted the little syringe. The injection had an almost instant effect. Richard looked once more at Jerry with an air of some intense meaning which he was no longer able to convey. Then he shut his eyes, sighed deeply several times, and appeared to sleep.

They watched him for some time. Away in the background Ernie hovered, anxious, ready to be helpful.

‘He’ll never come out of this,’ the doctor said.

Yet Jerry watched and waited. He had always somehow expected old Richard to say something with the authority of the other world. And this was the last opportunity.

He went out finally into the other room, where he had so often sat. A low fire, as always, burned in the grate. The silver clock ticked gently on the mantel, beside the box of cigars, kept there for Jerry.

The room was full of a terrible stench. There was a shocking mess on the floor. Ernie would have to clean it up. There was a great black ink-stain, and a smashed fountain pen.

Jerry looked at the desk. There was a half-written sheet of paper:

> ‘I revoke any previous will or testament. I devise and bequeath to Jeremiah Mertens, bee-keeper, of the village of Old Lowlands, all my . . .’

Jerry looked at this document for some time. Old Richard’s rasping breathing sounded from the bedroom. Jerry crumpled up the paper and threw it into the fireplace, where a few embers still burned.

XI

For several days after Edith had been taken to the hospital, Jerry spent much of his time in St. Stephens. He telephoned continually; he called at the hospital office till he became a nuisance. He was told that Miss Lancaster was very weak. She had had several blood transfusions. Jerry would have given her his own blood, if he had known it was wanted. Then she was better. Then she was said to be out of danger. He sent flowers. He sent fruits which he knew well she would not eat. He sent combs of honey. He put his card on all these gifts, but he did not ask to see her.

He did not want to see her. He was remorseful toward her, he was regretful; he was grateful. He had a terror of ever seeing her again. He felt only an immense relief, that they had both escaped destruction.

Then Richard Cumberland's sudden death took up his attention. Jerry had watched his last moments, which passed in unconsciousness. He was one of the pall-bearers. It was an enormous funeral, attended by half the county, and many eminent legal figures from Detroit and Toronto. A whole truck was laden with flowers. Old Richard was put to rest among his ancestors and collaterals, who occupied half the area of the Old Lowlands burying-ground.

Ernie was not at the funeral. Ernie was ill, from fatigue and overstrain, it was said. Ernie had indeed been under a severe strain. He had been put to the question, amounting almost to the third degree. But he had persisted in his statement, which was an admitted fact, that his uncle had died of a poisonous mushroom. Ernie should have been more careful. He admitted it; but he had meant no harm. It was easy to pick a poison mushroom with the rest. Such mistakes always happened during the mushroom season. And nobody wanted a police scandal at Old Lowlands.

The anxiety of everybody was about the will, and the contents of the will were made public immediately after the funeral. But, to everybody's disappointment, the millionaire estate had shrunk to comparative nothing. Almost all old Richard's money had been sunk in an annuity, now extinct.

The village house and the home farm were bequeathed, as everybody knew, to his nephew Ernest Cumberland 'in gratitude for long and faithful service'. The will was dated three years back.

The only other important bequest was one of $40,000, with whatever accrued interest, to the testator's niece, Miss Edith Lancaster, of Toronto.

One hundred dollars was left to the Chinese cook. All the library was bequeathed to Jerry, to his surprise. He didn't know that Richard had any library, beyond the detective stories. But there were more than a dozen heavy packing-cases full stored in the cellar.

Jerry had them hauled to his own house and opened them, damp and cold and mildewy. Many of them were legal works, or encyclopaedias, or scientific books. There were a great number of plays, in all languages, and books on the theatre, mostly in German. There were hundreds of classical works in English and French, the books of note, that everybody quotes but nobody reads. No wonder old Richard had left them in the cellar.

Jerry sorted the books out. He had no place for them, but he bought lumber from the planing-mill, and built new shelves. Upon these shelves he stored the books he would never read; but he could never bring himself to destroy any sort of book. But among the classics and the law books he was astonished to discover a great number of highly modern books—Gertrude Stein and Aldous Huxley and Gide and Proust, and no less than three copies of *Ulysses*, in the original blue paper Paris covers. They did not look as if they had been read; but they were probably valuable.

He sorted the books, for just then he had nothing to do. A great quantity of the more solid works he sold to a second-hand dealer, who bought them by the hundredweight. They weighed heavily, but did not bring much.

He continued to send flowers and fruits to Edith, but he never got any message of thanks. She was doing well; she would soon be able to leave the hospital. Jerry did not want to see her, but he knew that he must see her before she went away.

He wondered where she would go, suddenly enriched. If things had gone differently, if he had not so blundered with her, she would probably have married him. Then they could go away together, on old Richard's money. There would be plenty, with the income on that capital, and the income from Jerry's bees. But he knew that Edith wouldn't let him keep the bees. She would want to live all the time at a New York or Paris hotel, and Jerry knew that he wouldn't stand that.

And he knew that he wouldn't be able to stand Edith either, for more than a week at a time.

A rape would make them both feel better, he had thought, and they had had the rape, and it seemed to have done no good at all. He despised and disliked Edith, but it was with the dislike and contempt that men feel for their wives, so saturated with affection and loyalty that the strands are impossible to disentangle. Edith's figure remained in him like a foreign body, like a bit of shrapnel encysted in the tissues, impossible to extract, harmless, but painful at every change of the weather. And Jerry wondered again how a casual contact of the epidermis could produce such spiritual relationships.

Three days later Jerry brought in his customary flowers and his usual inquiries to the hospital office. He gave them to the usual nurse at the desk, who had come to know him. She was a very pretty, dark, plump girl, who reminded him slightly of Louie Stratford. She looked sensual and sympathetic; she looked as if she knew all the evil and good of the world, and liked them all. She looked like the sort of girl who would give a man a good time. Pretty and darkly demure in her blue and white, she looked at Jerry sensually and sympathetically.

'I think Miss Lancaster is leaving to-morrow,' she said. 'Oh yes, she's much better. She sent word that you were to come up if you called.'

Jerry thanked her.

The nurse looked at him with a darkly derisive smile, as if she knew all about the affair; and very likely she did, Jerry thought. She rang a bell and called another girl, who led Jerry through corridors and up stairways, and finally out to a balcony where convalescent patients were sitting wrapped up in long chairs. In the far distance he saw Edith.

She had a great white woollen wrap rolled around her, and she saw him at once.

'Hello Jerry!' she called.

He sat down beside her and took her hand, shaken with sympathy and remorse and affection. Her hand seemed so frail; she looked so frail and brown and so much older. Her brown eyes looked large and sad, and her face brown and papery.

'I'm so glad to see you, Jerry,' she said quite frankly. 'You've been awfully kind, with your flowers and things. I didn't send you any message, but I knew you'd understand.'

'That was all right, Edith. I didn't ask to see you, for I knew you wouldn't feel like seeing anybody.'

‘No, I could see hardly anybody,’ Edith said, looking at Jerry with a sort of dreamy penetration.

‘Anyhow, you’re better.’

‘Oh yes, much better. I expect to leave to-morrow.’

‘Where will you go?’

‘Well, back to Toronto at first. All my things are there, and I have a lot of arrangements to make. But I shan’t stay long.’

‘Where, then?’

‘Maybe for a week with some relatives in the east. But then I’m going where it’ll be warmer for the winter.’

‘Florida?’

‘No, not America. Italy, Genoa and Venice, I think, and maybe Egypt for the winter. I’ve booked my passage already, on the *Re Umberto*. At this time of year you have to book your berth early, on the Mediterranean route.’

It was exactly what she would do, Jerry thought—to take passage for the Mediterranean on a luxury liner; and she had the money for it now. He did not exactly envy her, but he felt frozen and out of it. She looked at him, dreamy and mocking. If you had played better, she seemed to say, you might have been sailing with me.’

‘I congratulate you!’ Jerry said. ‘You’ll have a good time. Of course I know about your legacy.’

‘Yes. We’d talked about it, hadn’t we? But I never really expected it. Poor Uncle Richard!’

She softened and looked really grieved.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘I really always thought—everybody thought—that you were going to be his principal heir.’

‘I don’t think there was ever any likelihood of that,’ Jerry said; but he remembered the scrap of paper he had found on the old lawyer’s desk. But he wouldn’t speak of it.

‘He left you his books?’

‘Oh yes, a whole library. I haven’t unpacked them all yet.’

Edith lay back in her chair and shut her eyes. She looked tired.

‘I’ll go,’ Jerry said. ‘I’m afraid I’ve tired you.’

‘No, don’t go yet,’ she said, still shut-eyed. ‘What are you doing now? Working with your bees?’

‘There’s nothing to do with the bees just now.’

‘Writing, then?’

‘I don’t write.’

Edith opened her eyes, and smiled at him, secretively. Colour had come back into her cheeks; she looked almost flowerlike again.

‘Don’t blame yourself, Jerry,’ she said. ‘It wasn’t your fault at all.’

Jerry knew that it hadn’t been altogether his fault, but he didn’t mind taking the blame.

‘Yes, it was my fault, Edith. But I never thought . . .’

‘I know.’

She looked at him keenly.

‘What did really happen in that place? I can’t remember. It’s all a blank.’

‘You stumbled on something, and fell on a broken old mower-blade. It was dark, you know. I tumbled at the same time.’

‘Was that all?’

She looked at him penetratingly, and he replied firmly:

‘That was all.’

She still gazed at him, and there was something in her eyes like that dark derision of the nurse’s smile.

‘Oh, Jerry!’ she said, and shut her eyes again.

‘What really killed Uncle Richard?’ she asked, after a bit.

‘Why, mushroom poisoning.’

‘Yes, I know that. But . . .’

She looked at him and he looked back at her, separated by a thin frozen film of truths which neither of them dared to touch.

A nurse came up, blue and white and smiling, and spoke to Edith.

‘Yes, certainly, let him come up,’ she said. And she said to Jerry, ‘Telford Smith has called. You know him, don’t you?’

Telford Smith came out upon the balcony, looking well-dressed, brown and healthy, smiling and prosperous. He gave Jerry a genial smile, he took Edith's hand and kissed it tenderly.

'Feeling fit again, Edith?' he said. 'Think you'll be up to going out to-morrow? How are the bees, Mertens? I never got back to see that apiary.'

'The bees are all quiet now,' Jerry said. 'I must congratulate you. When I saw you last, we didn't know the good news.'

'Oh, the good news!' Smith laughed jovially. 'You mean my prize story. Well, anything that brings a lot of money is good news, of course.'

Jerry's heart warmed to him. This was just the tone he should take, the successful buccaneer, drawing $50,000 from a race of suckers.

'I was delighted at it,' Jerry said. 'I've read the book, you know. Miss Lancaster kindly let me see a set of proofs. I thought it very remarkable—a fine work of imagination.'

Smith glanced at him a trifle suspiciously. He hadn't asked for Jerry's opinion.

'It's being translated in France and Italy,' Edith said. 'And they're to make a film of it in the spring, in England.'

'Oh, the translations don't amount to much,' Smith laughed. 'The foreigners don't pay much—mostly publicity. As for the film, it isn't settled yet. I don't know whether they'll come to my price.'

He laughed, looking easy and genial, the successful international artist. Jerry really envied him. He was going to have a good time.

'You'll be writing a sequel,' he suggested.

'Well, of course. They want a sequel. In fact, I've already signed contracts for one.'

'If it's not an improper question,' Jerry ventured, 'what do you think of the book yourself? How do you like it?'

This was the moment for Smith to wink like an augur, and Jerry was alert to catch the wink. But Smith sobered, and looked much more serious.

'It's a perfectly fair question,' he said. 'The opinion of the author ought really to be worth more than most. I'll speak quite frankly, Mertens. You're a writer yourself. My book has been a much greater success than I ever expected, though I've had it in mind for years. I didn't write it just for the

prize. Naturally I think well of it—who wouldn't, when he's making a lot out of it? But, seriously, I do think it's a presentation of Canadian farm life that has been overlooked. The stress has always been on the sordid and the squalid. I'd like to show our people at home that rural life here has something just as good as in England. I know some critics have complained that I was not technically correct, but I have described hardly anything that I have not seen for myself. I knew the original of Colonel Beverley well.'

'Did he make his living out of farming?'

'I really don't know. Money was not his object. Farming was his great hobby, and I learned a great deal from him.'

'I'm sure you did,' Jerry said feebly.

He looked at Smith with amazement, quite staggered. Smith actually took his novel seriously; he thought he had written a great book. But then as Smith said, who wouldn't, when it was going to bring in more than $20,000?

He wasn't a brilliant buccaneer at all. He wasn't even a clever circus-man, juggling the elements of popular success. His book hadn't been a piece of calculated craft; it had been a mere fluke. Jerry had thought that Smith would go far; but now he saw that he would never go any farther than writing sequels to *Beverley Park*, until the subject was worn out.

Jerry was greatly disappointed; but he collected himself.

'I congratulate you, anyway,' he said. 'You'll have a good time. Are you going to write your sequel in Toronto?'

'No, not in Canada. I've got all the Canadian material I need. I intend to go where it's warmer, for the winter.'

'Florida?'

'No, I'm sailing for Italy. Venice for a while this autumn, and then I'd like to go over to Constantinople, and afterwards maybe Egypt for the winter.'

'The Mediterranean ships are crowded now. You'll need to book your passage early.'

'I've booked it already—on the *Re Umberto*, for Genoa.'

Jerry glanced at Edith. She looked dark and pleasant, and perhaps slightly triumphant.

XII

Jerry was packing the Cumberland yard for winter, and this year it was the last of the yards to be packed. All the other apiaries were already in their winter boxes. And this fall Jerry had to do all the packing himself, as he had done the spring unpacking, for Roll was gone.

Roll had gone to Detroit, the city of hope for all the south Ontario boys, and he had got a job at a garage in Pontiac. Jerry had had a brief, stiff note from him, asking for some balance due of wages. But the note wasn't stiff from any animosity, Jerry knew. It was just that Roll couldn't express himself with a pen. The little black-haired girl from Lowlands Station might be in Pontiac too, by this time. Jerry didn't know, and wouldn't inquire, and didn't care; but he knew that the gossip of such a thing would come to him in time.

They were all gone. Old Richard was irrevocably gone. Edith Lancaster was probably in Venice by this time, and Telford Smith too. Nobody was left but Iona, and the village folk and the farming folk, who never went anywhere.

The prize novel was selling enormously. Jerry had received the compliment of an autographed copy, and the sequel was already announced. Critics said it was the study of a new and true aspect of rural life.

Everything was changed. Ernie Cumberland had taken over his inheritance, of the Cumberland house and farm. Ernie and Louie Stratford had been married some two weeks ago. Luck for Louie, everybody said. Ernie was going to work the farm himself. He liked farming; agriculture was in his blood.

But Jerry remembered the unsigned scrap of paper in old Richard's study. He might have had the property himself, if the mushroom poison had worked less rapidly.

But he wouldn't have known what to do with it, for he didn't want to farm.

It was rather late for packing bees. Snow had fallen, and then it had melted with warmer days, and the bees had flown a little, languidly. Then there had been a spell of mild weather, languid and cloudy, without wind.

Then a bitter freezing spell, and then mild again, with rain, and still dark and overcast, mild days without wind or sun, like a heavy dark meditation.

The bee-yard was covered thick with fallen leaves, yellow and amber, not highly coloured. Where they lay cupped they were full of water. No bees were flying. He did not need veil or smoker. Only here and there a few guards crept out perfunctorily, and then crept in again to the warmth of the cluster.

Iona did not appear to know anything about Roll, or if she knew anything she did not speak of it to Jerry. She came over to the shop, and swept and cleaned up, and helped Jerry to stack away the last of the supplies, and to put everything away for winter.

Jerry paid her for the last part of the season's work. She took the money without looking at it, and crumpled it into a wad in her hand, having no pockets.

'Well, here's another season over, Iona.'

'A bad season, I'm afraid.'

Jerry made an indifferent gesture.

'Not much over half a crop,' she insisted.

'If might have been worse,' Jerry said.

'Yes, it might have been a lot worse,' Iona said, and he knew she wasn't thinking altogether of the honey. She looked at him straightly, almost harshly, and Jerry might have thought it was animosity, except that he knew Iona so well.

She sat there idly, on an upturned hive-body, holding the money in a wad in her palm, and Jerry sat on another hive-body, smoking his pipe, tired and indifferent. It wasn't like the day when she had cried on his shoulder, and he had kissed her. The season was over, and probably Iona was tired and indifferent too.

'I suppose you'll be going to the city for the winter?'

'No, I think I'll stay here.'

Iona looked incredulous, that anybody would stay in Old Lowlands if he could go to town. And Jerry felt that way himself, except that he didn't know what he would do if he went to town.

‘Well, thanks!’ said Iona, getting up. ‘There’ll be another year, another season, and maybe a better crop.’

‘Wait!’ Jerry said. ‘Don’t go.’

Iona looked at him, as if startled, and seemed to waver and hesitate, and then turned about to the door.

‘Any time you need me,’ she said over her shoulder. ‘Any time there’s anything I can do . . .’

She slipped out the door with her money. That was weeks ago, and Jerry had hardly spoken to her since, except for casual greeting as he met her on the village street.

The season was over. Winter was coming, and it was already late for packing bees. Another snowstorm might cover the hives, not to melt for months, but it would be all done by sundown. He shoved the four hives together into a block, turned the great winter case over them, and poured in the planer shavings.

The big bee-yard looked brown and leafless and lifeless now, not like the rows of white towers and the raging activity of the summer. Winter was coming, Jerry thought, and he didn’t care. It had come and gone so often, and made so little difference.

> *In those days I sought to mould my life into a form of art that would be an expression of victory over my destiny and my desire.*

He thought of all that with an amused smile, as he worked. Winter was coming, and an immense leisure, and he didn’t know what to do with it. He couldn’t write, and he was tired of reading, and sick of thinking. He had no friends in Old Lowlands, but he didn’t want to go to the city. He had no friends there either, except, perhaps, Edgar Lloyd.

He would spend the winter at Old Lowlands, in his over-heated room, living on stews, drinking the powerful native wine, and perhaps reading detective stories from old Richard’s collection, while the snowstorms blew. That was how old Richard had lived for years, and it was a good sort of life, for a man about to die.

Now it was the only sort of life that Jerry could compass, this half-year of back-breaking labour, and the half-year of hibernation in reading and thinking and drinking. He had made a mistake to get himself sunk so deeply in Old Lowlands, deep in the primeval mud. If he hadn’t believed himself a

great genius he would never have done it; and now it was too late to get out. It was no sort of a life, but he would have to live it.

But he wouldn't say 'sour grapes'. He knew that there were better places, better sorts of life. He thought of Edith Lancaster and Telford Smith on the Mediterranean, on a luxury liner, at a winter hotel. They would have a good time, but it wasn't quite what he wanted.

Edith seemed very remote. He thought of her with detachment, almost casually. The spiritual relationship seemed broken at last. They had passed through the most frightful danger together, and somehow avoided it. Jerry thought of the panic that had seized him that night. He wasn't ashamed of it; he thought he would feel just the same again; but he was thankful that he hadn't been carried away into flight, into certain destruction. But the whole episode seemed far away and not important, in spite of its values of life and death.

It was late in the afternoon, and the twilight came early now, especially on a cloudy afternoon like this. The sky was all banked with leaden black. It would certainly rain that night, but this wouldn't matter, for the yard work would be all done.

The low west flashed and failed, and over all
Swept the piled masses of ensabled grey,
The last great gesture of the dying day
Folding her face in her penumbral pall.

Jerry recited the lines to himself with pleasure. They had given him pleasure when he wrote them, and it was worth while for that, even though they would never please anybody else.

There was not much more to do now. Only a couple more stands remained to be packed; and then the litter would have to be gathered up, and the old supplies loaded in the car. He sat down on an empty hive and lighted his pipe, glad to have nearly finished. It was a satisfaction to finish anything, to clear up anything; and the bee season was entirely finished now, and he would not see the inside of a hive again till next April.

A pale glimmer of yellow came down earthward from the banked clouds in the west. The air was mild and soft and deliquescent, as if the season were melting down. But it wasn't melting down; it was freezing up.

Anyhow, it was over, and Jerry looked down the long rows of winter cases, all quiet now, remembering how this one had swarmed repeatedly, and that other one had stored more than 200 pounds, and that third had been

too vicious to handle. But all that was over now; and in the heavy autumn air Jerry felt a heavy sense of satisfaction, almost a heavy happiness, almost a sort of contentment.

But it was contrary to all his philosophy, and he refused to accept it.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[End of *Bitter Honey*, by Francis Lillie Pollock]