ONE GENERATION AWAY

With an Introduction by
B.K. SANDWELL, F.R.S.C.

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

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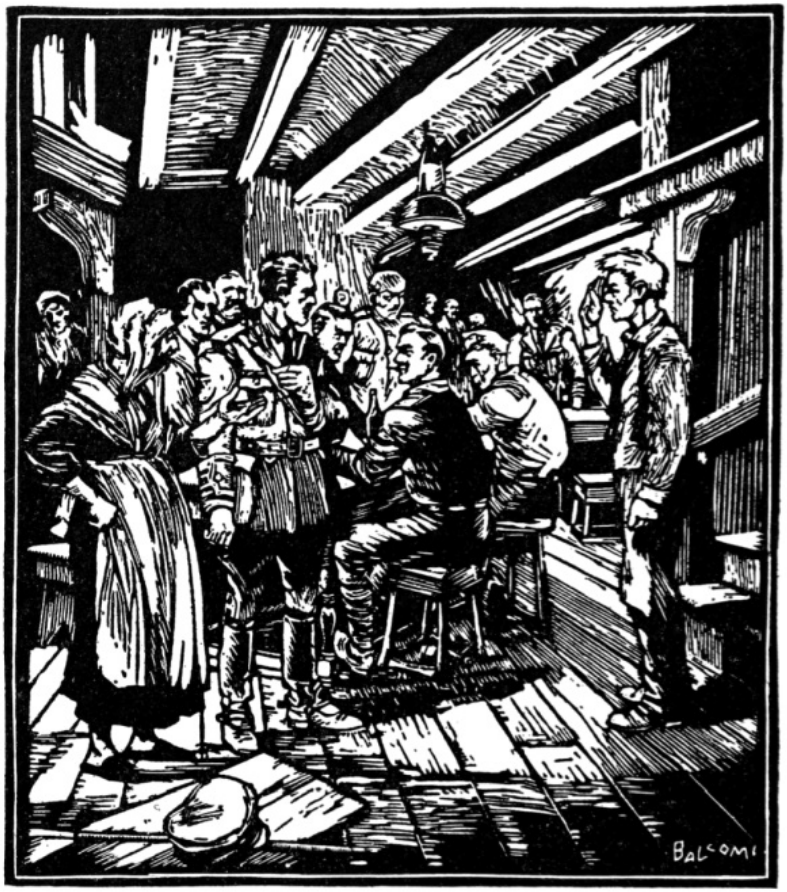

"Blighty, Sir!"

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By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

With an Introduction by
B. K. SANDWELL, F.R.S.C.
and a Woodcut by Lowell L. Balcom

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TO MY FATHER

H. A. BARNARD

A MAN OF TRANQUIL FAITH AND
RARE SPIRIT, WHO IN A QUIET AND
UNOBTRUSIVE EARTHLY LIFE ILLUMINED
FOR ME, AS FOR OTHERS, THE
PHRASE,—A CHRISTIAN GENTLEMAN.

PRINTED IN CANADA

The characters in this book are fictional creations,
not portrayals of actual persons.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

To intrude upon the reader with a personal foreword is in doubtful taste, but the title of the present volume makes this necessary. Into not a few of my stories there has crept an atmosphere of England that will not be denied. As a Canadian by birth, and a lover of my native land, I have examined myself in this matter, and can only conclude that what so insistently demands expression must have some element of authenticity that renders it legitimate. Whatever significance may lie in the fact that my father was born in Norfolk, and my maternal grandmother in Warwickshire, is gathered up in the title: ONE GENERATION AWAY.

The stories chosen for inclusion in this volume have not, however, been selected with this primarily in mind, but rather with the hope of making the contents representative of the various types of work attempted over a period of ten years.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Editors and Publishers of *Blackwood's Magazine*, *The Canadian*, *Canadian Home Journal*, *The Century Magazine*, *The Forum*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Hutchinson's Magazine*, *MacLean's Magazine*, *Modern Priscilla*, *The Quiver*, *Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine*, and *Year Book of the Arts in Canada*—in which stories included in this volume (not always under the same title) have appeared. The woodcut is used by kind permission of *The Forum* (New York), and by special arrangement with the artist, Mr. Lowell L. Balcom.

I should also like to thank Mr. B. K. Sandwell, Mr. Roderick S. Kennedy, Mr. Sid C. Simpson, and others who have shown a very generous interest in this volume.

INTRODUCTION

The short story at its worst is an exhibition of technical facility in the performance of certain well understood tricks of construction and manipulation, the mastery of which is now so common that the short story is in danger, like the acrobatic turn in the circus ring and on the vaudeville stage, of losing all its power to evoke surprise and wonder. The short story at its best may have comparatively little of that technical facility, but it must have another and much more important thing; it must, like any other true work of art, contain something of the personality of its creator.

Technical facility can be taught, and is being taught with great success by a large number of competent instructors. The products of their instruction fill the magazines, and bulk quite large even in the collections of Best Stories of the Year or the Decade or the Week as the case may be. Their likeness to one another is amazing only until one realises that they are produced not by the exercise of the human intellect and emotional powers but by the employment of a set of rules.

But while the rules for short story writing can be taught and learned, the possession of an interesting personality and an original outlook upon life is entirely independent of all courses of instruction. The writer who possesses that personality, that power to see human life with fresh eyes and interpret it with new meanings, will be able to make a story that one can read a second time with increased satisfaction, while the product of mere technical facility loses all its appeal at the first reading. When the acrobat has performed his triple somersault once one does not want him to do it over again.

The short story is unfortunate, in that it is its fate almost always to be read in haste, lumped in with a lot of other short stories by other personalities or non-personalities (again like the acrobatic turns in the circus), and promptly tossed away and forgotten. How few of us remember even the names of the authors who have entertained us for ten minutes each as we whiled away an hour or two of a train journey with a magazine! How few indeed of such authors can convey in their half-dozen pages enough of their personality, assuming that they have one, for us to remember them by! For the short story plays upon a shallow stage, and the intense lighting that is now in fashion gives little chance for the suggestion of rich perspectives and dim distances. It is therefore, I think, a distinct advantage to the short story writer that he should at times be able to bring together within the covers of a book such a number of his hitherto isolated products that in the sum total of their fragmentary

revelations a more rounded and substantial simulacrum of his personality may be presented to careful readers.

For that reason I am glad that Mr. Leslie Gordon Barnard has been able to gather within the compass of this volume many of the best of his short stories which have hitherto been exhibited to the public only one at a time. The dates attached to these stories will give sufficient evidence that Mr. Barnard is still progressing in the mastery of that technical facility to which I have referred. But that would be of no interest to me whatever, if I did not believe that Mr. Barnard has a sincere and personal outlook upon life which is worthy of our attention, and that he uses his short stories as a means of expressing it. Technique is like the extraction of a cork from a bottle; its cleverness is the same no matter what the contents of the bottle may be, but its value to society depends entirely on whether that which is released is the priceless wine of new truth, the poison of new error, or the flat water of imitation.

The reader of this book can hardly fail to acquire a much more definite idea of Mr. Barnard's personality than he could have acquired by reading the same stories at different times in different magazines. It is not for me to discuss what that impression is likely to be. But I may be permitted to suggest that one element in it will almost certainly be the realisation that Mr. Barnard is a Canadian author. These stories, whose scene is laid in many different places in several different countries, could not have been written by a British author nor by an American author. They have a sense of the continuity of racial tradition among Anglo-Saxon peoples which has been lacking in American literature since the time of Hawthorne; but they have also the characteristic cheerfulness of a new people in a new land with a good deal of power to control the direction of their own development. Mr. Barnard does not feel, and I suspect few Canadians do feel, that despairing helplessness of the individual oppressed by an exceedingly rigid and unwieldy social and political structure, which is so characteristic of the serious literature of the United States at the present time. The War, and the Peace of Versailles, have not broken his heart. He still has a rather high opinion of human beings, not merely as individuals, but collectively. His stories are pleasant to read, and they are steadily becoming more and more significant. This book is not a terminus mark, but it will be an important mile-stone in his progress.

B. K. SANDWELL.

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than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

ONE GENERATION AWAY

I

"The evening of life brings
with it its lamps."

MISS CHIVERS AND MISS SPRAGG

I

LITTLE MISS CHIVERS was getting ready to go for her walk with Miss Spragg in Kensington Gardens. Sometimes she wished she could go just by herself, and sit with her memories, and let her only company—intimate company, that is, not the surge of pleasure-seekers in the Gardens—be a ghostly one. Miss Spragg rather kept ghosts at bay; though at times she had an almost sacrilegious way of calling them up. There were moments when Miss Spragg aroused in mild Miss Chivers feelings of great antipathy. She was too dominating, too assured, too full of that vital essence which seemed to be growing so much fainter in Miss Chivers this last year or two. Miss Spragg was, however, her only intimate acquaintance in the boarding-house they shared, and, indeed, the only companion she knew in London. There had been one or two others, but time had changed that; it was rather a helpless feeling to be left alone in a familiar city. One needed a Miss Spragg. She should be grateful. She was grateful. Only, the last thing she would confess to Miss Spragg was the awful consciousness that she felt sometimes of being, especially in crowds, a little light, as if she were a balloon, such as the children bought at the Park gates, and that the string attaching her to earthly things was very thin. So silly! Miss Spragg would undoubtedly sniff. Excitement, too, was bad. She must not get over excited—about to-morrow, for instance.

To-morrow, Miss Chivers made her annual pilgrimage to an emotional shrine. By carefully conserving her resources she managed the trip once a year. Very fortunately, the Inn still remained quite as it was; one could arrive, by nicely calculating train times, just in time for tea—at one-and-six, with a threepenny tip to the waiter—and, by leaving not too long afterwards, arrive home by midnight. Miss Spragg said, rightly, it was a ridiculously long journey, and expensive, just to take tea alone with memories, but nevertheless she was vastly interested, and one must have someone to talk to, to whom one

could tell the physical facts, thus unburdening oneself, yet never sharing the deep things that lay behind train journeys and busses over familiar ways, and tea and scones and jam and cake, on a verandah overlooking a curve of river where young people lay in punts, so that one could imagine, with a little effort, that it was all the same as it had been that eventful day; only sometimes the short skirts and ungraceful attitudes, and cigarettes, and what-not, were a bit trying and hard to eliminate, to transpose to a gentler key, to push back to a more reticent day. Once a year she went—on the day itself, except when, unfortunately, it fell on a Sunday; then you fought against a wickedness that was with difficulty downed by pretending a day earlier or a day later could not matter—even national holidays being sometimes held over from holy day to holiday.

A faint but definite excitement did agitate Miss Chivers to-day, on the eve of her annual excursion. It was queer and silly to think of such a thing, but she felt as if something were about to happen, as if the return of the anniversary were to be marked with some more subtle essence of romance—or was it romance? She was almost afraid of it. She pushed it from her as she slipped on her best grey dress—her dove silk; only used for state occasions, it had lasted her very well; it seemed a pity not to wear it to-day. The sunshine was so hazily bright, the nodding of distant foliage so promising, and the faint excitement in her so disturbing. She looked at herself in the mirror, and wondered if the colour, unwonted, in her cheeks, could be eagerness for this intangible adventure, or a faint sense of shame at such folly in an old woman. Even the familiar grey silk promised things, the feel of it, the sight of it—grown lighter through fading than it had been in its original dove-grey excellence—how many years ago? One did not calculate—there were other ways of counting life than by the years. In that dress she had gone to see the Queen, the dear good Queen, at her Jubilee—and what crowds there were; *he* had piloted her so splendidly, they really had a wonderful view over the shoulders of several ranks of people. No, how stupid of her! This was new since then; got, this was, for Bessie Summer's wedding; people said then how nice it was—if a bit old-fashioned. People were funny about running after new fads in clothes. She'd worn it fine Sundays and Bank Holidays—besides anniversaries—when it was nice to go and watch the crowds and look one's own best. People always seemed to notice one so in the parks, the bolder ones staring quite rudely, but most of them more respectfully; and then you wanted to be sure of your taste. It made one feel one stood for something—something life might lose if one did not hold to it.

There, she was ready, ahead of time, her clock told her. Miss Spragg had a fine sense of time. If she said four-thirty, she meant just that. This was a little

trying, especially when one was a bit restless. It must be the day; spring—even late spring like this, almost early summer—had an odd effect. Sometimes, when she read of—of queer things in the paper—things that perhaps happened in the parks, things done in the dusk that made one turn quickly to another column, she felt a little cry deep within her, of pity, of understanding, quite a shameless thing, and instantly stifled in the interest of propriety. Excitement stirring in one! She must restrain herself. To-morrow she would need all her strength. She must be very careful what she did to-day. Just now she would sit down patiently and wait for Miss Spragg to be ready. Miss Spragg's room was directly overhead, and one could hear her moving about, making her own preparations.

There was neither haste nor dalliance, but only an efficient precision about Miss Spragg. One eye comfortably on the clock, she would be ready not a moment too soon nor a moment too late. If she had failed to command life—and her very presence in this cheap boarding-house proclaimed her failure—she had at least learned to regulate herself. In a world that had withdrawn from her most of its joys, she clung to a tradition of infallibility of this sort. She had little use for compromises, and none for evading what she chose to call the facts of life. Looking in her mirror now—on this day that somehow defied her by suggesting a restlessness, by tempting her, alluring her—she took a defiant pleasure in recognising boldly that she was by many years no longer young, that symbols of decay were upon her, that all her dignity, her stiff-backed courage, could not make her neck one whit less scraggy, nor her flesh by so much as a single wrinkle less withered. Full light from the window fell upon her, and the mirror did the rest. It reflected a tall, angular figure, clad in some dark material long past its prime, and over the bodice—though the day was sunny and quite warm—a beaver jacket whose counterpart could be found nowadays nowhere but in discarded family albums, and on yellowed pages of fashion books serviceable only as vehicles of amusement for newer generations. The hat was wide-brimmed, unstable in all its ways, and dripped with black lace at unexpected points. In all these trappings Miss Spragg found no occasion for humour or comment. They were still usable, and much to be preferred to the amusing creations of contemporary milliners and drapers. It was at the woman they clothed that Miss Spragg looked. And suddenly, as if these trappings did not exist, Miss Spragg felt naked before her own glance, naked and unlovely—and afraid. Yes, she was afraid. An enemy long kept at bay had crept in through a weak spot in her defences. She knew where that spot was and, again in defiance, took from the drawer, where she had run across it, an old vignette. She caught it up and forced her eyes to search it with painful keenness. Miss Spragg looked out across the years at Miss Spragg. Why didn't the clock move on? She had told Miss Chivers four-thirty; it still

lacked five minutes. For five minutes retreat was impossible; she must rally her forces, hold the line, rout the fresh attacks of this enemy who had secured so terrible a foothold. If she lost this battle, all was lost. A decent retreat she might make, seize upon time as an excuse, but anything less and she was done. Life would have worsted her, overturned her last defences. The dressing-table stood before the window, and the window opened upon a day of sunny perfection. A wind stirred the crisp, worn curtains at either side of the window, and little fragrances, caught up from street and garden, and perhaps the park far beyond, ran in gaily to assault Miss Spragg. She knew them, not for living entities of a present season, but for what they really were, the ghosts of a score of dead summers suddenly summoned, pretending they were alive, pretending their colour had not faded, that their essence had not dried, that their taste had not dissolved or become a mere bitterness. But they had, she admitted, their moment or two of power, of recreation; power to bring with them people, places, events—until the room was crowded and Miss Spragg felt suddenly smothered. Recently, she had felt that way in crowds.

She glanced again at the clock. One minute to the half hour! She could go now! Without haste! That much victory she would snatch, closing the door firmly, and feeling an instant relief. There was Miss Chivers already on the stairs; trust her to be fidgety and early! And smiling in her half-apologetic, half-assured way, almost with the coyness of a girl! Miss Chivers should know better. Miss Chivers should face the fact that she was an old woman. All this pretty stuff about romance was unfitting in her. Miss Chivers really got on Miss Spragg's nerves badly at times. Why Miss Spragg went out with her day after day was a nice point. And then a little surge of pleasant emotion ran through Miss Spragg's temporarily numbed nerves. She could dominate Miss Chivers; though their ages were on a parity, or nearly, Miss Spragg might easily be ten years younger. It made her feel young to be with Miss Chivers. And sometimes, as to-day, it made her feel a little cruel, pleasantly cruel—for, after all, cruelty presupposes a power over the victim.

She moved on down the stairs.

"All ready?" asked Miss Chivers, unnecessarily. She was always saying unnecessary things like that. "I've been waiting for you to come down."

"It is half-past four exactly!" corrected Miss Spragg, and the clock on the stairway confirmed it.

II

They had twice to encounter the hooting traffic of the streets. The first time Miss Spragg thought, impatiently: Why would that silly old woman gather up

her skirts and run that way?—a grey figure bobbing across like a frightened hen! Miss Chivers, achieving the triumph of the farther side, looked back and was impressed anew with the majesty of Miss Spragg's crossing, which seemed to have a terrible but effective disregard for the down-bearing welter of busses and motors. The second crossing was under the kindly eye and protective arm of a policeman on point duty; Miss Chivers felt impelled to her usual comment: "I always say they are the finest in the world!" Miss Spragg, who secretly shared the opinion, felt again conscious of her friend's limitations. After all, Miss Chivers had never travelled; but then neither had she, so she held her peace, though the faint irritation continued with her through the gate and into the Gardens. They walked now very slowly and with an immense dignity, for there were benches here, free, and seats, at twopence, quite filled to-day with idlers in the early summer sunlight. Laburnum dripped its yellow plumes above them, and on either side—against the vivid reaches of the park, and against the blue of the Serpentine—hawthorn flung its beauty in their faces: white, pink, crimson. Somewhere there must be lilacs, for there was a hint of them in the air, and Miss Chivers ventured to speak of it. Miss Spragg, lifting her head as if in defiance of all lilacs—which perennially affected Miss Chivers foolishly—said it would be no miracle if there were, and she made no doubt, if the newspaper gossips in the picture papers were correct, they might see rhododendrons if they went far enough. Miss Chivers, who had been casting vague glances towards possible seats, said of course it would never do not to see these—so they went on. The sun was quite hot, and Miss Chivers put up her grey silk parasol, peering out from under it so that she might not miss any of the May. They spoke very little; even at this pace—which Miss Spragg, perhaps unconsciously, being still filled with a restlessness, had begun to force beyond the usual snail's progress—it was well enough to conserve one's breath.

"The Serpentine," said Miss Chivers, presently, "is very lovely to-day, don't you think? Shall we sit in these chairs, where we can watch it?"

"I see no necessity for chairs!" objected Miss Spragg. She thought: "I have tired her out. She really hasn't my constitution." She was going to add a financial reproach—you never knew when the man would arrive with tickets and demand twopence apiece—when she saw that they were observed by a young man and woman, and that Miss Chivers was about to turn obdurate and make a mild scene, so, to preserve the dignities, she sat down. At that, she was glad enough to rest. She saw Miss Chivers give a little glance at the two young people in neighbouring chairs, and assess them as lovers. Miss Spragg had her own ideas: they were married, visitors probably to London, and not so terribly young—except by comparison. Miss Spragg was in a mood to pierce any

romanticism. She said:

"I went to Communion last Sunday. I didn't tell you, did I?"

"No!" said Miss Chivers, uneasily. They rarely meddled with the subject of religion, having intense convictions on minor differences. She hoped Miss Spragg would start no argument; she really didn't feel equal to it. The last time, on apostolic succession, had given her sleepless nights for a week.

But Miss Spragg was in pursuit of another point. She wanted to pin with it, perhaps, her own restlessness and Miss Chivers' romanticism. "When I went to go forward," said Miss Spragg, "I should have fainted if a young lady hadn't caught my arm and helped me. Everything went black for a minute! It was the crowds. Ever since my illness——"

Miss Chivers nodded. She'd heard the details of that illness so often, and it did seem a pity, on such a day as this, to speak of it. "There's a handsome man!" She drew attention away to a middle-aged gentleman strolling down to the road just below them, where it paralleled the water.

"That's because your young man was tall," said Miss Spragg pointedly. "Yes, after you've been ill like that, you can't stand crowds, my dear. I know! It's just the same with me. It's not a nice feeling," said Miss Spragg, suddenly forgetting Miss Chivers, and a little shiver running over her, "not a nice feeling at all. Sometimes, in crowds like that, of late, I've felt quite as if it wasn't me at all. Somebody else. Quite somebody else!"

Miss Chivers' generous sympathy was aroused. She knew how it felt. Like a balloon; she could see, down by the water's edge, a man selling his brightly coloured wares to the children. If you didn't hold on to the string tightly they went soaring away. But fancy Miss Spragg feeling that! Not to take down Miss Spragg's pride in her own infirmity, and perhaps disquieted by the subject, she kept silence, her head poked forward a little by the round—almost a hump—on her grey silk shoulders, that could never be straightened now.

"Not at all," reiterated Miss Spragg, "like myself!"

Her eyes suddenly fastened on a red-faced man, with a plaintive moustache and peaked cap, who was moving their way. Miss Chivers, sensitive to such things, also saw him. Their eyes met. The young man and woman on neighbouring chairs were still there. Miss Spragg said, quite loudly: "It's singular the man hasn't been round for our tickets! Well, I suppose we mustn't sit too long, anyway." She pointed to the Serpentine. "Shall we go down that way? It will perhaps be our best route home!" Miss Chivers assented. The man in the peaked cap was coming nearer. With vast dignity they moved off; and down under the trees beyond found a free bench—not so comfortable, but at least a seat. Just about the time they got seated, some excitement far up the

road moved towards them, but of this they were not yet aware.

It seemed imperative that they should talk. The bench was fortunately empty of any but themselves, though the presence of others who might overhear them, curiously enough, worried them little. These others seemed to move in a world to which Miss Spragg and Miss Chivers did not belong; to talk, indeed, almost a different language. Possibly because the bench was hard after the chairs, and because the fact that even twopence was an extravagance for them ruffled them still, speech became a wedge between these two whom an alien world had driven together.

Miss Spragg thought: "Can the woman talk of nothing but to-morrow, when she will make a romantic fool of herself again?"—and she remembered all Miss Chivers' unnecessary and obvious sayings—about the police and what not; and how she was always ready, in nervous haste, before the right time, which, if you looked at it properly, was actually a sin in unpunctuality; and how slowly Miss Chivers walked when Miss Spragg was in a hurry, and how she would suddenly summon up reserves of energy when Miss Spragg felt listless; and how timidly, yet obstinately, she argued about the apostolic succession, as if the Bishop were no more than an ordinary soul, in gaiters which had no spiritual value; and how she expected every day Miss Spragg to dance attendance on her and take her for this walk in the Park.

And Miss Chivers thought, mildly: "You would think nobody else had ever been ill in their lives; and why harp on about it?"—and she thought how Miss Spragg hurried her around so tiringly that she really felt all spent right now; and how Miss Spragg's tongue was quick in contradiction, without gentleness or apology, fiercely trying to snatch away even the queer, sweet, intimate things you'd never speak of to her only there must be someone for confidences when your own heart was too full; and how, too, she'd got her, Miss Chivers, dreaming in fits and starts about the glorious company of the apostles who gathered around her, Miss Chivers', bed, and challenged her to repeat her blasphemies—which were not that at all, but only straight common sense—to their faces, not to mention the Bishop—she fancied it was the Bishop of London, though she couldn't be sure, because she'd seen someone like him in newspapers, but then both newspaper pictures and dreams were a bit vague—and anyway, he came around looking under the bed for his gaiters, and you had to blame Miss Spragg for all that; so Miss Chivers began wondering why she ever gave in and came with Miss Spragg for her daily walk in the Gardens. There was to-day, too, so full of sunshine and lilacs, that you would really almost rather be alone. Only it was a long walk home, and Miss Spragg had said they would go all the way around by the Marble Arch, and somehow one's brain wouldn't let one work out any other route, and one might need

Miss Spragg's arm. It was terrible to feel so weak and dependent. But she must conserve her strength for to-morrow. She felt suddenly gay and better, thinking of to-morrow. She hoped it would be fine; you never knew about the weather nowadays; in the days of dear Queen Victoria there was always Queen's weather for holidays. She'd often stood and cheered. She could almost hear them cheering now!

Miss Spragg said: "Don't sit there dreaming. Can't you hear them? I think the Prince must be coming along, or somebody."

She was standing up, and with an authoritative pull she drew Miss Chivers to her feet beside her. Crowds, appearing from nowhere, suddenly—though you must admit the Park was fairly full and the chairman busy with his tickets—began to line the roadway.

"Do you think," asked Miss Chivers anxiously, "we can see from here?" Miss Spragg was so much taller, it seemed an unfair advantage. She said: "Perhaps you could help me up? I don't really suppose I'd hurt the bench, and the Park people shouldn't mind!" She was scrambling up herself, indeed, helped by a memory that found voice: "I can remember going with him once to see the dear Queen. He lifted me, and I saw quite well." She amended hastily, under Miss Spragg's eyes: "Just for a second you know—hardly that—when the Queen passed!"

Miss Spragg had a sudden thought, a quick, terrible impulse: "That woman! I must get away. I can't stand her to-day. If I go forward——"

Miss Chivers did not observe, for a moment, this defection. When she saw Miss Spragg, she was horrified into a little cry of alarm. Whoever was coming was quite near now, and the crowds were surging around. And, suddenly, the place where Miss Spragg had been was black with people, young, eager, strong people, swirling about; Miss Chivers could just see—for her sight, she thanked God, remained good—Miss Spragg's white, frightened face as the maelstrom took her. Miss Chivers' mind worked quickly. She knew what a horror a crowd could be when you felt, as Miss Spragg had confessed in her own case, "as if it wasn't me at all!" Once, some days before, Miss Chivers had gone after a little child's balloon as it bounced away, and, but for a tricky wind, would have caught it before it went up a tree and popped out against a sharp branch. Now, sillily of course, she could only think of poor Miss Spragg as a balloon which someone, carelessly, had let out of his fingers. She got down somehow from the seat, and began to run towards the spot where last she had seen her companion. Miss Spragg would need help in that awful crowd. They wouldn't understand how it felt to be like that in a crowd. Miss Chivers understood. It was a horrid thing. Like a balloon let loose, all light and helpless. She reached the edge. She began a curious burrowing process into the crowd. She wasn't

sure if she used her voice or not; but people began to make way for her. She did seem to hear herself, as if from a distance, crying out, “Miss Spragg! Miss Spragg!”—wanting to use, in that emergent moment, the Christian name, but habit being too strong. And then, suddenly she was imprisoned, a small, grey figure, in human walls; there was a cry: “Here he comes!”; the walls crumpled and broke; people could do nothing more than keep their own feet, and discipline their more unruly neighbours with their elbows. Somebody shouted: “Here, stand back! A woman’s fainted!” But Miss Chivers, of course, did not hear that. Fingers which, perhaps, should have been holding tight, had loosed a string; these people who stood around could not know that the wind had blown something far beyond the reach of any there, though a doctor was summoned from the crowd and somebody ran to put in a call for an ambulance.

III

Miss Spragg, breathless but triumphant, emerged from the crowd that had almost engulfed her, that indeed would have done so had she not been using them merely as a screen.

“Well, I’ve got rid of *her*!” she said.

She started across the Park at an angle that would take her towards the Marble Arch, certain that, however good Miss Chivers’ eyes were, they would not follow her here. Miss Chivers, without a doubt, was still perched ridiculously on that bench.

Miss Spragg was a little breathless; that crowd had frightened her; if she had not kept her wits, and slipped through an opportune opening, something terrible might have happened. You never knew what might happen in crowds. She felt a little faint as she went on; and excessively irritated at Miss Chivers for goading her to such a dangerous length. A sound reaching her ears, she looked back. An ambulance, clanging its bell with authoritative stridency, shot into the crowd and was lost. Miss Spragg could see a policeman addressing himself to bringing order out of chaos. Somebody hurt, she made no doubt. These crowds! She tried to see, but distance defeated her. A little pang ran through Miss Spragg. Miss Chivers must still be down there. For just a moment she was terribly afraid Miss Chivers might be having an adventure that she was missing. She put the tantalising thought from her, and continued her journey by the determined route. That silly woman!—how did she expect to be fit for her romantic folly to-morrow, if she went on this way, climbing up on benches and what not? Miss Spragg determined to wait awhile. Perhaps Miss Chivers would overtake her. She felt the need of giving Miss Chivers a piece of her mind. There were plenty of people on the paths, but Miss Chivers

did not come. Miss Spragg rose, at last, and went on. She felt a “gone feeling,” or so she described it to herself. It was queer to walk this familiar way alone. The roar and hum of London’s evening traffic became tremendous and inhuman. One felt lonely against it. And there were so many motors these days. Everything was in such a hurry. The sight of Miss Chivers’ slow-moving little grey figure would be something. But there was no sign of Miss Chivers on the path.

Miss Spragg’s pride would not let her go back. Besides, this might teach Miss Chivers a lesson in dependence. Glancing back once or twice, hopefully, Miss Spragg shook her head and went on. It was lonely, she admitted, walking homeward, even though the laburnums dripped their yellow plumes against the prodigious flowering of the hawthorn. It was lonely, in spite of the sparkling motors beyond, and the warm, mellow sunlight that lit up so beautifully the fashionable façades in Park Lane.

1929.

MUDGE LANE

I

NOBODY but Mrs. Gorsby would have thought of it! They were all agreed as to that. They stood about the little, cobble-stoned courtyard, leaning upon sticks, supported by the residue of fading life, and agreed upon it, with a clacking of tongues and a shaking of aged heads. Agreed that it was quite, quite ridiculous! Agreed that it was utterly brazen! Agreed that it was absolutely unthinkable! Eating into every aged mind was a secret, terrible jealousy that the thrilling idea had not been born first in it! Considering it, old hearts found their measured and declining beat growing faster, pulsing a little with the far, faint thrill of life. "She hadn't ought to!" said Mrs. Wurmble. "The nerve of it!" objected Martha Hawkes. "The ducking-stool!" shrilled old Granny Snodges, whose second childhood appropriated the things of the first with a calm lack of reserve, so that all history—of which, as a child, she had been fond—became a part of herself. "That's the thing for the likes of her! The horse-pond! That's what we'd have done to her in *my* day!"

"Hush!" warned old Mary Gimble. "She's coming!"

Mrs. Gorsby, indeed, was descending her crooked staircase leading to the courtyard. This staircase had known the comings and goings of charity feet for, some said, centuries now. It doubtless could detect the gradual transition from the first comparative sprightliness to the final shufflings of extreme age, and judge how long before there would be another sale of pitiful trifles, a temporary vacancy, and then the incoming of such other dear and sacred household gods as an old woman in penury may bring into the space of a single room up a crooked staircase.

For her age, Mrs. Gorsby was still incredibly sprightly—almost irritatingly so! She had been here but three weeks. She scrubbed her steps in a way impossible to a less active body. Her diamond-paned windows shone spotlessly, becoming a constant reproach to others. Some as well as she had bits of china within, and flower-boxes without their windows; but there was that in the ordering of Mrs. Gorsby's china that offended, and her geraniums in the window-boxes—though conforming to custom—were fresh and blatant upstarts! All this might have been overlooked had Mrs. Gorsby but shown a modesty natural and fitting in a newcomer to the Court, and at least some consciousness of the half suspicious, half resentful appraisement to which she

was subjected—which she did not! She held her head as high as any! “Airs she gives herself, do you look now!” grumbled one of the watching old women.

She held her head high!

In her hands she carried, with a certain sure caution, a bowl, covered with napery irreproachably white.

The intaking of breaths at sight of this was almost a hiss. The blue-and-white bowl glinted in the sunshine. A little gust of wind danced curiously towards her, caught at the covering napkin, lifted it—revealing for a moment a tempting corner of Spanish cream—and dropped it again. Mrs. Gorsby pursued her dignified way. The groups of watchers were now sufficiently dispersed to appear casual, to remove undue suspicion concerning their chatterings, lest it be mistaken for envy. As she passed under the archway towards the porter’s lodge, there was a general movement together again, and into the sunshine that filled one corner still. These women liked sunshine. They followed it about as if in its golden fire lay the secret of continuing existence. And these women liked to watch. From the sunlit patch of courtyard they could follow her progress with their eyes. There!—they hissed again, with quick inhalations of jealousy. She stopped, knocked, entered the lodge where old Simon, the porter and janitor, lived. Old Simon’s daughter, who kept house for him, was away, and Simon had chosen this unpropitious moment to fall ill. No one seemed to think of it—that he would need sustenance and care. Old Simon? He would fend for himself well enough!

Mrs. Gorsby had thought of it.

There!—she was in now, the quaint oaken door closing behind her, shutting her from sight.

“She hadn’t ought to!” declared Mrs. Wurmble.

“The nerve of it!” agreed Martha Hawkes.

“The ducking-stool! The horse-pond!” shrilled old Granny Snodges, showing her sunken gums.

They stood in the moted sunlight. The wind caught at them gently; the motes were whisked away by it. They were motes themselves, dried atoms of dust, ready to be blown away. They stood in the moted sunlight, peering at the door of scandal. Their breaths came and went hissingly.

Unthinkable, this conduct of Mrs. Gorsby!

Old Simon!

Why did they leave it to *her* to think of it?

Who was old Simon?

Another atom of dust, ready to be blown away. Hardy, of course. The chattering women in the courtyard could have told Mrs. Gorsby that. Made out well enough, he did, for a man—how old? Eighty-seven? Old Simon insisted on ninety, but Naddy Mudge, his daughter, was quick to take down this pride of years. Perhaps if he were all of ninety she would awaken to the incongruity of his making out so well with his pails and his broom, and his handy jobs around the place. She even might relieve him of more of the labour then, instead of herself gadding about so much! Aye, and an acid tongue she had, and small use for age in man or woman—being not too strongly in the shadows yet herself. But Simon, he was hardy enough! The women could have told Mrs. Gorsby that. Simon could fend for himself right enough, without her meddling. Mrs. Gorsby might have answered that the Mudges of Stocklow-cum-Chardy were all built for use. But she kept her own counsel.

The moted sunlight was mellower still in here, falling through ancient mullioned windows, slanting its way, touching the coverlet with its pale, golden finger.

"That you, Naddy? What's that? No, I'm not hungry!"

"It's not Naddy, Simon. It's just—me!"

Her own fingers touched the hand on the rough coverlet, a hand outstretched and yet almost overtaken by the clumsy nightshirt sleeve of Naddy's careless making.

He twitched oddly; his words came with a puzzled but urgent appeal:

"Naddy, you must tell Charlton about her. Old Charlton's a good sort, he'll get her in. I'd go myself, if I didn't feel—so poorly. Fetch a paper, Naddy, and write it down—there's a good girl—and Charlton'll put her case before the Governors. G-o-r-s-b-y, Mary Gorsby . . . that's it! That's it, sir, you've got it right. I'll be much obliged to you, sir, much obliged—an old friend—when I was a boy—"

She took his hand.

"Simon, that's all past. I'm *here*! Don't you know me? It's Mary. Mr. Charlton did get me in. You went to see him—in the rain—when you shouldn't, Simon! Now you're ill, but I'm here to help you get well again!"

"Mary!" He lingered over the name.

He sat up in bed suddenly, and she propped a pillow behind him. Her face was transfigured with an amazing radiance. She was young, and the fires of youth burned again. And Simon—aye, Simon sat up there, with the sunlight shifted to the lower part of his face and to his chest. Simon's face was grizzled and not overclean, for Naddy had been neglectful, and Mrs. Gorsby too timid

to offer such intimate ministrations; his teeth were mostly missing, and yellowed where they were not; his skin was parchment where it met the coarse grey flannel of his nightshirt. But Simon's eyes were young. He was an atom of dust, old and unlovely, and the wind, with its slightest puff, might blow him away and be done with it—but he would not be tabernacled thus by age and decrepitude; already his spirit wandered in Elysian fields at the touch of a *mortal* hand, scorning to await the breath of immortality.

Mrs. Gorsby sat beside him now, seeing not his aged and unlovely body, but his eyes—blue eyes that laughed with her down the lanes of Stocklow-cum-Chardy. So she, too, was young with him again.

III

A crooked lane, rather than a street. Cottages on either side, each with its bit of garden. Small, if one were really to see them now, but quite vast tracts then, and enclosed by brick walls, moss-grown with a mouldy, comfortable green. At one end of this lane, the Meadows, where is the brook—a vast, vast playground. At the other end, the traffic of High Street.

High Street, Stocklow-cum-Chardy!

Mudge Lane, Stocklow-cum-Chardy!

Behind the Mudge cottage itself, where Granny Mudge sits, presiding like a genial and protecting old witch over the games of the children, and imagining she can still smell the roses, there is the sound of hammering—a musical sound; and of saws eating into wood, more musical still; and of planes upon wood, most musical of all.

Evening! Well, they are working late in the carpenter shop to-night—the Mudges, father and son—old Mudge still able to do his day's work and better. "Come, Mary, let's go and see! Race you around!" Stout legs flying—rough stockings, bare knees and grimy, marked with honourable scars, scarcely ahead of Mary's brown limbs and gathered up skirt. Now she is ahead of him, little witch, around the bend of the path, into the yard, laughing her victory! He does not mind. It is Mary. The wide, double-door of the shop is open. The smell of fresh sawdust is a perfume of which one never tires. They sit on some boards, watching. A tremulous light hangs about them, filling the little yard with a quivering beauty. The sound of hammers rings more clearly, as if all things were strangely clarified at this hour, and so, too, one's heartbeats throb and pulsate oddly.

"Gettin' late, father!"

"Aye, we'll finish her by lantern, need be!"

Simon is proud of these men and their muscled arms—grandad and father

both, men of might and skill.

"What's the queer box for, Simon?"

"Huh!" Simon swells a little with pride that he should know. "It's a coffin —for old man Snibbs!"

"A-a w-what?"

"Coffin!"

"What's that?"

"To put old man Snibbs in, silly!"

She had heard, of course, that the Snibbs' blinds were down, and on his door was something black, and when you went by you ran. If you were a child you ran. If you weren't, you stood, and looked, and whispered to whoever you were with, and nodded wisely.

"Let's play hide-an'-seek, Simon!" You ran in that. "Who'll play hide-an'-seek?" Volunteers a-plenty. Mudge Lane rings with their merry shouts; the quivering evening stillness catches up the sounds and joins them to the twitterings of birds. Dusk falls more closely. The hammering ceases on the queer box for old man Snibbs. But the play goes on. " 'Tisn't fair Mary should always hide with Simon. 'Tisn't fair!" A mutinous group gathers. Mary draws near. "Yah! Yah! What were you doing with Simon in that old empty toolbox? O-h, M-a-a-r-y!" She blushes; she does not quite know why. Is it not right that she, liking Simon so well, should crouch with him, happily, their hearts beating half with joy of the game, half with a comradeship that makes them clasp hands, while the merry hue-and-cry is about them?

"Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty—"

"Hurry, Mary, we must hide again!"

They are watching her—jealous little minxes; her head goes high, she takes Simon's hand boldly, and runs. They hide together again, and are happy.

"Simon! Simon!"

Yes, they heard that call before, but did not heed it. It comes again.

"S-i-m-o-n!"

When the voice gets long like that a fellow has to go. If he wants his supper, that is. Mrs. Mudge junior has acid ways. The children don't like her very well. Against her and her ways they make common cause. "Oh, Simon, *must* you go?" No, the children don't care for young Mrs. Mudge. Young Mrs. Mudge is like the Brewster dog. When it starts barking all the dogs in the village join in. When young Mrs. Mudge calls Simon it is a signal to all parents that their offspring should soon be in. . . . Simon drags himself away. But he contrives to whisper: "See you to-morrow, Mary!"

The game goes on without him. “Goin’ to play, Mary? Aw, don’t go in! *You’re* not called just yet!” They like her now, want her—Simon having gone. Of course, she will play—happily enough, too, in the fast fading light. A gleam shines in the Mudge cottage where Simon has gone. She can hear his voice comfortably still, echoing within her: “See you to-morrow, Mary!” But the game must end for all. For her as well. “M-a-a-r-y!” That is her call. She goes homeward in the gathering darkness.

Teacups in the light of lamps, and the last rays of sunset falling upon dishes of blue-and-white. Her father’s grave voice reading the evening scripture before they eat. They are hammering again in the shop back of the Mudge cottage, hammering at that queer box. Perhaps Mary’s father hears it, too, for he seems to stop and listen. He opens the Bible. “. . . *though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*.” Mary is sleepy with her play, her mind refuses the rest of the reading, but that smooth, grave sentence that she cannot understand, brings singular comfort and peace.

Supper now. Dishes of blue-and-white. After that, sleep. Childhood dreams. And then?

“See you to-morrow, Mary!”

IV

The slanting sunlight had shifted. It no longer touched the coverlet, nor the grizzled beard and not overclean face of old Simon. It played for a moment on a corner of the ceiling, where the ancient timbering glowed under its touch, then vanished altogether.

“I’m cold, Naddy!”

Simon was back from the lane and the workshop at Stocklow-cum-Chardy. And Mary had gone—from his mind, not from the room. She drew a heavier blanket over him, tucking it about the arms with their coarse, clumsy sleeves. That did it! Tucking it about—as his mother used to do—his mother, the young Mrs. Mudge, of Mudge Lane. “Hide-an’-seek, ma! Such a game, but I’m tired now! I’ll play again, to-morrow, shan’t I, ma?” She would fetch him hot broth presently, from her own little stove, would Mary. Meanwhile, perhaps, she was the least bit jealous of the junior Mrs. Mudge, now forgotten in Mudge Lane, long since become the back alley of a factory district.

She put her hand on his.

“Simon—it’s *Mary*!”

But he was counting now: “—forty-five, fifty, fifty-five—” Now he is no longer “it,” but runs with her to hide. “Here, Mary, the old toolbox!” His hand tightens on hers. He starts up, listening.

"*Simon! Simon!*"

"Must go, Mary!"

"*S-i-m-o-n!*"

When the voice gets long like that a fellow has to go.

"See you to-morrow, Mary!" he whispers.

Hurries out, does Mary then, afraid of her emotion, her old breast throbbing with a far, faint life. It is chill in the courtyard now. The sunlight has gone, and with it the old women. Fires in small grates invite old women to huddle near. Heat! Fire! Sunlight by day, and stored sunlight, in coal, by night! Mary Gorsby fancies even firesides are neglected for her; imagines faces at every window. Perhaps she is right. Her head goes high. She smiles, thinking of Mudge Lane. "What were you doing with Simon? O-h, M-a-a-r-y!" Jealous minxes! Her head is held high.

The broth now! Strong, but not too strong. Lovingly brewed. Almost spilled, her fingers tremble so. Happiness? Aye, it is for Simon. The years have carried them apart, the current of circumstance given them other mates for the while, but now—Mudge Lane is now a back alley of a factory district. Mudge Lane, as such, is gone even in name. But Mudge Lane lives here again. In Mary. In Simon. Childhood is renewed. Childhood is not dead. A second—second childhood! Another bowl of blue-and-white; Mudge Lane knew that bowl, and the secret of its broth.

She went tremblingly down the stairs. One or two old women, braving again the chill of evening, watched her openly, whispering. She passed on under the archway. Simon would like this broth; they knew the delicious secret of it in Mudge Lane. She had to set it down on the low step, to open the door of the porter's lodge. What was the matter? It would not open. The latch had been off before. She fumbled anxiously; in the end it opened with a jerk.

"Well, what do *you* want?"

It was Naddy, back. Mrs. Gorsby tried to explain.

"No, no! Go away. I can 'tend to him well enough myself!"

Her heart failing, she murmured timidly: "At least, you'll give him the broth, miss?"

Couldn't youth understand that it meant everything—everything to age—this broth in its blue-and-white bowl from Mudge Lane? Aye, but perhaps youth was remembering he was ninety after all, and was no longer quick to take down his pride of years. And was seeing the incongruity of his making out so well with his pails and broom and handy jobs about the place—while youth went gadding. Self-reproach, like enough. And bitterness with it, turning itself against age that did thoughtful duty where neglectful youth failed!

“Get away now, I tell you! You had no business coming here. I’ve a notion to report you to the Governors!”

The door slammed.

Stains of brown on the grey cobble-stones now. Blue-and-white pieces of crazed earthenware. A stooping old woman tremblingly collecting them, as if they alone now mattered.

How had the news spread? Perhaps the raised voice and shrill tones of Naddy did it. Women, hurrying out, shawled against the evening chill, gathered around her. “Never you mind, dearie! She’s a hussy, she is!” “She hadn’t ought to do it!” “The ducking-stool! That’s the thing for her. In *my* day —” It is Naddy they rage against now, making common cause. An acid tongue and a quick way, had Naddy. Like the young Mrs. Mudge, whom the children did not care for in the Lane. They make common cause against her. “You come with us, dearie!” Simon has been taken from her. They no longer whisper against her. They chatter companionably.

Aye, Simon has been taken; but *that* they do not know yet. A last long call. “S-i-m-o-n!” When the voice gets long like that a fellow has to go. If this were Mudge Lane, and the shop behind the cottage still open for the honest labour of carpenters unafraid of overtime by lantern, to-night there would be the ringing of hammers, clarified by the evening silence.

“What’s that queer box for, Simon?”

“To put old man Snibbs in, silly!”

Hammering like that, if this were Mudge Lane. And, if you were a child, passing the door yonder, you ran. If you weren’t, you stood, and looked, and whispered to whoever you were with, and nodded wisely.

V

Days, as men count them, do not matter now. One scorns the petty measuring out of hours and minutes. Life is a day, and evening draws near. Simon has been called, and answered. There is a gleam yonder where he is gone. One catches it, now and again. In strange places. At odd times. A flower. Blue sky and sailing clouds above the courtyard. Warm, ancient walls, caught in the evening light. Sunset, as now. A tremulous light in the courtyard. Late sunlight slanting into the tiny room where Mrs. Gorsby entertains. She is one of them now, for Simon is gone. “Play with us, Mary, you’re not called yet!” Of course, of course she will! Proud of the spotless room, the bits of furniture —some of them from Mudge Lane, too. Proud of the china, and earthenware, blue-and-white—crazed a bit?—never mind that! A late gleam rests on it goldenly. Teacups in the light of lamps, and the last rays of the sunset on

dishes of blue-and-white.

The women are chattering, but she does not heed their prattle. They nod over their words, regarding her curiously, as who should say: “You know about her—and Simon? Well, well, she takes it lightly!” And then: “What a noise that new janitor makes!” The new janitor is hammering open a packing-case of incoming goods. For Mary, they are hammering again in the shop back of the Mudge cottage, hammering at that queer box. Mary’s father seems to hear it, too. He opens the Book to read: “*—though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day!*”

Her face is radiant. She pours tea. Dishes of blue-and-white, out of a far childhood. Oh, she can afford to wait, can Mary! Occasionally, she chatters a bit herself. Evening is pleasant, and the light tremulous: throbbing, quivering with ecstatic promise. Afterwards will come—sleep! And then—

“See you to-morrow, Mary!”

She smiles upon them all. She pours more tea into white-and-blue cups, offers more buttered toast on plates of blue-and-white. Evening is pleasant. The quivering, ecstatic light throbs about eight old women, sipping tea in crazed teacups from Mudge Lane. Such little things bring joy in childhood.

1925.

II

"How full of error is the judgment
of mankind!"

MR. WELLAND HAS A BAD DAY

I

MR. HENRY WELLAND, of Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper, leaned across the glass-topped mahogany desk, and poked one end of a gold-rimmed pince-nez at the young man who sat on the edge of the purposely uncomfortable chair that was provided for those who sought interviews with the senior partner.

"I can give you two minutes. Very busy this morning. Very busy. What is it?"

"About that policy, Mr. Welland."

"Oh, yes, yes! You're young Baridon who bothered me into taking out more Life. Knew your father, didn't I? Well, I don't thank your company for sending the doctor they did. Old fool! Knew nothing of the value of time. I suppose you want the initial payment now—your perquisite, heh? Well, let me see the policy."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Welland. Afraid I have bad news for you. The fact is, the company doesn't care to issue a policy to you."

"They what?"

Young Baridon nodded.

"Turned down, sir! Means blacklisting, I'm afraid. I'm fearfully sorry."

Henry Welland sat back in his chair. A little distress in the matter of breathing seemed to affect him even now. He'd rather noticed it lately. Said nothing about it. Thought nothing much of it. Once or twice, golfing—that kind of thing.

"Well, what is it, Baridon? Come, out with it! I suppose I may share the secrets of my own interior?"

"It's your heart, sir. I've a report here, if you'd care to glance at it—in

confidence. Of course, we're not done yet. We can fight the thing . . ."

Henry Welland heard only the monotone of a meaningless voice, and, more important, the beating of his own heart. Humph! So nobody could say—with a heart like his?

He handed the letter back.

"All right, Baridon. We'll just forget it. It's not as if I really needed more protection. Good morning!"

The door closed. Mr. Welland was alone. Alone with the luxurious efficiency of an office he had planned not to quit, say, until into the eighties. Just let down a bit; golf and what not—an older man's pleasures. Alone with the unnecessary stridency of his heart. He got up and went to the open window. The top of an elm tree rose just above the sill. A green crown was coming on it. The square below, with its surrounding skyscrapers, its office buildings, its hotels and shops, was bursting with spring. He smelt, for the first time from this elevation, the combined moist fragrance of earth and flowers after rain.

II

Thrusting back under a paperweight some letters he had purposed answering, Henry Welland, as if in great urgency, struggled into hat and overcoat. Passing into the outer office, full of the clack and hum of work, he nodded to his secretary. "Going to lunch, Johnstone." About to say, "Why it's barely eleven, Mr. Welland!"—the secretary, having regard to discretion and moved, perhaps, to puzzlement at something in the senior partner's face, coughed and made obeisance.

The square received Mr. Henry Welland with tender arms, with sprouting beauty, with an ineffable green, with a moist fragrance that held profundities of which in fifty-five years of life he had scarcely been aware. He strolled for a while, hardly conscious of those who shared with him this canopy of green upheld on trunks and splaying branches of brown and grey. On four sides, in the near distance, traffic ran its course. It seemed removed, unreal, an artificial life that might at any time end if not rewound by a mechanically-minded humanity. Here, in the square, was life that not even asphalt or gravel could subdue; where the frosts of winter had cracked the pavements on which one strode, green was bursting in delicate but complete triumph. All this was not for Mr. Welland's mind to analyse. Had it been law, of the kind he espoused, he could have put you right, dissecting this point and quoting that precedent, after proper reference, to a technical nicety, but this was a bit deep for him. He knew only two emotions—fear and a sense of temporary sanctuary. These

moved out of profundity to an obvious place where he might taste and handle them. Pulling down his hat over his eyes, lest Mr. Henry Welland be seen loitering in a public square during business hours, he explored the walks that formed an irregular network, then, enticed by the warm sunshine, seated himself on an empty bench. Trying to concentrate on a sparrow bathing gaily in an overnight pool, he saw only a typed letter, coldly medical. Nobody could say . . . with a heart like his. Humph! Might snuff out just like that, eh? Must see Graydon. Graydon was no alarmist, though he'd give a straight, fair opinion. These insurance fellows! You never knew; lots of people outlived their doleful prophecies. Just impertinence, after all, this actuarial fiddle-faddle. There, he could feel his heart. Probably just nervousness, imagination, that accelerated it. Fifty-five? No age at all! Good for twenty, thirty years, anyway.

"Excuse me, sir—"

He turned startled eyes to a man who had seated himself on the bench.

"Eh? Well?"

"Could I—would it be possible—to help me with a little something, sir? I'm rather up against it."

Mr. Welland bristled. He might have known this fellow would try that on. Impudence! What were the police about?

"If you're in need, try the charities!" Mr. Welland gave to these every year quite liberally. If you gave five hundred or more, your name got in the specials, and that put it decently in the top section of the list published in the newspapers. *W* was a bad letter in the ordinary course, down near the bottom. Not fair, this alphabetical handling. But, suddenly, before he quite got his sentence out, Henry Welland's mind dealt with an idea whose very entrance into his thoughts showed the morbid point to which they had come. If that confounded doctor was right, at any moment he might have to face—well, a place where there were no newspapers, and where public spirit might be differently evaluated.

Mr. Welland did then a most remarkable thing, occasioning himself keen personal disquietude. "Here you are," he said, even the first natural questions unasked. And then, still more amazed at himself, he added gruffly: "Good luck to you!" The fellow took the money unbelievingly—almost reverently. It was a five-dollar bill. The first bill offering itself to Mr. Henry Welland's fingers! It was while he was watching, with annoyance, the phenomenon of delight on the fellow's face that he made his discovery. The recipient was scarcely more than a boy; a young Apollo fallen on hard times, he might have thought, only he'd pushed everything mythical so far back into the refuse heap of unwanted

knowledge that it was doubtful if even this simple likeness would occur to him. If one ever required suitable allusions for some forensic utterance, there were always the reference books, or the brains of men more recently in contact with those childhood fields.

"That's fearfully good of you!" said the boy.

Henry Welland grunted, then softened the grunt, lest it impair the credit of that charity which covers a multitude of sins.

Conscious that the lad was still sitting there in possession of the largess he had so rashly tossed at him, Mr. Welland moved uncomfortably, and would no doubt have left, had the youth not spoken. There was an elasticity in the voice that made his listener aware again of an undeniable fascination. Like the vivid and imperious green of the square—suggested if not yet fully realized—here were youth and vigour in full blossom. The cheeks glowed with a clear delicacy that made Henry Welland's carefully groomed face a thing of sallow age. One felt that, beneath the shabby and ill-fitting suit—he wore no overcoat—there resided the litheness and muscular perfection of a race-horse. The eyes were peculiarly alive, meeting those of Mr. Welland—when the latter chose to raise his—like the blaze of new electrics against the smoky inferiority of ancient oil lamps in a country station.

III

"You must have guessed," said the lad, with enthusiasm that left Henry Welland cold, "how badly I needed this. I don't go in for this kind of thing, but I was up against it, and when I saw you sit down here I decided you were the one, sir. Lost all my wad—not much—in a doss-house last night."

"Doss—?" began Mr. Welland, with raised brows.

"A cheap lodging-house down town," grinned the boy.

Henry Welland felt a moral urge to resent the grin. There were places one could go—places appointed by constituted authority and subsidised out of taxes paid by Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper, individually and collectively. He ventured to suggest as much.

"Yes." The boy whistled. "One night before, I was bang up against it, and went to the place you speak of. Ever been there?"

Mr. Welland bridled.

"I understand it is efficiently run."

"It is, sir. But it's only for the absolutely flat."

"Flat?"

"Broke, sir. If you have any coin you hide it in your mouth."

"Microbes!" thought Mr. Welland, shuddering. "Why?" he asked sharply.

"Because they don't leave you anywhere else to hide it. Nature doesn't provide pockets in the pelt."

"Moral turpitude!" thought Henry Welland. He asked, not without interest: "They take away your clothes?"

"Every stitch, sir. Personal belongings, if any, in one bag. Clothes, for fumigation, in t'other bag. Both with your number. You have a number, you see, no name. Then you have a bath."

"Excellent!"

"It is. Nice clean towel. Afterward, you line up—a few dozen—and the doc gives you the once over. He knows most of the regulars. If you're a new one—like me—he gets you out of line, and prods you and asks questions. The rest look on and—and make remarks, sir."

"Remarks?"

"Quite intimate, sir. Discuss your points—and your ancestry. Like a horse."

A queer thought came to Henry Welland that he should like to see this boy that way.

"After that, a nightie. Bought wholesale, and all to a size." The boy grinned, confidentially, at Mr. Welland. "If you're six feet, it's a kilt, sir. If you're five, you hold up the drapes to keep your tootsies from walking on it. I'm not blaming 'em, you know, sir. The things are clean, at least. But it is a bit awful to see grown men tucked into bed at seven-thirty on a spring evening, sir."

"Seven-thirty?"

"If you don't get in line by seven, you're out of luck. The doors close. Well, there are tiers of bunks, and the blankets are clean. After a slice of dry bread and a cup of coffee, you climb in. You lie there—no talk allowed—and watch the daylight fade, and, if you're given that way, you think over your life."

The boy was silent. Mr. Henry Welland was silent, too. He felt that he was lying, in alien nightwear, staring into fading daylight, gravely considering his comings and goings in the earth. Fifty-five years. And success. Always success. A good start, of course—family money, family influence—but he'd kept his nose to it. School. University. None of that folly for him that you heard of nowadays. Perhaps times changed, or else he'd kept out of the contemporary drift that way. What was that song the students of to-day sang along the streets, doing snake dances after a football victory, and holding up traffic?

“It is not for knowledge that we go to college, But to raise hell all the year!”

Humph! And then they wondered! Shouldn’t be surprised if this young fellow were a college man; he had an educated tongue. A chap must stick to it to make a success. Look at himself, Henry Welland: not brilliant, perhaps, he’d confess that, but doggedly, everlastingly at it. Called to the bar at an early age; a decent number of good briefs; family influence to some extent, but not altogether; partnership; crown prosecutor; lecturer; and now in a place of undisputed seniority with Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper. All at fifty-five—comparative youth! Good for years! Ah! Mr. Welland felt suddenly an uneasiness in the pit of his stomach. His hand crept inside his piped waistcoat to assess the flutterings of his newly discovered heart.

IV

He said, so abruptly that he startled his companion: “Humph! Well, what were you thinking about?”

“Now?”

“No. Then. In the bunk.”

“Well, I thought of life, and that thing Shakespeare says—” He glanced, a little timidly, at Henry Welland.

“Go on.”

“You probably know it, sir. It’s a familiar bit:

> ‘Life’s but a walking shadow—a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing.’

You feel like that sometimes, don’t you, sir? I mean—all those fellows—lined up—grown men tucked into bed by daylight. Gone to seed, most of ’em. Good family, quite a few—you could tell that. You wonder what got twisted inside, and how. And then the rotters! You should have heard some of the remarks, sir! And the misfits, and everything.”

Mr. Henry Welland felt the time had come for the question direct. He asked, drily: “And how about you, young man?”

“Me? That’s a fair question. Well, I’m included in the idiot’s tale, sir. Hadn’t a penny when I got my education paid for, so I’m bumming my way around the world. I want to know life first-hand, sir. This is my stop-over Number One. When I get enough in hand I’ll push through to the West, work

my way across the Pacific, live, if I can, the life of the Orient and—and so on." He paused. The glow in his eyes impressed Mr. Welland again with an irritating sense of disparity.

Henry Welland said, abruptly: "That's all very fine. But you can't go on that way. It's nonsensical; madness! What'll you do for a living?"

"Do? But I am living. And I want to find out why."

"Heh?" For some reason Mr. Welland felt himself in deep water; and as if he'd like to grip the first rational straw he could get hold of anywhere.

Seeing none at hand, he snapped out: "And when you find it, what'll you do with it, eh? What'll you do with it?"

"Express it, sir, if I can."

"Express it?"

"Poetry, sir. I've done a bit. Nothing much yet. If you'd care to see—"

Henry Welland was horrified. The fellow took a worn notebook out of his shabby pocket, and was thumbing it eagerly. Mr. Welland had a well-stocked poetry section in his library, but he mistrusted all but the covers—in uniform editions, of the best class, very decorative, making a room look furnished. Occasionally, too, one could impress a jury—in the old days when he was in active harness that way—with a reference from a quotation book that was indexed topically: Murder, Justice, Love, Pity, Patriotism—anything one could want. When delivered with a certain emotional cadence, it influenced any pliable jury.

The notebook was in his hands. The writing, he saw, was neat but distinctive. As for the boy's poetry:

> "Let me live on; though life seem meaningless
> It offers vast adventure to the soul;
> If soul there be and not mere essence,
> A ghost of cosmic breath caught in illusion
> (If matter be but that) yet gifted
> With yearnings, strivings, questing so sublime
> That one would live if only to endure!"

Henry Welland thought: "Now what the dickens is all that about?" It made him feel uncomfortable, as if he were being prodded by agencies beyond his ken. He handed back the book. "I guess it's all right. I'm no judge of poetry." A suspicion smote him. He grunted: "Sure that's your own?"

"Why, yes, sir!"

"Well, all right. All right. I'm sorry."

He figured he'd be getting along. In fifty-five years he'd never

experienced, until to-day, anything like this. He, Henry Welland, of Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper, sitting, of a business morning, on a bench in a public square where he might at any moment be apprehended by acquaintances, listening to an impoverished young fly-by-night who wrote a meaningless but uncomfortable jargon of poetic fiddle-faddle. “Must be going,” he said hastily, consulting his watch, and having no idea of what the hands said. “Good morning!” He felt as if he were fleeing from some impalpable but baleful influence; baleful because mysterious. He disliked mysterious things. He preferred those which could be arithmetically proved, or technically dissected and docketed, or, by whatsoever method you might desire, put in their proper places and subdued. He reached the curb. Traffic wheeled by, glinting in the noonday blaze of a sun still mellow with a moist vapour. He would cross here.

A hand touched him.

“Just a moment, sir. Could I have your card?”

Henry Welland was annoyed at being followed, but there was a certain chaste pleasure in handing, to a down-at-the-heel youngster like this, an engraved pasteboard bearing his own name and that of Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper. His pockets yielding none, he was obliged to consummate the matter by word of mouth, pointing out from where he stood the building that housed the firm.

“Thank you, sir. I’d like to return the loan as soon as possible.”

Henry Welland grunted once again. He knew, of course, how to assess this gesture. These ne’er-do-well drifters had as much idea of returning money as he had of dying poor. But he nodded with a civility that surprised and did not displease him. It was odd how a suspicion of one’s heart, of possible deplorable contingencies ahead, of a limited span, changed one. It brought out, he hoped, one’s true colours, revealed one’s inner self. He was glad he had given that impulsive lad five dollars. It warmed him. Not that he expected to get anything back. Henry Welland was nobody’s fool. He’d kissed, as the slangy moderns would say, the fiver good-bye. But there was that thing in the Scriptures about hoping for nothing again. Feeling very scriptural and comforted, he began to cross the street.

V

Ordinarily most cautious, crossing only at proper intersections and on signal, Mr. Henry Welland was to-day experiencing new emotions, and discretion fell from him. For perhaps the first time in an orderly life he was guilty of jay-walking.

He heard a shout: “Look out, there!” He saw death, immediate and irrevocable, looming up in the guise of a truck. Paralysed, he was incapable. His wits could not decide this way or that. The same instant, he was catapulted by some tremendous but, he realised, human agency, into the middle of the street. Everywhere brakes ground; there was a crash, somebody cried out, several people caught up the sound of the cry; then Mr. Henry Welland, to his own astonishment and relief, and through a perfect maze of halted traffic, reached the farther side.

Certainly nothing like this had happened to Mr. Welland in such of his fifty-five years as Nature gave him knowledge of. The propulsion from behind had saved him; he took it to be the fortuitous but happily timed leap toward safety of some fellow human; but the method of it left him at once outraged, breathless, and shocked. His head reeled; instantly he remembered the condition of his heart. No man, with a heart for which the medical world would not vouch, could sustain such shocks as that with safety. The traffic behind him was still embroiled. That people should be more interested in it than in him who had escaped from death under its wheels, infuriated him, even while he desired no publicity. Feeling very ill, he staggered around the corner into a backwash, where a taxi-driver, seeing his plight, scented business and opened a door to him. Henry Welland gave an address. He would go and see Graydon at once. Disliking to put the thing to issue further, but remembering that many a judgment is thrown out by a higher court, he determined on this appeal. Two blocks away, their progress was suspended for a moment, to give right-of-way to an ambulance that added its clanging voice to the morning’s chorus of mutability. His taxi moved on, achieving the quiet elegance of that residential street where Dr. Graydon had dealt out hope and despair to many people for many years. Dismissing the car, he climbed the steps. Dr. Graydon was not in. He was expected. Would Mr. Welland wait? Mr. Welland would.

Nursing his hat, which by a miracle he had retained through the narrowness of his escape, Henry Welland considered the unostentatious luxury of Graydon’s ante-rooms and felt a sense of suffocation. The place, he decided, was like a morgue. The etchings, he shouldn’t doubt, were properly expensive and well, if not aptly, chosen, being unhappy in their inclination toward the sombre. They tended toward imagination and atmosphere, rather than a dependable forthrightness that would be better fitted to a place like this. The magazines were either too broadly humorous and mocking to a man in ill-health, or popular, of a type that Mr. Welland caustically supposed would appeal to women clients, or else stolid quarterlies, on subjects of abstruse literary and political interest. He sought for something on law, or business, or even golf, and drew blanks. So he sat staring at a window too heavily draped,

and at the spring sunshine on a green-flecked tree outside, and at one or two patients who entered and took chairs in that ghastly silence peculiar to doctors' offices. Concerning them, Mr. Welland allowed himself some morbid speculations; as to whether the blonde was dieting under the doctor's care, or whether the plaintive child with the straggle-haired mother was a victim of adenoids, which made it look like a puppy that should have been drowned at birth.

Out of this vortex of thought and speculation came remembrance—which Mr. Welland had all this while fought against—of the queer specimen he had run into. Uncomfortable fellow! He supposed maybe the chap was a genius. He'd always been told they were like that but, fortunately, he had had little experience with the type. He preferred that sounder estimate concerning the infinite capacity for taking pains. On such a basis he, Henry Welland, might almost qualify, had modesty not withheld the claim. These cranks were useless; set people by the ears and got no one anywhere. He supposed Shakespeare was essentially a sound fellow. But it gave you a turn to hear him echoed by a down-at-heel youth on a park bench. Some of the words actually stuck:

> "It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing."

You couldn't do anything with that kind of thing. And then, trotting out his own stuff, naively, one must confess; there was a saving grace of boyish modesty about it. Well, it had cost Henry Welland a good five-dollar bill. He found a pawky humour in that for a moment. He had become, in a new way, a patron of the arts.

An instant later he remembered the charity that covers sins and, shifting a little uncomfortably on his chair, and frowning at the plaintive child, who seemed disposed to make adenoidish faces at him, he tried to think thoughts more in keeping with a man whose ordinary span of life has been interfered with by the medical mercenary of an insurance concern. Then a voice disconcerted him: "Dr. Graydon will see you now, sir."

VI

His heart fluttering noticeably, Mr. Henry Welland girded his courage about him and followed on. Graydon, with cold and unnerving efficiency, went about his inspection, and out of an inexorable silence brought forth his judgment. "Nothing to worry about, Welland. Go a little easy, that's all. These insurance people play safe, you know. Don't overwork, don't overplay; but

there's all the years in you, barring accident, that a man should ask of life. And don't think too much about yourself!" Henry Welland, in quick, tremulous gratitude, paid the fee. When he was out once more in the spring air, he reflected that Graydon did himself well at ten dollars a whack.

Fifteen dollars since he left the office! Ten dollars reposing in Graydon's pocket, five for that folly in the square. A clock somewhere was striking two. Three hours wasted on a busy day! He felt more than a little of a fool. In the midst of his relief he was annoyed. Graydon was probably laughing up his sleeve to see his friend Welland with the wind up. Well, he was good for years yet. He'd still be sought out and consulted in big affairs. Welland, of Welland, Hotchkiss, Hotchkiss and Juniper. A figure about town. Known as a sound man. No fiddle-faddle. Gad, if anyone found out about the aberration of this morning, though! Sniffing flowers and what-not in a public square on a busy morning. Squandering five dollars on a young fly-by-night on a park bench, who thought it was soul adventure to go—what was his phrase?—bumming his way around the world, and writing meaningless poetry en route! Five dollars! It worried him. It was a blemish on an otherwise impeccable life.

"Paper, sir?"

He bought the two o'clock edition. He did not read it. He must hurry back to the office; lunch would have to go by the board to-day. He thrust the folded paper into his overcoat pocket. Headlines, which he did not see, stuck out:

UNIDENTIFIED YOUNG MAN
AUTO VICTIM
Fatally Injured In Trying To Save
Elderly Gentleman Also Unknown

There was reference in the text to a notebook, bearing no name or address, but containing scraps of probably original verse. The reporter, indeed, struck by one entry, had incorporated it, thus bringing it to the eye of a harassed city editor.

> "Let me live on; though life seem meaningless
> It offers vast adventure to the soul—"

Wearily, the city editor had struck his blue pencil through it. Maybe it was all right, but there wasn't space; and that report of the Travellers' Weekly Luncheon had to stand.

All this, Mr. Henry Welland, hurrying officeward, could not know. Life for him was sound again, save for the recurrent irritation over that five-dollar bill. He couldn't conceive what had got into him. A loan? Heh! To be paid back? Gammon! That was five dollars for which Henry Welland would get no value.

And he liked to get full value for his money.

At the office he set the paper aside, unread. The evening edition, when he had time for it, gave such small space to an incident of a busy day in the city that one naturally passed it by, turning, with a shifting of feet in carpet slippers, and of one's body more comfortably in the chair before the fire—the window being open, it was pleasant to have a blaze—to the financial page and the daily news of doings in the Courts of Law. A spring wind, capricious above the city, inclined toward a branching tree outside the window, and moved it to a sighing murmur. Mr. Henry Welland, feeling the draught slightly, and having not quite recovered from his solicitude for his own good health, went and closed the window tightly down.

1930.

LOVERS’ RAIN

I

THE reformatory was not an unkindly place. Letty, turning her back at last upon the institution, admitted this. They taught her things; not merely those which trained the hands, but those that stocked the mind with platitudinous virtue. Letty knew nothing of platitudes, as such; so the wisdom of what she was told registered itself thankfully on her brain. She needed this kind of teaching; somebody had failed to give it to her in time; her mother, for instance—one did not count her father in the scheme of things. He was a nebulous person who, however, at times appeared like a windstorm on the domestic horizon, and indulged in a cyclonic demonstration, brief, but leaving in its wake a trail of moral and financial damage. Her mother, of course, should have said something; given her some rules of the road; tipped her off to the mysteries of this business called Life; shared with her the intricacies of her own experience.

Scrubbing floors all day should afford considerable mental space for philosophy, though no doubt it depletes the energy necessary for effective impartation to a daughter. Letty, perhaps, should have drawn her own lesson from that cyclonic person who was her father, but youth is ever optimistic, and when her mother took over the fourth floor of an office building, which kept her away evenings, and quite late at night sometimes, Bud had a license hitherto impossible. Letty had always thought Bud such a nice fellow. She knew now, of course, that men were not built that way. Romance was just a bubble. It left you afterwards with nothing but an unpleasant taste of soap in your mouth. She couldn’t understand quite why this should be so; but, in her simple way, she supposed these people, like the Matron, who were set aside by the law to teach one, must know.

“Well, good-bye, Letty. You’ll remember now?”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“And there’s five dollars. You’ll be careful of that?”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“You know where you’re going all right?”

“Yes, ma’am. Directly home, ma’am!”

The Matron kissed her brow. It was a nice kiss, of course; well-meant, if a trifle casual. It lacked something as kisses go. Letty had been kissed before.

She remembered that. She must not remember it. She set her mouth with determination. She was a Reformed Character. She was now a moral woman. It was a little distressing that the day should be so vivid; the spring, in its manifestations, so young and tender; leaving a place of correction one should not feel such a sudden exultation, such a tremendous, almost sickening, sense of adventure running through one like wine.

II

The shop-windows were burgeoning forth in thrilling beauty! You looked at the displays, and queer anticipations ran in you. She passed a florist's, and instantly had to take tight hold of her purse; extravagance, she must remember, was one of the sins that led to greater. Besides, what would she do with flowers? Take some to her mother? Her mother would likely tell her she had a lot to do buying things like that, and *her* slaving to make ends meet. Letty puckered her brows. It would be comforting to get to the place where you could be sensible like that, and not feel that the very heart-strings were being dragged out of you by spring fragrance caught in the delicacy of yellow and gold and white and orchid. There were people in buying them; a girl came out with a young man. She was laughing up at him; Letty was astute enough to see at once that he had just bought violets for her. Bud had once or twice bought flowers for Letty. They went off, these two, swinging arm in arm down the street, lit now by a paler sunlight because a tenuous haze was growing, spreading itself above the city. Letty assumed a consciously moral expression. That girl ought to know what men were like! Someone should tell her. Letty felt proud of her own superior knowledge at seventeen. She stood watching them until they were out of sight, caught herself in a sigh, and moved on.

There was a hat in a window there! It was one of many hats displayed, but Letty could see only the amazing unit. There was a mirror, at an angle in the window which cleverly presented Letty with her own reflection. What a drab, terrible old thing she was wearing! She'd made it herself, under direction, at the reformatory, and been quite proud at doing it. Her mother had never taught her—if she knew it—the trick of the needle. Now, looking at this result of proud craftsmanship, she knew it didn't belong to a spring day; it was doubtful, indeed, to what kind of day it did belong. It was a hat without coquettishness or subtlety. Translated into Letty's own thoughts, this meant it was a hat under which her face was just a face and, above all, her eyes were merely eyes. But—that delicate green thing there? Bud had once told her she should always wear green. People shouldn't really put price tickets on hats like that! Then you could say to yourself that it would be far more than you could ever pay, and just sigh and go on. But there it was, in plainly-inked invitation:

“$3.95—Marked down from—$5.00.” She wondered if it would fit her. No harm just to try it on and see—see what your eyes looked like under it? They couldn’t charge you a cent for that.

Letty hesitated, started on, looked back, returned, and went into the shop. That hat in the window? The green one?—yes, they’d fetch it out for her to see. Letty had an appalling certainty that her own looked more terrible than ever in this place of real hats. She snatched it off; shook, with a half-forgotten movement, her close-clipped curls into place. The shop-woman, impressed perhaps with sunlight dancing on reddish-gold, said with genuine enthusiasm:

“I think this’ll just suit you, miss!”

Letty put it on. Immediately, a terrible certainty took up permanent lodgment in her. Without this hat she could never leave the shop. She looked at the face reflected in the long mirror. Was that really herself? Even the oldish suit seemed brisker under this impetus of green beauty. If only her stockings weren’t cotton; they didn’t go! A reproach spoke in Letty:

“*—there’s five dollars. You’ll be careful of that?*”

“*Yes, ma’am!*”

A middle-aged shopper brushed by. She wasn’t wearing flowers, but a scent of lilacs drifted to Letty. Tears sprang to Letty’s eyes. She tried hard to see the Matron kissing her good-bye; tried to summon up a pair of motherly but decisive eyes, a firm chin, and a brow puckered with one long-standing obsession that Letty revered as final and consummate wisdom. Instead, she saw motes floating in a pale drift across the mirror and, beyond this haze, herself crowned with Spring.

“I—I’ll take it. I’ll wear it with me, please!” she said quickly.

“Anything else, miss?”

“No, thank you!”

“Gloves? Hosiery?” The sales-woman’s eyes lingered for just an instant below Letty’s skirt. “We have a sale of silk stockings to-day—only a dollar a pair—wonderful value, miss!” She made the pronouncement with something of eagerness, as if she, who had herself passed springtime, were anxious for this essential touch. “Just step this way, miss!”

Letty’s fingers explored the sheer fabric of the bargain hosiery. And, suddenly, that sickening sense of adventure ran in her again.

She lifted her eyes to the sales-woman’s.

“Is—is there somewhere I could—could change into these?”

It was going to rain. You could tell that. There was a fresh, premonitory smell of it in the air. Letty, stepping from the shop, was sensitive to it. She liked the smell of the soft wind; the sunlight had not yet died, rather it was gradually withdrawing itself, to light a glow behind the slowly gathering clouds. This brought a pricking of fear. What if a rainstorm came on before she got home? She shouldn't have left her discarded hat behind her. Yet that seemed necessary. That was burning her bridges; that was destroying a symbol; that was erasing a flaw from beauty. She could not have told you in as many words why it meant everything to say: "I won't want my old one!" She even had tossed it on the floor. That, of course, was wicked! It showed just what extravagance could lead you into. Hadn't the Matron said so? She hoped it was going to rain—soft spring rain smelt so good. But, God, don't let it rain, please, for a while yet! How awful if she got caught! It took your breath even to think of such a thing. She started to hurry. A low urgency reached her ears.

"Letty!"

She turned around, her alarm, and some less tangible emotion, tempered only by a momentary unbelief of her senses.

"Bud!"

They stood facing each other, not speaking again. People, of whom they were oblivious, bumped into them, jostled past them, stared at them. Letty's face was white under the green hat; Bud's was as neutral as his expression, but some tremendous, questing, imponderable force moved behind his eyes and projected itself from his personality to impress her queerly.

His voice came at last; he had sense enough to draw her into the shelter of an awninged space, where the current of life did not beat against them. "Letty—you're not mad at a fellow—for speakin'? I kep' track of when you were comin' out. I've been followin' you ever since you left down there." He ventured a placating grin. "Gee, I thought sure you'd spot me back there when you stopped to look at the flowers in the window, and when you went into that hat place, why, I slipped back to get you these."

She became conscious of a green-papered, horn-shaped parcel in his hand. He began an eager plucking at the fastenings. Jonquils—just four of them—and asparagus fern. His grin was a quivering, unstable thing.

"Say, I didn't know then you were goin' to get that hat, but they're just, well, sort of right with it, aren't they?" His eyes explored her. "Gee, you look swell in it, Letty!" He lifted the flowers from their paper sheath. "You just stick those on, kid! See—they put a pin along with 'em!"

She had thought that, sometime, she might meet him; it had frightened her in prospect. She'd confided this to the Matron, once. Her mind now was

stocked with phrases borrowed for the purpose, but she couldn't think of many; and those she did choked her into speechlessness. She hadn't reckoned on the flowers. She hadn't reckoned on meeting him so soon. She must fight this thing. It was dark in here under the awning; the sun must have gone quite behind the clouds. What if it rained? The flowers looked pale and queer in his hands.

"I—I want nothing more to do with you!"

There, she got that out well at last. The Matron couldn't have done much better herself.

"Letty!"

"I mean it. I'm through!"

"But Letty—honest, Letty, you know how it was? You know we—I—aw, Letty, I thought you knew I—"

"It's no good bringin' up the past, Bud! I'm—I'm beginnin' again!"

That was another of the phrases. It was marvellous how helpful Matronly wisdom was in such a crisis. In the window, under whose extended shelter they stood, a little green god, enthroned amongst Chinese dragons, regarded them with an imperturbable smile. His green was less delicate, more mellow, than the green of Letty's hat; his face held all the wisdom and much of the cynicism of the ages.

"Letty—"

"It's no use talkin', Bud!"

She shouldn't have used his name. That was a mistake. Even Letty had this awareness. But she saw, just then, a woman passing, with an umbrella—not yet raised, though it impressed one as somehow pregnant. And the sunlight was dead.

"I got to get home," said Letty dully, but with haste. "It's goin' to rain. I got to get right along!" She had one last look at his face—disconsolate, despairing, baffled. It was he who actually left first, not she. She found herself alone. Thrust into her unwilling yet eager hands were the jonquils—a pale gold against the green of the ferns.

IV

It was sheer luck to get in before the rain came on. Just one or two premonitory drops fell, and then a slow pattering as she put her key into the familiar lock and let herself in. There, she was safe! She had a sense of escape from more than the rain; as if here, in the drab mediocrity of her home, with its very earthly wisdom, and its uncompromising attitude towards beauty, her

heart would be stayed. She hoped now it would rain—rain in torrents; rain in such a deluge that the very roar of it would shut her in; rain in such a downpour that it would wash beauty itself from the earth! These thoughts were inarticulate, but vividly present; sometimes Letty had run, in her rare reading, across verse or prose that, in a dimly-comprehended way, touched the springs of her inner life. At the Institute once, a woman had come and given readings. The Matron had sat stiffly through it all, gracious but unheeding, unseeing, no doubt remembering, poor woman, the responsibilities that were upon her—the domestic necessities of her large family of unfortunates, the details of drab routine that yesterday claimed her, that to-day were present with her, that to-morrow would renew their imperatives. The woman who came and read had credentials, and was part of the day's educational routine; for the moment the Matron could retreat within herself. Letty sat near her, but preoccupation had held the Matron from witnessing intoxication.

Dim impressions alone remained with Letty; for the life of her she could not have repeated a word; the very fragrance and stimulation of the experience had been battered back, by routine, by well-intended precept, by all the concomitants probably essential to institutional discipline, into some far place. But there they were! Like pale but determined ghosts, some now came forth; marshalled, they would have spoken in orderly fashion—yet only the emotion remained to haunt her:

> "And all the woods are alive with the murmur and sound of spring,
> And the rosebud breaks into pink on the climbing briar,
> And the crocus bed is a quivering moon of fire—"

"Who's there? That you, Letty?"

"Yes, maw!"

"Whatcha standin' there for? Why don't you come on in? Dear knows, I ain't seen too much of you since they took you there!"

Letty moved from the doorway, with the sound of rain in her ears, to where, in a subdued light, a woman lay shapelessly on an unkempt bed. There were only two rooms in the place; you saw it all from the door.

"I woulda come to meet you, Letty, only my lumbago's been somethin' fierce. You know how it gets me sometimes." She moved a little, upheaving herself on the bed. "Come here—lemme see how you look! My gawsh, aren't we snappy? Where'd you get that hat?"

"It's mine," said Letty. She commanded her voice. "Like it?"

"That ain't the one the woman said you'd made in the Reformatory?"

"No, maw!"

“Somebody give it you, I suppose. Nobody ever gives your maw nothin’.”

“They used to, maw, when you worked at houses and places,” placated Letty.

The woman raised herself higher, in expostulation.

“There you go! Just because I tried to better myself gettin’ office-cleanin’. Slave, slave, slave—that’s all I ever do! And my lumbago somethin’ fierce, Letty!” Her expostulation capitulated to a demand for sympathy. She lay back. “Well, I’ve just been figurin’ on takin’ a day or two off—maybe a whole week, Letty. I’ve got a little put by, and with that five dollars the Matron woman said she’d give you when you come out, we’ll get along.” She raised herself a little again. “She give you that all right, Letty?”

Letty’s eyes were frightened. Her mother’s eyes were imperative. She must say something.

“Why y-yes, maw.”

“What you lookin’ like that for, Letty?” Eyes, full now of a quick suspicion, dwelt on Letty, head to foot, foot to head. “Letty—you don’t mean to tell me—” The voice was more menacing in its flat tones than if it had risen to an hysterical shrillness. “Gawd, so that’s it? Goin’ the old road again, eh? Done up to the nines! Hat! An’ silk stockin’s! What you got there, behind your back? What you hidin’ on me?”

“Flowers,” said Letty, producing them. She pressed an eager, impulsive plea. “Look, maw, I brung these for you. Jonquils! Aren’t they grand—?” She choked. She had a queer idea that there were more than four jonquils there; that the room was full of them; that the sight of them made you dizzy, and the scent of them wouldn’t let you breathe.

“How much you got left out of that five?”

Letty’s voice projected the truth through an impalpable yellow fragrance: “I spent it all—all but five cents. I’m sorry, maw—”

“All but five cents! Five dollars! Do you know how much floor I got to scrub to make that? Down on my knees, everlastin’ly swillin’ and moppin’ and pushin’ furniture, and the lumbago in my back somethin’ cruel. And you with your hats, an’ silk stockin’s an’ flowers—”

Letty saw now how awful it was. She stood white and stricken. She should have remembered all the Matron had said. The jonquils seemed an insult to the room, and to her mother. She said quickly: “Not the flowers, maw. They were give to me!”

“Don’t lie out of it, Letty! Who’d give you flowers like that—straight out of a flower shop?”

She had to defend the truth.

"Bud!" said Letty, instantly aware of her mistake. That name seemed to petrify the woman. Then, suddenly, she caught it on her own lips, repeating it until the sound of it, by some alchemy of hatred and contempt, made it foul, and the echo of it a thing of lewdness. Letty cried: "Don't, maw! Please, maw, don't! I—he—I told him, honest I did, it was all over. Honest and truly, I did. I told him just what the Matron said I should tell him. Honest, maw!"

"An' took his flowers? Maybe I was born yesterday, Letty. And a hat to make you look pretty for him, and silk stockin's for your legs—you—you—" She advanced now, panting. "And me countin' on a little holiday, and my lumbago that fierce. A lot you care!" A sobbing frenzy racked her. "Get out, you! Get out—I mean it—I don't want the likes of you around here! I thought you'd learned your lesson. I thought you was goin' right. Get out, now—go on —"

A sense, almost of relief, in Letty mingled with a more dominant feeling of estrangement and unreality. This was her home. This was her mother. They'd been through things together. They'd faced things. They'd saved jointly to buy that strip of worn carpet. It had been a triumph when they brought home the stuffed comfort of that chair. Everything now looked alien and unfriendly. She saw, as she had never perceived it before, the workings of decay. Outside was Spring—all the marvel of budding and blossoming that spoke to the inarticulate in her. She turned to go; then stopped before the door, in abrupt dismay. Rain was still pouring down in a soft, gentle abandon. She temporised with words: "Maw, I'll go all right. I'll go. But I can't—just yet. It's rainin' hard. My new hat—can't you see it's just pourin', maw?" Wasn't it wicked of her to be going on about a hat at a time like this? She tried hard to see her wickedness. Instead, she could think only of the delicate green that crowned her with Spring. As if it were more important in this moment, than the crashing of her known world.

"Go on. I don't want you here!"

"Maw, please! Just lemme stay until the shower's over!"

"I said *now*, didn't I? Maybe you never heard me?"

She tried to see in her mother a woman harassed beyond control, to whom five dollars just now meant everything, whose loss of it embittered every word and look. Instead, she saw wanton cruelty thrusting her into the rain and its inevitable despoilment.

"Maybe—maybe you got an old umbrella, maw? I don't mind how old it is! I—I could send it back!"

"Where'd I get umbrellas to throw away on you? Go on! Don't stand there

plaguin' me!"

Letty glanced helplessly around. An old newspaper! Anything! Or, could she take the hat off, and run with it that way?

"Maw, just a minute, please! Don't push me! I'm goin' all right!"

The door was open. She was outside. From a sky hazy with driven grey, against a background of ragged blue, rain slanted to the earth. Letty, putting her hand above her head, tried vainly to shelter the hat. To endure the drip here was worse than to adventure into the steady descent of drops beyond; with a final desperation she stepped out.

A black concavity, moving from behind as she turned into the street, overtook her, descended upon her, covering her. A voice breathed passionate apologies in her ear! "Letty, you don't mind—just comin' under my umbrella—till the shower's over? Honest, Letty, I never meant even to speak to you! But I couldn't just keep away. I never meant to bother you—only, gee, I had this umbrella and that hat's so—well, gee, it looks so swell on you, Letty!"

She seized his arm, fiercely. She wanted to cry—that was silly! She wanted to laugh—that was silly, too! Lovely, lovely rain! Full of the sound and murmur of spring; full of the scent of earth and blossom. You couldn't help feeling things about it. It was cosy here under one umbrella. She wondered what the Matron would say if she saw them. Well, the Matron had given her no words to use in a case like this. Maybe if the Matron knew Bud like he was now, she wouldn't mind so much. Dimly, down the canyon of street—in the far distance, where the lines of grey, narrowing to the eye, closed in upon the indistinct traffic—a gleam of sunlight shot through the rain. You couldn't go on thinking of things you ought to remember; you had all you could do to keep your breath, with beauty there ahead. She held more tightly to Bud's arm. They said nothing. They walked without direction. They watched that distant sunlight through the rain. Letty hoped it would go on raining for a long time yet. It couldn't be so very wrong for two to walk through spring rain under one umbrella.

1929.

THE PAGAN

I

AT two o'clock on a hot afternoon the Curé climbed into his rig and drove down the street. He drove slowly, and with a sense of distaste in a mission that took him away at the very hour of his afternoon siesta. His mind protested, but his conscience pricked him into obedience. He was not a man to shirk duty.

All but he seemed asleep in the village. The whitewashed church slept in the sunshine; the hollyhocks in front of cottages nodded drowsily. "What a time to be dragged from one's cool rooms!" thought the priest, and then: "What a monotonous round is life! Births! Deaths! Marriages! Confessions—" He jerked himself up, and shared his penance with the mare by letting the whip fall lightly on the creature's back. The rig swung around the corner at a good clip, crossing the railroad by the rock cutting with a rattle of ancient wheels. For once the Curé failed to mutter his customary protest, "A very dangerous crossing! Most dangerous! Something should be done. I must speak of it!" But nothing was ever done, waiting perhaps for the protest to become something more than a mental attitude. Even the railway was asleep. Along its shining rails a heat haze quivered; the metals, narrowing into a single line, suggested an infinity that made him yawn. His head dropped forward on his breast.

The mare, with intelligent appreciation of her master's case, and lured perhaps by more succulent wayside herbage, turned off presently and, alternately grazing and ambling, drew the rig with the sleeping priest over a road that was little travelled, though it was not unknown either to mare or master. At a final turn, this road ended its ascent abruptly, then descended to rejoin the main road further along. It was, therefore, merely a jolting detour on the priest's journey, but the animal, having been the author of it, seemed determined to make the best of an evil purpose. Stopping, with apparent finality, before the uncouth doorway of the only habitation in this length of road, it turned its head and, pointing its ears expressively at the sleeping Curé, proceeded to whinny.

Two results were immediate. The priest started up from his sleep. A young girl appeared in the doorway. Both priest and girl seemed to be wooden figures —only the eyes were alive, yet both shared common emotions of embarrassment.

The girl spoke first:

"You'd better get on!"

There was no hint of impertinence or rudeness in her voice. It was a plain statement of fact. The Curé, but for his dignity, doubtless would have hazarded an explanation that his visit was without intent. Instead, he said quietly: "How is she to-day?"

"About the same, father."

The priest nodded. The woman of whom they spoke in these subdued tones had been the same for almost as long as memory of her served either of them.

Having completed the usual formula, the priest picked up reins and whip, then, in an idle way, let the whip-tassel tickle the sumach bushes rather than the mare's back. Up on this elevation the afternoon silence was peculiarly arresting: there was little drone of insects, as if the few untended flowers, perennials making a difficult fight for life, offered scant reward; no movement of wind to set the dead bushes alive, no song of birds—unless the whole silence were a fancy of the priest's, and the nearest sound was not the distant whirr of a mower felling long swaths of grass in an unseen meadow far below. He murmured, "She can't last for ever!"—as if settling that superstition. Austerity and compassion moved in his eyes, which seemed to draw comfort from the tranquil blue of the sky where it ran down like a sea to the surf of clouds on the horizon. He picked up the reins, decidedly. "I would go in again, but it is useless. She defies God, and the servant of God. When the time comes for her to go—" He crossed himself devoutly, but shrugged. "Well, I have warned her!" The girl in the doorway stood dumbly terrified, unable to attract his glance from the far horizons.

When the priest turned to nod good-bye, a woman, not the girl, stood framed in the unpainted oblong. The baked earth under her feet, as she stepped out into the glare of sunlight, gave up two puffs of dust uncannily like smoke. She must have trodden hard, as if the malevolence that showed in her eyes had penetrated her whole frame, but there was still no break in the silence. The priest lifted his hat in the presence of such immense age—or because action of some kind was imperative. She advanced, in her curiously silent way, almost to the hub of his wheels, and stood, arms on thin hips, regarding him.

Her voice, when it came, crackled like fire seizing on dry sticks. "So, I can't last for ever? Heh? Can't last for ever?" Her fingers moved in convulsive twitches; then, suddenly, she raised her hands above her head and shrilled: "Go 'way! Go 'way! I told you to keep away from here. I know you and your kind. You want me to die, so you can lick your lips over me, and get money to pray me out of the flames! Well, there's no one cares enough to pay for me—and it would take a lot. A lot—heh!" The Curé shivered. The sound of her humour was not like laughter at all. He lifted the reins, but remained, a morbid

fascination holding him. She shrilled: “I want none of your kind here, casting spells upon me! Wanting me to die! Get gone! Get gone, you—”

The torrent had broken loose at last. She showered upon him blasphemous imprecations of ascending bitterness and vigour. Horrified—though he had been waiting for this usual storm—he snatched the whip, and sent the startled animal plunging dangerously down the descent towards the main road. Laughter followed, shrill, crackling laughter, that would be distressing in a maniac, but that was lent additional horror by reason of sanity.

II

The old woman on the doorstep stood watching him go. Against the unpainted decrepitude of her house she seemed not only very alive, but colourful. Her dress was of some sombre stuff, but about her shoulders she wore a shawl of many hues, predominantly flame. Whether her cheeks caught something of this tone, or there was still hot blood to mount through hardening veins and arteries, the bronze of her pinched cheeks took on a glow that lent a certain roundness to the flesh. The village people did not call her less a pagan because she chose, in age, to wear the colours suitable for a young girl. “Blasphemous old pagan!” they would say, shaking their heads. “The devil must be in her to keep her alive!” The old woman was not unaware of this. But, as she turned away from this latest cursing of the man of God, there was no dramatic triumph in her face. Quickly as the colour had come, so it was drained. She put a hand to her forehead, and stumbled rather than walked to the door. And, suddenly, when she was scarcely in, the strength of her legs seemed to depart. She sank down in a heap on the sill. She did not call for help. The girl, her only aid and companion—a charity child with little imagination but a clear sense of duty—had retreated to the small kitchen at the rear. The woman would have sat here until the end rather than have called. Thrice she strove to rise, and flopped back with something of the ridiculous pathos of a wounded fowl. In the end, the girl heard her movements, and ran. Years of living with this woman had taught her repression. It had made her, perhaps, prematurely old, or shut youth so far within that it was with difficulty touched. Yet she had no unkindness to complain of, and imagination was kindly also in its meagre inspirations. Her face showed concern, but duty was paramount. She helped the woman back to bed.

“Is there not something I can get you?”

“No. Leave me. I shall be all right.”

The room was dim, with a settled, greenish gloom. Creepers had long since overgrown the shutters. Sunshine would have revealed too much. This partial

and indirect illumination was more discreet. The place was clean as brush and broom would make it, but incredibly bare, and the hour of dissolution was at hand even for the remaining relics. The old woman lay on the bed now, and regarded the room. Her eyes were singularly bright and active.

She was going to die. The prophecy of that was in her face, and, if one might judge by her eyes, had penetrated to the seat of reason. The eyes having finished their brief work, the mouth became bitter and sinister. In this room she had been born; the messenger of death would respect closed doors and shuttered windows no more than the harbinger of life. Less, for it was an angel of greater mystery, of more perfect subtlety. Between the two were twenty years of bliss, and how many of bitterness? Sixty? Seventy? She doubtless could not tell. Years had become unified—days strung like dull, imitation pearls on an incredibly tough and lasting string. A little, restless wind outside swept greenish waves of light across the room, like pale green ghosts. Its voice was very small, too faint to drown the overtones of insects, the murmuring of late afternoon life—very busy, very assured life.

The woman stirred, then called:

"Sophie!"

"Madame?"

Sophie always answered that way, without cause. There were no rings on the woman's left hand, no symbol of ceremony. The Church had stepped in there. Religion had robbed her; she made the accusation only within herself. That was at twenty. People said she would get over that soon. She was a good girl. A devout girl. Time would cure. Time would restore. A proper man, with faith that could be blessed, would come in time. Sixty years ago? Seventy? People said a deal more than their prayers!

"Madame called?"

"No. Yes. Did I? I wish nothing."

"A good cup of tea?"

"Nothing!"

The girl hesitated. "Maybe—a doctor—?"

"To help me die? But, yes—I am about to die, Sophie. Do not be afraid. I am not afraid. Why should anyone be afraid? It is natural! I am not afraid of it."

The girl shivered. "Of it?—perhaps no! But—"

"Well?"

"There is what comes after."

"What?"

"Madame—knows!"

"Nobody knows!"

The girl abandoned the words that were on her lips, and went out. The greenish light in the room behind her had deepened, and in one corner, high up, a tongue of flame from the advancing colour of the sunset flickered against a beam. The woman lay and watched it.

III

The colour remained on the ceiling, and grew. She watched it with an intense preoccupation. When it began to die, she lay shivering. The lazy day had spent itself; night was coming on. It brought a sense of movement in nature, a stir, a liveliness that, in this place and in this room, was intensely eerie. An insect, in the wood at the head of the bed, bored monotonously, with a ticking sound, like a slightly irregular clock. Furtive rodents moved in unseen passages, and the stilled piping of birds broke out in an agitation that suggested the presence of some feline menace. Hobgoblin shades played tricks in the corners. The girl, accustomed to obedience, brought to the room neither light nor the tranquillising presence of youth.

"*Nobody knows, Sophie!*"

Very faintly, the voice moved up from the bed; it seemed to have to press some intangible yet certain weight aside before it could make itself heard. There were no echoes to repeat it. And Sophie was not there to hear. In the kitchen, on the farther side of the house, she was clinking dishes and pots, making sounds that did not belong at all to this room. Had she heard, the girl would not have recognised the voice. It seemed to have been caught in the universal movement toward dissolution. Sixty?—seventy?—years of bitterness must be yielding to it. Uncertainty replaced defiance. There was a quiver in the voice, midway between irritation and despairing question. There was a tremor in the arms, uplifted as if to ward off something that, to the vision, did not exist.

"Sophie!"

Shriller now, the voice, beating vainly against the solitary darkness. After that, the woman lay a long time. Sometimes a hand went up, either to press away a wisp of hair, or to wave aside those non-existent entities in the room.

In the end, the woman got out of bed. It was an act organised and executed with the utmost difficulty. Her feet, still in slippers that she had not permitted the girl to remove, slid across the floor with a soft, dragging sound. She found a lamp and matches. Electricity had not come here. Bitterness defeats progress. The slow flame became a pillar of lurid smoke before her hand could adjust the

chimney. In the woman's face now was something both of terror and stealth. The shushing sound of her footsteps worked across another area of floor, brought up at a cupboard, then returned to the light. The woman opened a small book she had procured. It was a book of scattered verses, with appropriate religious comment. Her lips twitched uncertainly over the words she found: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them*—" She lifted her head, and, through the surface terror of her face, lines of grim humour broke. She flung the volume from her to the floor. For minutes her frame was convulsed with passion. Then, with an agony of effort, she retrieved the book. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she opened it again. There was in it a fern frond, dried through many years. She touched it, and it became a little green dust in her hand.

The woman sobbed.

At sound of it one might have supposed that all the elements of dissolution had been gathered, pent up, and then let loose.

"Sophie!"

This call was wrenched from her, but, unlike her body, it had no reserve of strength to support it. She got up and began a diligent progress, glancing behind her as if some terror pursued. An oblong of light beckoned her. She wanted light. The journey was immense. She stood in the outer doorway at last. Across the valley, a flood of light poured from a notch in the hills. Day was not yet dead. Sophie was out there. She was busy with other people. A farm wagon, tricked out with seats—a young father—a mother, with tired but not unhappy eyes—three children. Pretty mites, fluffed out for a jaunt to the village. They had got out and were running around; one alone of them all, seeing the old woman in the doorway, ran to her without strangeness, offering a blue cornflower. The woman took it. To bend down was agony; to straighten was worse. Her hand held the flower as carefully as if she were afraid for it. "But yes," Sophie was saying, "you should have followed the main road. Just you go down here, then to the right across the railroad by the cutting, and you cannot miss it—"

The woman remained in the doorway. She seemed chained there, her limbs stiff and unyielding, her eyes keen and watchful.

The wagon moved over the edge of the hill, out of sight. The girl turned and saw the woman, hurrying to her eagerly.

"You are—better?"

Her voice faltered at the end. The woman was looking at the cornflower as if it held hypnotic power. Her face was queer, her pose wooden. She seemed held together by some invincible willpower, of which she might at any

moment be bereft. One finger moved to the cornflower.

"You touch it, Sophie," she said, "see?—and it—it is just dust."

Physically, she was unsteady now. The girl caught her. She was without power to protest. She was a child again. She was being led to bed, through darkness to a lurid light beyond.

"The lamp!" cried Sophie. Smoke was issuing from a blackened chimney; the room was full of an acrid, oily odour. She left the woman, and ran. The lamp was subdued; its light burned tranquilly again, a dull red glow behind the fogged, blackened glass. Sophie turned from this security. The room was tranquil, too. No dragging movement of a tired old woman. No agitated breathing. No sign or sound of life. The woman was on the ground. Sophie, with a cry, knelt beside her. The woman's eyes opened.

"Sophie—the priest! Fetch the priest! Be quick! He must absolve me!"

The girl helped the suppliant into bed. The woman lay there, an appealing light in her eyes the thing most alive in her. Sophie stared at her, then ran on her mission. She might have reflected on the change, have speculated on the power, the finality, of childhood and its impressions, had she been other than a girl with a high sense of duty and no imagination. Yet she knew agony and terror when she saw them, and she ran, her stout, black-cottoned limbs impelled by urgency, her wisp of torn apron flying in the breeze created by her speed.

IV

The road curved dustily around a clump of maples, uplifted above sumach already prematurely reddening, then plunged into a sea of pines. The girl's feet raised quick clouds of dust as they sped. The evening stillness was cut through by the familiar whistle of an engine on the railroad below; the thunder that monotoned through the pines might have told her it was the heavy evening freight, but she was conscious only of the need of haste and a lamentable shortness of breath. She panted valiantly on. Tall towers lifted themselves uglily above a cleared trail, carrying high-power transmission wires, but no telephone lines came this way. She must reach the main road. There would be traffic there. Traffic meant people, and people meant help in carrying word to the Curé. The way was considerable for one in such haste. Familiar though it was, it seemed unusually and inappropriately long in its levels, and heel-catching in its descents. There would be two more of each, then a final turn leading to the main road, sharp downhill through the railway cutting.

A spiral of smoke for the first time drew her attention. It was moving up blackly, smuttily, in a more or less regular pillar, from the foliage below. There

was also, now that she listened, the panting of a creature much larger in its organs than she. The freight train had stopped. She had only one fear: that its drab length might be stretched clear across, and that it might delay her. She rounded the last turn. The way was not blocked. The engine and tender, with some cars, had drawn ahead, to leave a narrow gap. For this gap she dashed thankfully, then halted. There were people—quite a crowd—just beyond. At first they seemed concerned with the antics of a horse that was cutting capers over in the ditch beyond. Immediately afterwards, Sophie saw a smashed farm wagon, canted over. And only then she became aware of people bending over still figures in the road.

Someone, without noting her particularly, said: “For pity’s sake, why doesn’t the Curé come? They telephoned him at once—he should be here now!”

Sophie knew only impatience. She was on a mission of her own, and one of the first importance. This might delay the priest. The old woman might die without him. Inimically, she approached the recumbent figures, to whom physical ministrations were in course, but for whose extremity spiritual ministrations were urgently sought. Perception awoke. Couched on a man’s outspread coat was a child, whose fluffed-out clothes, intended for holiday-making, were now bedraggled and bloody. Out of a little face peculiarly passive two great eyes looked up at Sophie. The child’s hand clutched tightly a treasured bunch of faded cornflowers.

Sophie screamed.

A man nearby reached out and caught her arm, recognising her. Had she any stimulants up at the house? She nodded. She climbed dutifully into a Ford car nearby, and they ground up the slope. The house was queer and uneven, but not unbeautiful, in the clustering purple shadows, grape-colour; and the ancient wood had something of the bloom of grapes. She ran indoors, fetched stimulants, and gave them to the man, admonishing him to wait. She had her wits about her now. Pushing open the door of the old woman’s room, she had to adjust her sight to the uncertain glow of the smoky lamp. The woman opened her eyes. Sophie, with twin urgencies in her soul, began to speak. Her words came in a torrent, but, as usual, they were clear.

Fear that the woman might keep her was in Sophie’s face. But in two minutes she was outside again, and accompanying the driver on his mission of mercy. The car wrung echoes from the depths of the pine forest; behind them, as they swung out of sight, the grape-bloom on the ancient wood turned darker, and the trees were stark against the steel-blue sky of night.

Against this gathering darkness only a smoke-blackened lamp was left to fight. The woman, however, had no concern with imponderable changes in other places than where she lay. Her world was narrowing. It had resolved itself into a death-like chamber, in which the only evidences of life were in herself and the lamp. Even the unseen passages brought no sound of furtive rodents, as before, or else the narrowing process had brought limitation of hearing, too. Then, gradually, this very retreat of physical sensibility wrought a curious release. The vision of her spirit broadened. As a crystal gazer concentrates on the sphere, so, without intent, with seeming inevitability, the woman's eyes were fixed on the smoky, insufficient lamp. Perhaps that is why she saw visions, and spoke of them in jerking, breathless incoherencies, not, however, to be denied.

"*Just dust, Sophie!—when you touch it. I tell you nobody knows—nobody! Who's that at the door? Don't let him in! I'll curse him if he sets foot . . . Hasn't he come yet, Sophie? Hasn't he come yet?*" No answer, save the slight hiss of the flame leaping to meet the downward-trailing wings of a moth, lured through the creeper-grown shutters. "Sophie!" There was a little shrillness, as of fear, in that. "*She's—gone! That child with the cornflowers; she's gone there—see, she's in that corner! . . . Just dust—like so much blue powder! . . . Maman, Maman, he liked my new hat so much! He said the cornflowers were so pretty! Don't touch them, Maman! Don't touch them, please! They're all I have of him! . . . That child, Sophie—don't let that engine touch her! . . . Sophie, she's not dying? You didn't say she was dying? Quick, you fools!*"

She was sitting up now, bolt upright, rigid, listening. The scream of an engine tore through the valley, thrusting itself clamorously, plaintively, upon her narrowing world. The train at the crossing was moving on. But, for the woman, it was bearing down upon a farm wagon tricked out with seats for a family holiday-making. The tragedy, from Sophie's telling, ran in quick cycles through her brain. Her feet were on the floor; the vastness of the room frightened her. If she ran, she might overtake the retreating door. She couldn't run. You couldn't attack infinity with limited and quickly failing powers. Her jaw set firmly. She'd conquered here before. The door she sought opened to the darkness of an empty house beyond. . . . What was she doing there? She dared not step into that reeling darkness. One foot essayed it, and drew back. Perhaps there was in it some sense of that outer darkness into which the wicked, unshriven, must be cast! Old things had claimed her, and an awful immediacy of fear.

"Sophie! Sophie! The priest! He must come! He must absolve me!"

Her head lifted. There was a sound of wheels outside. Physical keenness seemed to have returned. She knew that sound. She'd listened often to it. It

was the priest's rig. He was in time! Tears stood in her eyes; the dissolution of the pagan was complete. Veneer of the years had been stripped from her. She was a soul trained from a child in doctrine, and, in the end, the cycle had swung around. She had strength given to go and meet him. She cast herself on the sea of darkness with the impulsiveness of Peter on Galilee, but her faith did not fail. She reached the open doorway, and the scents of the night, of resinous pine woods, of peaty grass, of dust, of a thousand indeterminable essences of the country, rewarded her. She put her hand to her head even to smooth her hair, woman fashion, for the coming of the priest. Her nostrils were sensible now of an odour of flower-decay. An agony of hesitation overcame her. She cried aloud: "Sophie! Sophie! The priest!" Her breath failed, and her courage; against both she fought through to speech again: "The accident, Sophie—the engine—the little child—tell him to go! Tell him not to stop—not to waste a minute! You understand? Not a minute! . . . Where are you, Sophie?"

Her hands moved up, as if to beat away the choking, unanswering darkness. The scents of the night were blotted out. She stood there, conscious only of an urgency born of green moisture in her palm, and the eloquent pungency of a crushed cornflower.

VI

The Curé's rig wheeled up the road from the crossing for the second time that day.

"A marvellous escape!" the priest was saying to Sophie. "I was glad they called me, but people lose their heads in a crisis. By the grace of God, they will all live to thank Him!" He urged the mare on, not too gently, for the beast, who had once taken him this way to-day in some obstinate choice of roads, rebelled at an enforced journey. "In the good providence of God," said the Curé, "I am here that much more quickly to shrive a soul I had thought, in my little faith, beyond my power, or any power, to touch."

The horse's head now stood out against the night sky, a sky steely-blue and full of stars, so that, though there was no moon, the outlines of earthly things were visible. The haunches moved up, muscles straining for the final tug of the ascent. The rig drew to a stop. Sophie jumped lightly down. The priest, with one foot on the carriage step, was halted.

Something, that seemed all white face and hands, staggered from the doorway. The hands made motions like those employed in the shooing away of impertinent fowls.

Words seemed denied the woman. Then they came:

"Don't stop! Don't stop, I tell you! Drive on!"

The priest's face alternated between surprise, dismay, and something more stern. Determinedly, this time, he stepped to the ground. She put her hand to her forehead, as if surprised that they could not understand, and that the girl, Sophie, should stand so dumbly by. The woman pointed urgently down the road towards the railway—the direction from which she could not have known they came. It was useless. The priest still stood adamant, as though time were in no degree precious. The tips of her thin fingers explored the cavities of her eyes, as if unsure they looked upon so obstinate a world. Her lips mouthed ineffective incoherencies.

She made a last effort, breaking through to speech—

"Get gone!" she shrilled. "Get gone where you're wanted!" The far echoes of an engine whistle crept to them. The anger of immense age, when it is brooked, distorted her face, and lent her strength. "Get gone!" she cried again, and then the torrent came: "Get gone, you—"

The girl, Sophie, covered her ears. Such imprecations to a man of God! The priest shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and, without vain use of words, climbed into his rig again. If this was horrible before, in the warmth and light of day, it was doubly awful in this lonely spot at night. To stay was to provoke fresh ebullitions of evil. Again—as earlier to-day—horrified, he snatched the whip and laid it none too lightly across the mare's back, the rig swerved dangerously in the small space, and the startled animal drew her master from the sound of habitual blasphemies. At the turn, the priest drew rein uneasily, listening fearfully for the aftermath of shrill, crackling laughter, more horrible than a maniac's. None came. He could not know of the triumphant yet hopeless light in the woman's eyes, and that there was no laughter there. The stillness was intensified only by the croaking of frogs far down in the swamp. If he fancied he heard a woman's repressed scream, he thought nothing of it, for he went on, hastily enough, to the less lonely flatlands where the village lay, unwitting that, for the second time that day, Sophie's habitual phlegm had given way—once, unnecessarily, at sight of a child not badly hurt, and now, with more adequate reason, in the unmistakeable presence of death. Otherwise, the village might earlier have had the news that set heads shaking and lips saying, "Ah, the old pagan! Died as she lived, with a curse for the man of God on her lips!" So they would sit, considering the thing, with the strength of native tobacco adding to the pleasure of prophecy fulfilled, and a gratifying sense of divine confirmation for human perspicacity.

1928.

III

"It is an old story yet ever
remains new."

MARIE-LOUISE

I

IT was on a Saturday afternoon that I ran into Lawrence Ashcroft on the street. He was hurrying along with that slightly bookish stoop to his shoulders that would be more pronounced if we, who were his intimates, had left him still more to his reading and writing, instead of insisting on occasional periods of recreation away from the city and his customary circles. For the holiday before last I had been responsible, a glorious two months in northern Quebec; now I remembered, with a slight inward uneasiness but an outward smile, that he must have been back some time from his European honeymoon. "The art gallery!" he replied, rather crisply, I thought, in answer to my question as to his immediate destination. "Does Marie-Louise take kindly to the artistic life?" I asked him. I could have bitten my tongue out after it was said. His eyes shot to mine. He replied, quickly enough, parrying it with a smile: "One cannot expect everything! I take her to all the exhibitions!"

A great desire came upon me to see again the little rose-cheeked Marie-Louise of our glorious Laurentian days. I hinted something of the kind. Perhaps he thought his non-committal silence would put me off, but it only increased my obstinacy, and I fell into step beside him, wittingly blind to any decencies involved. His slight stoop seemed to increase, as if I had, by my company, put an added burden on his shoulders. As we approached the broad steps of the gallery, he swung upon me. "Look here," he said, "you think I'm meeting Marie-Louise. I'm not! It's just—a friend. I'm sorry old chap, but—"

He smiled again in dismissal. In a moment I should have left him, but suddenly the smile on his face died and suffered a curious resurrection. This latter was not for me. I turned instinctively. A slim, autumn creature came gaily up; there was a little stirring of breeze behind her that seemed to carry her lightly to us; I thought of a scarlet leaf dancing in autumn wind and

sunshine.

“Both of you!” she greeted us, offering a hand to each, but letting mine drop first.

“Mrs. Holling!” I cried, with due deference to the bridal state of one who was Patricia Ward.

“Pat to my friends, please,” she chided. “Come along, Lorry. I’m just famished to see some pictures with you!”

Ashcroft hesitated, his eyes on me with an evasion natural, perhaps, in a newly married man about to escort through the gallery a newly married woman, and embarrassed by the unexpected presence of a mutual friend who knew how, having been as good as engaged, they had gone their respective ways and married elsewhere.

“You’ll come with us, of course?” suggested Ashcroft briefly, explaining to Patricia that I had thought of accompanying him.

“Of course!” she agreed, readily enough, but her eyes shot fire that her pretty lids were not quick enough to cover. With an impulsive movement she put a hand on Ashcroft’s arm; it was a possessive gesture. Remembering Marie-Louise, I felt suddenly chill. The high interior of the gallery was like a mausoleum after the brilliant sunshine of the street.

II

It was not my purpose to force my society upon them, even if my obstinacy had brought me this far. To do so I felt would be a disservice to our little Marie-Louise. I became ostensibly interested in a group of paintings, and left them to their own devices. The real fact was that my mental chaos cast a blur over the pictures, and only gradually did they come into focus. And there again I must amend my statement, for it was one small thing in oils that had, almost subconsciously, attracted me, and that now held me to the exclusion of all others. “Spring in the Laurentians”, it was called, though I did not need the catalogue to tell me that. A simple enough composition: a French-Canadian house of the better sort, a thing of honest stone and broad mortar, of casements below and dormer-windows above, unspoiled by any of the modern gewgaws that a more flimsy, ornate, and superficial taste has introduced. Set on a slight rise, the land sloped away from it in pleasant convolutions of brown earth, with snow in white patches still, and, working through it all, a faint, ethereal green, so elusive yet so pervasive one caught one’s breath. This spring patchwork melted into soft haze at the foot of the low, encircling hills that formed the background. In the foreground, the April sun had stirred the little farmyard into activity: some hardy fowls scratched in the uncovered mud and straw; a few

ducks waddled toward a muddy-coloured stream that ran in a depression to the right, a tiny stream, but so grown big with spring that it flooded the roots and lower trunks of a thin growth of trees on its banks—young poplars and one or two sugar maples, to catch whose sap cans were hung. As yet the branches were bare, but some cloudy promise hung over and about them, and, as one looked, faint life seemed to stir, and one felt again that sense of an all-pervasive green.

I knew at once it was Brynner's; nobody but Brynner could have done the subtle thing, and I remembered he was to have gone up the week-end after we left. For this was the house of Jean Choquette, and one required little imagination to fancy that the figure, barely suggested in the doorway, was that of Marie-Louise herself. It induced in me a curious sensation, not wholly painful; I cared to see no other painting than this; I sat down on the leather-covered couch opposite and remained, drinking it in . . . living again those holidays at St. Sauveur in the hills—those winter days, with long woodsy tramps while the surface remained unbroken save by our snow-shoes, and then the sudden break-up of spring—the real ecstasy of seeing the first brown earth where a wheel of old Jean's wagon rutted through; of hearing the gurgle of running water under the thinning ice of the stream, the cawing promise of a crow high up in the April sky; of watching the comradeship of my friend Ashcroft and little Marie-Louise, caught in the toils of spring themselves, their love affair as delicate and subtle as that pervasive green of Brynner's picture. Mixed with it was a fear, on my part, of heartbreak for Marie-Louise, if this should pass and come to nothing, forgetting that a man, in a case like Lorry's, may be caught on the rebound, and held at least so long as spring is in the air. Perhaps I was a fool not to think further, not to consider the greater heartbreak that might follow any more permanent attachment.

His poetry was mixed up in it, too. You may have read "Spring Hillsides," by Lawrence Ashcroft. It was there he wrote the greater part of it—to me the finest thing he has done, for it smells of the soil, and touches the humanities, though he regards it more lightly. He used to read the stuff to Marie-Louise, whose English, for she was convent-bred for several formative years, is good.

Sitting there, I could picture the interior: the little "front parlour" especially opened for us; the window wide to admit the sweet spring air; Ashcroft sunk back in a deep horsehair-upholstered chair; Marie-Louise curled up like a happy kitten on an ancient sofa; and Ashcroft reading:

> "The crooked road that runs beside the barn
> Is putting on a garb of ragged brown—"

at which Marie-Louise would sigh happily, shaking her head that he should

think of that which she had seen each year when spring came around; or again:

> “My window, growing weary of the white
> Of Winter’s onslaughts, now rejoices in
> The slow soft pulse of Spring that beats itself
> Against the panes in cloudy tints of green—”

when she would cry, her voice breaking a little, and her eyes eager almost to tears: “Oh, m’sieu! Oh, m’sieu!”

I thought then: “She will do! She understands!”—forgetting, of course, how Ashcroft had always said: “When I want real criticism I have to go to Pat for it. She’s not just gush and emotion; there’s a lot of solid intellect and judgment to anchor it!” But it was spring then at the home of Marie-Louise, at St. Sauveur in the hills. And he seemed well satisfied that she should cry, in that eager, broken way of hers: “Oh, m’sieu! Oh, m’sieu!”

III

Often, during the winter that followed my autumn meeting with Lawrence Ashcroft and Patricia Holling at the art gallery, I thought of how they came upon me as I still sat there engrossed in Brynner’s picture.

“There’s a good thing!” cried Pat, with her quick little way of forming assured opinions.

“Yes,” agreed Lorry, gravely. “It’s good!” His eyes, as if they could not help themselves, flashed to mine. How can I express the thing I saw in them? The most precious things of life are often the most elusive; to put finger on them is to let them slip. What was it? I do not know. Something as haunting as that cloudy spring of which he wrote; more elusive, for Brynner managed to catch that with his brush. It was gone, like a shimmering bubble touched by the eager finger of a child, for I tried almost with anguish to seize it, as if indeed I might hand it to Marie-Louise—a shred of happiness, perhaps—but, as I reached, it disappeared.

“Better come along with us to tea!” Lorry said, and, like a fool, I went. Marie-Louise, tremblingly happy over putting her wedding tea-service and china of undreamt-of daintiness to use, and childishly clumsy at her task, poured for us and served us. She was so glad, so glad to have Madame Holling. Also to have me, “comrade of happy, happy days,” she whispered in my ear, proud of the felicity of her English phrase! Patricia sat there, deep in a corner of the Chesterfield, where the lamp glow could burnish her red-gold hair to advantage, accepting the girl’s ministrations with sweet and dainty graciousness, her fingers like delicately painted ivory against the honest red

still showing on those of Marie-Louise from her days of labour on the farm. Occasionally, at some trifling *gaucherie* of the girl's, she would smile quickly at Lorry, her head a little on one side, as if to say, "But how quaint, my dear!" Ashcroft would fidget, and I found myself hating the crinkles about Pat's keenly observant eyes.

Afterward, while the two were busy over the reviews of a new book, I got Marie-Louise aside, asking how she liked married life. Her eyes were like stars; tears welled up. "You will think me so silly," she said, "but that is how it is with me—and him! He is so wonderful to me. One cannot speak of it." And then she shook the tears brightly from her. "Oh, I can see how greatly he must have cared when there were—others—such as she. Others who are not—" She laughed gently. "But there, he will not have me say that I am, after all—just ordinary!"

No, I could understand that he would not. There are thoughts that will not bear expression in words.

"Besides," agreed Marie-Louise, her big eyes gravely upon me, "it would be very terrible—would it not—to be—just ordinary—to one's beloved?"

IV

Not once during that first winter of her married life did Marie-Louise express in words any uneasiness or mistrust of her man. And I doubt if any was in her simple heart. She had exalted him to a pinnacle, and what he did up there, being right in his eyes, was right in hers. In some ways this was the very worst attitude she could have taken. Especially did her mention of his work irritate him, I could see. She had a way, when guests were in, for instance, of speaking with a certain awed breathlessness about it. Anything he wrote was wonderful to her. And Ashcroft, more than at her incompetence of judgment, her lack of the finer discrimination in literary matters, was annoyed at such candour in circles accustomed to pose a little about the things they created. When I say guests, I mean the occasional enlargements of his literary circle; ordinarily it was to Patricia Holling that he turned. You would think, sometimes, that it was her house, not Marie-Louise's, the cool way she had of making herself at home. Holling himself had turned out no good at all. We heard of him in Europe—ostensibly on a business trip, but word drifted back of some entanglement in Paris. In justice to Ashcroft, it was I who, long before he had any inkling, I believe, became aware of the subtle, desperate game Pat was playing for happiness. She was intensely modern, of course, and superior to old-fashioned ideas of marriage. Old Lorry and she both had made a ghastly mess of the business, and the sensible thing was to recognise it and retrieve the

future. I wasn't supposed to hear that. She chose an unfortunate time to be confidential with a woman friend; she caught my eye as I passed, saw I had heard, and flashed a quick defiance at me.

We met at tea the next Saturday, at Ashcroft's. He had just received advance copies from his publisher of a new edition of his "Collected Poems," and demanded the communion of a fellow-artist in celebration. I can imagine the tiger gleam in Pat's eyes when I was announced that afternoon! I left them, however, to their rapt consideration of the new volume. Marie-Louise was coming from the kitchen, after some instructions to the maid—always an embarrassment to one who had been accustomed to all menial work—and I intercepted her in the hall. She drew me over to a corner where, through leaded panes, the sunshine of late afternoon was touching a plain black vase, from whose dark mouth a bundle of pussy-willows lifted themselves. "This morning," she informed me, "the baker's boy brought them! He and I have such great talks! He, also, is from the country!" She was wearing a simple black dress; the sleeve fell back, displaying a white arm, as she reached up to stroke the grey, silky things. I thought: "She too is Spring in a black vase!" . . . She said: "You will hardly believe it, but I cried over them. Yes, like a great big baby, I cried!" Her eyes were brimming now, but with ecstasy. "Such a secret to tell you!" she confided. "Oh, my dear friend, how could I do without springtime in the country? But my dearest promised me, all winter he has promised me we should go—as soon as spring breaks, and the sap is running, and the stream is waking, and the silly fowls are cackling their heads off! It is to be our second honeymoon!" She broke off. "Oh dear! The tea has gone in, and I am not there! Come along!"

We entered the living room, where a cheerful fire burned, and soft lights were agleam against the orange glow of the window. Patricia Holling, regal and composed in a rather audacious gown of jade green, was calmly pouring tea from Marie-Louise's wedding silver tea-pot into Marie-Louise's best wedding china! Through much travail Marie-Louise had learned to perform this office with distinction; she was immensely proud of it. Ashcroft knew that; had himself praised her. It was a little thing, perhaps, but I heard Marie-Louise catch her breath, to see the girl there pouring tea as if she were the mistress. "Lorry was famished," Pat explained, coolly, "so we went ahead. How do you take yours, Mrs. Ashcroft?" Marie-Louise crimsoned and stumbled over words. I don't believe she knew how she took her tea. It was always her delight to serve others; her own cup she filled mechanically, if at all. "Mrs. Holling spoke to you!" said Ashcroft. "Cream and two lumps, isn't it?" She nodded quickly. If he had said four lumps and no cream she would have known no difference. Irritation showed in his eyes that his wife should appear

so stupid before his guests; I rose and transferred the cup from Patricia to Marie-Louise, drawing a small console-table near enough to her elbow to set the thing. Her hands were beyond the power of holding it, I felt.

You know how a little thing like that can create a most fearful abyss of silence, and how one is apt to topple unwise words into it.

"I was admiring the pussy-willows in the hall," I began. "By Jove, they make you feel the winter's broken at last! I'd like to be going up with you to the old spot, Lorry!"

Pat's eyes flashed up, to me and then to him.

"Going where?"

"St. Sauveur," said Ashcroft shortly. "Marie-Louise's home. She hasn't been home, you know, since we were married!"

Patricia nibbled at her toast.

"When did you say?"

"April!" nodded Marie-Louise eagerly, childishly snatched from her depths by this turn of conversation, and the joy of anticipation. "It is so lovely a month at home!"

"April?" Pat turned to Ashcroft, brows puckered. "Oh, Lorry! How could you plan that—when you know my recitals are to be then?"

"But I didn't know they were coming off that soon!"

"Well—they are!" She bit decisively into her toast. I knew intuitively that she had decided on the dates definitely at that moment. Marie-Louise looked small and frightened, forgetting to eat or drink, not understanding the subtleties of polite composure. Ashcroft did not look up from his cup. "We'll have to see about it," he said, non-committally, but I heard the quick intake of Marie-Louise's breath.

The anger that blazed in me found vent when Marie-Louise accompanied the visitor to get her wraps. I suppose I spoke more harshly than I had business to, or than was wise. Ashcroft, as if fearing we might be overheard, drew me into the music-room adjoining. He listened silently; somewhere a telephone was ringing, and I wondered if it was to that, rather than to me, he was giving attention. But, when I stopped, he swung upon me. "If it was any one but you, old chap, I'd call you a dashed meddler. You don't understand—about Pat. She's vital to my work!" He paced up and down, twice. "I've got to have that sympathetic and yet critical understanding. You can't just understand, of course!" I tried to stop him then, for a mirror behind him, which he could not see, showed me the door in the hall, and Marie-Louise approaching. He waved aside my words. "With Marie-Louise it's awful—awful! Everything I do is good—as if I were a god creating—she doesn't understand the first thing, the

first thing, in a critical sense. I tell you, Pat is vital to me!”

It was then he saw for himself what the mirror had betrayed to me: Marie-Louise trying now to escape from the doorway.

He called out: “What is it?”

“The telephone—for you!”

How she managed the words I do not know, nor where, for the moment, she disappeared to.

V

Patricia was in the living room, her outer wraps on, waiting. I had no desire for conversation, and halted at the entrance from the music-room. Ashcroft’s footfall sounded. He entered by the other door. She went swiftly to him.

“Lorry, you haven’t promised?”

“What?”

“About April!”

He stood for a moment, stroking his face thoughtfully. She drew nearer.

“Lorry—don’t you care—enough for me—to do this much for me?”

When he answered, he said: “The kid would be so disappointed. She’s such a child that way.”

Pat drew her furs impatiently about her. She moved toward the table where the new edition of his poems lay, and picked it up. She looked at him in her quick little way.

“Do you think it’s fair, Lorry? When we have our work to think about? I’ve tried to give you the best I had!”

He took the thin volume from her, fingering it. Eavesdropper though I was, I held to my place. The telephone rang again. Marie-Louise called him. He set the book down, decisively.

“You’re right, Pat!” he said. “I’ll have to manage it some way!” He excused himself. She lifted the volume thoughtfully; her face being toward me, and in the glow from the shaded light, I could see the nervous twitching of her lips. Her victory seemed bitter to her.

“Damn his work!” she flared, and threw the book from her to the floor.

Ashcroft, returning, said from the doorway: “Meriden calling. You remember Meriden, chap who works in oils in the Japanese style? I’m going down to his hotel, and I’ll drop you anywhere you say.” She glanced quickly at the book on the floor, which he could not see, hesitated, caught her wraps about her, and went out with him. That was Ashcroft all over, forgetting any

duty as host he held toward even a friend such as I, when something concerning art was afoot.

I was about to go and get my own things on, when I saw Marie-Louise slip into the room. She halted, then ran forward with a little cry, and picked up the fallen volume, smoothing, with infinite care, one page which had turned under. She kissed the thin volume, caught it to her breast almost crooningly, as if it were a child and hurt at this treatment. I coughed then, embarrassedly. She glanced up and saw me. There was a quite peculiar calmness about the way she said: "I do not understand—no, not as she! But I love—I love every word, every comma, because it is his!" She sprang up, and came to me swiftly. "You must not tell him what she did! To him, you understand, she is—how is it you say that which I am not?—vital?"

The broken sound of that last word tore at me. I think I looked away from the tragedy of her young face. I know that when I turned again, she had gone. The thin volume of Ashcroft's poems, a new edition but containing much of his old work, lay in its place on the table. I went and picked it up. It opened, naturally, at the place where the page had been crushed by the fall. A single wet blot had fallen upon the page, spreading to cover, in part, two lines. And these were the lines upon which the sorrow of Marie-Louise had fallen:

"The crooked road that runs beside the barn
Is putting on a garb of ragged brown—"

VI

Marie-Louise made no complaint at all. Her manner to him did not change, unless indeed it was in a refinement of her watchfulness for his comfort, and a quietness above the ordinary. Ashcroft himself was busy about a new creative idea that inspired him enormously, and he suspected nothing, for he has since confessed as much to me, as he has told me quite frankly the part of his story to which I now must come. The utter tragedy in his eyes as he said, "Old man, it makes me think of some poor little animal that, being hurt, licks the hand of its owner, then crawls away to suffer in solitude!" prevented me from amending his statement to do justice to a certain high pride that was also Marie-Louise's. He did not notice that the black vase in the corner no longer held the slim, grey-tipped pussy-willows in its mouth. But her bedroom window gave upon a back area fringed with poplars; and their pollarded branches, that she could not put away, must have mocked her daily with their cloudy green. He was lost in his creation. He would work away at it, and, three afternoons or more a week, Pat would come, and they would go over what he had done. Between times he often telephoned her. Sometimes they would vary

it by meeting down town over the luncheon table.

Holling had been back from Europe, and raised some sort of a scene; I don't know the details, but they were useful to Patricia in dealing with a man like Lorry, who was not to be browbeaten by a wastrel, and who scorned tea-table gossip. Holling did something else before returning to his Parisian widow —for so we understood her to be. He made it clear to Pat that he wanted a divorce, and quickly. You may imagine the triumph of that for her, the zest it gave to her game with Lorry. And he, poor dupe, was too full of his creative fire, and too thrilled by her unstinted but careful and clever criticism, to understand what really she was after; if indeed he had any suspicions, he deliberately pushed them from him. Patricia was vital to him—to his art! I believe he was too engrossed to notice the harassed look that began to grow upon Patricia Holling. Partly, of course, it was the consummating of plans for her recitals, the first of which, now that March had blown itself out, was due in less than a week. "Pat," he would say, realising at least this much, "I can never forget what you're doing for me, when you're so confoundedly busy yourself!" "You can do one thing!" she told him. "Bring me back here after the first of the beastly things is over. I'm all keyed up and fagged out after them, and I simply must have some one like you to talk to!"

He did better. He arranged to escort her there, to send flowers up to her on the platform, and to rescue her from a host of admirers afterward. At the last moment, he had one of his rare flashes of sense, or of conscience, or call it what you will. He told Marie-Louise that, if she cared, he'd come and take her over to the recital. It was, I recall, a most perfect spring evening: clear, perfumed, fragrant with growing things. Up at St. Sauveur there would be frost still at night, but the sap would be running well with the warmth of the days, when the ragged brown patches would grow in the fields, and the silly fowls would cackle in the uncovered mud and straw, and the stream would have grown big with spring, flooding the roots of the thin growth of trees, whose bare branches already would have caught that queer, breathtaking, pervasive green. Perhaps she was abandoning herself to these thoughts, believing he had gone, when he returned, running up to find her in the bedroom, at the window. "No," she shook her head, "I do not think—I care—to go!" It ran in his mind afterward that she was angry with him over the disappointment at their change of plans. The truth of it was she dared not trust herself to speak just then.

The recital was a tremendous success. "By Jove," Ashcroft said in my ear, chancing upon me in the aisle as he jostled his way to the platform afterward, "there's an artist for you!"

She was tremendously fatigued by it. In the taxi she lay back, her shoulder companionably against his; he was filled now with compunction, and

expressed himself. “You’ve been overdoing it! You shouldn’t have bothered with my stuff, Pat!” She smiled, shaking her head. When they reached home, Ashcroft had Marie-Louise brew some strong coffee, the maid already having retired. Patricia put a hand on his wrist while the girl was making preparations. “Just ourselves, Lorry dear! Just you and me. I can’t stand—anyone else—to-night!” That was easy enough, of course. Marie-Louise quite understood that they were vital to each other’s art, and had learned self-effacement. I gather that the creative artist in Patricia did a quite tremendous thing then, with the stage cleared that way. It almost “got” Ashcroft; he has told me so since. Holling was out of the way now for good, apparently; not that it mattered, of course, but there it was. And they were made for each other. The touchstone of their art was too great to overthrow. I am putting it very baldly; she did it with consummate finesse. She made it all so extremely logical, and modern, and sensible; and through her logic she shot the golden darts of her femininity. They were both in a sensitive, exalted mood after the recital—in a world almost of unreality. The room was soft with lights, heavy with the fragrance of narcissus and hyacinth. His latest manuscript lay on the table; she held it as she spoke, fondling it possessively. He was pacing the room. Rising from the Chesterfield, where she had been half-reclining, she went quickly to him. “Lorry, I need you! I’ve no one but you! And, oh, I’m so tired, so tired!” She staggered slightly; believing her faint, he put a hand out to steady her; she clung to him fiercely. Her voice, perhaps, had been raised a little too high; Marie-Louise, thinking something was amiss, appeared in the entrance. She was gone again in a minute, so that Ashcroft, whose face was toward her, was not sure if his imagination or his eyes had played him false. But it was sufficient to restore to him his underlying wholesome good sense. And that it was which saved him. He almost lifted her to the sofa.

“You’re overwrought, Pat!” His voice was very gentle. “We’re neither of us quite normal to-night.” He tried to laugh. “My manuscript and your old recital, you know. We’ve been too close to it. To-morrow, we’ll recover our perspective and see things normally again. It’s our work that draws us together, our common interest in creative art. Nothing else!”

She knew, of course, she was beaten for this time. She managed a smile as she asked him, like an old dear, to call a taxi.

VII

Marie-Louise had fled to her room upstairs. She remembered after a while that she had left a light under the coffee. She went down again. Ashcroft was standing in the hall, hands deep in his pockets. He had just telephoned for the taxi. He did not turn to look at her. It was that, I think, that broke her finally; as

if she were but a servant in the house of her beloved. She groped her way, blinded with tears, to the kitchen, and shut off the gas under the coffee. She piled up the few dishes and pots ready for washing; winning composure through this, and thinking Patricia Holling had gone, she returned to the living room for the rest, knowing only that she must keep going or some terrible thing would happen inside her. She went by way of the music-room, to escape Lorry's attention now. She would do the dishes and go to bed. Like a servant in the house. She had failed him otherwise! Her simple mind did not find fault with him. It had just all been a mistake, supposing that a girl such as she, from the country, could mate with a man like this. She could love, but she could not mate.

Stepping inside the living room, she came to a sudden halt. Patricia Holling was there still! She did not hear or see Marie-Louise. She was standing before the fire, and the light of it fell on her evening gown, on her white, wonderful shoulders, on her red-gold hair with its coronet of pearls and diamonds. A little, choking sob welled up in Marie-Louise. Never, never could she be wonderful like this! Patricia was smoking a cigarette; that Marie-Louise did not like, but refrained from criticism, as of a world she did not understand, and could never enter.

Patricia Holling tossed the cigarette into the fire with a quick motion. She caught up the unfinished manuscript, that new creative work of Ashcroft's, and glanced quickly through it again. A curious struggle was reflected in her piquant face; Marie-Louise watched in fascination. Then, quickly, Pat tore the precious thing, with the close, distinctive writing of Lorry upon it, rending it viciously in two. She hesitated; glanced at the fire. Marie-Louise stood stunned. She could not quite understand, even when words began to spill fiercely from the lips of the girl by the fire: "His work! It's that. His work—not me, not me! I hate it. Oh, I hate it!"

She started to crumple the fragments, her gaze again upon the flames; that it was which touched the spring in Marie-Louise, enabling her to run forward with a cry of, "Oh, no! Oh, no! Stop!" The torn pages cascaded to the floor. Pat turned, and went swiftly from the room. Ashcroft, unseeing and unhearing in the hallway, felt her hand on his shoulder.

"I thought I heard the car, Lorry! Oh, there it is now! You've been a dear to me—the flowers and everything!" She tapped his wrist; her laugh showed that she was still overwrought, he decided. "You mustn't do too much of that kind of thing, Lorry. The Latin mind might not understand such—comradeship!" He was relieved at the word. There they were, he told himself, on sensible terms again. "Oh, Marie-Louise you mean?" he said. "My dear Pat, she quite understands how vital you are to my work. Thank God, she's not the

jealous kind!" He called after her: "You'll not fail me when I get the next part completed? Good! I'll telephone you!" He went, whistling now, to fetch his cigarettes from the living room. He determined to work a bit on his manuscript while the "feel" of it was upon him. After his manner, he thrust from him the idea that Marie-Louise had seen the incident of a few moments ago. Probably just his fancy.

He stopped short. A frightened little figure, white-faced, knelt by the hearth, her hand full of torn pieces of his manuscript. She caught them to her, staring up at him. He towered menacingly over her, shocked and stunned at the desecration.

"You—little—beast!" He was too upset to notice or to guard his speech.

Marie-Louise looked up at him again, as if uncertain of her hearing. Then she stared at the pieces of torn paper in her hands, pieces she had been lovingly smoothing out, pieces she had been kissing, because even his writing was dear, though alienation had come and she was no longer anything but a servant in his house. Dropping the fragments, she got up, and crept away from the awful look in his eyes. She must bear that; she must take the reproach; for was not the other who had done this—how would one say it?—"vital to him?"

VIII

Ashcroft sent for me in the morning. "She's going home," he told me, greyly, after he had given me the gist of the matter. "I don't know that I should blame her so much. It'll be better for her to get away, for a while at least. She was cut up, of course, at our not getting to St. Sauveur for the month, and then—I can't be sure—but I fancy she saw us—that way!" He was enormously frank about it. "It's a ghastly mess, old man," he said. "I can't tell you how I felt, seeing her there, with the torn manuscript, you know. There's something—I can't just express it—some virtue gone from life. It's not a thing you can put your finger upon!" My mind snapped back to that afternoon at the art gallery, and Brynner's picture, and the elusive, haunting thing I'd seen in his eyes, that retreated from me as I reached for it. "I didn't see it before," he went on. "It was one of the things one accepted, like light and air. Once, you know, I was passing that vase there in the corner—the black one. She'd stuck those pussy-willows in it, and I thought, 'By Jove, that's Marie-Louise—that's spring!' Another time it was that white hyacinth on the sill there. You won't understand, of course. I don't myself. But there it is. And there's that bit of a thing I wrote at St. Sauveur—I believe, subconsciously, I was writing of her. You remember it:

‘My window, growing weary of the white
Of Winter’s onslaughts, now rejoices in
The slow soft pulse of Spring that beats itself
Against the panes in cloudy tints of green.’

I never felt a spring like that one. I didn’t—credit it—to Marie-Louise—that way!”

“It’s not too late!” I said.

He shook his head.

“She’s not Spring now,” he said, gravely. “She’s Winter now. That’s my doing. Spring beat itself to death against my window. I didn’t understand—I didn’t open it in time!”

The telephone rang presently, as we sat there in silence. He roused himself to answer it. I heard his returning step at last. I saw by his eyes, his whole demeanour, that something was up.

“It was she!” he said jerkily, after a moment. “Pat, I mean! To apologise! Overfatigued last night, didn’t know what she was doing, what would I think of her—that kind of thing. I didn’t understand at first!” He began pacing the floor, wringing one hand curiously with the other. Then his finger sprang at me, leading his words; “Why didn’t Marie-Louise say? Why didn’t she tell me?”

My intuition leaped to it.

“Perhaps she cared too much,” I said, a little scorn creeping into my voice. “Perhaps she would not snap a link that was so—vital—to you!”

Ashcroft was shaking all over. He was utterly broken; and any anger I had for him, any scorn for his blindness, died in that moment. He went over and touched the white hyacinth with his lips. “Marie-Louise!” I heard him say. “Marie-Louise!” And then, thickly: “Open that window, will you? I’m suffocating!” I obeyed. He drew in great breaths. “By George,” he said, “that’s good!”

“It’s Spring!” I told him. “It’s just Spring, old man!”

1926.

OUT OF THOSE YEARS

I

THE first time that Colford saw the girl she was dining with a large, floridly-handsome man in an officer's uniform. His rank and name were both of some importance during the hectic years of the war, though a generation knowing not Joseph has arisen, and he has done nothing since to justify contemporary public interest. There are not infrequent cases of men who seemed, in time of crisis and discipline, to achieve almost legendary heights, and then, once the time of crisis and of their own authority had passed, to drop into profound and unguessable obscurity. Just then he was in his heyday, and—on this night when Colford saw him and the girl—was up from a Convalescent Camp, at Epsom or somewhere, to attend an investiture in which he was not the least valorous figure. With several days' leave, and the lure of London upon him, he had taken lodgings of a comfortable sort, with the West End amusement district just at his elbow. Colford could understand that he wanted amusement. The thing for which he had put up a new ribbon left him frayed in his nerves. He betrayed that to no one but himself, except by certain of his actions, and it took the perception of a man like Colford to find even these at all remarkable in that peculiar time. With God-knew-what ahead of you "out there", one was apt to gulp one's draughts of life a bit greedily. Colford's later remembrance of that night on which he first saw the girl did not even include the name of the restaurant. It was somewhere, of course, near Piccadilly, for he could recall the intense movement of life through the indispensable darkness, that was cut, however, by the promise of moonlight. Those who have been to London since will know that the place has been sadly changed; your flower-women do not look right without the background of their fountain. She was rather a slim little thing, this girl—though she was not really so little, for when she stood up to go out with him she came above his shoulder, and he was tall in those days of his erectness. Her dress was of cornflower blue, and she had some kind of white wrap that he carried for her until they reached the door. So Colford's impression of her was of blue symmetry; the dress brought out the marvel of her eyes, her hair was beautifully done, without too great precision, and the play of light defeated any attempt to place the exact shade of it. It was, of course, very fair.

Seeing Colford, her escort seemed in two minds. Colford knew the man well, and there was no real chance of evasion. In the end, he stopped and spoke

a word of greeting.

Colford rose, in deference to the lady's presence, which left her escort no choice but to say quickly:

"May I present Mr. Colford, Miss—"

And there he stuck.

She came to his rescue.

"—Morton."

He caught eagerly at it. Colford had an unpleasant impression that perhaps she had coined it for him to pay for the proprieties.

"Miss Morton," he said. "Phyllis Morton." He was quite sure of the Christian name.

Colford's last intention was to be censorious, but the girl's face troubled him. Her escort seemed suddenly to feel the need of explanation, and then to be sorry he had started any, but bound to go ahead. "Miss Morton lives a bit outside London. We—we just happened to meet." He glanced at her. "You won't mind my—letting my friend into the secret?" He did not await acknowledgment of his remark, but hurried on. "You've heard, I suppose, of what some of our girls are doing? Invading doubtful territory just to get hold of our fellows who are a bit pleasure-mad on leave, and keep 'em out of harm's way! Dashed plucky, you know! And—and here we are! I'm being kept out of harm's way!"

The orchestra struck up then. What they were playing Colford did not know, but it held for him an impression of cacophonous tumult, partly sensuous, partly militant, and then, creeping between the two, a strain of almost heartbreaking plaintiveness. It seemed to exercise a subduing effect on the crowd; out of the comparative silence a voice, in bibulous ecstasy, cried: "There's that chap! His picture's in the papers! Right there!" His finger was pointing, and it need hardly have assumed the digital rigidity. The victim of publicity was flushed. Colford heard him swear once under his breath—even in the midst of many such, his exploit for the moment had the public eye; he shot an angry glance at this bibulous Tommy. Then he caught the arm of the girl in blue, and led her away. Colford saw her eyes for an instant, and knew the revelation of her escort's identity had startled her. Colford could not quite account for the immediacy with which he was afraid of the look almost of worship he saw there.

After all, it was none of his affair. He returned to his solitary meal. The orchestra blared to its end. The hum of conversation broke out anew, then hushed. People were listening. Dull detonations reached one's ears.

Colford forgot for the moment, in the mild excitement of another air raid,

the girl in blue and her officer friend.

II

It was the next morning that Phyllis Morton met young Bobby Elwell. There was not, as you may eventually judge, anything very coincidental in this. It happened that he was going up steps that she came down, in a familiar part of London, and he saw two things that, at his impressionable age—Elwell could only have been nineteen then—were irresistible. She was a slim, blue-eyed girl, and she was crying. Without stopping to consider either the decencies or the consequences, he followed. She did not notice him for a time; then she did, and, hurrying through traffic, dived down a cross street, and he just caught sight of her boarding a bus that was pulling from the curb. He managed, at risk of life and limb, to penetrate the intervening traffic and swing aboard. He glimpsed a pair of slim legs disappearing aloft. The conductor—a woman, of course, in those days—said, "Full up above!"—and blocked him with an arm. He went inside, but his eyes never left the steps down which she might come and escape. He could not quite have told you why he was doing this. His heart was leaping uncomfortably, he fancied in the region of his throat, and a warmish vapour seemed to move on the surface of his skin, except at his spine, which tingled a little as if with cold water. The façades of Park Lane were suspended in autumn sunlight above a ground mist that became quickly blue as it achieved any distance. He was subconsciously aware of them, and they became indelibly a part of this day. His eyes, however, did not leave their task of guardianship. At the Marble Arch some people got down, and Elwell went up. Two girls turned to ogle him. There were plenty of good-looking lieutenants in London, but Elwell had an unspoiled freshness that was not so common. They thought, mistakenly, the ardour in his eyes was for them. If they had known he saw them only as obstacles to his upward progress, for whom he must stand aside a moment, they would have felt the morning to be less vivid. There must have been something very tremendous about this morning, because young Elwell—who was an utter innocent, who had maintained and fought for his illusions against odds, and had not seen fit to tear down or even fly at half-mast his banners of chivalry—found himself, uninvited, sitting beside the girl in blue. They went, curiously enough, through a perfunctory word or two.

She said, scarcely looking at him:

"If you continue annoying me, I shall speak to the conductor!"

"I don't want to annoy you—"

"Then take another seat!"

He didn’t move. His ears were very red, but his heart remained sound in him.

Her voice came to him:

“If you don’t move at once——”

Just then the conductor came along, but the girl did nothing. Just sat and stared at the rows of Bayswater houses, and wondered why she went through the motions of getting rid of this nice boy. She decided he was a little her junior; that he was the kind who would never grow up; and that, this morning, she would give all she possessed to be able to use her eyes with his fine directness. He was the last kind of a person to follow her to-day. She rose, pushed past him, went to the back of the bus, struck the bell, and alighted. Misty sunlight lay in the Gardens; huge clumps of amazing dahlias invited the passers-by to come beyond the railings.

III

They went through the Queen’s Gate together—the girl and the boy—into Kensington Gardens. You may take it how you will: that he had pushed his gallantry to an ungentlemanly extreme, that she had capitulated easily, or that there was something much more subtle and inevitable in their meeting. It was this last they felt, and to it they abandoned themselves. One would have to be there, perhaps, to understand fully; it held so much more than an ordinary affair of the kind, which might happen, and may happen still, on a thousand mornings in a thousand cities. One would have to feel wartime London, as a city whose values had changed, and for the most part amazingly intensified; one would have to feel, beyond, the emotional strangulation of the battlefields, and against them set a morning like this, with youth suddenly pricked into a heartbreaking but gallant awareness of itself. Fallen leaves spattered the green-gold of the grass with brown. There was an infrequent drift of them in the air. The Serpentine was a metallic blue, uneven in spots to catch the sheen of sunlight. The sun itself was indistinct, contenting itself with a blurred penetration. These things impressed themselves, because afterwards both spoke, each in their own way, about them. To Phyllis Morton this mellow indistinctness was a soul-saving thing. It hurt—the beauty of it—but it held a certain redemptive grace. She seemed able to summon up a spiritual mist to shut out visions that would haunt her to the point of madness. Once or twice they overcame her; once she turned and looked at this nice boy who was with her, who encouraged her arm to rest in his, who was content to stroll and talk about the trees, about the oak leaves he had picked up, and to recall—with a little far passion in his eyes—the glory of native maples more flaming but

scarcely more beautiful than these, and who not once referred to her trouble, or tried to probe it.

She said: “I haven’t any—business—being here with you! You don’t even know that I’m—nice!”

He swung about to look at her. She could hardly explain what there was in his eyes that brought quick tears.

“What rot!” he said, indignantly, and then: “You know, you mustn’t cry! That’s why we came to the Park. And you wouldn’t spoil my last day on leave?”

She caught his arm urgently.

“Not—truly?”

“Absolutely. I leave to-night. Let’s forget that. We’ve got the day together. It doesn’t matter—beyond that—does it?”

She knew what he meant. One must pretend; one must live a little for the hour. But her heart beat suffocatingly. It did matter—beyond the day. To-night he would go back to the trenches, and she would go—where would she go? Home? To the terrible suburban flat she shared? Unless there were another raid to-night, there would be no excuse for staying in town. In an air raid sometimes all trains stopped! She realised that she was standing still under a plane tree.

He said: “I say—have you the day clear? I’ve taken it for granted! And may I have it?”

She nodded.

She would never forget that day. Morning, too short, in the Park; lunch at a Corner House, women’s orchestra, hurrying waiters, the ceaseless hum of voices, plenty of khaki, and not any one with the freshness of this boy of direct glances and flushed enthusiasms. Afternoon—“What luck!” he had exclaimed, dashing from the end of a queue. “Two in the eighth row; some johnnie just turned them in!” They came out of the matinée, and the mist had taken on a tinge of purple. In a little while the searchlights would sweep the heavens. In a little while the dark streets would be ghostly with a pale moon. Just now the daylight lingered. He cried: “We shouldn’t really have wasted it indoors! But I did want to take you—and my train goes too early to-night! There’s a bus! We’ll get to St. James’s Park!” The lagoons were growing spectral in the late light; people walking the paths were unreal, coming from nowhere and entering infinity. They did not, of course, matter. Many of them carried attaché cases and portfolios, and no doubt came from Whitehall, and were cogs in running a war. One did not talk very much. When one did, it was in a rather strained gaiety. Big Ben gave voice, and the mist seemed to make way for him,

or spread a curtain on which he billowed forth his sonority. “We’ll just have time to—to eat again!” the boy said. “It’s been a marvellous day!” They had only time, as it happened, for an A.B.C., close to the roaring traffic of Westminster where it converged to cross the Thames. The light seemed garish and cold, behind closely-drawn blinds. She gave him her address, and wanted to withdraw it only less than she wanted him to have it. His, in a big boyish fist, on the back of a postcard portrait of himself, she held in her hand until the writing blurred with perspiration.

She saw him off at the train. They were two in the midst of human confusion. People, brushing them aside, almost parted them. He waited until the last moment. Her heart died within her lest he should fail her—never would she make the simple offer herself. He started off, indeed, then came back, and said, shyly: “I’ll write, you know!” He’d said that before. She waited, hating herself, feeling faint. “And—would you mind?—everybody does it, you know! Nobody really thinks anything of it—and you—you—”

She lifted her face. She felt her few years’ seniority to be quite vast then. He was such a boy. Sense of disparity vanished as he kissed her. He stood looking at her, his face aglow, his eyes like stars; then, suddenly, he called, “Cheerio!” and dashed off quite madly. She fancied once he waved but, in the gloom and the crowd, could not be sure. She turned, and found her way from the station. The streets had darkened now; after a time there would be a moon again. She walked at random. Familiar streets were possessed of a double unreality. The moon came up, a tremendous circle, diminishing as it climbed into the misty circuit of steely blue. Pencils of light searched the sky. Sirens shrieked a warning. She walked on, scarcely conscious of them. A policeman on a bicycle called to her; she was alone in a deserted city. Something began to fall in the street not far away. She took tardy and inadequate shelter in a huge stone doorway. An ancient woman, with a basket containing a few faded flowers, shared the shelter with her. She did not see the woman. She took, from an inner pocket, a ring. There was a ruby in it that looked like blood under the moon. It winked at her like an eye, mockingly; she invested it with other proportions and a voice that spoke: “No trains out to-night, my dear. You’ll have to stay over. I can fix you up at my digs!”

She began almost to whimper, thrusting the ring away. The old woman startled her, speaking from the gloom, philosophically. “Don’t cry, my dearie! They don’t do no ’arm to speak of. It’s much cry and little wool. It’ll be over like a summer shower! There, it’s pretty well rolled awye now! You shouldn’t cry over an air ryde. It ain’t nothink! You’ve dropped somethink, dearie! Ho, picture of our soldier boy! That’s different, dearie.”

She left the old woman hastily, stepping out on the still deserted

pavements. It was only later she found a faded rose in her hand. She took it home, guarding it fiercely on the train, setting it in water in her room. Beneath it she put the picture of the boy. The flower revived in water, but in the morning it drooped, withered and dead, on its stem. The stem had been wired. From under it the boy's face looked out still with the freshness of an innocent.

IV

To say the boy was an innocent, does not mean he was anybody's fool. Colford, who knew him in Montreal, could have witnessed to that. His heart was itself clean, his eye, to borrow that phrase, was single, and he had a habit of seeing the same thing even in unpromising material. He came through the disillusion of barrack-room conversation with banners a bit torn, but to fight for a cause does not usually lessen your belief in it. His belief in Woman was remarkably unshaken. Colford had lost track of him, but one day, in a Montreal café, he ran across him. He had just checked his things, and suggested Colford should join him at the table.

"I'd like you to meet my wife," he said eagerly.

And that was the second time Colford saw the girl.

He stood, rather foolishly, trying to place her. Then, suddenly, he had the name. Phyllis Morton! The incident had slipped clean out of mind. It was now renewed. They took their seats; an orchestra struck up—Bach, Colford thought, but for him it became a thing of remembrance, an impression of cacophonous tumult, partly sensuous, partly militant, and, creeping between the two, a strain of almost heartbreaking plaintiveness. He heard a bibulous Tommy: "There's that chap—"

"You know London, then?"

Colford detected in her voice a hesitation, and in her eyes an uncertainty. Did she remember? Or was she merely feeling through to remembrance?

"I knew it in the War years!"

Instantly, he knew she knew! Elwell saved them both with a sudden rush of conversation. Colford could see he was immensely proud of her. They made irrelevant small talk, she and Colford, and the manner of it evidently puzzled Elwell a bit—though he was not one to be suspicious. It was only that he was disappointed; they should have been mutually appreciative, they were merely perfunctory.

She was waiting for Colford in his office when he arrived, a little tardily, next morning. She was looking, he thought, for all her worry—and that was evident—particularly pretty, and not a day older. Contact with Bobby, Colford decided, must keep one young.

She came right to the point:

"You remembered me—yesterday!"

Colford bowed.

"You shouldn't wear blue, Mrs. Elwell!"

The thing slipped out; he had no thought of harshness or cruelty, though perhaps a fear that some day she might dash the torch from Elwell's hands provoked him to it. "I wear it because Bobby likes me in it!" she told him. The manner of her saying this rather broke Colford. He wanted to apologise, and he could only stand there remembering—without desire to remember, with the utmost repugnance of memory—a man whom, not a month ago, he had run across in the lobby of a New York theatre. He had come up to Colford during intermission, spoken Colford's name, and stood watching his former friend reconstruct, out of this ghost, the man who used to be. They had gone to Colford's hotel later, and, high up above the city, with the vastness of its electric activity pushing up through a smoky murk, the man had become almost maudlin in his confidences. It was natural, perhaps, remembering the last time they had seen each other, that the confidences should revolve about that night. Looking at the girl now, he could only remember this man in the hotel room mouthing, with a passionate reiteration: "She was a good lil' sport, you know! A damn good lil' sport!" He had waved one hand, flaccidly. He seemed to read in Colford's glance a need for apology. "War, you know, old man! Things felt different. Not ordinary times." And then: "Air raid, you know! There was a moon that night. She couldn't get out of town. Trains weren't runnin'! Some day, Colford, I'm goin' to find that girl!" All this, to remember, did not help Colford's manner now. He felt embarrassed beyond words.

She said:

"I don't know—just what you know, Mr. Colford! But I—well, Bobby mustn't know about anything—"

Colford swung on her.

"He wouldn't love you less! He's not that kind!"

She got up, and went over to the window. Curiously, the posture affected him deeply, though he could see only her back. He reached her in three strides, and caught her shoulder. "You can trust me!" he said abruptly. "No good would be served by bringing that up. But"—he insisted on this defence of his friend—"he's too big to let that come between. He'd not love you less."

She turned to him.

"No," she agreed, "he'd not love me less. But you know"—she managed a smile—"he's got me on such a high pedestal—far too high for any woman,

much less me—and if I toppled off—it would hurt him to see me broken—and there'd be—pieces of me—that could never be put together again! Thank you, Mr. Colford."

She offered her hand. He took it, and she was gone. He was alone, staring at a patch of sunlight, with a sense of perfume, very delicate, left behind. He fancied it held a hint of roses.

V

Less than two months after her interview with Colford—whom she had not seen since—Phyllis Elwell stood for a moment of trepidation before the mirror of her bedroom. In it she could see her husband, lying very still—she felt certain in sleep, so that she was encouraged to reach into a drawer, take from a far corner a small, locked box, and from the box, in turn, a ring. There was no need, she knew, for furtiveness, even had he been awake. But she experienced a shaking sense of guilt and fear, standing for a moment, staring at the thing in her hand. It was a man's ring of unusual design, and the ruby, she knew, must be valuable. She slipped it in her purse, and, putting on her hat and powdering her nose, leaned over and kissed her husband.

He smiled up, sleepily.

"You'll be all right for a little while, dear?"

"Sure—going out for air?"

"And to get some things."

He nodded! Almost before she had gone, he was drifting off to sleep again. She turned in the doorway, a pain at her heart. It was so long after the war for this thing to develop—too long to be sure, except in your own soul, that it was an aftermath, too late really to appeal for help from a higher authority. And his firm, after carrying him grudgingly for two months, politely hinted that its charity had sixty-day limits. Bobby Elwell returned them the sixty days' pay, with suitable words, and came home to collapse grotesquely on the living room floor. Running from the kitchen she found him there, grinning helplessly up at her. "Something gone wrong with my thingummies! Give me a fin, like a dear!" She almost had to carry him to the couch; she reproached herself for letting him stir out. The doctor, with a first thought for the hospital, had a second one that home would be best for a long case like this, and, besides, Bobby would have no one but her for a nurse. She had, fortunately, a little money in the bank, how little only she knew. She hoped she'd be forgiven for stretching it in assuring him they'd get along. He was ill enough to be ready to snatch assurance. Going out now, she found the autumn dusk closing in. It must be getting on for six o'clock. She wasn't sure if such places closed at six.

It was raining a little, so, putting up her umbrella, she hurried through the homeward-bound crowds. The places were still open. She chose, out of the numbers that offered such service as she required, one that looked the most respectable and prosperous. Behind the counter, in a dim interior—she was glad it was dim—a man, suave at sight of a pretty woman, became businesslike when the transaction began, his eyes gleaming a little in spite of himself, at sight of the ring.

He studied it very closely, then shrugged.

"I can give you fifteen dollars, ma'am!"

She was dismayed.

"Fifteen? Why—"

He shrugged again, his mouth twisted in a conciliatory smile.

"To-night, fifteen? You come again—say in two days? I will have it valued and then, if, as you say, it is worth so much, we will do better—yes?"

His eyes, his glance, his expression as of one putting things together from memory, puzzled her. She felt a confused alarm. But the thought of going to another place, perhaps less adequate to her need than this, decided her. She capitulated. "Twenty, to-night. And then you can make sure of it, and I will return." He handed her a ticket, without a word. She felt, suddenly, as if she had done more than pawn a ring for an inconsiderable fraction of its worth; as if, rather, she had sold herself. The thing persisted, a feeling of depression edging curiously on excitement, as if she had set in motion forces to her undoing. It haunted her meanwhile; it continued and grew in her as she returned on the day, and at the time, appointed. It was dusk again; she felt the need of this insubstantial covering. The light from the pawnshop fell in gold splotches from a window full of a marvellous miscellany. One or two furtive figures considered her, with emboldened eyes, as she entered. She had to wait, while a customer bargained in a whining voice for some trifle of money. This shabby customer, securing his trifle and his ticket, departed in haste, cursing, and the sneer of the pawnbroker went after him. Instantly, seeing Phyllis, he was his suave self. "Madam is on time! Well, I have good news for you." Her heart leaped. "I can let Madam have—how much?" His bushy eyebrows moved nearer her face. "Shall we say two hundred, ma'am?" She was staggered into forgetting her need of money. Then, remembering this need, she became alarmed lest this man should change his mind. She tried to say calmly: "That will do." Her mind added: "He can keep it! I'll never redeem it. I'm rid of it now! I'm rid of it now!"

He was counting out the bills; she was amazed and perturbed to find herself receiving them with a renewal of indefinable fear; as if, indeed, this

man were the devil, instead of a rather polite and generous pawnbroker, and she a Marguerite—or a Magdalen. She felt his eyes intolerably upon her; when she left he saw her to the door, and she imagined she heard something that might have been only the clearing of his throat. The street outside was quite dark here, except for the occasional blaze of windows; she felt she was in a world of men; the only woman she saw was a shuffling creature, mumbling to herself—a broken tragedy. She felt the unwholesomeness penetrating her; and then, suddenly, she became aware of someone following her. She determined to halt and let him pass. He drew alongside. When he spoke it was thickly—she thought it might be drink, or again it might be emotion: "Phyllis—don't you know—an old friend?" He took her arm. Had he been the devil himself there was no virtue, no strength in her, to evade him. "My dear!" he said eagerly. She now detected liquor on his breath, though he was not drunk at all. "I got wind only a few weeks ago you'd come here. I've been haunting the city—couldn't find what name you went by. I've tried all the public places. Funny we never met!" He tightened his hold on her arm. "You know," he said, "rather clever—something told me you might have got, or might get into, a tight corner over here—and try a jeweller's or one of these chaps. You'd be surprised, m'dear, what a deuced lot of 'em there are, but I got around to 'em all. Nothin' else to do these days. I thought maybe my ring would help out, if things got tight!" He shook his head, unbelievingly. "That's inspiration, heh? And a thousand-to-one shot. But it won—by gad—it won! And here you are! And here you are!" He smiled at her ingratiatingly, confidentially. "Goin' to be a moon again to-night!" He cocked his eye at the sky. "Any chance d'ye suppose of another air raid?" The thing was too preposterous. That he should find out her general whereabouts, that he should know she had come to this city, was understandable; that he should follow her here, and conceive this thorough and amazing idea of checking up any move of hers to raise money on the ring he gave her that night—well, it made her feel queer, and afraid, and then, suddenly, filled her with an indefinable pathos. She looked at the man beside her; his clothes, though expensive enough, lacked smartness, or was that only the sagging of a figure once of military erectness? His cheeks were florid to the point of unhealthy purple; pouches of flesh hung under his eyes; and his jowls were sagging in a repulsively fleshly way. She thought of the man who had won a nation's homage for valour in time of crisis—now sunk into an oblivion which held not even the peace of that state; there was, in his eyes, looking at her now, the glance of a buffeted mariner who sees a friendly light through storm. She knew intuitively, and with despair, that in this aftermath, one goal, to the point of a mad, unbelievable obsession, had remained to him in a drifting course. To do the thing he had done, to seek out, at such odds, the companion of—an air raid—made it almost epic.

He said, as if reflecting her thought:

"It's queer, isn't it? I've known so many women, quite intimately—and you for a few hours—and they're just pictures undusted on a wall!"

She did not tell him her case now. She could not. She must first make excuse to get away. Apart from him, she must think things through. There were so many matters at stake. And then, impulsively, she made her appointment with him for the morrow. Hurrying home, exercised over the length of time she had been away, she wondered why she had done so. It rooted itself, she knew, in that indefinable but certain sense of pathos, and of this epic thing that entered into it. But, as she hurried on in the light-spattered darkness, a shattering fear began to grow in her.

VI

She had planned on the Mountain Park, and it was there she took him. She noted, as much by intuition as by observation, that he had undergone a meticulous overnight grooming. His hair was trimmed to a nicety; she was surprised that twelve years or so could grey and thin leonine luxuriance. On top, now, he was quite bald. A facial massage had done what it could; it was a rather pitiful restoration. His eyes, however, were peculiarly brisk, and she thought—with some dread—almost happy. He insisted on a cab to the top, no motors being allowed in the Park. The driver persisted in detailing points of interest, turning on his elevated perch to point them out with the tassel of his long whip. She felt the city of her adoption to be an alien place; she saw it with new eyes which were partly his who took them to be tourists, and, she estimated from his glances, who saw an old and rather fleshly fool committed to matrimony with a young wife. It was curious how the years had changed that; she felt, beside this man, intensely young—almost inexperienced. That was contact with Bobby. Bobby kept one young. Her mirror, a short hour ago, had gratified her, in the midst of fear, with a sense of inescapable youth. Fat, white clouds moved, with a smug majesty, above trees partially stripped, whose remaining leaves fluttered in a last spasmodic life above their fallen fellows. Autumn haze fought against an intense clarity that brought within vision the Adirondacks and, she fancied, the presidential peaks of the White Mountains; nearer ranges were a substantial blue. The haze began to win its fight, gathering colour from these nearer ranges, enveloping the city below in a blue and insubstantial vapour. Against these things, his voice came with commendable infrequency. She was afraid of conversation, and the direction it might take. She was content that he should have this time with her. By and by, there were things she herself must initiate, in the way of vocal commerce between them. From that she shrank, as much afraid of hurting him as of her

own situation. She was still under a sense of pathos in him. He was a shipwrecked mariner who, suddenly, had found a foothold, and could breathe again and take some heart. She put from her the knowledge that she must reveal to him this as an interlude; that the rock would prove no refuge when the tide came up.

He dismissed the cab. It was upon a walk they were determined, first about the summit, then down, by the gradual and widening descents. The haze below had grown; it was touched now, prophetically, with dusk. The city seemed to be sunk in it; it sent up, for the ear, only the drowned murmur of its life.

A sorrow for this man increasingly possessed her. It left her with a sense of detachment, that had better, perhaps, been caution. She was not so much part of his sorrow, part of his life, as one who watched. His eager happiness made the contrast unendurable. She had, for the moment, an incautious and most passionate devotion to his happiness. She was like a mother who would not cloud the joy of a child's party by knowledge of some painful thing beyond. He must have this hour. They had come now, in their walking, to a sequestered path, where suddenly she felt an awakening, a chill, a sense of being alone with him, as if all others—those tourists she had seen peering from cabs, or leaning elbows on the parapet of the observatory, regarding with delighted amaze the vast panorama offered by city, river, and distant flatlands and hills; these few habitués who tramped the mountain ways with familiarity; these other couples who had regarded them with something of their own hack-driver's glance—had withdrawn, like the scuttering leaves had retreated from the path, but, unlike the leaves, had left the place altogether and were now comfortably below, where the city swam smugly in its aura of civilized and lighted haze. A little-trodden path led them to the verge of what seemed a greater declivity than it was. She had an impression that one might leap from here to safety, that some unsuspected power of flight might be granted by which, with a spread of fanciful wings, one might alight upon those flat, uncompromising roofs below, or even on the nearer ways where, winding down, cabs with lights now lit moved beetle-like in the dusk.

"We're going to sit awhile!" His voice startled her, with an intimate nearness more compelling than anything physical. "Have to take more exercise, 'pon my honour I will! Puff too easily! Here, let me arrange the throne!"

She was a little surprised he should confess to physical deterioration, though the very frankness increased that sense of intimacy. Nor had he needed confession; the stertorous breathing of the man, as he stooped to gather dry, crackling leaves, and arranged them, with an attempt at gaiety, as a carpet for her to sit upon, betrayed him. Desiring to run away, she sat down.

The dusk was gathering with amazing rapidity, swift with autumn's intolerance; she thought: "I must tell him now. I must go back at once. I mustn't leave Bobby alone!" Instead, she sat upon the throne of fallen leaves. Above the city—which seemed increasingly a place of civilized and desirable security—a pale vessel moved upward on its voyage across a darkening immensity of blue.

"Not as full—as then!" he said.

She knew he meant the moon.

It exercised upon her—that complacently rising orb—a peculiar magnetism. She felt, through it, a cancellation of every physiological and biological change in her, as if not this body, renewed through the years, but that younger, ardent one, were called shivering into being. She felt him lean towards her, and experienced a sense of contact. Turning swiftly to avoid him, she was conscious only of his eyes, with uncanny penetration, upon her. "You're remembering!" he said, soberly, and then: "I've never forgotten, Phyllis!"

She sprang up, smoothing her skirt, with a sense, too, of shaking something from her.

"I've got to go!" she said, stupidly. "I've been away too long!"

"Away?"

His eyes were blank.

She nodded, bit her lip, and began, at a quick pace, to retrace her steps. She was aware that he was following, with a dogged, inexorable persistence. If he had not been silent she would have felt it less. If he overtook her, she felt she would scream. People would hear, and that would be scandal. It was silly to act like this. She forced herself to await his coming. She tried to smile at him; to pretend her action had been half in jest. He looked at her, curiously; she was glad he fell, tacitly and silently, into step beside her. She could deal with him better down below, where there were traffic, and houses, and many people, and not a pale, mad moon mocking one from the mist, and, underneath and round about, the ghostly scutterings of fallen leaves. It seemed to her most necessary that their descent from the Mountain Park should be an orderly retreat.

VII

The city was disappointing. It was disappointing because its promised protectiveness did not materialise. The moon, hanging low over chimney-pots, was still subversive. The tides of life that, physically, flowed in the streets beside these two, seemed to ebb, to retreat, so that spiritually she was alone with him still. He was silent, but she needed no vocal interpretation of his eyes.

There was some madness in this man. There was an elemental and frightening strength. She must speak to him. She must explain matters. She must dismiss him. But she was afraid to bring the thing to crisis. So she kept on walking and, as if he had an immense patience or queer contentment, he accompanied her without comment. In the end, she decided on cowardly postponement; she accused herself to no purpose. She would put him off. She would make a further engagement. She found wit to name time and place, and held out her hand to him. “No,” he said, “I’m going to see you alone! If you must go home, I’m going to see you to the door!” His voice and manner betrayed no suspicion, nor curiosity, merely a dogged determination. Temporising again, she took heart at his words. “To the door!” She felt an intolerable desire to be at her own door. It outbalanced a horrid fear that it would be unwise to let him know her address. She felt need of the support of the home base; as if, her back against the familiar door, she could tell him after all, and dismiss him with finality. Even the familiar quiet of the streets seemed helpful, and the intervention of two high apartments, backing on these rows of flats, removed the direct madness of the moon. She could see a light in Bobby’s room; the emotion that swept her was as much tenderness as an unutterable misery. He would be so nice to her—if he knew; his eyes would be very kind, very understanding—and between them, as she stood there, would be something broken, that nothing could quite put together again. It wouldn’t be Bobby’s fault; nor hers. No cement of love, of forgiveness, of understanding, could make it as it was. They would turn the flaw to the wall, where it would not be seen, and it would be the one ultimate reality in the place.

She had, she realised, her hand on the knob.

“So this is where you live?” he said.

She managed a nod, almost a smile. She held out her hand. He looked at it.

“No, my dear, you can’t come that!” he said. “You can’t play that way. I’m coming in!”

She shook her head, still trying to smile.

“You said—‘to the door’!”

He smiled back.

“And then—in! Don’t tell me you didn’t know that!” He said again: “I’m coming in!” She was reminded of the persistence of the drunken; yet he was not in the least drunk. He stood looking at her, and, suddenly, she realised in him again that dogged madness or mad doggedness, she did not know which. Her hand went to her lips. She cried: “Oh, you can’t! You can’t really! You don’t understand! There’s Bobby—”

He said: “I don’t give a crooked farthing for Bobby! Is that the name of the

present incumbent?”

She shrank, as if he had struck her. So that was what he thought? He would pick her up where he had left her. There was madness rather than tenderness in his eyes. She would play her last card; the one she should, perhaps, have played first.

“Bobby—Bobby’s my husband!”

The eyes opposite her did not change.

“I don’t give a bent penny for your husband!” he said. “You belong to me anyway. I’m coming in!”

She wondered if the man across the street, whistling his way homeward with a newspaper under his arm, could be aware that she was, with sudden fierce strength, pushing a man away from her door. Next instant, the madness she had thought to exorcise swept her inside the porch, inside her door. There rushed out to greet her familiar odours, cut through and supplemented by that of medication. With them, came Bobby’s voice:

“Hullo, who’s there? That you, dear?”

She knew now that whatever moved this man from the past, that past she had thought to shut the door upon forever, was more powerful than rational. She recognised in his eyes, his attitude, a cruelty that may change quickly a legitimate and tender passion into an intolerable acquisitive desire. If he could not possess he could at least wreck something. Her eyes, attempting an appeal, turned away from him. She knew ruthlessness when she saw it. This man had abandoned himself to his course. Whether there lay behind it any legitimacy of curiosity as to her present situation, she did not know; if so, it was secondary. Turning away, she saw, on a side table, four roses she had bought for Bobby’s bedside, that now were ineffectually fighting for life under fresh water and aspirin. They became, for her, a single rose thrust in her hand by a London flower-woman; a single rose, withered and dead on its wired stem, from under which the boy’s face looked out with the freshness of an innocent. All that had happened since fell away. Two epochs of her life, two crises, met and crashed. Seconds only had passed, but she knew the inadequacy of such measurement.

“What’s up?” She could hear Bobby getting out of bed. “I say—hullo there!” She felt paralysed. She could only stare at the man beside her, who seemed aware of, but not distressed or moved by, her discomfiture, and at the door in which, an instant later, Bobby appeared, the familiar cubistry of his pyjamas apparent under the dressing-gown she had given him last Christmas. He blinked at them. “Sorry,” he said. “Didn’t know there was anyone with you!”

“It’s just—” She halted on the edge of preposterous deceit; not fully

evolved, it had to do, she thought, with some mention of medical advice. Then she became still more painfully aware of the big man at her side. Even in that instant, she realised that the contrast must have embittered him further; Bobby, for all his illness, was essentially a youngster, an innocent, unlined, unmarked, by the things that had broken him. She thought of how he might phrase it; her mind feverishly canvassed, in that fleeting moment of suspense, all the nastiness that bitterness might make vocal. She saw his face, too, and was reminded of a man she had once seen smashing, with an axe, a barrel on whose rusty nails he had torn himself. He took a step—almost unsteadily—forward.

There was an odd look on Bobby's face. But, as yet, it held no suspicion of the real fact. She turned abruptly away. She had no desire to witness his disillusionment. Then Bobby spoke, jerkily, eagerly:

"Colonel! Why, sir, I didn't know you were in the city! How awfully good of you to look me up, sir!"

VIII

And that was the third time—save for the brief word with her in his office—that Colford saw the girl. No less vividly than before he saw her this time, but it was a mental projection, made possible by the man who sat opposite him at table in his apartment, refusing to eat, and toying with one of Colford's best cigars. It was then half-past seven, and Colford, fortunately, was dining alone. He looked at the man opposite, who had come to him, in queer haste, out of the night, and his own appetite fell away. Was this broken figure the man who so effectually led the battalion in which young Bobby Elwell was a subaltern? Was this the man with whose praises, even in a time of many investitures, London rang? More even than in the New York hotel room, Colford was impressed with the magnitude, and almost the magnificence, of the decay.

The Colonel, stooped a little forward, bit at his cigar.

"You know," he told Colford, "the only way I can figure it is that young Elwell met her when she left me—that next morning. He was going to look in on me at nine o'clock—and he never turned up! That puts it beyond the coincidental!" He lit the weed, shakily. "I nearly smashed things for them!" he said, after a moment, with an inclination of his head that told Colford he meant to-night's affair. "God knows, there was some madness in me, Colford. Not just caddishness!" He struck the table with his fist, and the dishes jangled. "You've got to understand! That's why I looked you up. It's a mad thing all round—my trailing her, and finding her—the way I did!" He smoked. "I loved her, Colford. You needn't believe, if you don't want to. That still goes. But it all turned sour in me when I knew I was too late. I wanted to smash things

up!" He said, after a time: "She knew that! She could see that! She stood there, waiting for it to happen, with him in the doorway. I was too blind with—with everything—to recognise him, until he spoke that way. 'Colonel! Why, sir, I didn't know you were in the city. How awfully good of you to look me up, sir!' Dashed young hero-worshipper! Silly young ass stood there wringing my hand, Colford, telling me what an honour—"

Colford pretended not to notice the silence.

"I came away—soon as I could!" The Colonel cleared his throat, and stood up. Colford remained in his chair. "The young ass kept telling me, 'You know, sir—been making a bit of a fight myself—confounded doctors got the wind up a bit—it's not for myself I'm afraid—it's Phyllis. Wouldn't want her to have to buck life alone, you know!' " The Colonel gave a throaty sound, an embryonic laugh. "Perceptive, eh Colford? And there was I, sitting under a damnable glare of a lamp, and he didn't seem to cotton to it that my face had—had changed a whit. Sat there in bed, like a radiant young pup, saying, 'I wish you knew, sir, how often I think of you—and the old battalion. I've often wondered where you got to—nobody seemed to know—' And there he stopped, Colford, and coloured up. I suppose some confounded busybodies have hinted the truth. You could see he didn't believe. You could see he was outraged. He looked up at me, Colford. 'I'm most fearfully proud that you came to see me, sir!' he told me. I got out after that—quick as I could! She saw me to the door. Pretty white and shaky, she was! She didn't say a word. It's none of your confounded business to know, but she—she kissed me, Colford!"

He began to pace the rug, by the range of low windows that looked down over the city, making the limits of the thick pile his own, then swung suddenly toward the table, where Colford still made pretence of eating, and snarled: "All very pretty and sentimental! And me? Look at me, Colford! A thing to be proud of, heh? Look at me, Colford, d'ye hear me? Don't evade. The lost leader—heh? You can't fool me. I know myself. That thing—I did? Told me I'd led a forlorn hope. Bunkum! Hardly knew what I was about at the time. Just had to go through with it—"

To bridge a silence, Colford said then: "That's the point, Colonel—just to go through with it!"

Colford's mind, curiously, had switched back to the girl. He was seeing her as he saw her on that war night years ago; as he saw her in the restaurant here that day with Bobby Elwell; as she had come to him frankly in his office, and left behind her, when she went, a hint of roses that haunted him; as he saw her again to-night, through the Colonel's eyes, standing, facing the smash that would follow the toppling of a pedestal. Had she been right, been wise, he wondered after all, to let the pedestal remain? He remembered her words: "It

would hurt him to see me broken—and there'd be—pieces of me—that could never be put together again!" He didn't know. It wasn't his business to judge. He felt suddenly a sweep of pity—too austere to be sentimental—for all humanity. It comprehended, of course, and especially, the girl and this Colonel. The Colonel? He had almost forgotten him. The lapse was reciprocal. The Colonel was standing at a window, gazing down over the lights of the city. Colford leaned forward a little. Was it imagination, or the stimulation of his moment of austere pity, or a reality—evanescent or otherwise—that made him see the Colonel, not as a broken, sagging figure, but as a man of fine physique, of mental power, of potential leadership, of essential courage? Afraid almost to break the spell, Colford rose, and moved towards his guest. The Colonel paid no heed. He was standing with soldierly erectness, shoulders braced, staring down over the myriad lights below him. His thoughts were his own; Colford, having no desire to intrude, went back to his solitary consideration of food.

1929.

IV

"Man's crimes are his worst enemies, following,
Like shadows, till they drive his steps into
The pit he dug."

FUNERAL OF A GANGSTER

I

TWO men sat at a round, bare table in a smoky dive that passed as a restaurant of sorts. They were both of average height, and, in dress and public manners, managed to seem quite average in every way—and thus unobtrusive. They were men who might pass as ordinary citizens, at whom one would scarcely direct a second glance. Only the initiate knew them to be powers before whom even the hardened might shake. The dark man was Madrigone. He had some mixed blood in him to which he did not confess. The only man who had ever mocked him with it, in a witless moment, was now enriching a pauper's grave. The blond man was "Lefty" Jones, who, after a score of aliases, had felt the strain upon his creative and imaginative powers too great, and been content with this very general surname. The difference, however, between being a mere Jones and this Jones was that handle—Lefty! In the main, one might take it as the difference between life and death. These men sat drinking some indeterminate mixture out of tall glasses and saying nothing. They seemed to be waiting for something. There was the least undercurrent of restlessness about them. Finally, Madrigone spoke, in a monotone.

"Sure you made all proper arrangements, Lefty?"

"Yes, chief! They're well credentialed. And if I ever saw three nice little killers they're the boys. And no local interest. Come clean through from the West, like I told you, and don't give a bad nickel who they plug. So much a head—and name your man. But the price was high! They're not the kind you can beat down!"

Madrigone smiled. "Money no object in this case!" he said. "It's time he took a ticket to the promised land. Last person I ever thought'd get mealy-mouthed and lily-livered was Wimms. There's a kid of his mixed up in the

case somewhere. Wimms ran across the brat and began to go soft—fatherly pride and all that. It don't do! What time do you make it?"

"Just turned eight. The appointment was for seven."

"Pretty near time we heard!"

"There's no sayin' they could get word back right away!"

They sat again in silence. Customers, coming in for late dinner, began to fill the tables. The atmosphere became more murky. A confusion of tongues arose. In the midst of the confusion only these two average men at the small table were quiet. They smoked now, with apparent calm. Occasionally, they cast oblique glances at the clock over the sandwich bar. And, once or twice, their eyes strayed questioningly to each other. Somewhere, a telephone rang. They were almost betrayed into a start; an aproned waiter was coming their way. "Telephone for you, please!" he told Lefty Jones. One treated Lefty with awed respect. Madrigone continued to smoke quietly, his eyes reflective, as if contemplating pleasant visions. He waited until Lefty had taken his seat, then flicked him a quick, "Well?"

Lefty swore softly, under his breath.

"It was only Connovan again!"

"What did he want?"

"The usual. An appointment with you! He wants to make peace. He's scared!"

"He has," said Madrigone, savouring his cigar, "a perfect right to be! He quit me cold, he ran with his own gang, he double-crossed me twice, and now he wants to come pussy-footin' back to the fold. Nothin' doin'!"

Lefty lit a fresh cigarette. He squinted peculiarly at his chief, then leaned forward. "He's not safe, chief! He talks peace, but he threatens war—as much as a man can threaten over a dangerous instrument like the telephone!"

"You mean—?"

Lefty shrugged.

"Yeh, just that! If you don't do a pretty quick stunt, he's got plenty on you to queer you!"

The least flush ran up under the roots of Madrigone's dark hair. He said: "That's all I want to know. We'll exterminate that breed! It's a nuisance, when I have enough else to do. Connovan must be mad to pull that stuff on me!" Madrigone, like most of his kind, was not without vanity. But Lefty nodded, appreciatively. "Listen!" ordered Madrigone.

From the doorway came the shrill shouting of a street Arab: "Extra! Extra! Killing on prominent thoroughfare!" For just a second Lefty's face and attitude

threatened to betray him. But Madrigone did not bat an eyelash. The boy had entered the place, and was filling a vigorous demand for his wares. As he came nearer, Madrigone quite casually lifted a finger, beckoning him to bring the news.

II

At four o'clock that afternoon, young Randall Wimms closed the books on which he was working in the semi-studious atmosphere of Parram's Progressive Business College, spoke a word of explanation to the suave, wizened little man who bore the name of Parram, and hurried out into the street. The autumnal dusk had not yet closed in; the sky, though mostly leaden and threatening, had rifts in it, chinks filled with an inspiring colour. Lights, spattering the dusk, began to glow in office buildings and in houses. One block along he halted, eagerly.

"Dad!"

"Hullo, son!"

The man who thus, in a tone of hesitant eagerness, responded to the greeting, was a strong-featured, tawny-skinned individual with amazing eyes. At least, they became amazing at sight of his boy. Ordinarily, they were lidded, a little furtive, and yet—as companions could testify—at times they had something of their present surprising gentleness and luminosity, as if, even on those other occasions, they became lenses, through which looked out a spirit, an ego, which had got lost and prisoned in this vast house of clay. But certainly no one else had ever seen Wimms hesitant, or at a loss, as now he was facing his own son.

"Have we time for a walk, Dad?"

"Sure thing! And then a bite together. I've got to meet a chap at seven. Business acquaintance! Have a cig—I forgot, you don't smoke yet." Wimms lit one himself. They moved off, the tip of the weed glowing, fading, glowing. "We'll catch a bus!" said Wimms. They stood, braced against each other, in the crush. They got off when an open space beckoned, and walked together on turf and gravel. Against a rift in the leaden west, filled with greyish purple, saffron tinged, the trees, almost leafless, stood out in delicate relief. Leaves ran before them, and gardeners, destroying these, stood rakes in hand—their figures, in the grey dusk, suggesting a strange order of priests intent upon a rite of incense burning.

"And how's the business college?"

"Fine, Dad! It was awfully decent of you to give me the chance. I like the city. Say, wouldn't it have been horrible if I hadn't been able to find you?"

“Um-huh!” Wimms tossed his cigarette butt into a burning pile of leaves. “Your aunt didn’t encourage you at all, eh?”

“No. She said mother had cut loose from you long ago, and she wouldn’t wish it. I didn’t believe her.”

“Did—did your aunt say anything—well, anything special against me?”

“She said your reputation wasn’t good!”

“Oh, she did, eh?”

“Isn’t it?”

“At least,” said Wimms, “it’s a very solid one. It took a bit of building. In my own line, I’m supposed to be a success. But I don’t fancy it would appeal to your aunt!”

“But, what *is* your business, Dad?”

Wimms blew a cloud of smoke before answering. He said: “I’m sort of a—an organiser—a promoter!”

“Oh, that’s all right, isn’t it? If you’re on the square with it!”

“I’ve played it,” said Wimms, “on the square—as the game goes. But it’s a hard game. I’m giving it up, son. I’ve a notion you and me’ll go away—quite a long way off, and forget it. If that will suit you?”

“Rather!”

They walked in silence. The dusk had drawn in. There was a grey ghostliness amongst the trees of the park—smoke, perhaps, but it seemed insubstantial, and through it ran a chill, though there was no wind. The heart of the park seemed remote, and to hold silences accentuated by the roar of traffic on four sides, which rose at a distance to give an overtone, magnetic and arresting. “Suppose we go and eat?” said Wimms. He consulted his watch under one of a series of lights now springing into being to mark the paths. “I’ve given my word to show up at this appointment at seven sharp!” He turned suddenly to the boy. “Look here, son,” he said, “if you hear anything about me, you know, give me the benefit of the doubt! Whatever’s true in it, try and believe the whole apple wasn’t rotten—not quite! I don’t care about others, but I’d like you to think that!”

“Dad!” Randall caught his arm. “What makes you talk like that? One would think—”

Wimms broke in, with a laugh of sorts. “Look at the ghosts in the street!” he said. “I thought I gave up seeing ghosts a good many years ago. They don’t mix well in my business. Let’s go. It’s getting chilly! Shouldn’t wonder if it will rain before long!” They pushed on, side by side, through grey, smoky avenues, toward the magnetic brightness of electrified buildings, and the

sullen, unending roar of city traffic.

III

Wimms left the boy exactly at ten minutes to seven. They stood for a prolonged moment at the door, or outside the door, of the restaurant in which they had eaten together. Grey ashes of a thin cigar he had purchased from a hovering boy with a tray of smoker's offerings, had spilled on the lapel of his coat; he made a business of brushing these off. It was a moment more of silence than of speech. They seemed to have talked themselves out over the table, and now to desire only a silent continuation of comradeship. This was at once important and embarrassing. You could tell that by their faces. Wimms squinted at his watch—a remarkable timepiece strapped to his wrist. He nodded, casually. "Well, I must be off!"

"Which way are you going, Dad?"

"Which way are you, son?"

"Well, I thought I might go along with you a bit."

Wimms chewed his cigar. "No, son! Better hop along to your room. I've got to think over this business appointment of mine. When you have an appointment with any one, son, get the wheels working in advance. So few do, properly, and it gives a man an advantage! So long, son!"

"So long, dad!"

Wimms watched the boy merge with the crowd, then turned away, with evident reluctance. A pace or two on, he glanced around again. "Mustn't be a fool!" he muttered to himself. "That boy's getting me shaky! No good!" He started on down the street. He had allowed himself exactly the ten minutes. It would take that by hard walking. He was a man meticulous about keeping appointments. Perspiration began to break out on him. He wiped his forehead. "Getting soft!" he told himself. He walked a little less rapidly, but still at a good pace. The flood of foot traffic grew, and on the pavements beyond was the continuous movement of many motors. This would grow as the theatre hour advanced. Wimms knew every inch of his city. Time and again, people had heard him declaim its praises. On his last birthday, some of the elect had foregathered; in a room looking down over a canyon full of traffic, whose noise rose cacophonously in the night, they had toasted Wimms, in bootleg which he provided lavishly and did not himself touch. A wit in the party, rendered bibulous as time wore on, retired with a bottle to a corner, and turned his emotions into verse:

"And when he dies (if ever he be dead)
Let it be on the streets and not in bed,
With motor traffic hooting on his right,
And, on his left, masked bandits in a fight!
And let his body, when reduced to ash,
Be borne to where the merry din and crash
Of traffic be most great, and there be thrown,
That city streets he loved may claim their own!"

With great shoutings, they had drunk that down. He had thanked them for their good wishes! Wimms walked on now, and, whether these things moved in his mind or not, the traffic grew with every block; here, you might almost say, was the heart of the city. People passed him without a glance, who might have turned had they known his celebrity. Young girls and fellows, arm in arm. Clerkly people, hurrying home, the lines of their daily bookkeeping written on their brows. Visitors, window shopping, taking their ease. Many people hurrying to dinners. And, over and above them all, a maze of electric lights, winking, fading, blurring, dancing—forming combinations of letters, of words, of figures—fantastic, accelerating—and, on the whole, very gay and enticing. It was a world of merriment. People could have told you—the initiate—that this was Wimms' very life. The beat of this life was the beat of his own heart.

Wimms told himself, halting on a curb, awaiting the green signal: "We'll get into the bush country for a time! It'll harden me up, and we'll get acquainted." His eyes brightened. "By George, how many years is it since I had a fishing rod in hand? We'll poke up the streams together!" A clock, in a high tower, boomed out the seven strokes. He nodded, as if to it. Crossing the intersection on the signal, he stood in the doorway of a furrier's shop, closed now for the day, but with its furs displayed under concealed and most brilliant electric lights. Wimms smiled. "We'll hunt a bit, too, shouldn't wonder!" he said. He glanced at his own watch, impatiently, and waited. Across the way, on a roof of an older and lower building, an electric sign winked on and off: "*Get your—G-e-t y-o-u-r—Get your——*" Get your what? Probably, your dinner at Somebody's, or your clothes at Somebody Else's—if you waited long enough for that motif to be played out. "*Get Your G-e-t y-o-u-r Get—*" A car swept in, close to the curb. People, glancing around, continued on their way. Back-firing, probably! Then a woman, near the brilliantly lighted furrier's shop, screamed. A man had crumpled down in that intense brilliance, one arm under him like a pillow, and a chewed cigar butt grotesquely caught between his tightly clenched teeth.

Madrigone, accepting and paying for his newspaper casually, sat at his restaurant table, and let his eyes rest on the headlines that concerned Wimms' death. He handed it over to Lefty.

"Well, that's that!" he said.

Lefty read the brief, prominently displayed item, nodded, sighed, and said with satisfaction: "I told you these boys was good! Killers, if ever I saw any. And not a sniff of suspicion who done it!" He glanced quickly at Madrigone. "Now that he's out of the way, chief, just what was the idea? Wimms was a square guy!"

Madrigone's face did not change. "It's these square guys who're apt to go soft," he said, considering the ash end of his cigar, judicially. "I wanted him to handle Connovan for me. He wouldn't. Told me to do my own dirty work. No man," said Madrigone, evenly, "can pull that stuff with me, especially a man like Wimms. He made me feel cheap, Lefty. I don't put up with any man who gives himself that kind of airs. I had a bad dream that night!"

Lefty nodded. "He was a big guy!" he said, soberly. "He was bigger'n any of the rest of us!"

"So you've got that idea, too?" Madrigone leaned forward across the little table. Lefty, whose eyes were turned away, said: "Oh, I don't mean big like you, chief! Not a big gangster that way. But—sort of big—inside!" He flushed. Madrigone sat back and regarded his henchman quizzically, inimically. Lefty, as if finally unable to endure, lifted the paper, and gave attention to it.

"Lefty!" said Madrigone, presently.

"Yeh?"

"I want you to arrange for his funeral, see? All the trimmin's, understand? Spare no expense. Flowers, best coffin—all the gadgets!"

Lefty looked up.

"Where?"

"Cullin's Funeral Parlors. Tell Cullin from me it's got to be done right. The newspapers'll spread themselves on this!"

"And the police?"

Madrigone gave a throaty laugh.

"The police'll keep the crowds back—and listen hopefully for shootin' inside. They're all in favour of this kind of extermination!" Lefty's shoulders twitched for an instant. "I don't want it said," observed Madrigone, after a space, "that I didn't stand by Wimms in death! Lots of flowers, Lefty. Say it with flowers. And then, Lefty—and then, say it with bullets!" Lefty's habitual phlegm deserted him. He licked his lips, as if they were too dry for words to

cross them. “Entrance by invitation only!” said Madrigone. “And Connovan and all his gang invited—the double-crossers! An overture of peace. They’re dumb enough to believe in it. Have your killers on hand, Lefty. It seems a pity to mess up Cullin’s place, but it can’t be helped. He’s just had the chapel redecorated, too. Tell ’em to aim careful, and they shouldn’t damage the plaster too much!”

Lefty said, after a moment: “Maybe Connovan’s gang’ll come heeled!”

“Sure they will!” He stared at Lefty. “Afraid?”

“Me?”

“Humph! Well! Besides, I’ll arrange with the police to search for weapons as each one enters. They’ll oblige! You can plant the killers’ weapons in Cullin’s chapel!”

“Cullin won’t stand for that, chief! You know Cullin!”

Madrigone meditated. “Guess you’re right! Well, say it with flowers then, Lefty. Park the gats in suitable wreaths, and park the killers alongside!”

“These boys of mine won’t know, chief, who’s who!”

Madrigone nodded, chewing on his cigar, thinking. “See here, Lefty, everybody who gets in has gotta pass you at the door, so you give ’em a buttonhole flower—mark of respect! Tell our boys if they want to stay a while longer on earth to wear ’em sure. They’ll obey. You needn’t tell ’em in so many words that those without the buttonholes are due to be targets. See?”

Lefty’s face was expressionless. But he said: “It’s stackin’ the cards. They won’t have a chance in the world!”

“Let ’em have it in the next world!” said Madrigone. “Don’t be a fool, Lefty! I don’t like fools! It’ll be over in five seconds, and the police’ll rush in, and nobody’ll know who done it. And the police’ll investigate perfunctorily, and be almighty pleased four or five more bad men have gone West! Tell your killers to be sure to wear mournin’ gloves, and park the gats in the flowers again!”

Lefty nodded. Madrigone, signalling a waiter, called for a replenishment of liquid in the tall glasses, and relapsed into a deep meditation, whose satisfactions Lefty made no attempt to interrupt.

V

The house in which young Randall Wimms lodged was a place of mediocrity in an obscure street. Its long rows of uninspired brick buildings, each like unto its neighbour, were enlivened only by occasional dejected trees, hedged about ineffectually by wooden guards in which the initials of scores of

knife-armed urchins were cut. These trees which, in summer at least, lent a touch of green, had lost all but a few remaining leaves, that clung, for no apparent good reason, to life in such surroundings. The interior of this place of lodging was full of an onion-tainted unloveliness. But, at the end of the street, not two hundred yards away, ran a thoroughfare, whose second-rate brilliance led to more first-rate attractions and—to a boy unfamiliar with the city—lent an aura of romance even to this dispiriting cul-de-sac. From his window, in the front of the house, one could hear the thrilling hum of continuous traffic, the overtones of an incessant and feverish life. Randall stood at the window, looking out. A moon, outdistanced by slow-moving clouds, hung above the roofs opposite, in an indeterminate area of blue. His eyes turned rather to the upcast reflection of a million lights. High up, clearly visible from here, were electric signs, winking, glowing, spreading, fading. They seemed to hold a fascination for him. Behind him on a table, under a single shaded light, books were spread—night work from Parram's Progressive Business College, ambitiously laid out. The gloom of the bedroom shrouded twin beds and an indifferent agglomeration of furniture. Young Wimms economically shared this room with another fellow from Parram's. If he questioned at all his father's insistence on this modest apartment, if he wondered why there were no overtures toward sharing a domicile, Randall did not seek for an answer. His father was an object of worship. He could do no wrong. Young Wimms, beginning suddenly to whistle, turned again to his books, but the night air and the sound of the city's life flowed to him through the open window. A door below banged. Steps sounded on the stairs. Perriton—fellow scholar at Parram's—entered. Perriton, perhaps without intent, had all the elements of a second-rate clown. He stood above Randall Wimms, making grimaces of surprise.

"Hullo! Hullo! What—here in the flesh?" He clutched his heart. "Then what does this mean, my bucko?" Grinning, he passed a newspaper to his friend.

WIMMS SHOT ON STREET
Prominent and Mysterious Figure Claimed by
Police to be Killed in Mob Warfare.

Perriton laughed. "Alas!" he said. "I thought fame had come to our low dwelling! I see—" He broke off. The grin remained fixed on his mouth, after it had faded from the rest of his face. He passed a hand across his mouth, as if to wipe this unnatural humour away. Randall was staring at the column-width cut, and three lines of print underneath:

Victim of Mob Killing. Believed by Police

to be Identified in Large Way
with Underworld.

Randall stood up. Perriton put out an arm, but Randall pushed it away. He strode toward the door. Perriton, with a callow look of fear on his face, was given sense to speak.

"Won't you need—a hat?"

Randall Wimms caught it from him, and went.

There was a hint of rain in the air. His father had spoken of possible rain. As he went along, it came in spatters from passing clouds, through which the moon looked down. The moon had small chance in the bright canyons beyond. The rain accomplished no effacement of glaring electrics. Crowds were in the streets. The dominance of amusement in their thoughts pushed aside the minor strain of a city's tragedies. One or two, perhaps, in each block were conscious of his tragic face and mechanical walk. At a busy corner, he crossed in defiance of a signal, of traffic, of a traffic officer's commentaries. An opera-cloaked young woman, with her escort, was admiring a sable coat in a furrier's window. Across the way, on top of a low building, a sign suggested: "*Get Your —G-e-t Y-o-u-r Garments at Goulden's.*" Randall Wimms stood in the doorway of the furrier's. The young woman and her escort turned to look a second time at him, then hurried on. Other people, though only a few, regarded the doorway with morbid eyes. A clerk, from a drug-store next door, stood chatting for a moment with a customer who desired information. People gathered to hear the young clerk with the slicked black hair, upon whose oily surface a few drops of rain splatted. "It was right there!" said the clerk. "I heard it, but I thought it was back-firing. Afterwards, I ran out. He was lying there. Right about so! Drilled, they say! I thought it was back-firing all the time!"

"Where'd they take him?"

The voice seemed to startle everyone.

"The morgue!" said the clerk, almost irritably. "Where'd you suppose?"

VI

Lefty had gone down to that tragic mortuary where are temporarily housed, awaiting inquest and disposition, the bodies of those overtaken by unnatural death. He was not unfamiliar with the place. In its cold and formal lobby he lit cigarettes with the most complete aplomb, and would have done so within had this been allowed. If any emotion moved him at sight of Wimms' body, it was overshadowed by a sense of policy. It was policy, under the shrewd eyes that

watched him, to show an aspect of restrained mourning, fitting in one of his caliber who, however, had lost a friend. “Shot down in cold blood by some blasted scoundrel!” said Lefty, in a proper tone of angry grief for the ears of an attendant.

The attendant was without illusions.

“One less of you!” he said, coolly.

Lefty took refuge in his grief. He murmured something fitting about wishing to get his hands on the scoundrel who did the deed. In the recesses of his accommodating mind, he was doubtless remembering the final payment due these western killers for value received. There was some genuineness in his voice, however, as he turned away: “He was a square shooter, anyhow!” “No insinuations about—others?” said a voice in his ear. He swung around. Madrigone was favouring him with something of a smile.

“You here?” Lefty’s eyes said.

“Good policy!” said Madrigone from the corner of his mouth, a trick he had borrowed from melodrama and perfected in a life not without that element. “Wait for me outside!” So Lefty waited obediently, smoking interminable cigarettes and thinking his own long thoughts. As he stood there, the door swung open, and a young fellow came in. He seemed both breathless and agitated, and then struck into a statue by the chill formality of this lobby to death. Seeing the lone figure of Lefty, he went to him. “How—how do you see—people?” he asked. The lights, from Lefty’s angle, shone on the youth’s hair; it looked like yellow taffy that had been pulled to smoothness. Lefty jerked an indifferent thumb.

“Go on in. Who d’ye want to see?”

“My father!”

“Name?”

“Wimms!”

“Oh! Well, you’ll find him in there, son!”

The boy, first hesitant, darted off; the door closed softly behind him, with a muffled sound that seemed to belong to death. Lefty stood gazing across the empty, vault-like lobby. An official in uniform appeared, crossed over, and disappeared. His footsteps remained for a few seconds after he had gone, echoing peculiarly in the immediate silence, and losing themselves at last, as if the grey ceiling, with its vague spattering of decorative stars, had absorbed them. Then Madrigone came out. He moved over toward Lefty, and his footsteps, more furtive than those of officialdom, did not echo.

“Who’s that lad gone in?”

“Says he’s Wimms’ son!”

“I thought as much!” Madrigone, with unwonted generosity, offered his henchman a fresh cigarette. They smoked. Little curls rose in the silence like incense in the courts of a temple. Lefty shifted his feet uneasily, and the sound went shushing through the empty place. “Quiet night!” observed Madrigone. He grinned. “Not much business round here—except ours!” He jerked his head.

“Don’t!” said Lefty.

Madrigone looked at him.

“Let’s go!” said Lefty. He made a motion to that end.

“Wait!” said Madrigone.

They smoked again, the incense rising—Lefty’s in volume, Madrigone’s in placid spirals, thin and blue. The muffled door swung open with vigour. A voice said: “Yeh, there they are, son!” And young Wimms came toward them. Lefty shifted his feet again. Randall Wimms stopped a pace or two away, and his eyes investigated them. The pallor of his face seemed to emphasise the intense blueness of his eyes and the sheen of his taffy-coloured hair.

“Wantin’ somethin’ son?” asked Madrigone.

Young Wimms’ thumb jerked backward toward the closed doors of the mortuary chamber.

“He says—you know!”

He stopped and swallowed. His eyes questioned, first Lefty, then, and finally, Lefty’s chief.

“Sure!” said Madrigone. “We knew your dad, if that’s what you mean. Well, you mustn’t be surprised over this, son! Sooner or later, it happens in our business. Our names get themselves written on a bit of lead, and there you are. Sorry, son, but he took his own chances. We’d have protected him if we could!”

Young Wimms seemed not to hear. His mouth worked a bit; and then words came, jerkingly: “Who—who did it? Who shot—my—father!” Madrigone’s head lifted; it may have been not evasively, to escape the direct burn of those peculiarly blue eyes, but merely to emit a very perfect smoke ring or two that moved up, expanding, to die in the upper air. “Do you hear me?” Madrigone’s arm was shaken. “Who killed him?” A sudden conviction rang in the boy’s voice. “You know! You know who did it!”

Madrigone permitted himself a smile. “Nobody ever knows these things, son!” he said. “And if they do, it’s healthy to get rid of the idea, pronto!”

The blue eyes burned.

“I’m going—to—find—out!”

“Don’t try, son!” said Madrigone dryly.

“I’m going to find out all about it!” said young Wimms fiercely.

Madrigone and Lefty for an instant exchanged glances. Madrigone’s shoulders hitched suggestively. Suddenly, he smiled. “Anything we can do to help you, son!” he offered. “Anything in reason! But, remember, it’s easy to get your fingers burned! We were friends of your dad. That’s why I’m warnin’ you. Friends of his? Why, we’re goin’ to see to all the funeral arrangements!” He looked now into young Wimms’ eyes. “Maybe you don’t think anything of that? Maybe you don’t know what such a funeral can turn into? Eh, Lefty? Remember the time we paid our last respects to Kid Kilkerly? Are you afraid of shootin’, son? If so, I’d stay away. We’re issuin’ invitations careful, but you never know. If you want to stay away, I don’t blame you!”

“From my father’s funeral?”

“Well, don’t look like that!” said Madrigone. “We’re glad to have you come. There’ll be an inquest to-morrow—of sorts. And, after that, we’ll fix it for Cullin’s Funeral Parlours next day. Two o’clock, Lefty! You come around to the Parlours, a quarter hour before, son, and this gentleman will let you in, see?”

Young Wimms stared at them again, then spoke curtly: “I’ll be there!”

They watched him go. He seemed now to be in a hurry to leave them. Madrigone turned. Lefty offered comment: “That kid’s fool enough to cause trouble, chief!”

“Maybe. But not for long!” He regarded Lefty with something like a smile. “You’ll be sure he gets in to the funeral, Lefty!”

“Sure, chief! You—you don’t mean—?”

Madrigone tossed down his cigarette stub and ground his heel on it. “No flower for him, Lefty! Maybe a chief mourner might look too festive with a flower, eh?” He winked, nodded, and started off. Rather more slowly, and with an admixture of fear and admiration in his eyes as he watched his chief, Lefty followed.

VII

For some minutes, on the day of the elder Wimms’ funeral, it looked as if Madrigone would be too late for that event. His full intention to be amongst those paying their last respects to the departed, was shown by the urgency of soul that came upon him on discovering himself in a traffic jam six blocks away, his taxi one of a hundred motors involved in a maddening tangle.

"What's the tie-up?" he demanded.

"Looks almost like a fire, boss! Yeh, see 'em workin' to get that hose into position?"

"Let me out!"

The man obeyed with alacrity. Madrigone tossed him an oath and a bill, and threaded his way to the curb, a figure not inconspicuous as usual—quite the opposite. But the crowd, hurrying toward that magnet of smoke now shredding from an upper window a block ahead, had no compliment of attention to pay to the killer or his clothes. They pushed brash elbows into the immaculate sides of his morning coat—product of the most fashionable tailor in town—and, by the time he battled his way into the relief of a comparatively quiet street, his grey tie was under one ear, and his silk hat cocked at an angle that did not flatter his vanity. Essentially, Madrigone was a vain man, like many of his kind. But clothes could not quite rescue him from an obscurity of personality that he had deliberately, and to good effect, cultivated. One caught the real Madrigone, the remorseless killer, only in the twitch of the mouth, the set, at times, of the chin, the glint of the eyes. Two blocks south, he was successful in hailing an empty taxi, and was borne with due haste to his destination. He arrived there at four minutes past two. The service would have started. Lefty had orders for two o'clock, and he was accustomed to dealing in split seconds. Outside Cullin's Funeral Parlours, a considerable crowd had collected. They stood, held back by a cordon of police, waiting, with that queer, immeasurable, unreasonable patience of crowds, who hardly know why they stand and wait, but nevertheless remain. Perhaps there would be shooting. They might scatter, but they would be among those present. Madrigone, driving up, looked them over. A policeman, white-gloved, on duty at the entrance, opened the door. Under this civil protection of the law, Madrigone stepped out. The crowd pressed forward a little. They probably took Madrigone for an alderman, or something more respectable than a high-class crook. A plain-clothes man in the doorway, who should have known better than the respect he accorded this silk-hatted gentleman, whispered a low word.

"Sure!" Madrigone told him. "Go ahead and search me!"

"Orders, sir!" said the man, apologetically.

Madrigone was passed in. Lefty looked his relief at sight of him. From the side of Madrigone's mouth, words were emitted only for Lefty's ears: "All set?" Lefty nodded. He handed Madrigone a white carnation. Madrigone, forbearing to wink, pulled it into his buttonhole, and made his way in. Pushing became unnecessary as his presence was known. Politely, men made way for him. The clergyman, seeing him, hearing perhaps the whisper "Madrigone," lost his place, found it, and went on. The funeral parlours were heavy with

flowers. Madrigone's eyes rested on his own wreath, a symbolic thing, expensively adorned with doves, at the foot of the casket. Everywhere he looked, Madrigone saw flowers in buttonholes—carnations, mostly white, a few pink. His eyes searched as if to locate those who were without this symbol of protection. It was impossible to see well in the crowd. Lefty would have seen to these fellows of Connovan's. Lefty was also to arrange, at a signal—which was the lifting of the casket—for the hired killers to jostle their men into position, so that the rest would not be too much endangered by the shooting. Madrigone gave his attention to the service going forward. If the words meant to him nothing worth grasping, he gave no sign. He might have been, indeed, a grave city father, or the chief mourner—except that the chief mourner stood by the foot of the casket, alongside Madrigone's wreath with its chaste representation of doves—done, appropriately, in white carnations! Randall Wimms' back was to Madrigone. He stood, head a little bowed, but with his eyes apparently unalterably fixed on him he had so tardily come to know as a father. Occasionally, his shoulders quivered. He gave no other sign.

VIII

A sonorous benediction moved through the mortuary chapel. Madrigone stiffened a little. His face, however, was impassive. His eyes, by a peculiar trick he had developed, saw much without any undue movement of the head. He started. Young Wimms had lifted his head from that concentrated gaze, and turned a little. In his buttonhole was a flower! Madrigone's lips, after a second of stupefaction, moved in an anathema. It concerned Lefty. "Gone soft!" he muttered. His face remained impassive. In the shuffle of relaxed bodies his own movements were made possible. He edged forward. The surge to view the mortal remains of the elder Wimms began. Madrigone, caught in it, reached the casket. Young Wimms was kneeling now, gazing at his father. His face was blank, but not vacuous, in boyish grief. He had managed a supreme control. His chin spoke rather a determination, that Madrigone might interpret how he would. So might a knight, swearing to see some sacred cause to its mortal end, kneel before a shrine. Madrigone's teeth for a moment drew, comblike, on his moustache. He leaned down beside the mourning boy. He put a hand on the lad's shoulder—the left shoulder. Randall Wimms relaxed in appreciation of the sympathy. "Sorry for you, lad!" said Madrigone, briefly, and withdrew his hand. In it was the pink carnation the boy had been wearing. Reaching up, he adjusted the purloined flower in his own buttonhole, crushing his previous decoration further into the hole. His eyes again shrewdly took in the roomful of silent, shuffling mourners. The thing had been easily, inconspicuously done. A voice said: "Everybody will please remain until the

casket is removed!”

There was no dissent. One or two exchanged grim, knowing looks. At Kid Kilkerly’s funeral there had been a bad affair just outside the door, as men waited, bareheaded. Killers’ funerals demanded precautions. Men stood about quite at ease here, recalling the search for weapons at the door. So long as they were in here, there was security. Six professional pallbearers—at Kid Kilkerly’s affair two out of six had qualified for funerals of their own—entered to perform their offices. The movement necessitated a readjustment of the crowd. Madrigone’s face twitched just once, nervously. A half smile followed and disappeared. Six stout fellows raised the casket. Instantly, a slight commotion arose. Madrigone, lifting his head like a war-horse scenting battle, felt himself jostled rudely. An oath moved to his lips. It was not spoken.

Outside, in the waiting crowd, a woman shrilled: “They’re shooting! They’re shooting in there!” The lines wavered and broke. Policemen and plain-clothes men began to run. A whistle shrilled. Inside, pandemonium raged. Friend was fighting friend, in an endeavour to escape. The doorway bulged with a mass of struggling figures, against which the immediate cordon of police was helpless. They burst from the building like water from a broken dam, and scattered in every direction.

Grim and shaken, Lefty, from a point of obscure strategy, counted hastily the figures lying, unmoving, on the floor. Nearby was the casket, left stranded by frightened pallbearers.

“Five!” counted Lefty.

He licked his lips. And then, suddenly, he leaped forward. Sprawled on the ground, one of the five, was a man in a morning coat, its tails spread in a grotesque way on either side of him. Forgetful of anything else, Lefty turned over this victim and stared, white-faced, at him.

“Madrigone!” said Lefty. He lifted the drooping head, supporting his chief. Madrigone’s glazing eyes opened.

“Double-crossed!” he gasped accusingly.

Lefty shook his head, mouthing incoherencies. Then he snatched at the carnations in Madrigone’s buttonhole, one obscuring the other. He shook the first before the filmy eyes of his chief. “Pink!” he cried. “For God’s sake, chief, who give you pink? Them western guys said they got to be sure—so we settled on pink—pink for death, chief! White for life. Pink for death!”

An agony curled Madrigone’s lips. The ghost of an ironic smile hovered. His head fell back. Somebody was touching Lefty’s arm. He looked up, dully. Young Wimms was there. His eyes were frightened, but—for the moment, facing the fallen Madrigone—quick tears sprang to his eyes. This man had

shown real sympathy. One did not forget, perhaps, a hand on the shoulder. Lefty's eyes opened wider. And, suddenly, he rasped out, "What happened to your flower?"

Young Wimms looked blank. His eyes sought his buttonhole.

"I—I don't know!"

Lefty's face was queer. He let Madrigone collapse to the floor, almost roughly. He stood up. At the doorway, the police were still in action. "I'd beat it, kid, if I was you!" said Lefty. "You go down them back stairs, see?—then turn right! And make it snappy!" His eyes moved to Madrigone's still figure. He tapped the youngster on the shoulder. "And don't you bother your head mixin' in such affairs no more, to find who sent your dad to death. The guy who did that has got the works himself!" In Lefty's voice there might have been almost a satisfaction. But, when the police broke in, he was kneeling like a mourner beside the man to whom so long he had given his allegiance.

1929.

V

"Keep then in sight what war has made you see,
Think no small thoughts again."

THE TRAITOR

I

IT began, of course, with Mr. Reggie's return. That was on the Friday, and a great to-do there was about the house; and even I—who knew him but slightly—felt excited about it, and distressed because Sir Loyden let his sense of military propriety overcome the sentiment that almost impelled him to meet the boy at the boat.

Before the morning of Friday was over, I had other reasons to wish the major-general had gone. He snarled at me over the morning dictation, until I thoroughly wished he would betake himself to his foul-smelling laboratory . . . his larger one—not the innocuous little test-tube place in the house, but the one at the rear of the estate, where he won his O.B.E. in the World War. However, his renown as a chemist and scientist requires no restatement here. That is common property. And his speech before an audience of military bigwigs, on the value of poison-gas, particularly for punitive expeditions, is hardly less commonly known.

From his dictation, Sir Loyden swung suddenly upon me, with a sharp, "What time does that train get in?"

I told him 3:11.

"You've ordered Gregg to meet him with the car?"

"No, sir. I thought you would be going—"

"Who the devil asked you to think?"

I let that pass. There are many things that I let pass with Sir Loyden. Somewhere, down in the man, there was a magnet for my affection, such an affection as one might have for a prize bulldog of uncertain temper. Straight as a string, Sir Loyden is, I'll say that for him, but a red-faced martinet of the old school, with whose ideas I was in constant opposition. I have sometimes fancied that it was this very quality that cemented our relationship, as

employer and employee. To do his best work, he must be roused by some antagonism, expressed or implied; and I was often the spur. He liked, I am convinced, to wave his ideas before me—red rags to a bull!—and then to twit me quite unmercifully. As now. “Slade,” he growled, “what d’you make out of this Nurabian business?”

“That we should have been out of there long ago, sir! We went in ostensibly to do police duty, and remained to act as agents of the ‘interests!’ ”

“Humph!”

I had expected something more explosive, especially when you consider that Mr. Reggie had been one of the Nurabian expedition, having been gazetted as lieutenant just before the armistice, and sent out there to help solve this one of the many riddles that sprang into being in the trail of the World War.

“You forget the white man’s burden, Slade!” said Sir Loyden, dryly sarcastic.

I rose to that like a fish to a fly. “The white man’s burden, sir,” I retorted quickly, “is too often the shouldering of the loot!”

He said, still singularly quiet about it all: “How about General Porteous, and now Sir Hamiss?”

It is scarcely necessary that I should remind those who read these lines of the murders of these two leaders of our national interests by Nurabian fanatics. The one, of course, dates from the troublous times when first the expedition went out, and has been paid for by the blood of some score of tribesmen, but the latter is too recent to require further mention here. I thought of Sir Hamiss, lying there in his bed; of his orderly entering the bedroom to report having heard curious sounds in the night, and finding him bathed in blood in the moonlight.

“Our raw materials are stained with their blood, sir!” I said.

Sir Loyden stared at me, but he did not see me. He was looking at another picture, as his words proved when they came.

“I knew Sir Hamiss,” he told me. “We were at the ’varsity together. A splendid fellow, and—you may sneer if you wish—a humanitarian.”

“I have no desire to sneer, sir!”

“Hold your tongue, Slade!” The storm, I could see, was brewing now. Red mantled his cheeks and brow until they purpled. But he controlled himself. “Too much a humanitarian, poor chap. You can’t treat these niggers like human beings; they don’t understand! By gad, sir, there’s a bit of poetic justice about it!” He rose and paced the room, the words seeming to bubble up in him, until at last they overflowed. “Yes, sir! Poetic justice—that I should have a

hand in punishing his murderers. . . . You knew, I suppose—or have at least suspected, with your perspicacity, Slade—that there is to be, when the time is ripe, a punitive expedition to the interior?"

"Surely, sir, you're not going out?" I cried.

He looked away. "No," he said presently, and with a certain grimness, "not personally—no—except in a way. Mr. Reggie will represent me."

"He's going again—soon?" I could hardly credit that, knowing how he had been longing to get back to life in England again.

"On Monday he will return to town for final instructions, and sail by the first boat!" said Sir Loyden, and, like a flash, I knew that his grim calmness was not the portent of a surface storm, but of one in the depths.

"Mr. Reggie knows?" I ventured.

He almost winced, but drew himself up stiffly. "Not yet, Slade. But he will go. No Jaruss has ever failed the Empire in its need!"

I thought of young Mr. Reggie, the beardless youth, who went out with a proud quiver on his lips, and the high military traditions of the family in his heart; of his years out there; of his letters, making a brave show of contentment that only in the face of his actual return home had been broken through. Filing correspondence one day recently, I had found a letter addressed to Miss Miriam—who ran the household since her mother's death, and who was as much a mother as a sister to him. Almost without thinking, I had read a paragraph or two that caught my eye before I realised that this was private:

". . . you know, sis, one doesn't get used to life out here—oh, in a way one does—there are interesting things about it, you'll have gathered that from my letters—but I've never dared confess, until now, when my face is set toward England again, the *unsatisfied* thing *inside*.

"When I came out, of course, and the war was still on, one couldn't get into things fast enough, but now one thinks of things at home, getting back into the jolly old rut . . . I've had letters from some of the chaps—cricket and shooting, and town in season, and even the Christmas pantomime . . . Teddie Markham writes that he's settled down in a little place—for two—not far from Oxford, all green and grey and the flowers of English spring—that kind of thing! It rather gets a home-loving bird like me. Besides, don't breathe it to the guv'nor, but I've a rather different slant on things after five years or so—I suppose we all have, more or less—perhaps even he, though the dear old war-horse would never admit it, would he? . . . You remember, sis, that volume of Noyes you sent me? There's a thing been haunting me lately, asleep and awake—

‘A moon ago there came a cry
From England, from England,
Faintly, fondly it faltered nigh
The throne of the Spring in the Southern sky,
And it whispered “Come,” and the world went by,
And with one long loving blissful sigh
The Spring was away to England!’

I’ll be too late for it, sis, but not for English summer, and long, lazy days . . . I’ve planned a score of things for us to do . . . and in the autumn we’ll take in the ‘little season’ in town, and then heigh-ho for a real English Christmas!”

Was I wrong in reading this far before I remembered? The thing caught at my throat, and now again as I faced Sir Loyden.

“What’s on your mind now, Slade?” he snapped suddenly.

“I’m thinking,” I said, “that perhaps, after all, the white man’s burden isn’t just shouldering the loot!”

II

I met Mr. Reggie myself. He was a bit dashed at sight of me, though he gave me a tremendous grip of the hand, as if I, at least, were a link with home.

“Guv’nor not ill, I hope, Slade?”

I told him “No,” and wondered if that was the whole truth, remembering the face of Sir Loyden, as he stood hesitating whether to go to the station after all, and deciding against it, doubtless, as a sentimental thing!

“Miss Miriam would have come, only she was putting the finishing touches to the house, that things may be just so for your arrival, Mr. Reggie!”

He laughed, shaking his head in a boyish way that reminded me of the lad who had left, and who was now, seemingly, so much older, and tawnier, and on whose shoulders were a captain’s stars.

“Good lord!” he groaned comically. “As if I would notice if the parlour-maid had dusted the top shelf of the what-not! The same old Miriam—steeped in the ‘Jaruss sense of duty’!” He threw back his head again and laughed. The car rounded a turn in the road, between clipped hedges, and he caught my arm. “Gad, Slade, there it is—dear old place! . . . One never knows just how much of home is knit into every bone and sinew until one gets away from it far enough. And one’s country!” His voice trembled a little, and I told myself that this tawny-skinned captain was still a boy at heart. “Look,” he cried again, “there are the jolly old woods we used to adventure in as youngsters! Listen to the rooks! It was always full of them. . . . Sometimes, at night you know, when

one is fanciful, I've wakened, and fancied I heard the rooks calling." He broke off. "I suppose the guv'nor has his ghastly old stink-hole back in among the trees still? . . . There, I forgot, the need of that is past, thank God!" His face clouded for a moment, and I made quick answer: "Yes, it's closed now!"

Which, God knows, was true enough in a way, yet not as he took it, for there was still vividly in my mind that time, a month or so back, when Sir Loyden had his triumph, and a half score of military bigwigs to clap him on the back.

There was Miss Miriam in the doorway now, for we had come quickly up the curving driveway and swung to a halt in front of the old Queen Anne mansion; and, just behind her, Sir Loyden—in uniform! Only on special occasions did he wear this, and it came to me at once that it was ill-timed now, when his grey tweed sack suit would have struck a much happier note. However, I gave him credit for seeking, after his manner and tradition, to do honour to his son, the captain . . . until I remembered, and a little chill stole over me, there in the English sunlight. As for Mr. Reggie, he recovered from his sister's impetuous embrace, turned to his father, hesitated, and drew himself up in a quick and punctilious salute.

But a moment later they were in each other's arms.

III

There was the week-end, of course. Miss Miriam with all manner of things arranged to celebrate the home-coming; people in and out, neighbours, local gentry, all glad to welcome the lad back. The old house alive as I had not seen it in my time there! Girls, of course, plenty of them, and Mr. Reggie in gay resignation accepting the rôle of hero thrust upon him, though I noticed he gave them all the slip whenever there was the opportunity of an *affaire à deux* with the Rawlinson girl, to whom, it seemed, he was attentive in his callow undergraduate days before the war. And Sunday! I have often thought since of the utter peace of that Sunday morning—one of those dew-drenched summer mornings, with an infinite delight in the walk by the short cut through the meadows to the parish church—Sir Loyden was rigorous in the matter of his household's attendance on divine worship Sunday mornings—and a laziness in the sound of church bells, and in the movement of the kine in the lush meadows, and in the breeze that stole gently through the ancient windows of the ancient building, a somnolent breeze that had no sooner entered than it fell asleep, and tempted you to like irreverence. We forgot to be lazy, though, when the sermon came. Young Merrivale, the new curate, spoke, the vicar himself suffering from a growing bronchial affection, and I was aware at once

of Sir Loyden stiffening in the seat beside me. He himself had helped secure the young man this post—as an ex-service man—but had since repented it. “A wishy-washy sentimental fool!” was his comment. “There are too many of the breed nowadays!”

“Damned impudence!” exploded Sir Loyden as soon as we were out. “What business have politics in the pulpit? And even to make reference to the Nurabian affair, with you in the seat there—”

Mr. Reggie laughed, clapped his father on the shoulder, and thrust his hands into the capacious pockets of an old sack suit he had insisted on wearing.

“Dear old war-horse!” he jollied the major-general. “My dear guv’nor, how could the fellow know I would be home, and what of it, anyway? I’m not the Nurabian affair. Matter of fact, I thought he talked pretty straight common sense. That thing he quoted rather tickled me. Remember it?

> ‘Christ’s followers here denying what He saith,
> Christian in babbled word, heathen in act—’ ”

I do not know what would have happened then if Miss Miriam had not suddenly called a truce to the argument, for all of which Sir Loyden was still speechless and purple when we reached the house. There his duties as host—for he had asked one or two over for midday Sunday dinner—had a calming effect. It was not until the late afternoon, when others had joined us at tea on the lawn, and the shadows were drifting lazily across the turf, that the thing came up again. It was natural, I suppose, that the Nurabian affair should be mentioned, with Mr. Reggie there, just back from the scene of it. One of the men put a question, and Sir Loyden, with what I felt to be infinite wisdom, rose and quitted the party.

I can remember, with singular clearness, how Mr. Reggie leaned back in his garden chair, smoking lazily, and answering the questions thrust upon him. “Sir Hamiss? . . . yes, we all loved him.” Mr. Reggie’s eyes half closed, as if to summon up a vision. “When I think of him,” he said quietly, “I think of that type of courteous, justice-loving, big-hearted English gentleman that has been the very genius of all that is best in our empire-building. The natives loved Sir Hamiss, too—those who knew him, and weren’t blinded by the things they fancied he stood for.” He smoked a while. “Jolly decent beggars, the Nurabians, most of ’em—if you give them half a chance!” He smoked again. We hung on his words, for the matter was critical at that time. “Sir Hamiss was killed by the—interests—more than by the natives. You knew?—or perhaps that didn’t get over in the news—the man who killed him gave himself up later on, half crazed with the thing he had done! Sir Hamiss had befriended him

once. You see what I mean? It was the protest of his country, but not against Sir Hamiss. The beggars marched at his funeral—the biggest fomenters of rebellion in the pack. If only they could see that he was England—not the England of the politicians and the demagogues and the interests—but *the* England—" He broke off. "Listen to those rooks, will you! The things haven't forgotten their raucous voices. You've no idea how jolly they sound!"

The conversation drifted off into lighter vein at that, but, watching the rooks flying above the trees, I caught a glimpse of Sir Loyden Jaruss coming out of the woods. . . . Later, I happened upon him in the office, his cigar glowing in the darkness, and his lips muttering: "Not until the morning . . . not until the morning!"

IV

I wakened on Monday morning with the sound of voices under my window.

Mr. Reggie had always been an early bird with a fondness for an airing before breakfast, and it was scarcely conceivable that he would neglect the opportunity on this the occasion of his return home. Sir Loyden looked like a man who has passed a sleepless night. They went away together, father and son, quite companionably toward the woods.

I was dressed and downstairs when I saw them return. Mr. Reggie's face was white and set; Sir Loyden's was flushed with anger. I heard him say: "You will report to me at ten, in the office. We must be in London by three. My instructions are definite!" Mr. Reggie simply said, "Very well, sir!" with military stiffness, and they parted. Breakfast was a ghastly meal, at which Mr. Reggie put in no appearance, and from which I escaped as quickly as possible. Going out, I found Mr. Reggie in the garden. He was in uniform again, and I thought, with a quick pang, how well it suited him as he moved about in the rose garden, almost idly sniffing their delicate fragrance, and touching their dew-wet petals with an odd gentleness. He started at sound of me, drew himself up, nodded briskly.

"Great morning, Slade!"

"Yes, Mr. Reggie!"

And there we stood, facing each other like two fools, afraid of speech, and still more afraid of silence. He said, at last, "There's nothing—just like this, is there?" He gestured with his hand, though I knew he meant the garden, and the shrubbery, and the turf beyond, leading to the house, and the broader sweep of meadow and sloping land to the village, pierced by a glittering stream of quiet water. "England!" he said, and then, gravely, "I wish to God I didn't love her

so!”

“Mr. Reggie!” I said impulsively. “It’s a wretched business—you having to go again—”

“You don’t understand,” he said; then quickly, “You know about this new punitive expedition, Slade?” I nodded. “Thank God for that!” he cried. “I’ve got to talk to some one—and he doesn’t understand! My father! . . . Is he my father? . . . What am I saying?” His eyes sought the landscape again. “This England, you know—it’s not just the leaving again, I could stick that—if I could take the real England with me—this mellow peace, Slade, this native, natural peace!” He lit a cigarette jerkily. “We’ve given so much—we’ve so much more to give—our best things, the ripe flowers of civilization that the years have brought to perfection—like these—fragrant, beautiful!” He touched a rose. “You’ll think I’m gone queer,” he said, “only I’m seeing the other thing . . . You understand, they’re just waiting—the fanatical ones—for such a move. We’ll advance into the interior, you understand, still under pretence of police duty, as a sop to the people—well, thank God, the nation, and the House, wouldn’t stand for the thing if they knew how they’re being hoodwinked by the extreme military clique! Anyway, we’ll advance, and it’ll be a red rag to a bull. They’ll come on to ‘drive us into the sea,’ as they have sworn. The same ghastly, decent beggars who followed in poor Hamiss’s funeral cortège—fighting for what they conceive to be their freedom, like the ancestry we play up in our histories—that kind of thing. And then—little puffs of explosion—and the gas, Slade!—the gas! My father’s gas, Slade! . . . If it would blot them out then and there, even, but it won’t!” He almost staggered, himself, then straightened. “Spare the rod and spoil the child, Slade! Better a few should die that many may learn the lesson! Lots of specious excuses . . . You understand, Slade, the damnable cleverness of it? Not too big a dose, they flee before it, gasping—the white man has put an evil spirit upon them! When they get back to their homes, and comrades, and families, not till then, if the gas is used discreetly, will the thing get them, or most of ’em—a few may get more merciful whiffs—then the evil spirit will tear them, and they’ll die in agony before the eyes of their families, and friends . . . A splendid lesson! My father’s gas, Slade, the triumph of his life!”

He became aware of my silent horror.

“What have I done?” he cried. “You didn’t know?—no one is to know, of course, the inside truth, except the military bigwigs—and me! I shouldn’t have told . . . the thing that’s up there in the woods, such an innocent-looking case of it, that I’m to take!”

“You?” I cried.

“Who else?” he said bitterly. “My father’s son! A supreme compliment!

I'm to get my majority out of it! A happy arrangement all round!" Sir Loyden's voice, calling imperiously for his secretary, took me from him then. Sir Loyden, I noticed at once, was spick and span in his staff-officer's uniform.

V

It was, I believe, by deliberate intent that Sir Loyden detained me in the office when the hour of ten struck and Mr. Reggie came in. My own interpretation is that it was to be strictly a matter of official business, transacted before a secretarial witness, with no earmarks of a father-and-son dispute.

Sir Loyden looked up almost casually over his glasses and fingered some papers. "I have the instructions here," he said. "You may read them." Mr. Reggie took them without a word and read them through. Then he stiffened to attention.

"I am sorry, sir," he said, "but I cannot carry them out. I am resigning my commission!"

"You—what?"

"Resigning. Throwing up my commission, sir!"

The veins in Sir Loyden's face turned purple. He leaned forward as if to speak, sat back again, stared blankly, leaned forward at last to say, with a deadly quiet that was more terrible than any explosion: "The Jarusses have never failed in their duty yet—generations of them! It has been left to me—to me, sir—to produce the first traitor!"

Mr. Reggie started at the word, flushed, clenched his fist, got himself in hand to say, "You will be sorry for that word, sir!"

"Traitor!" repeated Sir Loyden bitterly. "Refusing to obey orders! Swanking about in uniform, and how much fighting have you seen? Barely a smell of powder with the Nurabian expedition! And now, when you're needed for special and important duty, you would resign, would you?"

"You are deliberately misunderstanding me, sir!" cried Mr. Reggie suddenly. "You know my feelings about the gas—"

"A soldier has no business to consult his feelings!" He stretched out a podgy forefinger. "By gad, sir, a soldier's business is to deal with death! What is death? Nothing to the soldier, everything to the coward!"

Mr. Reggie seemed about to speak again, but held himself in, his brow wrinkled.

Sir Loyden toyed with a key on his key-ring, then detached it, and set it deliberately on the corner of his desk. He looked up at the clock on the wall,

compared it with his watch, and said with surprising calm:

"You will go, sir, and reconsider this for a quarter of an hour. Should you decide to obey orders, you will return here in uniform and get the key. Should you decide to play the traitor, you will discard the uniform that no—coward or traitor should wear, and return in mufti. I shall then understand that the army has lost a worthless member, and that I have lost a son! Take some dictation, Slade!"

Mr. Reggie bit his lip, hesitated, turned sharply on his heel, and left.

VI

I have marvelled, since, at the control of Sir Loyden in that fateful quarter hour. He removed his Sam Browne, as if there were relief in the act. His face was grim and white instead of the usual dull red, but he dictated calmly, steadily, until my own trembling fingers almost failed me. Once or twice my eyes stole to the clock, and once, when a minute was lacking, I caught him at the same trick, and our eyes met. His almost wavered, then he said, brusquely:

"Another letter, Slade!"

In the middle of it, there was a quick step on the gravel path outside, for one can enter the office directly from the garden. My back was to the door, and I did not dare turn. I saw Sir Loyden look up, his face ashy; then he reddened strangely, and stood up to face the thing. A tall figure in khaki, his soft service-cap jauntily in place, passed me, and, clicking to attention before Sir Loyden, saluted.

"I'm not afraid to leave England or—to die—for her, if necessary!" said Mr. Reggie, in a high, tense voice. "May I have the key, sir?"

Sir Loyden just pointed to it. Mr. Reggie picked it up, faced his father for a silent moment, saluted once more, and went out. For an instant, the stiff military figure of his father broke. He reached out an arm as if to stop the boy and tell in words the high pride that was in his face. But Mr. Reggie had already gone out into the sweet-scented summer air.

"Where was I, Slade? . . . Yes, yes . . . 'I will make enquiries and advise you further'—confound these letters, Slade!" He took off his glasses, put them on again, leaned forward to snap at me: "I suppose you disapprove of the lad, huh? Thought he'd turn out a pussy-footed sentimentalist of the ultra-modern breed, didn't you? Dear knows where the world and civilization and the white race and the Empire would be, if there weren't some of us to balance things! Forgot he was a Jaruss, didn't you? Thought he'd buckle in the test, didn't you? Well, maybe I did too. But he didn't, Slade, he didn't! Thought I was harsh with him, didn't you? My dear Slade," he laughed now, "I really didn't

believe that stuff—called him traitor and coward just to put him on his mettle. See that picture up there?—that was the boy's great-great-great-grandfather, well, I don't know just how many generations back—time of the Roundheads. Got some scruples about his conscience and the king, and it seemed a toss-up if he'd play the traitor or not; but in the end, like all the Jarusses, he stood loyal in the test, Slade, loyal in the test. Odd how history repeats itself!" Seldom have I seen Sir Loyden in such a communicative mood. And, looking back now, I think it was compounded of other elements than a natural pride in the boy. His last words come up before me in confirmation; no, not quite the last, for he said: "Slade, a soldier has to do repugnant things sometimes!" . . . and then: "Listen, Slade! What's got into the rooks?"

"They scolded like that, sir, when you came from the woods yesterday."

"Didn't notice," he said; then, suddenly, we both found ourselves tense, listening. Never was such excitement in the rook colony before! We were in the door now—Sir Loyden beside me—both staring across the sunlit meadows to the woods at the back of the estate. Often since, in sweating nightmares, I have dreamt of the rooks as I saw them then—a black cloud rising above the trees, an angry cloud, hesitating, then sweeping under some sudden leadership toward us, a strange halting flight, battalions of them, more than one would think the woods could hold.

"Good God!" cried Sir Loyden, gripping my arm.

The black battalions were faltering in their flight. Somewhere we could hear the shrieks of women—the domestics, and perhaps Miss Miriam. The birds were almost overhead now; right and left they began dropping, in meadow and shrubbery and garden, and one black lifeless creature at our feet on the garden path. Out of the woods they still came in their eerie flight, and now death was among them savagely, and their cawings, save for a few escaping birds, were stifled in a croaking and, finally, a ghastly silence.

Out of the woods came a figure, barely distinguishable at first in his khaki, a figure not less eerie in his way than the flight of birds above him, for at times he walked, and at times he seemed to run jerkily forward, as if, at any cost, the distance must be covered. If we thought at all to run to him, our feet were paralysed. We stood there, dumbly watching, until he came upon us, a staggering figure now, reeling forward, stiffening straight as a rod at last before his father, Sir Loyden, saluting.

"It's all destroyed, sir!" he said. "All destroyed!" His hands worked convulsively about his head and face. "If—if you make more of it . . . remember, sir . . . just what the thing—looks like!" He choked horribly, put a hand to his throat, controlled himself, and gave all his effort in a struggle to tear off his Sam Browne and his tunic. "A traitor, sir!" He reeled. "A traitor—

to you—and gas—and war—but not to England! . . . England!”

An agony seized him again. He fell to the ground, writhing, clutching at his throat. We were impotent. It is not of his convulsive anguish, as I saw it then, that I shall always think and dream. It is his face! I cannot describe it, as at last he turned and lay stark and still, with the English sunlight full upon him.

I only know that his father, Sir Loyden, with an inarticulate cry, tore off his tunic, with the red tabs of authority upon it, threw it over the face of his dead son, and fled.

1928.

LONDON FOG

I

WHEN I passed down Whitehall that afternoon, the street lights were already on, and the murk was thick and soupy. Out of it the cenotaph rose, a lonely memorial, whose flowers, still banked from the celebration of a ten years' armistice, were lost in a sea of vapour. I know, because I crossed just there and felt the pang of it, caught for the moment in a solitude not to be found even at the dead of night. The pavement beyond was crowded with slow-moving figures making ghostly progress through the fog. For an uncanny second or two, I linked them with the cenotaph; preoccupation with the business of movement and direction, there in known places grown suddenly unfamiliar, lent to them a soundlessness. There was a whiteness, too, about their faces—a quality of unsubstantial outline to their figures. The heart of London seemed to be beating very slowly. And then my mind, stirred by the lost, unseen traffic, leaped to fresh imaginings. I saw long lines of transport, heard the dull mutter of guns, felt the compulsion of imponderable powers behind unquestioning units pushing with blind obedience into the unknown.

Big Ben recalled me. Remembering that Sir Runnells Moberley would probably already be launched in his speech, I addressed myself again to the problem of reaching the House. At lunch time, I had received a note in Sir Runnells' characteristically decisive handwriting:—"Sorry to have missed you. Speaking this afternoon in the House. Delighted to have you dine with me later at the club. Shall expect you six-thirty unless you telephone my secretary to contrary. Would have you out home, but the missus is under doctor's orders." He naturally would add that last line. Mary Dawson and I were intimate friends long before Sir Runnells—his passion dating from an Ottawa dance in her débutante year—with his inimitable persuasiveness, in action as in word, literally swept her off her feet, eventually landing her in London as Lady Moberley, with the press of two continents taking due note.

II

Sir Runnells, as I had surmised, was speaking when I reached the House; the galleries were full, but I was fortunate in securing the first vacated place. The exact nature of his subject escapes me. My interest was rather in the mass effect of his eloquence. A bulldog of a man, he was, in a distinguished way,

with the power of defeating better logic than his own by some grim magnetism, more effective than any defined charm of manner. His utterances had all the staccato insistence of a machine gun; fact after fact, argument upon argument, were thrown at a House breathless in spite of itself and its knowledge of how facts may be marshalled and subdued to a desired effect. I thought again of the years when, in his staff-officer's uniform, he was a figure in London—a figure who since had notably survived the aftermath, when more than one of his colleagues had sunk in the morasses of untimely oblivion. As he had thrown his energy and eloquence into recruiting—mufti to khaki—every man wanted—your King and Country need you—more men—more men—more men—so now, even while he convinced, he irritated one, so decisive was he, so certain of triumph; a man, nevertheless, to whom was turned, with riveted attention, a sea of faces, upon whose almost monotonous swiftness and regularity of diction there waited that handmaid of the orator—a power of mass hypnosis, weaving a spell that made the ancient chamber unreal, the faces oval blanks, the lights—festooned a little by penetrating fog—a thousand crystal balls to aid one's trance.

Suddenly, a voice at my elbow let out an imprecation against the speaker. The utterance, startling as it would have been at any time, seemed more than ordinarily profane—a very sacrilege.

The spell, for me, was broken, and could not be regained. I smelled fog. I realised London. The tense staccato phrases had dwindled into words; the oval blanks were human faces; the crystal balls became mere lights suspended above a materialised chamber. I turned sternly to regard this interrupter. He seemed to feel my unequivocal gaze, for he let his eyes meet mine. They were singularly placid eyes, mild and blue, and I fancied that his greying hair had been quite fair in youth. He was threadbare and shabby in a genteel way. All this impressed one in a flash, for the main characteristic was upon me almost instantly. There was something quite wrong about him—eerily wrong—almost grotesque. For a moment, it baffled me, even while it wrought alarm. Then I had it. Nobody but one mentally deficient could combine in his face so murderous a hatred and such unnaturally mild eyes!

An attendant was tapping the man on the shoulder, urgently.

"Come along, now! None of that here! Out with you!"

The man made no protest. I fancied he even smiled. He apologised in a low voice as he stumbled past my feet, holding out his arm a little gropingly toward the suspicious attendant. Then only the truth flashed upon me. The man was blind! That instant pity which blindness evokes moved in me, though perhaps other and more subtle influences brought me to my feet. When I took his arm, with a whispered apology for the liberty, he thanked me without gratitude;

when I continued my pilotage, he offered no objection, nor, as we descended, anything but tacit acceptance and a curiously emotionless silence. By some implicit understanding we emerged together into the street, and there, for the first time, he took not ungrateful cognisance, for he remarked: “Pretty thick, sir! I can tell that by the feel—and the taste of it. You know,” he said, quickly, as if suddenly his confidence had been won, “I like fog. It gives a man like me special privileges. Which way do you go, sir?” I hesitated. The man interested me. Could we have, I suggested, a friendly cup of tea together somewhere? He nodded. There was a restaurant not far away. He was almost eagerly deferential now. I considered the fog. Even here, a few paces away from the exit, I was lost, though traffic was still ponderously on the move. He must have realised my thoughts, or anticipated them.

“Take my arm, sir!”

We moved forward—he tapping the pavement with a stick that up to now had been lodged on the crook of his arm. Immediately, my own obtuseness was made clear. Fog was nothing to this man! This was a time of privilege for the blind. He led me with marvellous precision to our goal. “I often eat here,” he told me. “It’s handy to the House, and whenever I can get to hear *him* speak, I go!” An empty table in a corner accommodated us; we ordered, but food seemed secondary. Then, suddenly, without urge of mine, as if indeed it were ordained that he should tell me, he was launched in his story. His eyes rarely left mine as he spoke; he could focus to a nicety that way; it struck me only afterward that the lines of his face, like his eyes, seemed fixed, nor did the rhythm of his words and the perceptibly expressionless flow of them alter much. It is hard to convey to another who did not experience it the strangeness of the effect, as if a child, looking inward upon memory, were repeating by rote an oft-told story, with more regard to judicial accuracy than to emotional values. And yet he confessed: “I’ve never told this to a living soul before. I don’t know why I do to you.” He shook his head, considering this. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

“You must understand, sir,” he said, “my uncle had a small tailoring establishment in the West End, where I worked for him. A tiny place in Maddox Street—it’s gone long since. Always wanted to travel, my uncle did, but death tripped him up, as you might say, and there I was with a little money he’d saved against the day he could get away, and my promise to him I’d take the trip he’d always fancied—up the Rhine, sir. I felt a sort of fool about it, when I had no great fancy for it myself, and no knowledge of foreign ways and words. You’ve been to the Rhine, sir? Ah, then you’ll understand. I’m no hand at all at description, but it was when the grapes were purple, you know, and there were songs on the water; very strange and sweet, they were, because *she*

was along. Her father ran a restaurant that was suited to my purse, and, after the first day or so, when we only smiled and I said awkward things to her when she waited on me at table, we got to walking out together, when the restaurant was quiet. There was a moon, I remember, and she laughed at me because I felt we should see—well, you understand, thinking my uncle would wish it, I'd read up the legends in the guide books. Language? Oh, she knew ours well enough; her father had carried many a tray in London before he saved enough to start this place back home, having a feel for his native soil—a thing that ran in her, too, as you shall see. That's why it seemed so hard to ask her—me, with only a small share in my uncle's business left me, and no great recommendation of looks. But, one afternoon, there was an excursion to Coblenz, a day, as you might say, all purple and gold, and there were songs—some students from Bonn, they said—and first thing, far back by the rail on the upper deck, everything was settled. She liked England well enough, sir; she made it her land. And we got on comfortably after all, me with a small interest in my uncle's business, and her quite happy in a place far enough out to have a few flowers, with the neighbours more than kind, because they thought our story was romantic-like."

He paused just here, but even this seemed other than an emotional interlude.

"She couldn't understand the War, sir. And, feeling for her as I did, we let it go at that. We just went on as usual—me in every morning to Maddox Street, with the news of things and the sight of it all flung in my face, and maybe a bit of it getting under my skin—but, for her sake, I washed it all out, as you might say, before I got home nights. We talked of how her flowers were growing and all that, and the nearest we got to the War was the price of potatoes and so on. It'll be of slight interest to you, sir, to go into how changes came about, and how at last people looked, and what they said. She stayed close to the house, as much as she could, and tried not to notice things. People got to whispering, too, about my not being in khaki. That was all regular, you know; that was just the War, and I didn't mind much so long as they laid off her. It was quite regular, too, you understand, that they should take me at last for the army, and I was fortunate in being near her in barracks—not more than three hours or so away. I used to get to see her, and once or twice she came to see me. And then rumours got about that we were due to go. I got a last leave—just time to run down and see her and report back by midnight. It was queer it should be just then, but that's the way things go, and you can't blame people too much, either. I knew right off, when I saw her, that something was amiss. She just caught me and hung on to me, and only after a long time could I get it out of her. I put it to you, sir, if it wasn't natural in her? Her standing all she

could, taking everything and giving back nothing, and then a viper-tongued woman coming right in and taunting her—who had never seen the Rhine, I suppose, and couldn't know a girl would have feelings. 'I sang when she went!' she told me. 'I couldn't help it, dearest! I sang loud. Oh, my dear, so very loud that every one might hear me and know I was not afraid or ashamed!' You will not ask me, sir, what she sang! We had a small piano, and I could show you, sir—for I still have it—the portfolio she opened. It was the English version she sang, that they might be sure to understand!"

For a moment his voice was redeemed from its impelling monotony. He leaned forward.

"Can't you see her, sir? Can't you fancy you hear her? You know the words—and that part that goes—

> 'While in my veins the blood drops flow,
> While sword of mine can strike the foe
> Or rifle sure is my hand,
> No enemy shall walk thy strand—' "

He shook his head. "It's queer now, isn't it?" he appealed. "She wasn't that kind, you know. She wasn't at all that kind, and she hated war!" He sighed, leaning forward again. "I'd like to have heard her sing it, sir! Maybe it's wrong in me, but I'd like to have heard her sing it!"

We were silent. A waitress let a cup fall, and it smashed to atoms at my feet. Stupidly I watched her as, red-faced, she stooped and retrieved the pieces, and, when I looked again at him, the eager current was lost once more in an emotionless sea.

"It all happened quickly after that, sir. They came, of course, and took her away. I stayed with her every minute while we waited. It was in the morning, you see, when they took her away. Then I went up to Whitehall to see about it. I thought if I just told them all the facts of it, they'd understand. It was Sir Runnells Moberley I went to. I was told I'd better see him. It took half a day—I remember hearing the clock striking regularly as I sat. I kept wondering what they were doing—with her. He's a good-looking man—or was—Sir Runnells! You'll know best as to that now. Maybe he's put on too much flesh; so many men do. I remember thinking this even then, and how busy and important he looked, as if the Empire was on his hands, and maybe the world, and who was I to speak? Then I remembered the business I was on was more than empires to me. You see, I speak plainly, sir! Sir Runnells looked at me, then, and said: 'Well, my man?' and I told him as quickly as I could, feeling the need to be brief. He made notes, I remember, on a pad, as I spoke. My name, and hers. Our address. My unit. I should have suspected from his face then that

something was queer. Perhaps you know he has a rare memory? ‘What unit?’ he snapped me up. I told him again. He put on his glasses, took them off, pulled at the bridge of his nose in that fashion he has, and then he said: ‘And pray what are you doing here, then? You’re supposed to be *en route* to France!’ It was the quiet way he said it that made it somehow worse. You will not, of course, believe me, sir—any more than he did—that, up to that moment, my duty to report back had gone clear from me. For all of me, I might never have joined up. ‘Sit down!’ he told me. So I sat there waiting, while an orderly came and went twice, and I could hear Big Ben striking, like he is now. What’s that, sir? Six o’clock? I’m keeping you!”

I told him to go on.

“Well, Sir Runnells came to me at last, pulling the bridge of his nose, and swinging those glasses of his. ‘Blake,’ he said, ‘I’ve arranged for you to rejoin your unit at Folkestone. You can overtake them if we ship you at once.’ He looked at me. ‘Under escort, Blake!’ he says. ‘You will leave immediately!’ I stared at him. I got it out at last—about my wife, you know—and that I couldn’t go like that. ‘We will look into her case!’ he said. Somehow, the word itself got me, sir. Her case! It seemed to put her among so many, and I’d heard things!” He shrugged. “I think, sir, he did not like my pleading with him then. I fear I broke down a little, and he probably thought it didn’t look well, with me in uniform there—not dignifiedlike, and military. He said: ‘You had a longer time than your comrades. A last night together. Come now, come!’ He couldn’t have stopped to think, sir, what kind of a night that was. He couldn’t have seen me having to get breakfast for us both. I tried to tell him, but he said: ‘That’ll do, Blake. You’re lucky to get off so easily. Keep the rest of it for your O.C.—you may need some of it!’ I saw then the orderly had come in, and was waiting for me. I turned on Sir Runnells. ‘I hope,’ I cried, ‘that some day you’ll understand what torture means!’ But the orderly had rushed me out, and the door was closed, and I don’t know to this day if he heard!”

Somebody, at a nearby table, scraped chair legs across the floor. The harshness of it ran down my spine. But Blake seemed not to have heard, this time.

“Perhaps you don’t believe in premonitions, sir, and can explain away why I felt I shouldn’t see her again? Oh, I don’t mean my eyes—that was the fortune of war—that was quite regular. And it was maybe nobody’s fault in particular that she caught cold and couldn’t make any fight of it at all.” He fingered the cruet. “That was regular enough,” he explained, carefully, “but I’ve always held it against *him* that he shouldn’t have let me see her just once again. It might’ve made a difference.” A little salt spilled. “A plant, sir, hasn’t the roots when it’s transplanted. It can’t fight for life the same way. She’d

always kept it from me pretty well, but I can see now that, even before, she was pining a bit for the grapes and the river songs, and her people, sir. They were all like that, her people—powerful strong, they were, for their native soil." He scattered the spilled salt. "That's why she sang that way, you know!" he said, unnecessarily, and then, "There's things inside us—and outside—forces altogether too big for us!" He added, after a moment: "I've made a study of river songs since, sir! It may seem a queer hobby to you, but it means a lot to me. There's a chap who helps me. There's something—big—about river songs, sir. I can't explain it!"

He rose, apologetically, as if he had kept me quite too long.

III

Outside, the streets had thinned of their human traffic; there was a more complete silence. The nearer lights were moons, circled about with ragged-edged halos; the farther ones were partially or completely lost. I must allow him to be of use again, he demanded. Where was I going? I told him the name of the club. "I know *it*!" he assured me. "Why, that's his club, sir!" He held out his arm, ready to give me guidance. We moved forward. "You'd be surprised how I know my London—anywhere central, as you might say. Ten years! You learn a lot if you keep going, and your spirits up. Little things nobody'd suspect. A tap here! A tap there! Railings; the feel of a curb; the drop to a roadway—there's a personality about things, you know. I had a boy at first—sharp little beggar! I kept him at it until, as you might say, I could take over myself." His voice dropped. "You'd hardly believe now, would you, that I could tell *his* footfall in all London? It's true. A little twitch he has—that helps. It took me years to learn. With the boy first—we'd stand waiting for him to come from the House, or his home, or his club. It took me a long, long time. 'That's him!' I'd say. Sometimes I was right, sometimes wrong. We'd keep score, like a game. Now I can follow him anywhere, and little he suspects—"

The venom in his tone caught me back to the first occasion. He must have felt the movement of my muscles. His voice rose a little defiantly.

"Some day, I'll get the right chance. Ten years I've waited, and more. Some day, it'll seem just right. I know. I've dreamed of it. Oh, I can wait! I can wait! We cross here, sir. That's the cenotaph just there, if you look." The full flight of his envenomed speech was halted. By reaching my hand, I could have touched a mound of withering flowers. "I put a wreath there, last eleventh," he told me. "People whispered, 'For his comrades, poor fellow! He's blind, d'ye see now?' I laughed to myself, sir, in a kind of way. I wanted to turn on them and say, 'You should have heard her sing!' This way now,

sir!”

Anyone without knowledge of the turns of life might put it down as odd that we should arrive at the club but a minute or two before a taxi, its groping eyes upon us, ground to a halt at the curb, and broad shoulders emerged in the muffled gleam from the two lamp standards. I heard the hollow tones of the blind man: “That’s him now!” I saw his face, ghastly, in the imperfect light, with vindictiveness, and some triumphant expectancy still more terrible, and, to make it completely grotesque, a blue mildness in his eyes that could not nullify the other.

“Hullo!” cried Sir Runnells, almost bumping into us, and then extending his hand. “How the dickens did you get here? My man took an eternity to make it—swore it couldn’t be done, but I put him to it. Lazy devil! Quits work on the least excuse. Come along in!”

Only half my mind was given him. The thought that he stood, unwitting, on perilous ground, obsessed me—a certainty that murder lurked beside me in the fog. But when I turned to look and, if I could find my wits, to act, Sir Runnells and I were quite alone on the steps of the club.

IV

It was characteristic of Sir Runnells’ club that his identity as a celebrity fell from him as he entered; the respectful ministrations of attendants, and the casual recognition of friends, held that tranquil equality which a man should expect somewhere in his world. And, with it, fell away the London fog, and all the spectral things that it contained. The blinds were closely drawn; the windows must have been promptly and discreetly closed; the triple doors at the entrance functioned to perfection. My mind, bent on relieving itself of its burden, was turned back; in Sir Runnells’ presence, too, one hesitated to speak of spectral things. Time enough later, I thought.

He was still full of the speech he had delivered. But afterward he spoke, less implicit in his egotism, of Mary and the days we shared together, and I marvelled at the instant change. Was this the dominating figure of the House—who loomed so high above the morasses of post-war politics—speaking now, with the eagerness of a boy in his eyes, of his Canadian days? Did I remember? he quizzed me. There was that ball at Government House? The masquerade at the Winter Club? That cricket match in Montreal, when I had played, and he and Mary sat under the elms through a long afternoon, watching white figures on the green, and shadows creep across the campus, below the dominating slopes of Mount Royal? A score of memories—and always Mary central in them. His power of capturing the imagination was not confined, I

thought, to public utterance; in me just now was born a quick nostalgia for familiar native scenes.

"Bit worried about her!" he said, suddenly, and I was recalled to the present, and to Mary as Lady Moberley. "Not a bit well. The doctors give me the fidgets. Can't pin 'em down." He leaned forward, greyly. "Why, if anything went wrong—" He laughed, nervously. "Mustn't get on to that speculation. Nonsense, that is! A bit run down. She laughs at me, Mary does—bound I'd come along with you to-night." He glanced at his watch. "I'll get home early!" He pushed his anxiety from him with effort. "I say, what was that place you drove us to once? Ste. Anne's? Of course, I remember. Good meal we had, and sang like school children coming back, with the water darkening beside us. Mary's soprano, with your tenor, and my old voice croaking the bass. How did it go—that thing of Tom Moore's? Wait now!" He took a shot at the tune.

" 'Faintly as tolls the evening chime,
Our voices keep tune, and our oars keep time,
Soon as the woods on shore look dim,
We'll sing at Ste. Anne's our parting hymn?'

Suppose every sentimental tourist does that, eh, or would like to?" He caught the thread of it again; I found my own voice vibrating to it.

"Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near and the daylight's past!"

My mind moved suddenly from this, and from him, to a vague and then vivid association. I fancied I could almost hear a voice in half-apologetic explanation, "She was pining a bit for the grapes and the river songs, and her people, sir!" A chill swept me, as though a breeze, river-cooled, had really reached me, bringing an instant unsteadiness, as if beneath me, and this man across the table from me, and all men, there moved the currents of unknown and powerful waters.

V

It was as we were about to rise from the table that an attendant respectfully approached us. From intimacies, the conversation had turned again to public affairs, and once more the change in Sir Runnells was striking. His mouth and chin were decisively hardened; he expounded to me national and imperial policies with an energy habitual rather than necessary, for I remained humble in my receptive silence. We were interrupted. "The telephone, if you please, sir!" Sir Runnells tossed a final triumphant argument at me as he strode away,

and, not knowing what else to do, I reseated myself, and smiled at my thoughts while looking at the cruet. And, suddenly, I saw a man scattering spilled salt across a public table-top, and I thought, “Shouldn’t I tell him at once?” And then, quizzically, “Will it penetrate his self-sufficiency?”

A tap on my shoulder recalled me. Sir Runnells had returned, and was holding out his hand.

“You’ll forgive my running off like this?” He seemed not to want to explain, then the words leaped from him, and the grip of his hand hurt me. “Mary’s taken a bad turn. They say she’s—” He broke off. “Just a scare, of course! Just a scare! I know these fellows. Hutton’s with her now. A good fellow, but a bit of an alarmist!”

Had he really admitted his fear, I should have felt the situation less. Instead, I saw a man accustomed to winning but now facing defeat. To fend off this, neither argument, eloquence, nor personality would avail a bit. But my lips were saying, “Of course! Hope you find everything all right at home!”

He started off across the room at a little jerking run, one leg dragging a trifle, so that I remembered this aid to the ears of the blind. I followed. He turned, and called: “You’ll be wanting your things. Stupid of me. This way!” But in the cloak room I was a stranger, measuring my haste by his, though at that he was gone before me, and when I reached the first of the triple doors he was beyond the last. Outside, I found him indulging in unnatural profanity to the doorman. “No taxis!” he snarled at me. “No busses! Nothing! Impotent hounds! Stop at a little mist!” He nodded his decision. “Have to walk. It’s not far, though!” I urged my company upon him. He accepted with a brusque, “This way! This way, then!” And, as the choking, sulphurous blur received us, he pushed aside another evident anxiety with a quick: “Know it like a book! Get there blindfolded! We cross here. Then keep right.” If it was thick before, now it was impenetrable. Even your Londoner might grudgingly admit it to be a real fog. Hardly a soul was astir, though occasionally a misshapen head and shoulders would emerge close at hand, and grope onward to a new obscurity. “Now left!” said Sir Runnells, and we wheeled. “Now, just a moment, here we —” He hesitated, made little false starts this way, that way, then sought to return to our original place. A moment later he had stopped dead. And, suddenly, as if lacking other expression, he began striking the pavement with his cane, muttering to himself, “Fuddled as a fool! Can’t understand how I missed it. Fuddled as a fool!”

An echo of his tapping crept back to us out of the murk; then I saw he had stopped this futile gesture—though the echo went on. I caught my breath painfully. A figure moved into our limited range of vision, forging past in steady progress. Sir Runnells instantly shouted: “I say, there! Hullo! Can you

give us our direction, sir?" He caught my arm. "You saw him? He seemed to have no trouble getting on with it!" He seized on the one word my wits could evoke. "Blind? Of course! What luck, if we can catch him!" He raised his voice again. "Hullo! Hullo! You hear him? He's coming. This way—just follow my voice, sir!" You will ask why I did not speak quickly, warning him, but you cannot realise my sense of the futility of any attempted explanation then, in the moment of his urgency. There we were in the fog—two muffled figures, groping; then for an instant three; then only one—myself! I did not blame Sir Runnells for forgetfulness; indeed, I have a recollection of his bidding me follow closely, and a more vivid one of how, too late, I stood and shouted like a fool, "Sir Runnells! Sir Runnells!"—and then, in desperation, "Blake!"—with no reward but the indrawing of acrid fog that choked me into an equally vain silence.

London fog, or any fog, had always been for me a thing of amusing or, at worst, mildly irritating consequences. Now its mocking wraiths, cohering at last into an impenetrable and sulphurous mass, were not mere imps concerned with making men late for minor appointments, and upsetting social routine; they were the servants of crime and the handmaids of potential murder.

VI

In eccentric circles, I worked my way until I found a railing, and, following this—with an irrational fear that it might disintegrate at my touch—I came upon a gateway, formal steps, and, eventually, an encouragingly solid front door. My voice, at least, could travel where my body could not go. Could I use the telephone? I asked. No good would be served by alarming the stricken household, but inquire I must. Sir Runnells was not home yet; they hopefully expected him. A gentleman in evening dress took over the care of me from his butler as I emerged from the telephone closet in his hallway. Could he do anything for me? Moberley's place? Why yes, it was just four minutes' walk—but in this fog—? He shrugged. Perhaps the fog might lift, or would I care to telephone again a little later? I can remember, vaguely, our talk passing from weather to politics, to books, to drama. I gave him only the surface of my mind and the polite mechanics of my tongue. Beyond that is remembrance of my telephoning twice again, of declaring I must go, of the white oval of his kindly face, with its glittering eyeglass, and his voice bidding me keep close to the palings to the right, until they ended, then left across the street; there was something also about a gate and hedge at Sir Runnells'. I knew that I should have it when the time came.

At the end of the palings, I swung deliberately out into the sea of fog. The distance seemed immense, my progress painfully slow, but urgency and

determination held me true, so that the curb beyond welcomed my feet at last. I seemed to know beyond peradventure that this was Sir Runnells' block, and that I had triumphed, with minor guidance, where he, accustomed, had failed—for I had been here only thrice before. Yet I could find, in all the block, no gate and hedge like his, or else the fog was playing tricks with every landmark. My hands, from contact with stone and iron, were suffering from abrasion, and, under a smudge of light, I paused to give sympathy to my knuckles. Instantly, my mind was distracted by a sound. Not the stumping of Pew's cane ever caused a Stevenson-created heart to beat faster than mine in that moment, when there came to me, through the unearthly vapour, the persistence of a regular tapping. My emotions accepted the truth before it became credible to my brain. Blake, the blind man! Foolishly, perhaps, but inevitably, I found myself urgently calling to him.

The tapping ceased, resumed, approached.

I think he said some ordinary word of greeting, of recognition, but I am not sure. The smudge of light—one can call it nothing else—touched his face; from sight of it, I started back. You have seen, perhaps, some slow-maturing plant leap, under sudden change of sun or weather, into miraculous maturity? That was his face as I saw it then; the ruttings of the years were a mere background for a wild and paradoxically grotesque beauty. I must have questioned him, and been met with silence, for I know I threatened him with calling the police. He had a right to laugh at that, of course, and I think he did after a fashion, for he cocked an ear, listening. "There's one not far away," he said. "I could fetch him for you!" And then his laughter, coming harshly again, trickled away in a sob. His fingers hurt my flesh. He said, and there was that wildness caught alarmingly in his voice, too: "What moves us around this way—you, and him, and me? Just us and the fog, as if nobody else mattered to-night at all. I always knew it'd be that way at the last—him and me alone in the fog—but now there's you, too. You've heard me once, and now you've got to listen—understand? You've got to listen to the thing I've done!"

He was shaking all over. There was an insistence not to be denied in the way he took my arm and set us both in motion through the unsubmissive atmosphere.

"I always knew it would be a night like this, sir! Fog! Fog and the river! And me and him, and it all thick and baffling to him, and clear as noon to me, as you might say. The river—yes! *He* was the Thames, you know—just like *she* was the Rhine. Queer, isn't it? But him and me in the fog, and no help to him, even if he shouted. That was it. I've dreamed it over often. Often! And about the morning, too!" His breath was right against my cheek. "In the morning, there's old Bill, the newsman, to ask like I always do, 'What's new,

Bill?' Can't you hear him, sir? 'Why, a werry good sale o' papers, all along of the news!'—and then him shouting, 'Get your morning paper here. Body o' Sir Runnells Moberley taken from the Thames!' "

My fancy ran that Blake even now was shouting it into the night, but that his words, high-pitched as they came, were beaten back by vaporous curtains, to echo and re-echo in our brains. In swift descent, his voice dropped.

"And then, to-morrow night—the evening papers—a slight insertion: 'In memory of H. B.' Just that and, underneath, four lines—" His voice, attempting them, broke on the first. I can still hear the uncertain movement of his voice, " 'While in my veins the blood drops flow—' " Instantly, he picked up the former theme. "Ten years of waiting, sir! And then this! What's that saying about the Mills of God? Something like that—pushing us together—the fog, and him lost, and his wife there dying without him. And him all broken, sir, broken like that!" I could feel, rather than see, the clenching of his hands, until I almost fancied some tangible evidence of destruction must appear. "All broken—babbling—not military or dignified a bit! Wasn't it a thing to make a man gloat? He must get there. Oh, yes, he must get there! I must go faster. And where were we? And, all the while, me leading him farther away from her—farther and farther! After ten years waiting for it, and small chance it'd ever come so right, so perfect again!"

He quickened his steps, and I could only conform; there was a sense of direction in them now. Then, suddenly, he had halted me abruptly, and was facing me in queer, questioning challenge. There must have been some light here, too, for I saw the face of a man whom life had marked deeply, and now with finality—almost a legendary figure to my perhaps oversensitive imagination, and I had a quick subsequent impression that here was not the lustful elation proper to an avenger after many years, but that mysterious, indestructible element that finds poetic expression in the folklore of primitive peoples, and musical expression in their native songs—something born of, and akin to, the soil, and forests, and rivers.

His hand went up and brushed his forehead, with a gesture almost of irritation. Yet the man was broken, in a pathetic, resigned way—face, form, voice.

"I've been a fool!" he said, and then, "There are things too big for us, sir! Quite too big for us!"

He was gone. The fog, before I could make a move, or cry out in appeal to him, had swallowed him. Had he ever been there? I turned, and felt my way to a railed area, to a hedge—to a gate! And, suddenly, I was groping agitatedly for a familiar knocker. The door opened, and revealed a bright patch in the vaporous night. Behind the questioning butler's body, and the butler's voice,

came a strident welcome: “Hullo! You here? I say, have you been seeing ghosts? Yes, she’s better—much better. Thought I’d never get here, though. I couldn’t make that fellow see the urgency. We seemed to dawdle. The man was more than blind, I found—a mental case. I kept saying, ‘We’re not getting there!’—and he’d say, ‘Oh, yes, we are! We’re getting there fast enough!’ I tried to believe that, of course. And all the time I *felt* something was wrong. I thought I’d go mad, but I was helpless except for his guidance. I fancy I must have acted like a fool—a broken fool. Had to talk, you know. About Mary—and everything. Got telling him how I’d met you. He seemed interested in that, and went quicker, so I kept on telling him about it. Suddenly, I thought he’d gone clean off! Startled me, he did, grabbing my arm and crying out, ‘How does it go? Tell me how it goes?’ I couldn’t figure it. He shook my arm. ‘The song! The river song!’ He was acting like a crazy man. I suppose I must have told him how we’d been singing it, for old times’ sake, though I can’t remember. Anyway, I began the words, but he cut me off. ‘Yes, yes,’ he cried, ‘I know it! I’ve got that one!’ And he began to croak the thing out—there in the fog. ‘Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast!’ You’d have laughed—but it wasn’t really funny. And it had an odd effect on him. He began to shake all over, and then we got under way fast. He never said another word—just kept pushing on, tap-tapping like mad. I’d have sworn we’d turned squarely the opposite way. But I had all I could do to keep along close to him.”

Sir Runnells pulled out a lavender-tipped handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. I could see the beads standing out. He laughed, like a man who has been under severe strain and is still unsure.

“Well, we got here!” he said, and then, after a moment, spoke more naturally, as if he’d pushed the thing from him. “I asked him his name when we got to the gate here. ‘Blake, sir!’ he said. Queer voice the fellow had—creepy! ‘I visited you once in Whitehall during the War!’ he said. Something about his wife, I gathered. I laughed, of course, thanking him, but asking him how the devil a man could remember all the little things that happened during the War!”

1928.

MARCHING FEET

I

IT does not matter what or where the village was. Out of a mist that swept, perhaps, from the Channel, or that may have gathered itself far inland, hovering over pollard-bordered canals and elm-sentinelled roads, it seemed to be born that night. And yet, when one saw it, one knew it to be immensely old and wise.

Over many kilometers this mist shut down upon roads and fields—more capriciously than consistently, with its alternate pockets of clear atmosphere and its dancing wraiths that played the very mischief with a motorist's eyesight and nerves, mocking the power of his premature headlights. My own roadster took the ditch and lay in a hopeless huddle against the base of a tree, whose upper portion, in the gathering dusk, and by a trick of the fog, seemed decapitated in a queer, tortured way. The mind inevitably fled back through the years to blighted trees under which men marched in columns—khaki, and blue, and grey-green. Possibly I am making too much of this, trying to weave into the fabric threads of colour; and yet I do not think so, for I recall that I turned almost without thought or regret from the abandoned roadster which I had planned should take me over so many Continental roads, my mind much more concerned with scarcely remembered lines from a thing I saw somewhere in a magazine:

"Of grinding hobnails pushing east
Into the rising sun—
Dear tired feet upon the road
From Montfaucon to Dun."

Perhaps, I thought, yesterday's ghosts would accompany me along the way, not unpleasantly. One remembers so readily the colourful things, the vivid bits: the muffled swing of silent columns under the immutable stars; the jest of comrades in the face of waiting death; the dull, shivering beauty of distant gunfire; the ministrations of women—giving laugh for laugh, and the tears just underneath; the soft benediction of age from some unseen casement above the cobbled ways by which one reached, at last, the open nakedness of fields of honour: a score of things, a score of faces, springing up to greet one from dear, dead years.

Having no certainty of direction, I stumbled on until I became conscious of

a motor behind me, whose groping headlights grew steadily nearer. Here was luck on this obscure roadway! They saw me at length. The car ground to a sudden halt. A voice addressed me in imperfect French; I answered in English. The voice said then, in a tone of startled laughter: “Are you a ghost, an English ghost?”

I joined in the laughter, but it was subdued mirth. “I was just thinking of such things myself!” I admitted.

“We all were!” said the voice. “It gave us a bit of a turn to find an English one—though from our talk that was just what we should have expected! Going our way?”

“Going any way,” I told him, “that will offer shelter for the night. Frankly, I’m busless through an accident, and most thoroughly lost!”

The driver laughed again, and opened the door for me to sit beside him. I heard echoes of his laughter from two men in the rear seat.

“The fact is,” explained the man at the wheel, “we’re all in a like plight. What is the name?”

I told him that, and my home town.

“A Canadian, eh? Montreal! Here’s a New Yorker behind you, at present supposed to be doing diplomatic things in Paris. Shake hands, Boggs! And young Watson there, from London, who’s more at home in the air than on the ground, and has been picturesquely damning the misty earth for better than an hour now. . . . All set? *En avant*, then!”

Coming from the darkness of the roadway, my eyes quickly accommodated themselves to the meager light from the dials, raying up curiously through the moistness that swirled even in the closed car. I discovered then, with a start, that the man who had thus spoken and accomplished these facile introductions was in uniform, that he wore the insignia of colonel and, on his breast, multicolored ribbons—for valour. He seemed to sense both my question and the emotion that stirred in me, almost an unbelief at finding here in him more of a ghost than he had found in me—a living thing in khaki along a road where I had walked with spirits clad like that.

“My omission!” he apologised quickly. “Thornbury—attached to a British mission now in Paris, and at present lost some scores of kilometers from home. We set out,” added the Colonel, “to look up some familiar places—and got captured by ghosts. Look at ’em—ahead of our lights there. You’ve little idea what a silly start you gave us, turning up that way in a fog—and talking English!” He paused, and went on after a moment: “We were speaking, you know, of how many of our boys must have passed—this way.”

We fell silent then. The car moved on unsteadily through the murk. Time

seemed too vague and relative a thing for any mechanical measuring. The mist increased in density, and the chill of it crept in beside us and remained. And then, unbelievably, we discovered ourselves to be in a village or town of some sort. I grant you it was natural enough that houses and even lights should be cloaked and shrouded by this fog. But the thing left an odd impression—after travelling through open country that way and thinking ourselves still in the fields, to find a village born in the mist, and the lights of an estaminet welcoming us faintly.

II

The estaminet, in which we presently found ourselves, had neither particular virtues nor grave defects. It was one of a thousand such. Three or four loungers were grouped at a table in one corner, sipping native wines. They were country folk, evidently, to whom our entrance would have had the transient interest occasioned by passing motorists had Thornbury not been in uniform. One could see the eyes following him—not rudely, but with a certain reserved directness. The pacific bent of one who has learned the lessons of a war to end war cannot alter the fact that the khaki tunic, the Sam Browne belt, the service-cap, of your British officer are distinguished things. And here, even in this dimly-lighted place, I had a better chance to observe the Colonel. A well-proportioned fellow he was, ruddily handsome, with fairish hair, now grizzling, and a close-clipped moustache of the same hue above a straight mouth and decisive chin.

“You can accommodate us over night, Madame?” He spoke in his imperfect French.

“But yes, Monsieur—in such rooms as I have!”

The woman was obviously the keeper of this place. Her appearance provoked attention. She had all the wiry strength of that type of Continental woman who does not disdain physical tasks at which even a man might balk. I thought of a very aged woman I had seen in northern Belgium, bearing upon her bent but able shoulders an amazing load of fagots. There seemed to be about this keeper of the estaminet a similar impression of immense age—that age which accepts the bearing of burdens with philosophic resignation and a remote, almost frightening, tranquillity. Yet, when I looked again, I realised instantly that here was a woman deeply matured by something other than mere passing years. By ordinary accounting she could not be old. Her eyes, shrewdly taking stock of our numbers and quality, returned to Thornbury—and rested there, and I fancied that from some smoulder, deep-buried under dead ashes, a young flame rose to burn for a revealing moment in her mysterious

pupils. Then, with a quick gesture, she signed to us to follow her. The rooms above were low-hung under the slanting roof, cluttered with worn furniture, but possessing the inevitable feather beds that promised restful slumber. Watson and Boggs bunked with the Colonel, two in a bed and one on a couch, in the larger of the two available sleeping apartments. It was natural that a newcomer to the party should shift otherwise, by himself; but Madame, taking me into a smaller front room, made her apology: "It is my son's room, Monsieur. If you do not mind sharing it, he will take the small couch that you see over there."

"Not at all!"

She nodded approval, moved about the place to make minor adjustments, then turned to say, hesitatingly: "Monsieur will not mind if he seems—a little odd?"

"Odd?"

"Oh, it is nothing for worry, Monsieur. Myself, I do not notice it much—now. But people talk, and I thought you should know. . . . And what is the other gentleman doing here—in uniform?" Her abrupt question, her change of tone, the fierceness of it, disguised only by the modulation of her voice lest it carry beyond the immediate walls, startled me. I replied that he was attached to some British mission at present in Paris. But after her question was once put, she seemed not to care particularly for the answer. She had moved over to the casement window; drawing aside the curtain a little, she peered out, then motioned me to join her.

Dim firelight flickering in a narrow grate threw a polished reflection upon the panes; beyond that there was only the fog, swirling eerily. She caught my arm, and her fingers bit into the flesh with unbelievable strength. She gestured with the other arm now, but her lips seemed stricken with a dumbness that she struggled to overcome.

She said at last: "Since then—he is the first one to come."

Only vaguely understanding, I remained beside her, waiting, as if I knew the explanation would follow.

"So many like that used to pass by," she said, slowly. "The English in their khaki. Often they would stop. I tried to serve them well. I think they liked to stop here; it was my fancy at least that they did. Always a joke, Monsieur, and often a song. And when they had gone, and the place was empty again, I would think I heard it still—their song, you know—though it was, of course, my ears tricking me, as they trick me sometimes now when I wake in the night and hear their marching feet." She paused. "So often in the night, Monsieur, when we were darkened, with the shutters up, they would pass by, and I would start

up in bed and listen to their feet on the cobbles—and I would say a prayer for them, and for my own boy, who marched off like the best of them long before any English in khaki came this way!" Her appraising scrutiny was lost for me in a flash of remembrance, in a drumming monotony of repetition:

"Of grinding hobnails pushing east
Into the rising sun—
Dear tired feet upon the road
From Montfaucon to Dun."

Her voice came to me as a distant thing: "You do not, perhaps, believe in prayer, Monsieur? So many do not. Well, what we believe cannot change it. My son came back to me—was given back from death!" The woman's face was a study. There was defiance in it, as in her voice. Meeting her glance, I could think again only of a young flame rising from deep-buried smoulder.

At the sound of footsteps, I turned. For an instant, until I remembered that I had heard them go below for a drink, I fancied it was one of our little party. A second glance convinced me that this was the son. He stood framed in the doorway, the firelight playing upon him trickily, so that my mind was carried to some painting I had once seen that haunted my memory, though where or what it was I could not say. Or was it that some echo wakened out of the dim years, recalling the entrance of an inimitable actor upon the boards of a theatre, whose presence brought to the audience a thrill, a hush, an intangible but certain reaction, before ever words were spoken? He did not at first see his mother; he had eyes only for the stranger in his room. He stood there, hesitant, in the doorway, and I thought, "His mother's son!"—for about him was the same impression of baffling and uncanny maturity, of immense and terribly wise age. Then he straightened himself a little, and put one hand across his forehead in a groping way, and suddenly I had a ridiculous assurance that childishness had defeated a premature age. With it came the amendment: "No, he is not like her!"

A sound of strident voices, floating up from the wine-room below, shattered our tableau.

"This is my son, Monsieur. You will not mind taking the couch to-night, my dear Raymond, and letting this gentleman have the bed?"

He inclined his head slightly; his mouth gaped a little in a shy, childish smile. He stood aside, as if to let us pass, but his eyes did not leave me all the time. The woman nodded to me to accompany her. In the hall, she said: "You understand? He is odd at times. But not troublesome, not at all troublesome. He is—well, he is a child, that is all. The war made him a child. Even the language he had to learn again at my knee, so slowly, over and over like a

child!" Her voice quivered; then she smiled, shrugging her shoulders. "Why should I complain? So many did not come back at all!" She went on down the dark well of the staircase. I returned to the room. The son was sitting now on a low stool before the scant fire, head in hands, staring into the dim flicker. My entrance drew his slow attention. And again there came to me that indescribable feeling that before had caught me—as if more than a war-stunted son of the house were confronting me. He must, I thought, have been a very bonny lad. His hair was inclined to be fair and wavy; his eyes were a peculiar blue; his skin, touched by the firelight, had attained a glow that restored something of health and youth again. And perhaps because of this I have always thought of him as a mere boy, forgetting the procession of the years.

He looked me over with a quaint directness, almost with groping eagerness. His eyes kindled in a little smile. His breath moved more quickly in him.

I found myself saying impulsively, in English: "Hullo, my lad!"

"H-hullo!" he said. He leaned forward, and I could catch the fevered movement of his breath. "I—I say—"

Had I heard correctly? He was sitting back again, quite blankly regarding the fire. Yet for a moment, in that interchange, the room had been blotted out, the woman forgotten; some mystic, imperfect communion had been upon us. I spoke to him again. He put out a hand, whether to touch me or to grasp mine I did not know; it was withdrawn before I could take it. He got up instead, abruptly, and, opening the window, stood beside it very stiffly, his head—so different from that bent, groping posture—thrown a little back, his nostrils dilating. What was it made me think of lilacs, when there entered the open window only a Continental fog to assail us with its pungency and bring a chill harshness into the room as it stirred the dying fire into protesting flame?

III

The stridency from below stairs reached up to snatch us from this elusive mystery. A sense of prophetic shame drove me down to see if men of my common blood were making fools of themselves over liquor. Laughter, too high-pitched to be altogether wholesome, greeted my reappearance. The tables were filled now. Perhaps the news of visitors had brought out the local folk through the fog. These, however, for the most part, kept unobtrusively in the background. A woman, evidently a hired helper, was aiding Madame in supplying the constant demands of Thornbury and his comrades, who had pulled two tables together in the centre and had invited a couple of the more distinguished-looking citizens to drink with them. They hailed me, insisting

that I sit at these tables. Thornbury cried merrily: “An international episode! Now we have a Canadian as well!” The strangers, he pointed out, were a local doctor and a German, happening in on his way through to Paris on business. “And our feet all under the same table!” said Thornbury.

They were not, of course, in any sense drunk. But the conviviality had loosened tongues. They had all seen service and were abnormally anxious to talk about it now, in a curious mixture of languages, supplemented by gestures, and based in the main on French. As the talk went on, I noticed some youngsters—countrymen—move nearer eagerly, their lips parted with excitement, their eyes and cheeks aglow with the false patriotism and glamorous adventure of war. The elder folk hung back, watching, listening closely, but sucking their pipes and, at times, shaking their heads.

Who made the fatal remark I do not know. But somebody, in the midst of more or less technical reminiscence, suggested: “The next war will be different!”

Watson spoke up then for the air service; somebody else for the advance in gas; Thornbury put in a good word for tanks—that kind of thing. I was in no mood for it and rose abruptly, almost rudely, from the tables. Thornbury shot a half-sarcastic glance at me, though his slightly flushed face was pleasant enough and handsome as the devil. I went and sat in an obscure corner, my mind rebelling against this vain, boasting chatter between the various arms of the service, and my thoughts quickly returned—at sight of him slowly descending the stairs—to the fair-haired son of our hostess. He paused for a moment on the lowest step, in a lack-lustre way appraising the scene before him, then slumped down, apparently uninterested in it, and half hidden by the turn in the stairway.

A young countryman next to me, seeing my interest, removed his pipe and spoke. Had I met Madame’s son? What did I think of him? I turned the question back upon local knowledge. The young fellow sucked at his pipe, looking wise. “Always certain, she was—always certain her son would come back.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Even long after the armistice.” His fingers played with the polished bowl of his pipe. “He was missing, Monsieur. And then, one night, this fellow came. She was always the first up of the village every morning, and she found him there on the steps. He was not in uniform. Where he came from is not known—some say he must have been a prisoner, wandered back. Anyway, she took him in; he was pretty bad, Monsieur, and she nursed him. Like many others the war had left him—” He shrugged his shoulders again, eloquently. “Well, it is understood she had even to teach him to speak all over again!”

He paused, and my eyes went to the woman, who was standing not far

from the tables where the silly talk and argument waxed hotter. He saw my glance and his eyes were shrewd. “It was given out presently, Monsieur, that the son had returned. I think she knows better. Still, who shall say? Her heart demanded her son back—and here was this one. He was not unlike the other. It got about the village—and who could deny the possibility?—that the war had changed him, bleached him out, as you might say.” He lifted his eyes gravely to mine. “In time, Monsieur, maybe we come to believe the thing we want most!” I gave silent thanks for this intelligence in unlikely material. The mystery of the son had hung over me unshakeably. About to question further, I was halted by a renewed stridency from the group at the centre tables.

The inevitable had happened—from branches of the service, competitive argument had leaped into national and racial camps. Boggs, red-faced, was pounding the table to emphasise his high utterances. Watson was white with excitement. The foreigners opposite bristled defiance. Thornbury was grim; the pleasant twist of his mouth had gone; the purplish veins of his face were prominent.

My mind framed something that was near a prayer, and it took familiar words—

> “For frantic boast and foolish word
> Thy mercy on thy people, Lord!”

It seemed a very feeble thing.

The atmosphere of the low room had risen, so I fancied, to keep pace with this fevered talk. I felt my own cheeks burn with it. It seemed tangible—as tangible at least as the fog that cloaked the outside world. The villagers were growing excited under its influence, as if with fumes from the wine now spilled upon the tables. One of the foreigners made an empurpled utterance. What it was I don’t know. Thornbury rose to his feet, flushed, went white, said cuttingly, with bitter, sardonic calmness: “That’s damned nonsense, you know! I tell you, in the next scrap we’ll jolly well—”

He got no further. Madame startled him into silence, and us into more painful tension, by her quick, querulous outcry. She ran forward, her hand outstretched at him; but when her finger pointed suddenly, it was not at the Colonel. She gestured toward the little group of youngsters, in whose eyes also the eager fever ran. “They don’t know any better!” she protested. “They were but children—but children in the war. But you, Monsieur le Colonel—” She turned now, and actually touched the ribbons on his breast, defiantly and yet with tenderness. “But you know better, Monsieur!” She swung upon the others. “And you—and you—and you!” She spread her hands in an inclusive gesture.

And then her defiance died as suddenly as it was born. She staggered back a pace; a little gale of hysterical laughter followed, harder on us who listened than her defiance. Her hand went to her lips. The flame of accusation that had blazed so fiercely in her eyes was gone; again I had the feeling that, like her village, she was immensely old—and immensely wise. She turned to us who watched, as to an audience, but her eyes sought something far beyond us. She gave a sound between a laugh and a sob. But when she spoke, her words fell with a dull, terrible insistence. “They would have them marching up our street again! They would have the columns marching up our street!” She swept around upon the Colonel and his group, blazing a new defiance, though it was a flame still clouded by dead ashes: “Isn’t it enough—enough for you, Monsieur le Colonel, that from the last time—their feet can still be heard upon our cobbles?” She inclined her ear for a mad moment, as if listening even now; and there was none that did not listen with her. And I have a fancy that our imaginations wrought for all of us the muffled sound of marching feet.

The Colonel swore an oath, but I think not in anger. His hand went up before his face, as if to ward off something, and I wanted to cry out that the sleeve of his tunic was red with blood—until I remembered the spilled wine. He saw it then himself, and brought his arm down with a quick gesture, almost as if he were striking at the woman there before him. And, as if that were a signal, he found himself confronted by another figure. The son stood there, facing the Colonel. His features were working in a way that baffles description. He seemed to be mouthing words that fell silent but awesome from his moving lips. He was taking, we saw, his mother’s part. He pointed at the woman, then menaced the Colonel with a blow—in the midst of which the change came. He fell back a pace, as if the Colonel had struck him. Then, suddenly, he stiffened slowly to attention, and attempted a shambling salute.

The Colonel stared at the lad; and then, as if he could not throw off even now the rigours of discipline and tradition, stiffened into a military posture himself. When he spoke, it was in English—curtly—as if that were the natural way to address this son of a Continental wine shop.

“What do you want?”

The lad did not speak. His posture remained rigorous. A tip of tongue explored his lips. The corner of his mouth twitched. His eyes never left their exploration of the uniform—the military boots, the leggings, the smartly-cut khaki breeches, the tunic with its polished Sam Browne belt.

I did not notice the silence, but it must have been intense. I did see, as if they were figures frozen in a tableau, the faces of Boggs and Watson, the French doctor and the German business man. But that was only for a flash. Everything hung on the two figures facing each other.

The Colonel said again, almost roughly now: “What do you want?”

And then the boy spoke. He lifted his hand again in a difficult salute and only two words came. They were English, and one a word no alien would ever use.

“Blighty, sir!”

The Colonel dropped back another pace. His face was that of a man who had found kinship in a ghost, and, it may have been, rebuke in a ghost. His hand clawed queerly at his close-clipped moustache. I think he must have seen, as I saw then—perhaps more sensitively than he—the thing in the boy’s eyes. It was all in that word. Blighty! He wanted Blighty. The eyes were shining as if some untapped source of light in the lad had suddenly been touched. I cannot say just what the Colonel saw in them. But, as for me, I saw a lane in England, heavy with the bloom and scent of lilacs; and elms at sunset with the rooks flying homeward; and a bit of English sward against an ancient wall; and well-tilled fields under an English sky; and people on bus tops in London traffic; and chimney pots against a misty skyline.

Thornbury sprang forward then, and caught him by the shoulder. Perhaps the movement was too impulsive; I do not know. I do know this, that I who watched saw England pass and vanish.

“English!” cried the Colonel, eagerly. “Good God, you’re English, sonny!”

The boy shrank from the touch. His eyes were dull. His speech was the broken native jargon he had learned. The woman interposed, protesting he was her son—that the English words were not unnatural in one who had seen Allied service. Thornbury put the woman aside, none too gently. He faced the lad again, desperately determined, trying a dozen expedients to resurrect that ghostly flash. Only a groping something answered—and was gone. The Colonel turned at last; swept us all with his glance; regarded for a moment the strained but hopeful faces of the men with whom he had sat at table.

“It’s gone!” he said, brokenly. He gestured queerly, and his glance seemed to seek something far beyond us. “There was England in his eyes!” he said. “He wanted Blighty—and there was England in his eyes!”

My eyes, for an instant, met those of Boggs and Watson, the local doctor and the German business man. They did not seem to see me. Was it my fancy that in their faces was the ghostly light of moving columns under blighted trees—khaki, and blue, and grey-green; and in them, too, a sudden, sick desire for the quiet, natural peace of native scenes?

I couldn’t stand it then; how I got out of the place I don’t know. But there I was in the street, with the swirl of Continental fog about me, and in my nostrils the smell of earth and lilacs—and in my ears, for a queer, uncertain moment,

the sound of marching, ghostly feet over the cobbles of an unknown village.

1928.

VI

"If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness
And findst not Sinai, 'tis thy soul is poor!"

HAUNTED MAN

I

I HAVE JUST received word that Haydon is dying. The shock has revived memories; it amazes me to think that I have been so forgetful, but every detail now presents itself again to me. It is eight o'clock. I have been asked to go to him in three hours' time. There is a last consultation of physicians in the interim. I sit here rebuking myself for a shivering instability. Eleven o'clock has drawn into its focus for me all the mysteries of the human spirit. I confess I am afraid to face it. What will he be like? And why has he sent for me? My neglect of him through the years sits over against me like a figure of reproof. With the thought of tranquillising myself, I have determined, in these hours before I go to him, to set down as best I can a pen portrait of Haydon as I have known him. It was as a young man, just under thirty, that I first saw Haydon. He had a picture "on the line" at the Fall Exhibition, and, with a friend, I was admiring it, when this friend turned to say:

"Hullo, here's Haydon now!"

They knew each other. I was introduced. I looked at him, and instantly thought: "He will burn himself out—in Art, or following some equally jealous mistress!" Just now he was in the full flush of his triumph. After years of obscurity, suddenly he had "caught on."

And then his wife was pointed out to me. She was sitting over on one of the leather-covered lounges, watching us. I had an instant desire to meet her. Introductions were accomplished. I was permitted to sit beside her for a time. Mrs. Haydon was a most attractive woman. One felt, underneath the more superficial beauty, a peculiar radiance, almost an emanation. There was the balancing influence of a clear, strong intellect. We spoke of his art. "Your husband," I said, "is a made man." She considered the group now gathered in almost fulsome congratulation about him. I recognized several of them. There

was Sherrit, the broker. There was Williams, who kept dogs and yachts, and what was left still of his father's money. There was Maunders—worth millions, if a penny. His face looked more dissolute, but not less handsome, than in the financial columns that featured him, on an average, once a week.

"Yes," said Mrs. Haydon, "I suppose he is—made—now!" She looked at me appraisingly, as if deciding my qualities. She said: "I've seen a lot of men—made! The longer it took, the harder to stand prosperity, especially for an artist!" She cupped her hand in her chin, regarding me. "You know," she said quickly, "there's a lot of nonsense talked about commercialising art. If you'd been through—what we've been through—you'd know that poverty can be almost as killing as wealth. It saps one's confidence a little, never to get recognition. But, of course, there's the other side. It's been such a game, climbing the hill. I like to think I've done a bit—stuck a stone behind the rear wheel when the affair started to back down—that kind of thing!" She laughed; it was like the aeration accomplished by rushing water. "Tell me," she demanded, "would you care to see his really better things—not stuff they'll hang on the line? Real stuff." She broke off; Haydon had come up. "Dear," she told him, "I'm just arranging to show your pictures. Would Friday suit all round?"

"Sorry," said Haydon, "Maunders is coming. But Sunday?"

I said Sunday would suit me. He nodded. I saw his mind was elsewhere. And considering, for a moment, his flushed face and burning eyes, I felt a prescient fear. "If she doesn't run behind with stones," I thought, whimsically, "he'll slip easily again. Or, maybe, the danger will lie head-foremost down the slope beyond!"

II

That Sunday stands out as a day apart. The Haydons lived in a cottage in suburbia, on top of a hill. Their artistry was written into every detail of it. The view, they declared laughingly, was fortuitous, not of their making, but when we sat out in their little bit of a garden, and drank tea, you swore it must be an ambrosial vintage in such a paradise. I lingered until I felt I should make a move to go. "Ordinarily," Mrs. Haydon said, "we go to church Sunday evenings. But there are the sacraments of friendship!" She smiled, motioning me back to my seat. "It's almost too lovely to be indoors!" So we sat and chatted, and fell into eloquent silences, and then, at last, Haydon, who had been extraordinarily quiet, began to talk. He broke in on my dialogue with Mrs. Haydon; we were discussing beauty, a little too abstractly, perhaps—she, I fancy, with design to draw him out.

"Associations," he said quickly, catching up our thread, "of course help to beauty. Half the beauty of your antique is the deposit of the years—mostly human values. Your modern craftsmen can reproduce an Elizabethan table, even to the wormholes, but he can't quite summon the ghosts around it. Your modern architect and builder could reproduce a little English village, almost stone for stone, and timber for timber, but the breath of generations would not have blown through it to fill every nook and corner with the beauty and pathos of evanescence!" His eyes sought the distance, now sinking in a nebulous and profound mist of grey. "Places—and even words," he said, "have the power to evoke beauty—but they must have the content of which I speak. A shivering beauty!" said Haydon, considering his phrase. "You know, of course, the thing I mean. Unless a man is intractably dull and insensitive, he has his moments. I have had one or two of my own. One was in Arras—the tranquil, ruined Arras, immediately following the Armistice. I shan't forget one moonlight night standing, with a sole companion, in the ruins of the cathedral, with the remains of a gothic arch cutting across an amazing sky. Or our walk back through a city of the dead, the only sound—and a startling one—a woman's laugh from behind a closed upper casement. You get something the same kind of thing in the Abbey, by the grave of the Unknown Soldier. Names, too—cities, towns: Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele—the war put a special content into them."

We were silent, remembering back.

"Why," demanded Haydon, suddenly, "is the Sabbath a day apart—even in a supposedly mechanised and irreligious age? Look at those shadows on the lawn. Don't they seem a little more perfect and restful? Materially that's nonsense, of course, but mentally, spiritually?" He laughed softly. "Well, we haven't managed, in our age, quite to spill all the content our fathers poured into the day! But may I show you something?" We excused ourselves. Side by side, we walked across a lawn close-clipped and perfect as fine green velvet. He stooped to examine some fancied blight on a rose bush, but the action was mechanical, for he said: "There are two place-names in scripture that have always possessed for me a shivering beauty. I haven't got past the first yet. Since I was a child," said Haydon, opening a door for me to enter, "I have always wanted to paint them. Don't bark your shins on that stuff!" I realised that we were stumbling our way through his studio. He guided me now, without light, until suddenly he reached for a switch and revealed a picture almost covering the wall of a considerable recess.

The lighting was discreet and not too strong to destroy illusion. I saw a young man sitting alone at the foot of an olive tree. This tree, and others with it, rose dimly in the gloom about and above him. The face was at once boyish and mature, but it was the light in the eyes that held me. Words are more apt to

destroy than to portray a thing like that—that revealing liquid light, at once of agony and ecstasy, at once of triumphant vision and of prophetic dread. I heard Haydon's voice, as from a distance, as something immaterial and startling.

"Can you see the other figures?"

I looked more closely. And vaguely I became aware, far beneath the olive grove, of a suggestion of men sleeping. Beyond, and to one side, there grew a sense, too, of a steep descent, full of a menace caught by faint tips of flame. " 'With swords and staves and torches'!" said Haydon in my ear. "I've got Judas there, leading; you couldn't see him, but he's there. He fascinates me, too. So terrible—and so easy, eh?—to be a Judas!"

Mrs. Haydon's voice was calling: "Hullo, you people! Are you going to stay in there all evening?" He shut off the light, and we went out. The shadows had lengthened; there was almost a chill in the air. Mrs. Haydon had thrown a light wrap about her. She said: "I'm sorry to disturb you, but there are some people here to see Ted. They're out at the front, Ted." She caught my arm as I made a movement to go. "Don't, please! I'm not going in to see them—really I'm not. And I'm not asking them out here." She smiled, as she confided to me: "They're not the kind of people who belong in a garden."

III

The time, I see, grows short. I have forgotten myself in friendship. I have lost myself in a garden. By the chances of life, I did not see these friends again in their home, nor sip ambrosial liquids on their terrace. These are the terrors of acquaintance; so many things can happen. The wheel upon which one may, perhaps, sit like a fly sunning itself in inconsequent and undisturbed equilibrity, may meanwhile have whirled others, caught too near the rim, into an outer darkness.

When next I saw Haydon it was a chance meeting in Paris. My infrequent visits to the French metropolis had not satiated me. I walked its famous streets with the wide-eyed innocence and credulity of a virgin tourist. I sought beneath porticos for romance, and beneath hat brims for characters. I lingered before boulevard cafés, fascinated with the slow luxury of black coffee and liqueurs in native hands. And so, one day, with a hot chocolate before me to give me countenance, I suddenly encountered an instantly familiar gaze. "I have," I told myself, "seen that man before." At the same moment I knew myself to be under recognition. I felt at once embarrassed. I had unwittingly stirred in this man some confusion greater than my own. Presently, he rose and came toward me, putting out a hand.

"You don't remember me?" he said. "You're trying to place me! I know

how hateful it is to have a thing on the tip of one's tongue and not be able quite to get it. Haydon's the name!"

I had it, even before he spoke. If he interpreted my dominant distress—for I have small faculty of concealment—he discounted further embarrassment by casually fetching his glass and seating himself at my table. A small movement of traffic, more languid than the crescendo of Parisian streets at busier hours; the sound everywhere of a language not our own; the unfamiliar architecture; a flower-woman opposite with violets and floral contemporaries of an early spring—all these shut us in upon ourselves. There was no escape in them. We spoke of them, of course, particularly of the flowers, but it did not matter.

He said: "It's several years since we met."

I meticulously counted them, and handed him this arithmetical offering towards a conversation that must, we both knew, break through the delicate insufficiency of small talk. Naturally, it was he who forced the issue.

"You're wondering what I'm doing in Paris?"

I told him that I had heard he was in Europe.

"Heard anything else?" His lips were almost defiant.

I told him I had been travelling and was out of touch. We spoke for a moment about travelling, as if it were important for us to make trite conversation on a subject that concerned neither of us then. Suddenly, he challenged me harshly: "What the devil made you come across me to-day? Can't you understand what it means to a man to see a face from—from home—when there is spring madness"—he indicated the flower-woman across the boulevard—"everywhere?" He pushed his drink from him. "Let's walk!" he said curtly. I summoned the waiter, and paid for both of us. He was unaware of this necessity. His urgency lay elsewhere, and its immediate demand was motion. I had difficulty keeping pace with him. I began to wonder if he were deliberately trying to escape from me without benefit of words. Loungers turned from leaning over parapets to interpret our unseasonable haste. There was apathy even in the taxis, which contributed to the spring haze an essence that at times hung low and blue above the pavements. In all the city we alone seemed filled with a specious urgency. Palpitations began to affect me. I caught his arm. He saw my distress, but shook me off.

"You don't have to follow me! You don't have to come! What do you want with a rotter like me?" But he had halted; the question thrown at me seemed to demand an answer. I realised, of course, his need of me. And, when I took his arm and led him slowly away, he was tractable, beaten, walking beside me, dumb in his misery. A bench, under some trees I would be at a loss now to locate, invited us, and there we sat, with our toes in last autumn's leaves thrust

through by rapiers of vivid green.

With the detachment, but inexorable logic, of a prosecutor summing up an unanswerable accusation, he put his fingers upon the sore spots in his life. He did not spare himself, but bared every wound; he did not explain them to me—merely showed them. It was enough that I saw them. “You will blame Maunders and his set, of course!” he said, at length. “It is because of him I am in Paris now. He has a chateau twenty kilometers out. No—Maunders is only the extra pressure placed on a chair that had flaws in the wood!”

I offered no comment. It was his moment for speech, not mine. But, in the pause, I recast in my mind the swift epic of his disintegration. My mind flashed to Mrs. Haydon and to her intuitive fear. He was not the first man to whom prosperity was unsafe. I had seen artists before, of all kinds, and seen creeping upon them the miasma of popularity—not that mere popularity of the masses, which may or may not cheapen, but a more insidious rallying of those parasites who feed their own uncreative cleverness at the expense of the creator. I looked at Haydon again. Someone had drunk his heart’s blood. Someone had drained virtue from him. Maunders and his set were only symbols of warfare more fundamental, more universal. That their own morals were unsound to an unbelievable degree was another issue. The germs of that could only have taken root in Haydon after the first sure poison had weakened his system and despoiled his self-respect, even while it stimulated his creative artistry to a point of mad genius that could only last—and did—for a few months.

He held out a hand.

“Look at that!” he said, bitterly. It was shaking, the digits themselves twitching. He laughed. “That’s mental, they tell me. Just nerves all shot. But I can’t hold a brush. I’ve had one or two commissions offered me, but I couldn’t go them. I worked like mad for days, under stimulants and without. Result—monstrosities! Well, I got some money from them—not from my clients. Maunders bought them; he has a room of such monstrosities in his chateau. There’s a lot of genius in them—he’s no fool that way—but it’s horrible—a nightmare! He holds his special dinners there. I’ve been. You have a mad, foul cleverness as sauce with your food. It chokes you at first. You get used to it!” He looked at me with queer, distant eyes. “You get used to it!” he repeated, and his look seemed to invite me down long corridors, into a chamber reserved for the ultimate reality of evil. He rose, hesitated, put a card into my hand. “If you care to, come and see me there. I used to have a joint lodging and studio with him. I still retain certain outworn privileges.”

I made no attempt to stop him going. I saw that he had had enough of confidences and friendship for one day. I watched his figure diminish down an

avenue of green. I read the card he had given me: “James Jennifer, A.R.C.A.”, and the address. I put Jennifer in my pocket and forgot him. Ghosts came and sat with me under the shade of the trees. The spring sunlight held for them nothing but encouragement. In all this, Haydon had said no direct word about his wife. I was left to draw my own inferences, and it was there, perhaps, that the ghosts were most busy, haunting me even when I rose and deliberately sought out the likeliest diversions in a supposedly gay city.

IV

Jennifer greeted me decently enough when I presented his own card at the given address two days later—a prodigious interval, as it seemed to me. No, Haydon was not in at the moment, but I must come up. I completed my climb of impossible inner staircases, and found myself in a largish attic, disconsolate with unkempt twin beds, unpromising or neglected canvases, and spider-webs that held gossamer riot, especially about the square panes of a huge and partially wrecked window. Brushing impedimenta from a shaky chair, Jennifer bade me sit down. He was a tousled little man, in the dirtiest smock imaginable; one gathered from the general cut of him that he was a bit of a poseur. He waved a hand affectedly, to indicate the melancholy glamour of his surroundings. Hair, sprouting from him unexpectedly, in weird tangles, threw him as much out of drawing as some of the incoherent canvases with which he was surrounded.

Having sized me up, Jennifer began to talk. He threw words from him in gusty sentences. I grew to respect the man’s talents, even though I disliked him. He revealed, in talking of others, an amazing pungency, an almost brutal wit, and a cynical philosophy that seemed staggeringly sincere and logical. His humour, his uncanny dissection, ceased only when he spoke of himself. And, at present, it was of Haydon that we talked. He seemed quite amused about Haydon, or perhaps the essential humour of it was the facile cleverness of his own dissection. I resented, and was fascinated by, every word. I watched each gesture with supreme interest. And my reward was one sentence to remember, to carry with me, to haunt me later in the Parisian sunlight.

“No man could ever face his wife after that, you know; and a woman would have to be a poor, prideless devil ever to face him, except in contempt!”

His shrewd eyes read my puzzlement.

“He is a fool, our Haydon!” said Jennifer. “He is one of those fools who confirm the romancer in his epic loves! You will understand, of course, that he did it all deliberately—to free her, to kill her love. He got this crazy obsession that he was unworthy of her, and must put her forever from his life. So he took

the only sure way!" I could have struck Jennifer's smiling lips. "Of course," he said, "the man is still mad about her. If you are here long enough you will see that for yourself!" There was a terrible quality of truth in Jennifer's statement. It was given to me to see this thing in Haydon. I became, it seemed, a necessity to him. I walked with him interminable miles, through streets alien in everything but some universal beauty that cursed him as he walked. He did not speak much, and never of his wife, and I fancy had I once intruded he would have cast me off for the greater loneliness of a life supported only by Jennifer. Just now Maunders and his crowd were in definite eclipse. The country soothed him more than the city, but he turned from it, preferring, it seemed, the exquisite torture of a city in which he had spent part of his honeymoon! It was Jennifer who had opened to me that secret, too.

Afterward, there were two ghost-haunted men to walk the city streets. I believe, on rare occasions, he almost saw her, and in this I was not far behind him! Sometimes it would be the flash of a skirt in the Bois, an English voice suddenly in a café, a woman's laughter on a starlit and romantic night. He made no apology for following them, but, as suddenly, the skirt would become the fabric of a stranger, the voice an alien echo, the laughter a mockery. Then he would walk very fast, anywhere; occasionally I would lose him. Later, he would be apologetic. I could only accept his apologies; who was I to say that for me the city was haunted, too, that sometimes even a tree, feathering into green against the spring sky, became embodied, a living symbol of the ghosts of a dead honeymoon?

I might have known this mood could not be sustained. It must eventuate in something, madness or worse. And one day, at an accustomed hour, there was only Jennifer in the studio to greet me. He whistled slyly at sight of me.

"Not wanted!" he told me. "Friend Haydon's through with you, for a time at least. You mustn't mind him. He's like that. If I weren't a philosophic soul, I'd have had words with him myself, and parted company. I mentioned," said Jennifer, "that you'd be along. He told me to tell you to go to hell! The language is his. If he had waited, he might have shown you the way. It was in his eyes!" Jennifer seemed to enjoy my dumb, questioning despair. "Oh, there's a reason!" he reassured me. "You mustn't blame yourself. That came to-day!" Lying on the floor was a partially unpacked painting. "The lady had that," said Jennifer, nodding wisely, "so it must have been she who sent it along. I gathered that from the way he acted. It's his Gethsemane picture." He uncovered it, regarding the painting critically. "At that," he said, "Haydon did himself well with it, didn't he?"

I looked at Jennifer, and, suddenly torn with irrational anger, hurried out of the place. His gusty laughter followed me. At the foot of the stairs I bumped

into a man. It was Maunders. He did not know me from Adam. So it must have seemed queer to him that I should stop, and suddenly shout at him.

"Get out, you! He's not there any more!"

Jennifer told me afterwards, full of delight over it, that Maunders went gibbering up to tell him there was a madman tried to assault him at the door below.

V

Jennifer, it was, who sent for me that night when the thing was, in a way, consummated. He knew my lodging in Paris, and there the boy found me. It was a night of late spring or early summer; heat had come to the city, and upon it now pressed clouds like a sombre pall. One wished vainly for wind to stir the grey masses. They hung like grotesque and sometimes majestic personalities above the spires, and found reflection in the Seine, but neither in the sky nor in the water was there the faintest motion. They were still hanging there, ponderous and immobile, as I found my way through the darkening streets.

Grey light filled the untidy studio, and, in the midst of it, stood Jennifer. For the first time his humour seemed to be lost.

"Look here," he said, "you've got to do something. I don't want a man killing himself in my place! I don't fancy getting involved with the gendarmerie!"

"Where is he?" I asked.

"He's gone out. He'll be back. He's been doing that all afternoon. It gets on your nerves. I told him to get out and stay out. But he'll be back! What did I tell you? He's got to stop it." I looked at Jennifer's betrayed weakness, but had no time for scorn. For once he gave the comfort of his humanity. We stood listening to the footsteps on the stairs, in their own way eloquent, and then Haydon was in. He stood for a moment in the doorway, as if waiting for his vision to clear; then almost ran at me, his finger pointed in accusation: "Who told you to come? What do you want here?" Before I could answer, he was plucking at my sleeve, urgently. "Come!" he said. "Come with me!" Jennifer's eyebrows lifted at me bushily; a grin came out like a mocking sun after the devastation of a storm; perhaps he felt it was my responsibility now.

Haydon was first to reach the streets again, but, lest I should escape him, he kept looking around at me, though his eyes, when I was able to see and assess them, repulsed me with a depth of tragedy too deep for the plumbing even of friendly desire. I told myself this was merely the ultimate in a man haunted, as he had been haunted, in a city such as this. But I knew better, and then something burst on my groping senses like a flash of light. Somewhere I

had seen a phrase, “these god-haunted men”—and, without knowing why, I realised its fitness. The old, haunting agony of an epic lover who was also an epic fool was there, too, but superimposed, demanding everything for itself, was this new thing. His feet and mine alone expressed our feelings, uncertain at times—almost stumbling, swift and sure at others, as if there awaited us an inescapable goal.

And then he stopped dead. There seemed something of prescient silence to accompany that moment. I remember it was under a tree, for I was conscious of its still beauty against a sombre and depressing sky. He seemed to be seeing me with new and surprised eyes.

“Why should you be here?” he rasped. “What have you got to do with this?”

“You brought me along, Haydon!”

“Did I? Yes, I remember. You’d better go back. *He* had nobody with him! *He* went alone!”

“*He?*”

“Judas!”

“Judas?”

“The betrayer of our Lord!”

I thought: “The man is mad! His brain has gone at last!” But this solution seemed too easy. There was something here less bearable.

“You see,” said Haydon, now more quietly, “*he* had no friend to see it through with him.” I groped for and found words: “Had I been there, and a friend, I should have stood by him. Did man ever need a friend more?”

The sky seemed to have dropped so low it pressed upon the eardrums. Under it, and upon pavements that meant nothing to us, we walked. He kept telling me, between interludes of silence: “She sent it! She must have sent it. God knows why! I couldn’t stand it, you know. Couldn’t stand it!” Presently, the pronoun changed. “You understand, I couldn’t stand Him there!” I knew he meant the picture. “He brought up all the past—all belief, and ambition, and happiness—so I sold Him!” He pulled out a roll of paper money. “It should be silver, shouldn’t it? It got rid of Him, you see, and it’ll keep me here! Why should a man want to prolong the tortures of a city of remembrance like this?” He did not require or expect an answer; another question leaped, first to his eye, and then to his lips. “Why should Maunders turn up just at the time? What devil twists things that way? Why should he be there, with his dirty pockets full of dirty money and his dirty eyes full of a smirking humour? ‘I’ll buy it,’ he said. Or did he say *Him*? I don’t know. Said he’d taken a sudden fancy to hang—it—with the other stuff—a new guest at his damnable dinners!”

I may have looked a little aghast. He caught that quickly, halting, looking at me as if to drag the last atom of accusation from my eyes.

"You see what I've done?" he cried. He looked away.

I was speechless. I cannot explain it, but for the moment it was another city and not Paris that I was in; it was another figure and not Haydon whom I faced; it was a hill and not a banqueting hall that filled my mind. And I saw this man go from me, walking swiftly under alien trees, like olives yet too nebulous for definition, walking, then running, and my mind followed him until he reached streets I had never seen and yet knew, and I heard him cry out his sin, and throw down a handful of silver before men who, when he fled from them, mocked him in their beards. Then I looked up, and it was Haydon who had gone from me, walking and then running, under the trees of a boulevard in Paris.

VI

Jennifer and the studio became my one hope. Jennifer had neither surprise nor accusation when he saw me come alone. We sat there in an interminable silence, as if awaiting something, and I saw the sombre sky change behind him to sulphurous prophecy, as he sat against that window over Paris, smoking, withdrawn within himself, but whether to a place of malice, of humour, or of awe, I could not know.

At midnight, he said abruptly:

"It's going to storm. Will you stay? He'll not be back."

I declined the invitation, glad even of the buffeting of the storm that swept upon the city as I went out, drenching me, crashing about my ears, driving every pedestrian unhappily caught by it into a remote struggle of his own, thrusting me back into an intense individual awareness, until my thoughts became as vivid and as irregular as the lightning, and there swept in upon me fancies that beat quite as stormily against my mental defences as ever the rain beat against my unprotected form. The Seine, beside which I went, was livid and unreal; over Notre Dame, as I came near, a cloud seemed to open to drop a ball of fire; I shut my eyes and awaited the terrific crash that instantly followed, and fancies, leaping in anew upon me, showed me a temple veil rent in twain, and, behind it, an open mercy seat. Almost upon the heels of this there came a calm. A little breeze stirred; the rain ceased; and spring scents were everywhere alive as I walked to my hotel.

In the sunlight of a morning fresh as only a morning after storm can be, I went again to the studio. Jennifer was just coming out. He stopped and looked at me anxiously, shaking his head. "I was wrong," he said. "He came back last

night. You'd been gone about an hour, I should say. The man's mad!" insisted Jennifer. "He caught my shoulders," said Jennifer, after a moment, his eyes a little queer. "Caught my shoulders till he hurt, and almost shouted at me, 'They can't hurt Him! I took them back their filthy money and I saw Him. They couldn't hurt *Him* by hanging Him there!' " Jennifer sucked at an empty pipe. He made a motion to prevent my going up. "No use," he said. "He packed his things after that—there weren't many. Then he went. He said he'd not be back. I didn't try to stop or question him. I'm glad to be rid of the fellow. The man's clean mad!"

For a week I remained in Paris, haunting our familiar places, questioning here, searching there. But I could not remain for ever. I wrote a note to Jennifer, asking him to forward any news. Next morning, I left Paris. Until to-day I have never heard of Haydon.

My time, I see, is up. I must hurry. I am amazed at the volume of my writing. Memory, and the lash of to-night's message, have accomplished the incredible in a life ordinarily too languid for its own good.

VII

I have seen Haydon. I have stood by his bed. I have held his hand. I have looked into his eyes. If Judas had lived, what would his years have been? Who can say? There is a haunting beauty about the story of the Wandering Jew that comes to me at this point, but its relation I am in no mood to determine. Haydon, of course, has wandered. A little of that he sketched as I sat by his bedside; it was queer how objective his statements were. There was this thing in Persia he remembered, that thing in India. Often minor things, but vivid in his mind. Behind these I had to read for myself. He did not once mention the spiritual agony that had lashed him across three continents, God knows how, for he did no steady painting.

"I came home to die," he said. "It's curious, when you think of it, but I was taken sick on the ship, and my only fear was that anything should happen before I got here! Now I'm here, what good does it do? There's you, of course —I'm not ungrateful."

There are some men whom travel would have cured—or killed. But Haydon was not of the majority. All the objective things of which we spoke only pressed in upon him like walls. I was slow to realise this. Then it was given to me to understand. This man had come home to die, but even the familiar things for which he craved could not come near him, could not essentially touch him. I was a voice, without penetration to a point where it mattered. There was some deep place to which the spirit of Haydon had

retreated. There he dwelt in an unutterable loneliness. There was a place to which I could not go. There God himself could not reach. The solitude lifted up hands to push Him away.

Yet Haydon's speech otherwise was quite normal, terribly normal. He chatted to me comfortably enough; we spoke of Jennifer, still in his beloved Paris, of men known to us both, of events current in the world. And I knew it all to be the patter of dried peas. When he seemed tired, satiated with the empty exercise of talking with me, I took my leave. The nurse told me that the physicians in consultation were mystified. The man was dying without due cause. I felt superior for the moment. I saw a spirit retreating too far within ever to return. I saw a man suffocating in too narrow a place.

I went on down the stairs.

There was a woman just coming into the lobby. I might have passed her. She came to me and put a hand in mine.

"Thank you," she said, "for telephoning me."

I wondered if Haydon would.

I said, gravely: "I remembered the stones you put behind the car when it was in danger of backing down the hill."

I did not go out. Hat in hand, I sat in the lobby, waiting. There seemed a responsibility I should not shirk. I might have to take her home. Through the hospital door I watched the slow dawn. Then, at last, I saw her walking down the single flight of steps by the elevator shaft. She came directly to me, but I could read neither her face nor her eyes. "Take me somewhere near where we can get some coffee!" she said. There was a place not far away, forlornly garbed in paper flowers, a withering palm or two, and a rubber plant with five leaves left. But the morning sunlight came in the window, and the coffee was fresh, and hot, and strong.

She put her cup down.

"Can you imagine," she asked, quietly, "that he thought I had come out of —of some pity for him in his state? It took me a long time to make him understand I had never changed towards him. I thought he didn't want me, that was all, and I'd not force myself upon him. But I've never, never ceased to—want him!"

I put in my word, quickly: "Nor he you!" I added: "You were in Paris with us all the time. But we never caught you! You were the flash of a skirt at a corner, a voice in a crowd. You were laughter coming suddenly in the stillness of a starlit night. Sometimes we almost caught you—never quite!"

"That's poetry!" she said, dully.

"I hadn't meant it so."

“I’m wrong,” she apologised. “It’s more than poetry. I *was* there. I was always where he was. I have been all these years.” She stirred her coffee. “He couldn’t understand that, quite. And then he said”—she set her spoon down, and looked at me—“he said something awfully queer. He said, ‘Then maybe *he* was, too.’ Did he mean you? You’ve been such a friend!” She put a hand on mine.

“No,” I told her, “he didn’t mean me, Mrs. Haydon.”

“Oh!”

She did not question further. I think she understood. She said after a time: “They say he’s going to die. He’s not, you know!” Her lip quivered, but her voice was firm. “It was odd, but—well—while I was talking to him I knew there was a change. I don’t know just how, but I think, maybe, I *had* put a stone behind the wheels again!” I nodded. We sat, consuming the residue of our coffee in silence. The sun was rising higher over the city; the withered palms in the window were tipped by it; and in the street outside we could hear the eager rush of the earliest morning traffic.

That was three hours ago. I have had time since to finish Haydon’s story. Some necessity seemed still to be in me. Did I say finish? We use glibly such trite inaccuracies.

1930.

THE PORTRAIT

I

WHEN I first saw him, that afternoon of early September, he was one of several passengers who alighted readily enough from the unqualified discomforts of the bus that, in those days, constituted the daily link between the obscure fishing colony of V—— and the outside world. Yet, stopping to watch these new arrivals, I found myself concentrating on him, to the exclusion of the other passengers setting foot upon our market square, opposite the Inn. He was clean-shaven and of a certain refinement, his profile excellent, with its slightly Semitic cast, but when he turned I saw in his eyes an immense weariness. The handbag he carried was small, but evidently too great a burden for his strength. He stood gazing about in a helpless, dazed way; then, suddenly, his knees bent under him, and he crumpled up in the dust of the roadway.

Someone shouted for brandy, and another one ran to fetch it from the taproom of the Inn. Others of us carried him within, and laid him on a sofa. His eyes fastened on me. He beckoned weakly.

"Can you tell me of a—quiet place—to recuperate? I have—been—very ill."

I bore him off to my own lodgings, from under the resentful nose of mine host, who, I am sure, scented a long and profitable visit. In Mrs. Wilkins' best bedroom, overlooking the moors and the sea beyond, he lay presently, deep in sleep. By nightfall, though, the landlady came to me in trouble about him. "He's taken bad!" she said. "Maybe you'd come, sir?"

Dalgleish, for so he was able to give his name, was burning with fever. I saw it was a case for a doctor and called the local man. A mild delirium came over him in the night, and the days of lassitude that followed lengthened into weeks, when he could scarce lift a finger, and preferred—for his eyes were in some way affected—to lie quietly in a darkened room, and think his own long thoughts.

II

An importunate publisher having dragged me back to town, I remained there most of this time. October being unusually warm, I returned to the refuge of Mrs. Wilkins'. The usual time of "high tea" was past when I arrived, but she

set cold meats before me, and herself on a chair hard by. “No, sir,” she said, “there’s no one here at present, but him. He’s still abed.” She lowered her voice; her expression was fleetingly touched with awe, or fear, or kindred emotion. “He’ll be up in a day or two, he says. The doctor hasn’t been now this long time. Rest, he said, just rest and good air and food would do it.” She shivered; going over she shut the window against a chill night wind that came off a grey sweep of ocean and the rustling dark green of the moor. “I’m glad you’ve come, sir! I’m not a person for fancies or tomfoolery, and I’ve never, as you know, held much with—things that some people believe. I’ve always tried to keep my rates reasonable and treat my fellowmen like they deserve. I’ve known lots worse than me that’s forever darkenin’ the doors of churches!” It was a new strain for Mrs. Wilkins.

“Something has happened?” I hazarded, for we had been friends ever since I had offered her an autographed copy of my first novel—and given her occasion for quite unnecessary, but apparently effectual, pride.

She put her hands on the heavy black that covered her generous hips, and regarded me for a moment. Then she leaned forward. “There’s no one seen him but me, you understand, sir? I’ve tended him right along, and his eyes being that bad he had to have the room dark, and maybe I didn’t notice—well, you’ll mind, sir, when he came he was shaved clean? He hasn’t had strength nor desire to shave since.” Her voice trembled. “Seems like I didn’t notice anything, and then—one day, he says, ‘I think I can stand a little more light, Mrs. Wilkins.’ I drew the blinds a trifle, and went to leave the room. He called to thank me, and I turned again, and saw him smiling at me.” Her face was white now; her breath a little short. “I saw him there, you understand, against the pillow—smiling at me, and I—I knew I’d seen him before, sir!” She glanced up at a clock. “You shall judge for yourself. He’ll be glad to see you back. He told me himself he took kindly to you.”

“I hardly think—to-night—” I began.

“Please!” Her frightened eyes appealed. “You don’t know what it’s been like, living in the house with him, and no one round.” I gave in, a prick of curiosity aiding as a goad. The window on the stairs was open, and I remember how the gorse rustled in the breeze from the sea beyond.

Mrs. Wilkins knocked gently at the door.

“Come in!” said a voice grown strong from weakness, a deep, resonant voice.

“The gentleman’s back, sir,” she said, timidly. “I brought him in to see you.”

He was able to read now, under a shaded lamp. The room was full of late

twilight, and he lay in the patch of radiance, against the white pillows that supported him. I started back, for this was not the young man with the sad eyes, whom I had helped that night. As Mrs. Wilkins had said, no razor had touched him. His beard was full-grown and silky, a soft reddish-brown. His face and noble forehead were marble white, though the shaded lamp touched him with its mellow light.

I have seen such things done on the stage, but there was no histrionism here. I forgot the room, forgot Mrs. Wilkins standing, watching me, forgot everything but the figure in the path of radiance there, who set aside his book and said, in his deep, quiet tones:

"It is good to see you again. You did me a great kindness in a time of need!"

He smiled, and held out his hand. I went forward and took it. As I did so, it flashed across me that here it was more fitting one should kneel . . .

II

I think it was three days later that we missed him from his room. He had been up and about his own apartment, but no further. Mrs. Wilkins, taking up his evening tray of delicacies, found him gone. I had difficulty calming her perturbation.

It was a warm October evening—so warm we sat outside on the verandah, chatting hardly at all, but listening—I, to the distant, solemn murmur of the little surf, she, I am certain, for his footfall.

"He did not say he was going out," she kept reiterating. Then suddenly, silently, he was with us in the soft dusk, his figure, as it chanced, in the shadow, his head, slightly in profile, silhouetted against the orange afterglow. "I have been walking by the sea," he told us. "There is a special wonder in it on a night like this." I think, indeed, if he had said he had been walking on the sea, the face of our landlady could have expressed no more agitated, yet reverential awe.

After that, each evening, he walked abroad, invariably alone, as his days were passed largely in solitude. Down in the village already there was talk of him. "Who is he?" men would ask me in the shops, or stop me on the road to say: "Who is this, sir, stopping up to Wilkins'?"—and I have wondered since if the look in their eyes could have been an echo, a reflection, of my own.

Within a fortnight there came, with the early autumn dusk, a sunset of peculiar glory. It hung a kingly mantle in the west, and eastward, over the sea, stretched serried fabrics fading to most delicate lilac. The progress of twilight seemed suspended, as if this amazing, colourful interlude must be prolonged

that old men might see visions and young men dream dreams. I walked that night alone. It was a time demanding companionship, but Mrs. Wilkins, interminably rocking on the front verandah, and contriving at the same time to prepare vegetables against to-morrow's needs, scarcely fulfilled the ideal, in spite of her constant iteration: "My, but it's a grand night, ain't it? Just grand!"

I chose a path across the moors, that led eventually to the sea, mentally reciting some lines that once had caught my fancy, and that now became an intrusion.

> "There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
> There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
> There is society where none intrudes
> By the deep sea, and music in its roar."

The sentiment palled to-night. I wanted something more, I craved the humanities. The world of beauty was a background; it needed the complement of human comradeship. The path across the moors brought me suddenly upon the seashore, perhaps two miles above the village, and I turned now to retrace my steps. At one place a great flat rock, washed by the waves at high tide, but a favourite spot in summer from which to see the sunset, juts out into the ocean, terminating a curving point of land. Few of the local people are interested in spots such as this. I found, however, that others had forestalled me. A man was there, and a girl. I was unseen, and should not have remained but for a compelling awe.

The girl, I saw, was Mary Wamsdell—a village character, a village reproach. Rough as some of the fisher-folk were, there was a puritanical streak in them, hereditary I fancy, for their forebears were rugged, dour, though godly people. Mary's wild-rose beauty was almost a reproach in itself. But she had taken it to the city and sold it; this was the girl I saw on the rock that evening; this was the one I saw waver a little, and kneel on the rock, sobbingly. And the man lifted his head, his beard touched with the late light, and looked upon her with compassion, and spoke to her, and I—I found myself clambering along the rocks, homeward, in the dusk.

Dalgleish was not long after me. I had gone to my room; conversation with Mrs. Wilkins I could not have stood. There was a knock at my door. I opened, and started back. Dalgleish stood there.

"May I come in?" he asked.

I proffered him a chair, but he waved it away. I moved to light a further lamp, for the one I had gave little illumination. He stopped me with a quick laugh.

"Don't!" he said. " 'Men love darkness rather than light because their

deeds are evil.' " I thought of the origin of the words, and shivered. "Give me a cigarette," he said. He helped himself from a box on the table. His fingers were shaking. "I'm not accustomed to smoking with—with this beard." My single light fell upon a mirror nearby. Following his glance, I saw his reflection there; the high white forehead, the beard slightly auburn as Rossetti might have done it; I saw the whiteness of the cigarette moving, in his fingers, towards his mouth, then withdrawn again. He tossed it away. "I'm a fool," he said curtly. I had not spoken. The blood was pounding in my ears. "It's got you, too," he said, at last. "I'm sorry to shatter any illusions, but I've got to talk to someone. You've been a friend to me. There's something to-night—is it the night or myself?—that makes one demand expression to a friend! You'll have to bear with me." He sat on the arm of the chair, I on the bed, as he unfolded his life before me.

"My family name is not Dalgleish," he said. "I chose that at random from a directory—the other is forgotten. I am unworthy of it. My maternal grandmother was a Jewess who married a Christian. Both were talented, my grandmother a poet of sorts with a mystical slant. My mother inherited richly from them. She was deeply religious, and from earliest girlhood artistically inclined. Her early and untutored pictures, from her favourite Bible characters, have been pronounced unusual by competent critics. She studied abroad, and returned to paint a long planned picture. While abroad, however, she met my father, fell in love, and married. He, too, was deeply interested in her plans. She worked on her picture until the day before I was born, consumed with an intense fear that she would not otherwise finish it. The strain was too great. She did not long survive my coming. The picture remains unfinished. My father has it; critics say that, had she lived, hers would have been one of the finest of all conceptions of the Man of Nazareth." He paused. "What warp was there in me, I wonder! I grew up a rebel against such things. And then—well, there is nothing unusual in that part of my story. I got into devious ways. The law reached out after me—and I was faced with a ten year term. I served eight months—and escaped! I suffered many things to get away, but I had some money, and I managed. Then I got a kind of 'flu—for weeks I lay in a boarding-house at the point of death. It served me well, for the hue-and-cry died down. I determined to seek a quiet spot, far off the usual route. I heard of this place and came, still very weak and ill, as you know—and was shown kindness of which I was not worthy." The room seemed suddenly close. I rose and threw up the window. No touch of kingly purple was left on sky or sea or land, but the soft echo of the surf was a plaintive murmur in our ears. "I don't know why I'm telling you all this," he said. "I'm putting myself in your hands, you see. But just now nothing seems to matter." He rose, and paced the room. "When I was ill, I grew afraid, somehow, to die—the mystic in me, perhaps,

but there it was. I vowed if I should get better I would try to be different." His eyes were touched with awe. "I used to see Mrs. Wilkins looking at me oddly. Then, when I got up—and faced my mirror—" He swung upon me. "What madness compelled me to play the part this fortnight, to let myself be seen this way? At first it frightened me, and then I laughed a little at the—the disguise"—his voice broke for the moment—"and then, to-night, a girl followed me." He went to the window, gazing out into the night, then turned to me. "She told me the story of her life, brokenly, asking not who I was nor what I did here, only that she had seen, and followed, and must tell me. Perhaps I knew enough of the under side of things to have—compassion. Perhaps—well, I told her I was not He. I do not know if she heard me or not—anyway, I found myself without words of my own to comfort or aid her, and then I discovered myself quoting—well, words you and I have known since childhood. She—she knelt then, and presently I found myself alone!"

He paced the room again, restlessly, turning to me, his voice half triumph, half appeal.

"I touched a soul for good to-night! Can you imagine that?" His laughter rang out harshly. His reflection caught him again. He stared into the mirror. "God!" he cried. "What trick of fate is it?—why must it have been I, of all the world, to grow into the likeness of my mother's Christ?"

III

As it happened, the next day saw me on my way, although I had intended remaining another week. My literary agent, an autocratic person, had fallen foul of my publishers again, and it was he who this time summoned me. So hastily did I pack my traps and leave, that I had time for only a hasty leave-taking of Dalgleish, in which I managed to convey to him that his secret was safe with me. I asked him, however, what his plans were.

"I don't—know!" he said.

His eyes, even more than his voice, were hesitant. At the time, I dismissed the problem of them, and of his future. Town and its affairs swallowed me up rather effectually. He drifted into the background with other odd experiences of a lifetime. The fact that I wished to respect his confidences, and could not speak of them, aided to this end. To cap it all, a chance meeting with an old friend led to a winter in a more southerly clime. The cold weather was almost done when I returned home. Sitting down to my breakfast one windy Sunday morning in March, I propped up a week-end pictorial against the cruet, according to custom. The maid addressed me thrice in the matter of eggs before I answered her. Then I stared again at the half-sheet in front of me. No

mistaking the brow, the slightly Semitic nose, those eyes, that beard, even if over it there had not been the caption, “Fame of Fishermen’s Apostle Spreads —Remarkable Likeness to Portrayal of Christ by the Masters—Oberammergau Students Interested. Shrinks from Publicity.” This modesty the paper seemed intent on affronting. It dragged in the details of his daily life. He still lived modestly at a boarding-house, it seemed, but, going in and out among the simple fisher-folk, had so won their hearts—I read into it, also, a superstitious awe—that people were flocking to see him. He had inaugurated a Seamen’s Relief Fund, and other coastal charities. Most of all, he was the friend and counsellor of the afflicted and the despairing. Miracles of recreated lives attested to the power of his ministry. There was, perhaps, a column of it. A reporter had smelt the thing out, with this result. My eggs went cold while I read it. A thousand possibilities and fears flashed through my mind, and yet, somehow, I felt a quiet confidence in the man. I determined at the first opportunity to go and see this thing for myself, and talk with the man whose mother had given to the world a portrayal, in flesh and blood, of what her brushes had lost the power to achieve.

I broke away from work at the month end. March went out like a lion that year, and a high wind was driving sheets of spray across the moors, so that we who travelled by the bus huddled together in mackintoshes. No rain was falling, but the streets and market place were gleaming wet, and a stormy wrack drifted in from the sea and dulled the sky. Very glad I was of the shelter of my old lodging-place, and to see the cheery fire Mrs. Wilkins had lit in the living room. In the light of it, I fancied she had grown younger, and I saw that her mourning had suffered effective moderation. More than this, her voice seemed changed, as time might smooth it out, had time there been. “You’re looking well,” I hazarded. “It’s him!” she declared, readily, her eyes alight with a pride almost maternal. “He’s made me see things, he has.” She drew a chair for me by the fire. “I guess you knew well enough that Jim’s goin’ made me hard and bitter—after our losin’ Maggie, too. One day—it was Maggie’s birthday—she’d been fifteen if she’d lived—I guess I was feelin’ that much I showed it. I thought I was alone in the room, and then, suddenlike, he was there with me. He seemed to know almost without my tellin’. It was about this time, sir, with the sunset comin’ in, and suddenly he takes me by the shoulders and looks at me. ‘They shall sorrow no more, neither thirst any more,’ he says, simple as you please. ‘And they shall go out no more for ever.’ It broke me up, I guess, him standin’ there sayin’ it like that, for when I looked up, he was gone.” She paused. “You’ve noticed it?” She fingered her dress. “It seemed wicked-like to mourn that way so much!”

Just then Dalgleish entered, I remember. His eyes lit up at sight of me. He

came forward eagerly, taking both my hands. “I’m so glad you’ve come,” he said, and repeated, “I’m so glad you’ve come!” And I, knowing all I did and not forgetful of it, felt again, as I stood before him, that here was a place that one should kneel . . .

Dalgleish took me to his room that night, not his bedroom, but one on the ground floor that Mrs. Wilkins had given him as a kind of office, where he might keep up with his growing correspondence, and where those who sought interviews with him might come if they chose.

He waved me to a chair.

“You’ve wondered about me,” he said, after a silent regarding of each other. “You’ve seen that article? I wish it had not appeared and yet—” He leaned forward, the fire of a zealot in his eyes. “You can’t imagine how this thing’s gripped me! After you went, I tried to remove this—” He touched the silky auburn of his beard, reverently. “I couldn’t. Believe it or not, I couldn’t! I seemed to see my mother—as I knew her so well from a portrait—looking at me through my own eyes, bidding me preserve the thing she had given to the world, to preserve it and use it. I decided to leave it a day or two. And then that Wamsdell girl’s mother came to see me.” Dalgleish paused, his voice a little difficult. “She is a good woman,” he said, gravely. “She would have wept—at my feet—at my feet, if I had not restrained her, telling her I was of common clay. When she went out, I was conscious of an odd exaltation. I had touched a life! There were other lives! I had power—influence—such as few men could have!” We sat in silence for a time. “You’re thinking,” he went on, “that I wanted to do good—that I had experienced some regeneration. It wasn’t that. It was power, a sense of power, a desire to exercise it, an insatiable curiosity. Like an hereditary drunkard, I had tasted wine, and I wanted more. That’s how it began. And now—now, you see—I’m caught in it, and I don’t know that I want to escape!” He leaned close to me. I involuntarily drew back. He said, drily: “You have the awe too—like the others! My face is so—so like—you draw back. But look closer still, look in my eyes.” His voice rose a little, “What do you see there, in the eyes? Good?—no, evil! Peace?—no, storm! I’m an evil man, an unregenerate man, under sentence unfulfilled, lustful of power, able to quote the scriptures to beat the devil, laughing sometimes in the privacy of my own heart at the credulity of people!” He sat back, and said more quietly: “Then tell me why it is that, when there is distress and need, I find the words that banish fear and give peace! Tell me how so evil an instrument can be used for good!—how, for the time, I feel other than myself!”

He waited, in a silence emphasised by the ticking of a small clock on his desk, for me to answer. I had none for him at the time. He rose and went to his desk, running his hands through a pile of letters. He laughed shortly.

“More credulity!” he said. “Letters—letters—letters! Such opening of hearts! Such opening of pocketbooks! That Sunday feature article has captured the minds of a lot of simple folk. Look!” He opened a drawer and took out a wooden box. In it were money-orders and bank-notes, neatly ticketed, and banded with elastics. “Money,” he said, “money! Aid for the coastal charities, or any work I may care to put it to. It’s coming in by every mail!” He closed the drawer again with a bang. “What would they say, if they knew that this ‘fishermen’s apostle’ towards whom their generosity is turned, is wanted by the law for embezzlement of funds?”

As I remember, it was just at this time that a rap came at the door.

“A poor woman to see you, sir,” said Mrs. Wilkins, a little breathless with the import of it.

Dalgleish looked at me, and nodded in a tight-lipped way. I left the room, and walked the road outside, glad of the chance to fight the gusty winds. When I went in again, the woman having passed me on the road, Dalgleish sat by his desk, his arms pillowing his head. He looked up, and gripped my arm.

“Another soul touched for good!” he said, in a kind of awe; then, in quick terror, “I can’t drop this now! I’ve got to stand by this work! If I failed them, their foundations would be shaken. You must stay and help me through it!”

Standing there, with a tremendous sense of destiny pressing upon me, I gave my promise. My first concern was that Dalgleish should have the handling of his monies put on a business basis. I should have liked a committee to head things up, but a committee suggested organisation, and destroyed at a blow the simplicity and naturalness of this odd mission. As a compromise, we determined on an assistant for him. At his suggestion, I saw Mrs. Wamsdell about it. “Mary would be mighty pleased to help,” the woman said, eagerly. “I just know she would. And I—why, anything I could do for him—” So Mary Wamsdell was installed as an unofficial secretary. She was, I confessed, when now I saw her under the sunlight from his office window, a stunning girl. Her hair was raven black, and she had a trick of doing it that softened her rather too regular features. The bloom had been restored to her cheeks. Her eyes were happy, and doubly so now that she was near him who had rescued her from the mire, and could serve. Once or twice, as I watched them working over correspondence, I intercepted glances singularly ardent, and I remember thinking that it might not fall out ill, if they should chance to care—and then it flashed across me what thing he was, and what blade of justice ever hung above him, and I wondered if I had done well or ill in this appointment.

Summer crept into our springtide, with the wind so soft one fancied it carried perfumes from southern seas. It sang its way through the gorse on the moor, and came in at our open windows, sighing a little that we would not heed its call. But we were busy over a new batch of correspondence, separating the offerings from the others, and committing the unanswered ones to a basket, temporarily. Mary Wamsdell was not with us. Spring sunshine slanted in, and in the roadway an itinerant organ-grinder played half-forgotten melodies. A boy, clattering noisily over the cobbled street, took up the strain that had just ceased, but his whistle died respectfully as he passed our open window.

Dalgleish pushed aside the work, and turned to me. He had seemed ill at ease all day.

"I've got to get out!" he said. "I've got to walk—to walk in the open air. Don't look at me like that. When I get restless this way I've got to move about. Sometimes, I think I can't stick it another day. Do you think it's easy to live up—to this?—to have one's every movement watched—to be an idol to some, and a freak to the scornful? Sometimes, I think I'll take the razor and be my old self, and then—then I know if I did I'd slip—I'd slip, and I'd take others down with me. I've started something I can't stop! And then I get wondering how much root this all has in those I've touched, in good springing out of evil." He stood up. "That's half truth and half deceit. Fact is, you know, I'm afraid of losing *her*." He laughed shortly. "That's next door to blasphemy, isn't it?—wearing the—the mask of a good face for—for love of a girl! Put those things aside, I'm off for a walk."

"Shall I come?"

He hesitated, and I saw he wished to be alone. Later, I went for a ramble myself, in the opposite direction to that I had seen him take. It was quite late when I returned, by way of the village. Passing along the street, Mrs. Wamsdell ran out to greet me and inquire for Mary. Had I seen her? I told her she was not at the house. "She left early in the afternoon," said the woman. "I couldn't get out'n her where she was goin', except for a walk. She's been a bit queer all day."

I asked hastily: "Which way did she go?"

The woman pointed.

"I'm walking that way," I said, for my decision was suddenly made. "If I see her, I'll remind her of the time." I took the road along the sea-front with a good swing. Instinctively, and without definition of my fears, I headed for the point of Sunset Rock. An April cloud had come across the sun, partially, so that the sea was drab, but the curving shoreline caught full its slanting rays. A mild surf was running. I quoted aloud remembered lines—

"And the sea is breaking his old grey heart
Upon the golden shore."

They saddened me vaguely. The mood held until I came, at length, to my vantage point on the near side of Sunset Rock. Dalgleish was alone. He stood, arms folded, staring out to sea. I ventured to approach; he did not hear me at first. When he turned and saw me, he showed no surprise. His tone was almost conversational. But he said: "I've been through hell!" He paused, and added grimly, "And dragged another soul with me. Mary's just gone—she must have passed you somewhere as you came." He gripped my shoulders. "Can you imagine a man with—with this—tempting a girl to devious ways again? I wanted her to go with me—far away from this abnormal life. I think it was a passing ship suggested it. Some far place where we could have each other, and no one to spy upon us and force us to impossible standards. There was money available, I said. She looked at me, as though I had plucked her eternal soul from her. 'Don't!' she said. 'Don't! I want to go!' She did not think of herself; it was of these others I had touched for good. I pleaded with her then to have me—here—anywhere! She said, No, I must not handicap myself with such as she." He repeated, fiercely: "With such as she! I did not confess to her what I was. I played my last card—I took her in my arms. 'Just this one time,' she said. 'Just this one time.' Then, suddenly, she was down on her knees, like that first evening—" He broke off, straightened himself, and, as if tranquillity had suddenly been restored to him, regarded me with a grave smile that set my heart beating faster, my mind remembering One who walked beside another sea than this. We returned home in the twilight. I cannot tell what quality there was to mark that evening hour, but something there was, at once subduing and strengthening—the spring earth smelling moist; the dimming golden light; some children on a pasture gate regarding us, as we passed, with eyes grown big and grave; an aged woman, from a stark verandah, blessing him whose seamen's charities had saved her home for her. Not soon shall I forget that silent walk. We reached Mrs. Wilkins'; he bade me enter with him. In his little room he opened up a safe that stood against the wall, a small ship's safe.

"Look!" he invited.

There was money inside, quantities of it.

"I've been playing double!" he confessed. "Gradually withdrawing from the bank, and putting it here ready—the last week or two only. To-morrow, it goes back!" He shut the lid decisively. "Anyone could do that—any fool can steal money when there's no hindrance in the way!" He took a turn up and down the room. When he stopped, his face was the face of a zealot again. He cried, his finger pointed at me: "There's something big possible in every life! It came to me to-night, walking home. Something bigger than laws and

conventions. Convention would put me back behind the bars, to live a useless existence for my best years. I've a bigger thing to do than that!" He drew himself up, magnificent now in his healthy manhood, his vigour, the radiant wonder of his face. "Here," he cried, "here's something no one's ever done! No one, in twenty centuries, has ever grown into full likeness to Him! I'm young yet—just"—his lip trembled—"just thirty-three! If He had lived, what would He not have done! I—I'm going to be worthy—*inside*"—he tapped his heart—"of what people see in my face and form!"

I shrank back, as if he had uttered some conventional blasphemy, or as if madness had seized him, but his eyes held only, as it seemed to me, the spark of sacred fire.

He hesitated a moment, then began pulling on his coat again. "I've got the first thing to do," he said, his voice subdued now. "I'm going to confess to Mary all I am. I've got to straighten things with her. It's only fair to her that she should understand."

I caught his sleeve.

"No!" I cried. "No, you must not go to-night!"

He put me aside gently, but decisively. I followed him into the hall, watching him go out into the darkness. It was late when he returned, though I had not gone to bed, and my light must have shown through the transom. I heard him come heavily up the stairs and go directly to his room. For a long time there was the sound of movement, and I think I must have dozed off. When I awoke, in the soft darkness, the silence was complete and lulling. My sleep was not kindly, and I was glad of the first streakings of dawn. I lay awake for a long time, watching the day growing, and sniffing the clean smell of salt from the sea. A sense of oppression demanded action. I determined on a walk along the coast, before breakfast. Silently, I slipped out, and along the still deserted roads. My return journey took me down the main street of the village. I saw a small gathering of fisher-folk—shawled women and a few jersey-clad men—gathered about the Wamsdell cottage. I drew near. A white-faced woman seemed to fly out of the crowd, and almost throw herself upon me. "Where is he? What do you know about it?" She plied me with vehement questions, her frail hand clutching and shaking my arm, as if to shake some news of good or ill from me. My look, more than my voice, told her I did not understand her purport. Her eyes dulled with despair. "He's took her away—my Mary's gone with him! Mait Scarvell lent him a rig late last night, to go to some sick person, he said, and Tim James, he saw 'em drivin' by like mad. He was comin' along with his rig, so they had to slow, and he knew it was—was him and my Mary." Her voice shrilled, suddenly: "Who is he? What's he taken her for?" There was some awesome hope, as well as plain fear, in the woman's

face, from which I turned impotently away. I knew, before confirmation of my eyes was given, that the ship's safe no longer held its store of voluntary gifts. But—that the foundations might not be too broken up—I held my peace. A dozen pairs of eyes appealed to me, but I had no answer of hope for them at all. I turned, and went slowly down the village street in the pale wash of spring sunlight.

I know of few more evil days than that, in my remembrance. If there had come a stream of questioning folk, it would have seemed easier than this blank, ghastly silence. Mrs. Wilkins moved quietly about, as in a house of mourning. Twice, indeed, Mrs. Wamsdell—subdued into resignation now—came and went, seeking news of the girl, and finding none. A singular incident happened at sunset time. Mrs. Wilkins came into the room where I was, and did some late and unnecessary dusting for the sake of companionship. I was thinking of the foundations broken up in many lives, of the laughter of the scornful—when, suddenly, the woman raised herself from her work, and I saw tears in her eyes. "Oh, sir," she said, quaveringly, "whatever he was, he wasn't all a—a lie! He gave me a peace that his goin' can't take from me! No one who was all evil could look as he looked, or talk as he talked. No, they may lie against him, so they may, but you can't tell me! Maybe he was weak, and maybe he fell, but God can use the weak things, and, come to that, what is any man that he should preach to others? 'Tain't the farmer counts so much as it is the seed. Anyway, God used him to help me, and I kind of reckon the Almighty knows more'n anyone hereabouts!" She hurried out, as if afraid I might negative such a thought.

Twilight grew, and still I sat deeply engrossed in my speculations. An odd little sense grew in me that he was not far away, that at any time his footfall, his voice, might be heard. I stopped at the sound of a door, a footfall, and heard my name called. Mary Wamsdell stood before me, there in the dusk. I think my hands reached out, as to a vision. Perhaps she saw this, for she spoke quickly. "I have come back!" she said. Her voice was low, and clear, and sweet. Her face was pale, but her eyes were like stars. "He said to give you this!" I stared at the package in my hands, fumbling with the wrappings, with the rolls of bank-notes inside. After a time, I found sense to ask: "And he?"

"He has gone to serve elsewhere!"

For a moment her gaze faltered. Then, with a quick little nod to me, and a commonplace about her mother wanting her, she was gone. I stood at the window, watching her, until her slim, graceful figure rounded the corner, homeward bound.

No other words would she ever give of explanation, and few, I fancy, cared to ask. To this day there is a tradition there: that he who blessed their

countryside could not tarry, having larger fields in which he yet must serve. If you should visit there, even to-day, you will find older folk who will hint at many things. By the sea there is fertile soil for superstition.

V

Less than a month ago, I dropped into a writers' club, of which I am a member. In the lounge, a prominent *littérateur* seized upon me, to introduce a friend of his. Dr. Trevor rose to greet me, a tall, fair young man with kind eyes but an air of immense practicality about him, and took my name appraisingly on his lips. "The name's familiar somehow," he said. My friend suggested, drily: "He has written books!" "Never read 'em," said the doctor ingenuously, snapping his fingers as if to summon memory. "Bless me, of course, that's the name! Probably no connection, but if you're interested in a singular hospital incident—?" He laughed a little. "I'm always afraid to tell it for fear I'll be accused of drawing the long bow. But you writer chaps—" He laughed again. We drew about the fire. "It's not a story—just an incident," he said. "We run across lots of queer things—but this—well, up in our part of the country we're blessed, or cursed, with a penitentiary of proportions, and we, in hospital, pick up our share of odd characters. Not long ago we had an ambulance call. Just a street accident, man of middle life or better, fractured skull and other injuries. Pretty well battered up. Well-known merchant came in with him. Seems this merchant's little girl had been visiting her father's place of business, and our case was in at the same time, trying to get work for a paroled man. The merchant would have none of it. Our friend took it well. 'It's not easy to have faith in men,' he said. 'So many fail. But the more faith, sir, the less failure.' He went out then, and the little girl just after. The girl, in a hurry, started to cross the street. A taxi was coming at a good clip. She didn't see it. Anyway, the chappie ran out, it seems, and literally threw her aside. He got it instead. The father was pretty cut up about it, and our best room was none too good. The man was in a bad way. We did a decompression at once—relieved the pressure a bit." The doctor smoked, thoughtfully. "Half the ex-jail-birds in the country called at the office to ask for him, and to bring flowers and things, so the office said. Couldn't see him, of course. He was on the D. L., with specials night and day." The doctor's cigarette smouldered, unheeded now. "He lay in coma most of the time, then one day he took a turn. We hadn't shaved him at all, and a silky growth of reddish-brown had begun to cover his face. The nurse tells me she saw his hands stroking it, and his brow wrinkling. Then he covered his face with his hands, and she heard him cry out, 'Not this—not this!'—his hands still clutching at the beard. As she went to quiet him, exhaustion claimed him. She thought nothing of it until, next day, leaving the

room for a moment, she returned to find him at it again. As she entered, he half rose in bed, his eyes wild, to cry, ‘Nurse—nurse—it mustn’t grow!’ She told me, and we had him shaved. He rested then, a smile on his lips. We—we rather joked about it amongst ourselves. Someone suggested he had committed a crime with it on, and feared recognition. It seemed plausible. We humoured him, and an intense, quiet gratitude glowed in his eyes. He did not speak much—once he asked for the little girl, and was rewarded by news of her recovery. No one, as yet, was allowed to see him. Then, one night, he took a turn for the worse. From his delirium we caught two names—but he called mostly for ‘Mary.’ For days, life hung on a thread. We kept him in a darkened room, for his eyes were troubled with the light. He had told us his eyes were sensitive that way since boyhood. He was too far gone now to know that we did not—could not—shave him.”

The doctor tossed away his cigarette, mechanically. His eyes were on the fire.

“It was a Saturday night, I remember. I was out somewhere with friends when the call came. He was dying, they said. I hurried over in a taxi. He lay in the semi-gloom, the end close upon him. He was murmuring unintelligibly. Then his voice grew quickly clearer. We caught a few words: ‘Mary—don’t—leave me! I’m only a man—weak, imperfect, human. Don’t go—don’t go—Mary!—I can’t do it! You ask too much—you to go back your way—and I mine. Mary—Mary!’ His voice rose, he fell back,—we, who watched, felt that we had witnessed a parting. Exhaustion held him for a time, then a strange peace seemed to steal upon him, and something grew in his face that gripped us. I have asked the others, and they declare it was so with all of them. ‘Thank you, nurse,’ he said, a little smile coming. He tried to lift his hand to his face, but could not for weakness. ‘It mustn’t grow,’ he said. ‘I’m—not worthy—there’s no one worthy—until then—’ He seemed to gather strength. Before the nurse could move to stop him, his hands were on his face, feeling the beard. Wildness came into his eyes. He cried: ‘Not yet, oh God, not yet!’ Then—‘Nurse, nurse—the razor!’ His voice broke on an hysterical note. He covered his face with his arms. They were like steel bands that we could not unlock, for all his weakness. Gradually, he sank into lassitude, his arms unlocked again, the nurse gently put them down. We watched, with a growing sense of awe, though all agree with me that we did not then—see it—for his face was disfigured with suffering.

“He lay for some moments, breathing heavily, then slowly a change came. His face grew calmer, his lips moved. We leaned closer, but only the nurse caught what he said. He was calling a name again, not ‘Mary’, but the other name he had called before. It was your name, sir,” said Dr. Trevor, turning to

look at me for an instant, but hardly seeing me, "—or one like yours. It was almost as if this person were there, and he was talking to him, confessing to him, appealing to him to understand the case. And these are the words, gentlemen, the nurse could just make out: 'So far behind—but I've tried—I've tried to follow since, but no one can—no one's worthy—until then—when even I—when even I—' His voice rose at this point, and we all heard him. Then it died to a faint whisper that the nurse could barely catch, though she tried to convey to us, afterward, a sense of eager triumph that impressed her—it seems he repeated, over and over that way, 'I shall be like Him—shall be like Him—for I shall see Him—as He is!' I heard that last myself, for I was bending close. I nodded to the nurse. He was dead. She turned on another light in the room, cancelling the shaded gloom he liked. She caught my arm. 'Doctor!' she cried, affrighted. The face of the interne was as white as hers. Both were staring at the pillowed head, as I already was. The disfigurement of suffering had been smoothed out. The forehead was composed, the lips parted in a grave, sweet smile. Gentlemen, you may believe it or not, as you will, but the face on the pillow was the face of the Christ!"

1924.

VII

"Romance is always young!"

VANITY SQUARE

I

ONLY yesterday I stood outside the railing, now grown rusty with neglect, and watched the preliminary attempts at demolition following a protracted period of disuse. As I leaned upon a familiar gargoyle still decorating what is left of the gate, and watched the weed-grown space about the long-dried-up fountain crushed beneath alien feet, I felt as though a sacred thing had fallen upon irreverent times. Even as I looked, a great shock of red hair preceded a pugnacious face from out an upper window exactly opposite, and the owner of the face vented a raucous cry—"Look out below there! Mind yer heads!" And down crashed débris of wood and plaster that must surely have come from the very quarters that were once the pride of the Major himself. A cloud of dust arose, to settle presently in a new, white layer upon the powdery accumulations of years that had gathered in every nook and crevice, not forgetting the more lowly lodgings underneath Number 12, where the leaded windows of Number 12A had of old shone spotless through the orders of Emmaline and the efforts of her husband, James—more commonly known as "Slim." If you should happen to pass by and look for the name, you may find a scarcely-decipherable legend cut into the stone-work of the gable-end of Number 12, bearing the words "Waverley Court." But, to those of us who occupied the twelve apartments that formed three sides of a square—the front railing making the fourth—and who were ministered to in a janitorial way by Emmaline Foddleton and her spouse, and who paid a generous rent to the Major, as forerunner of the modern apartment house landlord—to us, I say, it will live in memory as "Vanity Square."

The tale I have to tell gathers itself around that strange and unforgettable period during which the place came to bear this interesting nickname.

II

It was, I well remember, a drizzling, foggy October day. For hours a ceaseless downpour had been at work, filling the inequalities of the pavements for the feet of the unwary, turning the carpet of leaves, under such trees as still struggled against the destructive utilitarianism of civic growth, into a soggy carpet. By evening, the thought of dry clothes and a warm fire was a sweet morsel to roll under the tongue of anticipation. From my study window I watched the incomers to the Court sloshing their way through rivulets that flowed across the walks and made the jerky bubbling of the miniature fountain seem a thing of superfluity. I almost envied these home-comers the pleasant contrast that lay before them. From nearly every window lights gleamed in welcome, shining out upon the compact squareness of the Court, barren now that frost had nipped the few growing things, gleaming in its black wetness. There came familiar figures: Miss Corneroy and her sister, Patience—the former coming from her carriage with a supreme disregard for the sloppiness of the way, Miss Patience following on with a careful picking of her steps that emphasised, in a way that touched one's humour, the difference between the two; Gadwick, the lawyer, more stooped than ever as he hunched under his collar, and hurried for the welcoming bachelor portals of Number 10, his little black bag protruding from under the cape-like waterproof he wore; later, the Major himself, disdaining the wet as much as Miss Corneroy the elder, a tall, spare figure, stiffly erect, giving the impression of one who had seen weather in his time and was not to be affected by a little drizzle such as this.

The Major did not proceed directly to his own door—Number 7—but stopped, it seemed, for a word with the janitor. Presently, from out the low doorway of Number 12A, I saw Slim Foddleton come—an attenuated figure, topping even the Major by a matter of inches. He was hatless, and scarcely clad for such weather. In the oblong of light that was the door, his wife, Emmaline, stood, her rotund little figure clearly silhouetted. When the men disappeared out the gateway into the dusk, I saw her lean forward, with a curiosity that must have cost her a wetting under the drip of the eaves.

Beyond the railing, the lights of a cab gleamed. There came from the gateway, presently, not two figures, but three. A great, bundled-up figure in the centre depended, as though in weakness, upon the support of the Major and Slim. They half carried him through the pillared portals of the Major's own dwelling, and the door was shut.

Across the way, Emmaline's form was regretfully withdrawn, and foggy darkness descended again upon a deserted courtyard.

III

Recent discovery, in unearthing the remains of prehistoric apartment house systems, may have robbed the owner of “Waverley Court” of the mantle of an originator, but at least the Major was a generation ahead of his time in this matter. Also, while the place was not the highly developed apartment idea of these days, it possessed advantages, and was admirably adapted to the needs of the type of residents it held.

With the exception of the Major and myself—and an occasional complainant, strictly on business—few of the dwellers in “Waverley Court” entered the janitor’s quarters under Number 12. The Major went frequently, of course, for purposes of conference; I—without reproach from my neighbours—because an author is to some a being apart, and must be permitted the indulgence of mingling with all sorts and conditions of men for the purpose of his craft. Candidly, I found it much more diverting than Miss Corneroy’s everlasting card-parties and musicales, or even the Major’s occasional evenings. Perhaps an added vein of curiosity sent me after dinner that October night to the low, leaded-glass doorway opposite. As soon as I entered I knew, by the pungent odour of his favourite brand of tobacco, that Marty Connolly was on one of his regular visits. Marty, now only a decade away from the Ould Land, would some day hold a large place in the councils of the people, distributing patronage with a lavish hand; meanwhile, until the summons of the *vox populi* reached his ears, he made shift with driving the proletariat in his hack, extending his good offices frequently, and remuneratively, to the dwellers in “Waverley Court.” One night a week, at least, he and his beast rested.

“Come in, sir, and welcome!” Emmaline led me into the tiny living room, where a smoky hearth did its best to compete with Marty’s pipe. “I was just miking so bold as to s’y that if you couldn’t mike nothing out of it, no one could.”

“ ’Tis the truth of the matter she speaks, sor,” said Marty, deferentially, “being entoirely flummoxed, the lot of us.” Emmaline nodded briskly; Slim pulled at the straggly reddish moustache that curved downward each side his mouth, and shook his head as though to say it was beyond him. “Then it’s this way, sor,” continued Marty, prodding a new charge of tobacco home with a vigorous forefinger; “to-day the Major sends for me, his face very set and determined. ‘Droive,’ says he, ‘droive like the divil to this address.’ And droive I did—down into a boardin’-house district where the doors are cheek-by-jowl, and drew rein before one of ’em. The Major wint in. Before long out he comes again, and beside him a young man the dead spit av him. ‘’Tis yer last chance,’ says the lad, and the face av him wint to me heart. ‘I’ve humbled myself before you for her sake,’ he says. ‘You have three hours to think it

over. We'll come then to the only place that should welcome her in a new land.' Says the Major, terrible grim, 'You needn't come.' But maybe the lad could see the foight that I saw in the Major's face, for he says again, 'Three hours from now. Three hours to think it over. Dad,' says he, laying a hand suddenlike on the Major's shoulder, 'there's a divil of hate strugglin' in me. I've fought it all these months. I need yer help, dad,' he says. Then the Major just climbed into the keb without so much as a word. 'Droive,' says he, 'droive like the divil to the "Mariner's Rest." ' Well, sor, to make a long story short, we drove down by the docks, and in wint the Major, and out he came wid a seafarin'-lookin' man wid a face like death. I noticed the folks there sort o' shrank away, and wan ould wizened-up fellow in a pea-jacket says somethin' in the Major's ear. 'Fiddlesticks!' says the Major, and helps the man wid the face av death in. 'Fiddledee!' he says. 'I've seen these things before, and know what's what! Home, Connolly,' he says, and back I come, and the rest I guess you know as well as I do. Now, what's the answer to it all?"

Perhaps I should not have shared with these simple folk the thing which was common property in the Court, but it seemed then the natural thing to do. They listened characteristically: Emmaline with quick nods of her chubby head, and occasional murmurs of, "There, now, who'd believe it?"; Slim, his legs curled about the lower part of the chair he occupied, his big hand tugging at the ends of his drooping moustache; Marty alternately frowning and smiling to show how quick was his perception of the salient points, and everlastingly pulling at his short-stemmed pipe.

The estrangement between Major Cornwall and his son was, I say, common property, but the reason of it all was surrounded with some doubt. This much we knew, that the pride of the Cornwalls was a fierce and stubborn thing; that years back some disruption had occurred that had put the ocean between two branches of the family; that the son, who had come to fill the Major's life—after the death of the mother—with a real passion of feeling, had set ablaze again the smouldering volcano of hatred. It was, perhaps, for youth, a natural thing to make light of any traditional differences that had split a family all these years, and when Ronald, on a fateful European trip, picked from the Cornwall stock across the water the girl who was to be his wife, the fierceness of the Major's wrath must have come as a shock. The Major had wired a remonstrance on receipt of the news; opposition took at last all normal urging out of it, brought it to the point of an ultimatum. Ronald might choose between the girl and his father. Ronald had chosen—had remained this while, indeed, in England, with the thought of settling down. This much I knew—and told them briefly. Singularly, it was another point that roused Emmaline's ire. It was hinted, I said, that social standing entered into it, too. The girl, it

seemed, was earning her living in a London store when Ronald met her. Miss Corneroy had stressed the point when the matter was spoken of, offering it as a mark in the Major's favour. Even Miss Patience echoed it timidly, but then that might be because the Major's defence was the thing nearest to her heart.

Emmaline's bright little eyes blazed as I mentioned these things. "There, now," she declared, "if that isn't stubborn pride, as ever was! And this a free an' democratic country as they s'y."

"Come off!" interposed Marty, scornfully. "It's not so much the Major's fault as the blood that's in the man—him havin' descinded from them dratted English aristocrats, bad 'cess to 'em."

Emmaline experienced a quick change of front. Three years on this side of the ocean had not erased the traditions of a lifetime.

"Garn," she retorted, "haristocrats is haristocrats on both sides the ocean. And there's good ones and bad ones. Jimes, don't sit there like a blinkin' mummy and 'ear the institootions of yer native land run down."

Slim shook a morose head.

"I don't 'old with these 'ere haristocrats," he said. "Wot did I ever get out'n 'em? Didn't I s'y to that perisher, Lord Lumley, arter cleanin' 'is blinkin' stibles for better'n a year an' 'e fires me for takin' a drop too much and forgettin' to feed 'is favourite mount, 'My Lord,' I says respectful, 'kind 'earts is more than coronets, my Lord,' I says, and the blighter just looked at me, and twisted the little rat-tail of a moustache he wore. 'You don't tell me!' he drawls. 'But you see my simple faith in you is gone.' Arter that I allus says, 'You can take yer perishin' dooks and earls and lords—I've no use for 'em!' "

"Serve you right," affirmed his spouse, "but if there's a place on God's round hearth that's got more vanity an' pride to the square hinch than this same 'Waverley Court,' my nime ain't Emmaline Foddleton—as was Emmaline Boggs. If I 'ad my w'y, I know right well wot I'd call it. Vanity Square—that's wot—just like the fellow who wrote the book."

"You mean," I ventured, "Vanity Fair?"

"Fair or Square," retorted Emmaline, nettled, and a trifle red, "it's all the sime. Vanity Square I calls it. 'Ullo, who's that?" The bell was ringing furiously. "Ow, these 'ere tenants do try a body!"

IV

It was, however, a stranger who rang so impatiently that night—a stranger to all of us except Marty, whose whispered aside to me revealed the young man who entered as the son of the Major. "Is Major Cornwall not at home?" he

inquired quickly. I caught, in the flash of the dark eyes, in the imperiousness of the tone, in the tilt of the rather finely-modelled head, in the nervous, thinnish mouth, the family resemblance. “There’s a light there, but no one answers.”

“ ’E should be in, sir,” opined Slim Foddleton.

“Does he live alone?”

“Yes, sir. The missus an’ I tend to ’is things, and Emmaline she cooks for ’im. ’E ’as a visitor with ’im just now.”

“Well, perhaps you’ll be good enough to see if you can rouse him. I have a lady waiting outside.”

Slim left us. Emmaline and Marty crowded to the doorway; more discreetly, from the window, where a curtain sheltered, I viewed the proceedings. Afterwards Slim supplied details from which the fog and the wall partitioned me off. It seems that the Major, responding to Slim’s stridently respectful shout from below stairs, appeared on the staircase. The light on a newel post gleamed strangely upon a grim, set face.

“Some one to see you, sir!” ventured Slim.

“The—doctor?”

“I don’t think so, sir.”

“Tell him I can see no one.”

“ ’E ’as a lidy with ’im.”

Growing impatient, the young man in the doorway made his way in.

“Go back,” commanded the Major, sternly; “you can’t come up.”

“Dad—I have Letty here. She’s tired and wet, and hasn’t a soul in town to call a friend—none this side the water. She knows nothing of our differences. She’s looking forward to your welcome.”

“Tell her I’m sorry”—the Major’s face was very grim—“but I’ll have to postpone that pleasure. Tell her I have a sick man on my hands to care for.”

A sudden, fierce anger came upon the Major’s son.

“Yes,” he sneered, “tell her anything to get rid of her. I’ll tell her no lies. I’ll tell her the truth—that my father has no spark of humanity to be fanned into flame by a simple appeal to decency, that he’s forgotten all sacred obligations, trampled under foot everything but his arrogance and pride—that he’s raised a devil of hatred in his own flesh and blood!” A little more soberness touched his speech. The meaning of it all must have come to him. He said, gravely, “Well, that ends it. I’m sorry!”

The Major’s lips were twisting. Few men had dared to give the lie to his words. The struggle of emotions contorted his face. In the end, his pride won.

“Go then,” he nodded.

“I’ll go,” said the lad. “And I’ll never come to you again—not if you asked for me with your dying breath! You can blame yourself for it!”

They parted, with a final facing of each other—the one at the top, the other at the bottom of the staircase. The same dark eyes looked into replicas of their own, the same chin uptilted to chin, the same stubbornness finding its immovable equal. Ronald turned to go. For just a second the Major’s stiffness went; involuntarily, his hands relaxed in appeal. But the lad was gone. The Major’s door was shut. So the father did not see the son return, bringing the girl from the carriage to the shelter of Number 12A. What a carefree little thing she was—one of those naturally bubbling natures that find joy where others might not, yet without being superficial. Something about the deep, neutral-tinted eyes, the long, dark lashes, the high, clear forehead, the firm, rounded chin, spoke of reserves of character, I thought. “What a fussbox you are, Ronnie!” she laughed. “Don’t look so upset. Poor Major!—he probably feels as badly as we do—and I think it’s jolly decent of him to look after his sick friend.” So Ronnie had not told her the “truth” yet!

He said, shortly, “You don’t mind if my wife stays and gets warmed up a bit and dried out, do you? I’ll be back as soon as possible.”

“He’s gone to try and get lodgings,” explained the girl. “We foolishly gave ours up this afternoon, although we never suspected, of course, anything like this. Ronnie’s been wanting me to meet his father. What a cosy place you have here!”

“Not too bad, ma’am, as plices go.” Emmaline was obviously pleased.

“There, I knew as soon as I saw you”—Mrs. Cornwall clapped her hands in delight—“you come from dear old London, too.”

“Indeed yes, ma’am—down Lime’ouse w’y—that’s me ’ome. My ’usband, too—meet the lidy, Jimes.” Emmaline, having started, proceeded on her introductory course. I had been about to leave, but I confess I was captivated by our little visitor. Conversation became general and democratic. Slim went out, presently, to see to the Major’s needs. We had seen the doctor’s figure pass, on the way in, a little while before.

In two minutes Slim was back, his eyes agog, his mouth agape, his reddish moustache stiffened, with horror, out of its tendency to droop.

“I mustn’t s’y nothink to no one,” spluttered Slim. “Not a thing to nobody. Oh, lumme!”

“Jimes Foddleton!” Emmaline shook the apparition, vigorously. “What ails you, man?”

“ ’Tis crazy the man is,” suggested Marty, who had been a much intrigued witness of it all.

“Nothink to nobody, so there won’t be a panic or nothink!”

“A panic?” repeated Emmaline. “Speak, you fool!”

“Nothink to nobody,” reiterated Slim, shaking his head dazedly, as though to clear his brain, “until they’ve shut us all in!”

“Shut us all in?”

Slim nodded lugubriously.

“Until we’re quarantined.”

“Quarantined?” It was my turn to stare.

“Nothink to nobody,” reaffirmed Slim, “but it don’t matter, for we’ll all be dead soon!” Slim added, in a sepulchral whisper, looking about as though the dread visitor were already on the threshold: “The sick toff up in the Mijor’s ’as the plague!”

Marty sprang up with an oath.

“I guess I’ll go. I’ve got a business to keep goin’!”

But the medical man had forestalled all attempts at escape. A bland, imperturbable, brass-buttoned figure already patrolled the sidewalk, outside the railing that fronted our little square. Even Marty’s glib Hibernian tongue failed of impression. The quarantine had taken effect.

V

The memory of the council of war that was held in Miss Corneroy’s next morning is still vividly in my mind. Why it was summoned there no one knew, except that Miss Corneroy felt herself to be the leader, now that the Major was shelved by circumstance. On one side of the room stood Miss Patience, very white and terrified, Gadwick, the lawyer, who accepted the situation with silent resignation, together with the other residents of the Court—folk of respectable averages, childless, married couples, a bachelor of uncertain years. On the other side, as though conscious of the gulf between, and betraying evidences of extreme nervousness—all except Marty, to whom probably a vote was a vote, whether in the hands of the latest garlic-consuming citizen by naturalisation or the most fastidious person alive—stood the group from Emmaline’s: Emmaline herself, wisping her dress with trembling fingers; Slim, more straggly-moustached than ever, and with eyes that bore the patient resignation of one condemned to death but determined to see it through as uncomplainingly as he had a life of injustice and oppression; Mrs. Cornwall, very composed and interested, and myself beside her, because I wished to bridge the embarrassing chasm, that she might not suspect the real state of affairs so far as she was concerned.

“The doctor informs me,” said Miss Corneroy, in her characteristically decisive tones, “that, with due precautions, we need apprehend no great danger. Discomfort, yes—but no danger. The Major has undertaken the duty of nursing this—this individual whose coming has threatened us. There is no need that we should lend assistance. Enough that one life should be jeopardised. It is only right the Major should bear the burden—it was thoughtless, incredibly, criminally thoughtless, of Major Cornwall to expose us to this chance which even we must run.”

“My dear!” Miss Patience ventured the protest. Two little spots of red touched her cheeks, partly due to this unnatural defiance of her sister, partly, we told ourselves, because of the betrayal it involved in Miss Patience’s mind, whose devotion to the Major was, nevertheless, common property.

“Criminally thoughtless!” reiterated Miss Corneroy. “And such a rough kind of a person, they say, to bring to ‘Waverley Court.’ I cannot understand the Major.”

“I think it rather fine of Major Cornwall!” All eyes turned to Letty Cornwall, including those of Miss Corneroy. The woman’s chin suffered a considerable elevation; something very like contempt showed in her eyes.

“Oh?” said Miss Corneroy, icily. “Indeed! Perhaps this young woman would like to assist in the nursing?”

I think we all jumped a little when a new voice spoke from the doorway. It was not altogether the surprising fact that he had managed to elude the guard, and get in; it was something in the tone. “You need not discuss that,” said Ronald Cornwall. “Neither my wife nor I will have any part in this. It is Major Cornwall’s affair.”

Even Miss Corneroy seemed astounded.

“The Major,” she said, “is your father!”

“The Major,” returned Ronald, coldly, “is nothing to me!”

I felt the girl beside me shrink back from the revelation, but this Ronald could not have seen. It occurred to me, then, that the devil of which he had spoken had come to take possession of him, heart and soul. I wondered if this sunny-dispositioned child—for so she seemed to me—would be able to exorcise that demon from within him.

VI

Those were trying days in Vanity Square—and you may read a double meaning into the adjective. Under such circumstances, one grows to know his fellow-victims more intimately, perhaps, than in months of commonplace

existence—self-revelation, willy-nilly, lending aid. It fell to my lot to see more of Ronald and his wife than the others did, for I opened my place to them, and they were glad enough to accept the hospitality. Ronald seemed to pull himself into his shell, and to be content with such goodly fellowship as my rows and stacks of books afforded. Letty Cornwall, on the contrary, became the life of the place. To an old bachelor like myself, she was one of those flashing revelations that sometimes come to shake the serenity of one's choice of single blessedness, giving one pause, setting the heart beating out the question of what might have been! The girl, I say, became the life of the place. It was Letty who settled, with the wisdom of a Solon, a domestic breach between Slim and Emmaline, whose nerves were admittedly "all on hedge"; it was Letty who won the everlasting thanks of Gadwick, the lawyer, by rearranging a library that had got quite out of hand; it was Letty who sat for hours, literally, listening to Marty's political aspirations, drawing him out about his family back home, and showing a knowledge of everyday folk that made Marty declare "if it weren't for the little lady 'tis dead av the blues an' lonesomes I'd be"; it was Letty who restored confidence when a young married couple feared that the plague was upon them, and Letty diagnosed the case rightly, and with superb assurance, as a common or garden variety of biliousness, consequent upon unusually sedentary living; it was Letty to whom, when evening shadows brought vague unrest and terror, Miss Patience fled, confiding all her troubles, and whispering, while the light in her eyes was not just the reflection of firelight glow, the secrets of romance that had not died with youth.

We noticed, though, that Miss Patience never asked Letty Cornwall to her place. So it came about that Miss Patience, falling ill through worry, took to her bed, and Letty went without hesitation to see her. She came out five minutes later, and her face, usually a thing of lovely colouring, was white as death, her lips were thin and set, her eyes misty. Her simple confession, that night beside my hearth, lingers in my mind as something very fine. Ronald was shut up in the library, reading and occasionally pacing the room, as we had heard him do the last day or so.

"Miss Corneroy was—unkind—this afternoon?" I asked her.

"Perhaps we should not blame her," she said, after a space. "I think it is her upbringing that's at fault. You see—Ronald did not tell me—all about his father not wanting us to come. This afternoon Miss Corneroy told me—everything."

"Everything?"

"About Major Cornwall's feelings towards me. She mentioned my being not quite, well, not quite socially acceptable. I can't think that's the real reason. I feel she has something against me herself. She doesn't want me to go

to see Miss Patience." I muttered some things uncomplimentary to the woman. Letty Cornwall smiled up at me quickly, shaking her head. "You mustn't think so badly of her," she told me. "You see, she resented my wanting to do anything for her sister when she was there. Miss Corneroy is very capable." After a time, she added, "I'm sorry for her."

"And—the Major?" The question would come out.

She said: "I'd rather not talk about—him—just now!"

It seemed to me that she was listening to the uneasy pacings of Ronald in the next room, falling upon the hardwood floors, alternately muffled in the rugs—of this boy-husband of hers, into whose eyes had come a strange hardness, into whose heart had come the devil of the family pride.

VII

During those days, none passed in or out of the Court save the doctor, who submitted himself to some process of fumigation each time, it seemed. To my lay mind, it has always seemed incredible that the medical profession should fail to drum up business in their rounds from place to place, introducing the symptoms of one to another patient! The tradespeople, leaving their wares gingerly within the gate, for the attention of Slim—who seemed to feel a sense of daily miracle that constant research of his person revealed no fatal swellings, or other symptoms described in the encyclopedia O-R that he borrowed from me—fled as though a devil lurked in the courtyard. Curious folk came often to stare, from a respectful distance, at the yellow sign that hung by the gate, and, longer, at the grey stone fronts of the apartments, as though expecting some rash to break out upon their dignified exteriors. If I speak of this time as though it were a long siege, it is because the few days, comparatively, it covered, seemed to possess themselves of more hours than the allotted twenty-four, and every minute to tick its way at half-speed through the seconds. I cannot recall which day it was that the doctor came to my door, asking for Ronald Cornwall, but I can vividly remember Ronald's boyish form silhouetted in the open doorway. Above, on the stairs, Letty Cornwall and I stood, intuitively waiting for the pronouncement.

"I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Cornwall," said the medical man, gravely, "that the news from Number 7 is not good this morning." Ronald said nothing. I think he knew what was coming. "The patient is recovering nicely, thanks to excellent nursing," went on the doctor, "but I'm afraid your father—the Major ——"

"Well?"

"That your father has contracted the plague!"

Letty Cornwall gripped my arm. I felt a quick contraction of my heart; somehow, just then, all the sterner side of the Major was forgotten, and all his lovable qualities came to stir me strangely, not least of all this last great sacrifice of his. We went downstairs—Letty and I. Out in the courtyard, in the crispness of a sunny, autumn morning, the inhabitants of "Waverley Court" began to assemble. Some almost telepathic sense of foreboding brought them down, awakened, I fancy, by the sight of the doctor and of Ronald, white-faced, on the threshold of my place. Even Miss Corneroy, forgetting for the nonce her dignity, was there, strangely attired, Miss Patience at her side, depending upon the comfort of her arm. The doctor explained it all, counselling calmness. "I'm afraid," he said, "I must ask for a volunteer to nurse these two patients." We all saw that he was looking straight at Ronald. The workings of the boy's face were unforgettable. I felt his wife's hand trembling on my arm. She gave a little sigh—it seemed to me of mingled relief and resignation—when Ronald's face cleared. "You think that I——" he began. A moment later I cursed the doctor for a fool. "Fine!" he cried. "The Major will be mightily pleased. He sent word"—the doctor lowered his voice to shut out listening ears—"that he would forgive everything if you came to him." Ronald started; he said tensely: "Forgive everything? Forgive my marrying the best little girl on earth?" Just for a moment the softening influence of that thought showed, then he swept on to the inevitable climax. "Forgive? I'm glad you told me that. Go back—and tell the Major to recall my words—that I'd never come to him—not if he implored me with his dying breath!" His voice, unconsciously, had been raised, reaching the white-faced circle about. He did not seem to see us there; he spoke now as though the Major were there before him. "Good gad, Major—what a devil you've raised in me!" His voice broke, he turned abruptly and went within, slamming the door behind him.

We stood out there, looking at each other, held in a grip of silence. The doctor said, at last, "I must have a nurse—will some one volunteer?" Before my own offer could find birth, Miss Patience spoke timidly.

"I'll go, doctor—please!"

"Nonsense!" said Miss Corneroy. "Fiddlesticks!"

"It is my right!" I had never seen Miss Patience more defiant or more lovely. She repeated, "My right!"

"Patience!" Miss Corneroy was exasperated. "Not another word about it. How ridiculous!"

Then it was that Miss Patience let the traditions of a lifetime extinguish that brave little spark of defiance, and sacrifice—and love. Often, afterwards, she confessed to me that it haunted her persistently—that she should have

failed him in his hour of need—failed him, not merely because of her sister's opposition, but because she was afraid.

It was at the same moment that I realised one of our members had slipped away. The upstairs window of Number 7 opened, and a little figure appeared. We all stared up, agape. Letty Cornwall was looking down from that house of plague, smiling bravely at the upturned faces of the watchers.

VIII

To some it may seem strange that delirium should so quickly seize upon the Major—that, even before Letty slipped unobtrusively away upon her mission of mercy, he had gone down the strange road where phantoms flit, and the abnormal holds sway; but the plague, as much as any malady, has its vagaries. Its swiftness is not least of all its terrors. The doctor came out, after a while, with a list of her personal needs in his hand, and something about his face that gave his words meaning. "God bless all true women," he said. To me, he confided, "He's calmer already, but, funny thing, he calls her Patience!" I went with him to seek Ronald, and to secure the articles required. Ronald said nothing when we told him. His face underwent no perceptible change. It seemed that the lines had hardened beyond the possibility of that. He came out, presently, with a black bag in his hand, containing the requirements. The doctor held out his hand for it. Ronald walked by, as though he did not notice him. The medical man said, sharply, "Here, give me those! I'll look after them." Ronald said nothing. The doctor intercepted him. "Get out of my way!" said Ronald then, and pushed on. "Don't be a fool, man!" cried the doctor. "It'll only worry her, if you're there. I order you—" "Get out of the way!" said Ronald again, and pushed forcibly past. We watched him go on down the steps, and across the courtyard—and so into the house of plague. I thought of it, then, as a sort of triumphal march—love triumphing over pride, with self fighting vainly all the way. Afterwards, I knew that, partly at least, I was wrong.

If I were writing fiction, rather than setting down the facts as I know them, there are points that might be cleared up more effectively. As it is, I must stick to those things I saw or heard. From the doctor came news that all was going well. Both patients were recovering nicely—the worst was over—but the Major's mind was still rambling. His previous worry, his choleric outbreaks, had not fortified him, physically, for such a visitation as this.

It was on towards evening, of the day on which the doctor brought this cheering word, that Miss Patience came to me, entering with hesitation across my bachelor's threshold—an offence against her principles of maidenly

modesty that I am convinced nothing but desperation could have induced. She sank, with a little sigh, into a chair by my hearth, then thought better of it and sat on the extreme edge, as a seeming concession to the proprieties. She said: "You'll think it strange, my coming like this—but I had to speak to some one, or go mad!" "My dear Miss Patience," I assured her, "I am honoured!" "You see," she hastened on, "I've learned, through the doctor, that he thinks—the Major, I mean—that I've been nursing him. I wouldn't want him to think—by-and-by, when he knows the real case—that I was a coward. But I wasn't quite that. I'd really have gone, only my sister—" She choked at the remembrance. "You see, the Major and I have been—friends—for many years. He used to be in our home a great deal, back in the old days. Afterwards, we went away for some years in Europe, and lost track of him, but we moved back here a few years ago through the advertisement in the paper of these apartments to rent. I really don't know why I'm telling you all this, but perhaps you'll understand that Major Cornwall and I are very—good friends."

"I understand," I told her, gently. The glowing embers on the hearth conjured up pictures in my mind, of Miss Patience, in those years between, exemplifying her name, and yet hugging the dead flowers of romance to her. "You want, I take it, to ask my advice about going to the Major—now?" She looked relieved. "I think, Miss Patience, the Major will quite understand how it is. After all, there is no one has more right than his son and daughter-in-law."

"There's nothing wrong, or against the law, in my going, is there?"

I smiled.

"Purely a matter of judgment, and an overruling of the doctor's orders, Miss Patience. I'm sure you will see the folly of it."

"Thank you," she sighed. "That's just what my sister says, only I wanted some one else's judgment on it. I'm sorry to have troubled you." As she crossed the courtyard, I watched her stop, and look up at the lights in Number 7. Then, after a space, she went on to her own apartment at Number 5. When, in the morning, Emmaline came hurrying with the news, I was not surprised.

"Oh, sir! She's gorn an' done it!"

"She? Who?"

"Miss Pytience, sir! She's up in the Mijor's plice now. When Miss Corneroy woke up a while back, she found 'er sister 'ad put some things in a little bag, and gorn."

On investigation, Emmaline's estimate of the case proved correct. The doctor, when he came, smiled queerly, and made another remark about the women, but this time it was not "God bless 'em!"

IX

There were times when the thought of Miss Patience's silence during those days aroused within me the bitterness of scorn, and then, again, I remembered, in her favour, the timidity of her nature, and the fearfulness with which she worshipped the Major. Perfect love had not then come to cast out fear.

The same day of which I speak—the day on which we learned that Miss Patience Corneroy had tardily essayed the rôle of nurse—the doctor came to my place, with Ronald and Letty under his escort. "Discharged!" laughed the doctor. "Superseded by a higher command." "You're not afraid to take us in?" Letty asked, smiling up at me. "The doctor has submitted us to all manner of fumigation, and gives us a clean bill."

Later, after the doctor had gone, and Ronald had lost himself anew in his unfinished browsing among my books, I had a chance to speak to Letty alone. She told me, very simply, of the coming of Miss Patience to fill the place that the Major, in his ramblings, had assigned to her. "She's such a pathetic little thing, and so anxious to be all that he would expect of her," Letty told me, "and so proud that he wanted her to be with him. She did not suggest it in so many words, but when I said Ronald and I would keep out of it, and whispered assurance that, if we could help it, the Major should never know that she wasn't the first to go to him, she was so breathlessly, wordlessly eager, I nearly cried. Then the doctor came, and said he could arrange for us to be properly disinfected, so we could leave, and the Major will be none the wiser. You must promise me to say nothing." I asked quickly, "But—Ronald?" She shook her head. "It won't make any difference, that way," she said. "You see, he came just because I was there. He wouldn't turn a hand for the Major, but tended the other sick man. I've made him promise, too—Captain Terry, I mean. He looked so queer, when I asked him, but he promised. You will, won't you?"

I gave my word. Later I heard that her conspiracy of silence had been tactfully spread throughout the Court, always with the same simplicity she displayed in asking my support. It did not seem to occur to Letty Cornwall what a splendid thing she was doing. I mentioned it to Ronald, praising his wife's self-abnegation. He turned upon me, with that quick little cynical twist about the mouth. "It suits me," he said briefly. "If the Major had known, it would have put me in a false position with him. We'll neither of us trouble him, as soon as we can get clear of this damnable hole. I'm taking her to the Pacific coast, and if he wants our address he can hunt for it. I'm through!"

X

The night on which the whole affair saw its conclusion was so like that

which had ushered us into our reign of terror that, for many of us, it brought vivid remembrance of the opening circumstances—drizzle and fog, coming on with the darkness, and, through it all, the cheery glow of lights in the windows, as though the Court were celebrating the fact that, to-morrow, no brass-buttoned guard would stop us when we essayed to pass out of the gate. The quarantine—which had been rigorously maintained, even after a considerable period of convalescence, by authorities who were taking no chances—was officially lifted, indeed, at seven o'clock that evening. At seven also, in Gadwick's apartment, loaned for the occasion, the Major gave his famous dinner—a Major very thin and feeble, but spruce and military in his bearing as ever. All the dwellers of the Court were invited—all, that is, except two. Over in Number 3, lights twinkled, long after darkness had signalised the departure of the folk from the other apartments. Ronald and his wife were packing. The invitation had not included them.

In some ways this Letty Cornwall, who could on occasion play the woman so well, was very much of a child. She told me, whimsically, as I left at seven for the Major's. "Bring me some titbits back in your pocket. I wish I were going." Then she whispered, with a quick glance backward, "Tell them all—good-bye for me, won't you? I'm going to miss you all horribly. One gets to know folk so well in a time like this. And—good-bye, yourself—and a thousand thanks for all your kindness." I looked my surprise, and she said, "No, you see you needn't bring those titbits—I'll be gone!"

"In the morning, though," I interposed.

"To-night," she said, a little shakily. "Ronald wants us to slip away without any fuss or farewells. He's up there, composing a letter of thanks to you, now. You won't tell a soul, will you, until we're gone? Ronald is so strange these days."

I had to go then, but, in the grip of her hand, I sensed something of the loneliness of a soul in exile. It spoiled the dinner for me. And yet, there were so many interesting things that, at times, I almost forgot Letty Cornwall and her brave resignation. Now that the shadow was lifted, how quickly the old self came to each one! In the kitchen, Emmaline, with Slim and Marty to help, dished the dinner, and the maids, from those who were fortunate in possessing help of this kind, acted as waitresses—quite entering into the spirit of the celebration. Gadwick, the lawyer—immaculate in his evening clothes of a slightly antique cut—gallantly played up to the elder Miss Corneroy's sallies. The rank and file laughed uproariously at nothing in particular. But my attention was for a few. On the Major's right sat the stranger who had caused all the disturbance—a grizzled, elderly man, who somehow seemed out of place there, as though the seafaring life had put upon him a stamp of rough-

and-readiness. I noticed, though, that his table manners were correct, and it flashed across me that the lack of ease was through disuse, and not through want of breeding. He was introduced to us by the Major as “My friend, Captain Terry.” On the Major’s left sat Miss Patience—and I thought, as I looked upon her, that I had never seen such an admixture of glowing happiness and of fear. Poor Miss Patience!—the memory of her sitting there, scarce daring to drink her cup of bliss, comes to rebuke all thought of criticism.

XI

We had barely taken our places at the table, when there came an incident that I still recall with zest. “Confound it,” said the Major, “why don’t they bring on the oysters?” One of the “borrowed” maids approached. She seemed frightened of the Major. She whispered something to him. “Fiddlesticks!” snorted the Major. “Tell Emmaline to serve the dinner at once. I can’t see her now about any complaints!” The maid went, but Emmaline herself appeared in a trice in the doorway. She had a blue-checked apron still covering her best dress—donned in honour of the party—and her face was beet colour, not altogether due, as it seemed, to her efforts in preparing dinner. She stood just inside the doorway, regarding the company with an air between anger and nervous fear. “Where,” queried the Major, icily, “where is dinner? We are twenty minutes late now.” The Major was punctilious about time.

Emmaline put hands on hips, and delivered herself of her famous ultimatum.

“There’ll be no dinner served if I know it,” she said, “until Miss Letty comes!” Emmaline always insisted on giving Letty the prefix of maidenhood.

The Major’s jaw dropped; his eyeglasses fell from his shapely nose. In those days, domestic help was more tractable than now; Emmaline, in her defiance, was a generation ahead of her time.

“Bless my soul!” said the Major, nonplussed.

“Who,” asked Emmaline, taking a step forward, “who ’as been the garden hangel of this plice since the plague come, I’d like to know? Who’s kep’ us all from dyin’ of sheer fright?”

Reinforcements appeared suddenly, from behind. The doorway framed the Hibernian countenance of Marty, and, alongside, the morosely-moustached Slim.

“Bless my soul!” cried the Major again. “It’s a—a blasted revolution, Cap’n!”

“Mutiny!” averred the Captain, scowling with ferocity and trying to prevent the twinkle in his eye from becoming too apparent.

“What’s the world coming to?” snapped the Major, voicing an age-long question.

“Rank rebellion!” affirmed the Captain, pulling at a scrubby new growth of beard.

“It’s this way, sor,” said Marty Connolly, coming forward, and bracing himself for the encounter. “This here dinner business was in cilibration av the —av the—”

“—happy issue out of our troubles,” suggested the Captain, staring at the ceiling.

“Right, sor,” said Marty, gratefully. “An’ we were all asked to pitch in an’ help, on thim terms—that it was for all the folk av the Court. Now we find that the little leddy—Mrs. Cornwall—is lift out of it, an’ she the wan that meant most to us all. So, in she comes, or out we go—ivery last man an’ woman of us common folk, though it cost all of thim their places.”

In the lull of an awesome moment, the elder Miss Corneroy’s voice was heard clearly.

“Such impudence, Major! Order them away at once, and we all, I am sure, will wait on ourselves. You can deal with these impertinent servants afterwards.”

“Indeed, sir,” broke in Emmaline, more hotly than ever, but appealing now to the Major, “you can tike my word for it she’s at the bottom of all the trouble. It’s all along of ’er this plice is at hodds and hends—Vanity Square, I calls it—and it’s people like ’er mikes all the trouble in the world, grindin’ down folks under their blinkin’ ’eels! Marty, ’ere, ’e’s well up in it—’e’ll tell you!”

Gadwick, the lawyer, rose to the occasion.

“Major Cornwall,” he said, “this deep political argument may be very interesting, but, meanwhile, the oysters, to which you made succulent reference, are still below, and I doubt not the soup and meat are endangered. If a mere guest may be pardoned such a breach, I should like to support this rather—er—remarkable attempt at coercion. Mrs. Letty Cornwall has endeared herself to all of us these last days. We ask it as a favour that, if she will consent at this late date to come, she be sent for. It will make our meal complete. With your permission, I would nominate a one-man delegation as most likely to succeed.” He looked significantly at me. The Major sank down in his chair; his face was working strangely. Then he spoke. “The terror from which we have escaped, ladies and gentlemen, may well excuse many things to-night.” He managed to smile at me. “If you will, please. Maybe”—a suspicion of a smile lingered—“Emmaline will withdraw her battle hosts below, and proceed,

meanwhile, with the serving."

"Thank you, sir," said Emmaline, meekly, and withdrew. She seemed glad enough to escape, and her look of triumph at the elder Miss Corneroy brought a flashing glance before which she almost wilted. The traditions of a lifetime are not easily upset. The other belligerents trailed behind.

"If—that—person comes," said Miss Corneroy, decisively, "I shall leave the room!"

The Major looked uneasy. I hurried away before any countermanding order might be given. My task was not an easy one, but intuition bade me win out at all costs. I think the appeal of the dinner being spoiled for most of us, without her appearance, did it. She said, finally, with one of those rare smiles of hers: "I've a lot of packing to do. But they mustn't know we're leaving. Ronald wants no fuss or farewells. Perhaps you'll—thank them all for me, and say I'll try and drop in for a few minutes—later on?" It was the best I could do, and I let it go at that. The rebellious forces received the news, and were appeased, if not reconciled. But the dinner went through its courses, and still she did not come. Miss Corneroy ate with an air that said she would do her duty by the dinner until her duty to other things demanded action. I have sometimes thought, from the way she kept an eye on the entrance through which Letty must come, that she betrayed an eagerness to humiliate the girl before us all.

After dinner, came the Major's toast-list, and that night I saw the Major through new eyes. The memory of all other toasts fades before the one that the Major gave, with the glass in his hand not quite steady as he uttered the words. "I want you to rise," he said, "to rise with me, friends, and drink the health and happiness of one who exemplified in her conduct the most sublime courage and womanliness. The one who faces danger bravely because unconscious of fear is scarcely a hero. The one who faces it, knowing all the time the deadly grip of fear, is the real hero, because the fight then is more against self—the greater enemy. Let me pay personal tribute to one who, through brave fortitude and tender care, has nursed me back to life. She has shown this real courage of which I speak. Though always brought up in a sheltered way, depending upon others almost for her thinking"—the Major's lip curled a little, and I dared not glance at Miss Corneroy, the elder—"when the need came she answered it, without hesitation. I give you," said the Major, coughing a little, "I give you my future wife—the former sweetheart of childhood days—Miss Patience!"

I fancy that every eye, of those who knew the story, went involuntarily to Miss Patience; I fancy, too, that surprise in the announcement was swallowed up in a complexity of emotions. The glow, that had brought a renewment of youth to Miss Patience faded. She seemed to be waiting, dumbly, for some of us to set off the mine that would blow her hopes into nothingness. I believe

that Miss Patience had been such a dreamer of dreams that, childishly, she had permitted herself to live in this fool's paradise, hoping that it would come out right, not realising just what a sacrifice Letty Cornwall had made. But no one spoke. We had risen to drink the toast, keeping our pledge to Letty. I saw the man, Captain Terry, glance at Miss Patience. The Major, stopping to enjoy the dramatic triumph of his announcement, was just lifting his glass to his lips when we heard Miss Patience's voice. "Stop!" she cried. "Don't drink that, please! I can't take what isn't mine!" Her eyes met her sister's; Miss Corneroy seemed to be signalling frantic disapproval. Miss Patience's eyes wavered for a moment only. Then she said, "You've all been very kind to say nothing—as she must have asked you—but you see"—the glance she gave the Major, standing, stiffly erect, beside her, was a sweet, tremulous, almost girlish thing—"it wasn't I who responded to your appeal. I was afraid. It was"—her eyes seemed to be caught in her sister's baleful glare again—"it was—" She stammered, and choked. Then all eyes turned suddenly from Miss Patience, to a flushed little figure in the doorway. Letty had arrived at last. I have always admired the Major more since that moment. The shock of Miss Patience's confession left him whiter than ever for a moment, but a guest, invited by him, was in the doorway, and gentility triumphed. He excused himself to Miss Patience, and went forward, bowing with courtly grace. "It was good of you to come at all!" I heard him say. What reply she made was lost in a murmur of whispering about the table, but Letty favoured the Major with a smile that could scarcely have left so gallant a gentleman unmoved. Often since, I have speculated when it was that the light of day broke in upon him, and the identity of the real respondent to his need was flashed to his mind. I still cling to the belief that his innate gentility was the thing that first moved him to welcome her. "We must find you," said the Major, glancing around, and evidently perturbed at this lack of foresight, "we must find you a place."

Then it was that the elder Miss Corneroy rose stiffly.

"Mrs. Cornwall may have my place!"

There are silences that can be felt. The hush which came, at this obvious and deliberate insult, was of that kind. I heard Miss Patience, who had sunk back lifelessly into her place, give a little cry—but apart from that, and the ticking of the clock through the few seconds that the hush lasted, there was a deadly quiet. Over by the doorway, the Major had ranged alongside the girl, Letty; had offered her, indeed, his arm, as though in deliberate alliance. Facing him, from across the table, was Miss Corneroy, white with the pallor of hatred. Their eyes seemed to hold each other with an unbreakable spell. Neither seemed able to move. Miss Corneroy, it was, who broke the hypnotic period.

"There is no reason, Major Cornwall," she said, "why we should prolong

this farce. Perhaps, in fairness to myself, I may be permitted to explain a position that may seem to call for the censure of these—friends. The impression seems to be that I refuse to sit in the room with Mrs. Cornwall because of her—lack of social standing. That is hardly the reason. It is, perhaps, best for all concerned that the thing should be put straight now—otherwise rumour will whisper many things that are not true. The Corneroys have no reason to love the name of Cornwall. Over a third of a century ago"—let me pause in my tale to express admiration for this woman who despised her sex's squeamishness in the matter of age—"the Corneroys and Cornwalls were partners in a great financial enterprise. The enterprise failed with a crash, carrying down many to ruin and disgrace. Defalcations were charged, and a Corneroy was made a scapegoat. He went to jail, with only one of the Cornwall family protesting his innocence. That one was Major Cornwall. He was only a young man at the time, but he would have shared the penalty had that been possible. To the condemned man he swore a debt of gratitude that some day he hoped to pay, and swore, too, hatred against the other Cornwalls, who remained in England. I was only a little girl then, and my sister a baby in arms, but I can remember it all so vividly. We were taken away to be adopted by an aunt, and I can recall, when leaving the house, some children watching us go to the carriage, and one nudging another to say, 'Her father's a thief—they've put him in jail.' Something came into my heart that day that the years could not remove. The one ray of light has been the loyalty of Major Cornwall. My father could not live down the disgrace—though innocent, he disappeared, and we have not heard of him since. Mrs. Cornwall may be ignorant and innocent of all this, but no Corneroy will sit at the table with a Cornwall from across the water. Come, Patience. You will excuse us, Major, but since you have chosen to ally yourself—" She stopped. Looking at her face, I remembered Ronald and his hate, and thought what a complexity of hatred this old-time feud had brought through all the years, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Miss Corneroy had spoken with admirable dignity and precision, but repression failed her now. She bit her lip, and almost groped her way from the table, and so towards the door. And then we saw Miss Patience grow red and white, and glance at the Major, meeting his eye. But she, too, rose and started for the door. The Major, stiff as a ramrod, and with Letty's arm still in his, stood aside to let them pass.

Into our quiet, broken only by the quick breathings of an excited gathering, came the sound of a rumbling bass voice.

"Miss Corneroy. Miss Patience—please. You must not leave this room."

Captain Terry was standing at his place. His voice held a mixture of fire and some alien emotion. It was so commanding, so startling, that Miss Patience stopped dead, and even Miss Corneroy faltered.

"In fairness to—everybody—please wait!" It was half command, half request.

Miss Corneroy found voice. "Who—what right have you to interfere?"

"The right," said Captain Terry, calmly, "of the man who was guilty of the defalcation!"

"You?" I saw Miss Corneroy sway a little—her reserve seemed badly shaken. "Who," she asked again, "who are you?"

"The man," said Captain Terry, quietly, "who paid the penalty, and later fled from the disgrace."

The Major's voice thundered out: "Captain Terry, I want you to tell no lies for me!"

"It's God's truth, Major. I was guilty. The proofs of innocence I gave you were spurious; afterwards, I could never bear to undeceive you. Your loyalty—to me—to us all—was something I could not bear to lose. These last days have changed us all. We've all been facing something. That's why we're talking so frankly, I think. And our friend, Letty Cornwall, has shown me, at least, the way of selflessness. The Cornwalls have played their part—you, old man, have cancelled that imaginary debt by taking me in at risk of your life; Miss Letty has shown, Major, as you may have guessed by now, a spirit of forgiveness and love, towards yourself and Miss Patience, that has made some of the rest of us sit up and think. Perhaps, Major, you'll even find it in your heart to forgive—me."

But, before the Major could make a move, Miss Patience had run forward.

"Then you are—?" she began, tremulously.

"I am—your father, my dear!"

And, indeed, it seemed in that moment that Miss Patience's starved childhood came to reassert itself, after over thirty fatherless years. Perhaps some intuition made her certain of his identity when Miss Corneroy herself, through shaken pride, refused to credit it.

"It is Bartholomew Corneroy—your father," the Major said, gravely. "As Captain Terry, he has lived a life of exile from his kind. If he has wronged any, he has suffered for it. I thank God that, stranded here in his sickness, he sent for me." Still holding Letty's arm, he faced Miss Corneroy—meeting the thing in her eye, squarely, and recognising it. He said, still more gravely: "This is no time for false pride. Pride has done enough mischief for us all now. God knows I speak it from my heart!" I fancied that his hold of Letty Cornwall's

arm tightened for a moment, and I sensed the loneliness that sent his thoughts to Ronald; but he recovered bravely, smiling a little, to say, “Emmaline’s ‘Vanity Square’ is redeeming itself to-night. I shall really have to subscribe to Emmaline’s statements, my dear, if you—” He paused. No one, I am convinced, but the Major, could have done it. Before that humorous but meaningful glance, the impossible happened—Miss Corneroy’s lids wavered, her glance fell. Very precisely, she turned and went to the Captain. Her first words were characteristic. “Don’t keep the man standing up like that! Haven’t you sense enough to remember he’s been sick?”

So was the Captain welcomed by his family after many years. But I saw the Major turn away, as though he chose not to look upon the reunion.

XIII

It was surely not surprising that none of us thought of the passing of time, much less Letty Cornwall, who was ushered so hurriedly into the strange scenes of this hour.

Emmaline appeared, suddenly, with the message: “Please, Mijor, but Miss Letty’s wanted downstair at once. Mr. Ronald’s askin’ for ’er, sir, and ’e seems rare put out!” Evidently Ronald had impressed her with the need of haste, for Emmaline’s jaws were still struggling with a mouthful from that feast at which the lesser folk made merry. Letty went white, and turned to go. I sensed the feeling that must have come to her in that moment; to go, without even a farewell upon her lips, away from the strange fellowship of this hour—a fellowship that must have answered the great yearning of her companionable little self—into the unknown, with hate to dull the edge of the love for which she was leaving, and which alone must sustain her. I caught her quick backward glance, and the brave smile and nod she gave me I shall always cherish.

Major Cornwall seemed inclined to follow—to reach out after her—almost as though he knew she was going from him for ever—this little girl in whom, tardily, he had found the thing that appealed to his own brave nature. At last, he shrugged his shoulders, and came back into the room, with the struggle barely gone from his face. He had taken but three paces when I saw some decision shape itself, and, with an abrupt excuse, he left us.

Five minutes later, Emmaline’s rotund form appeared again, more breathless than ever, with tragedy writ large upon her perspiring face. She appealed to me directly, perhaps because of those many evenings spent at Number 12A.

“Oh, sir. The Mijor and Mr. Ronald, sir!”

"Yes?" I encouraged. She had paused, breathing heavily.

"The Mijor and Mr Ronald are quarrelling somethink fierce, sir! I'm fair terrified, sir. Perhaps you'd come."

I rose, with an exclamation on my lips. A quick sense of impending tragedy came to me, rooted not in any alarm of the woman's, but in the memory of the thing I had seen in Ronald's eyes. I hurried down. The Major was standing on the doorstep—alone—looking across the little court to the lights in Number 3. I put my hand on his shoulder.

He said, heavily, "I've done it now. I came in a spirit of forgiveness, and he rebuffed me. I offered to fight him, sir, my temper bringing forgetfulness again!"

"To fight him, Major?"

"To fight him, sir. He was upbraiding the little girl for coming to us to-night. I told him off, sir. The young blackguard! He would not fight. He just laughed at me, and I, by gad, sir, I struck him across the face! He followed her into the house. She fled when we began to quarrel. I have lost them both now!"

I tried to express something of that which rose up in me just then. The Major seemed suddenly to have aged terribly. He shook his head. "Confound you," he cried, "don't stand here, yawping out sentimental folly! Go on over and see that the little girl gets a square deal!"

I loved the Major all the more when I went to do his bidding.

XIV

The house was very quiet when I entered. And then I thought I caught the sound of a woman's suppressed sobbing. Something of the Major's anger came to me. I wanted just then to meet Ronald. I found him upstairs in his own room, busy over a portmanteau. He did not favour me with a look when I entered. I just stood, and stared. From out the neatly-packed portmanteau, he was pulling collars, and ties, and what not, and flinging them into a supreme disorder on the bed. "Ronald, man!" The question would not be denied. "What in the name of all that's good—what's the idea?" I waved a hand, helplessly, at the bed. He turned to me a face that was almost sheepish. Then he straightened up, coloured, and met my eye squarely. "Dash it all!" he said, "I was going to quit to-night, but I think I'll stick around and let the Major introduce me to my own wife! I thought I knew what a fine little kid she is—but, I say, you ought to have heard the Major! Called me everything under the sun! Not fit to blacken her last year's shoes, he said. Wanted to fight me—honest, he did!" Ronald forgot all embarrassment, in a quick rush of boyish enthusiasm. "I say, the old boy's the real stuff after all, isn't he? Do you know, I'll swear he'd

have given me a great battle, at that, if he is just up out of bed. It's the spirit that counts—and if anybody lacks spirit it isn't dad!"

Somewhere in the back of my mind was a remembrance of an unmanageable horse that could be broken into harness only by drastic action. But I hastened to say: "How about Letty? Have you told her? She's feeling pretty cut up over leaving, I think." "Was—not is!" We started at the voice behind us. Slightly tear-stained, but quite radiant, Letty stood there. "I couldn't help overhearing," she apologised. "Oh, Ronald!"

Even a confirmed bachelor has his moments of insight. I beat a hasty retreat downstairs, and out into the cold, clear autumn night, for the drizzle of rain had ceased. For a moment I stopped, to give place for thanksgiving, and, looking up at the lights in Number 3, saw a scene silhouetted that indiscreetly mocked my bachelorhood. Then I went on to Gadwick's once again—to the famous dinner-party and—the Major.

XV

How many years ago? you ask. Ah, better find the elder Miss Corneroy, who has so supreme a disregard for the yearly records of Father Time! You will find her wherever Captain Bartholomew Corneroy spends his roving existence, caring for him with a rule of iron that seems to suit him, for he retains the perennial bloom and spirit of youth, that stood him well through all his troubles.

The other day I met a man, ruddy, inclined to corpulence, dressed in the habiliments of those whom the world treats generously. He nearly wrung my hand off. "You don't remember me, sir? I'm Marty—Marty Connolly. What's that? Mr. and Mrs. Foddleton, of 'Vanity Square'? Bless you, sir, they live down in my ward. If you've nothing on this evening, perhaps—?"

I went.

Emmaline nearly wept over me. The years had dealt with her in a kindly way. Slim had scarcely altered, though he seemed taller and thinner than ever, and his morosely-drooping moustache was streaked plentifully with grey.

We sat late that night, talking, as human beings always will, while time lasts, of the "good old days"; of the lawyer Gadwick, long since gone through those portals where his legal mind will stand him less in stead than the kindly heart we had come to know and love; of the Corneroys, and the Cornwalls—Ronald, and "Miss Letty", and the Major. "Stringe, isn't it, sir," said Emmaline, "I always think of it still as 'Vanity Square,' and yet, maybe, I spoke 'asty about it that w'y." "That was a great speech you made, Emmaline," I laughed. "She mighta lost us all our jobs," said Slim, shaking his head

gravely. “She’s an orful woman that w’y with ’er tongue. Now you tike me, I’m tactful, I am. Like the time I said to that perisher, Lord Lumley, ‘Kind ’earts,’ I says—” “Stow your kind ’earts. Slim!” advised Marty. “The thing I want to know”—he winked at me—“is how much the Cap’n gave you, Emmaline, to spring that stuff.” “Get aw’y with you, Mart Connolly,” said Emmaline, indignantly. “The Cap’n, ’e comes to me and puts me up to it. ‘Nothink but a bloomin’ hearthquake will shake us all straight,’ ’e says, and wants to p’y me to speak up. ‘Get out,’ I told ’im, ‘I’m fighting mad about it now, and if you s’y it’s right for me to up an’ speak, speak I will!’

“Some one,” put in Slim, “some one ought to write this ’ere perishin’ story. I’ve seen worse in the magazines!”

“Good!” acclaimed Marty. “It’s up to you, sir!”

“Yes,” said Emmaline, with a new softness in her faded eyes, “an’ don’t forget, sir, ’ow I went out into the Court the very next night, and found them there in the moonlight.”

“Ronald and his wife?” I asked.

“I almost fell over them,” said Emmaline. “Least, I thought it was them. They jumped up from the shady side of the fountain-plice, sir, an’ I says, jokin’ like, ‘Excuse me, Mr. Ronald, but you needn’t mind me seein’. A man may kiss ’is wife when ’e likes, I s’y.’ And who was it but the Mijor ’imself, and Miss Pytience, who give a little shriek, and they walked aw’y out the gate, very dignified, and quite far apart, as it were, sir—but I follered ’em a bit, and, you mind where the trees is ’eavy up the street, even after the leaves is almost gorn? Well, ’e took ’er arm again there, sir. I sawr ’im, I did. Just think, sir—the Mijor! You’ll put that in, sir?”

“I will, Emmaline,” I promised.

1921.

VIII

"There are more things in heaven and earth
than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

MR. PARMALEE

I

HE stood, a little withdrawn, aloof, yet instantly and civilly thankful in his acceptance of our gratuities. His posture could not be construed as a pose, but he seemed to belong there, just like that, against an alabaster warrior sleeping the centuries away with an alabaster dog couched at his heels. Once or twice, as if with a sense of authority or because the habit had grown upon him, he jingled keys mysteriously hidden in the folds of his black gown. His smile —not too easily awakened by mere humans of a contemporary day—was granted to one or two of us who, speciously or otherwise, had proven intelligent beyond the tourist average. We had "done" the cathedral. Our tour of its age-old aisles, our inspection of its treasures of antiquity, our appreciation of its modern continuity, was over. He would go from us now to another group, already herded hopefully, patiently—like cattle at a pasture gate —awaiting the coming of a guide.

A man, whom I recognised as one who had hung on the outskirts of our own party, fell into step with me as I moved away, though it was I who spoke first, glad of a human channel for my enthusiasm.

"That man's a genius!" I said. "He's worth a score of ordinary guides. He made things live. He should have been an actor—"

"It takes more than an interest in medievalism," interrupted my new friend quickly, "to make an actor. You will forgive my saying so, but I know. This man will never tread the boards of a theatre. The cathedral is his final place; he will grow old here. When he is too old, he will—barring the accidents of life— retire on the savings from the pittance he makes, and those who care to winnow wisdom from a man who can reconstruct the past will know—if nobody else is perceptive—that the cathedral will never be quite the same without him!" My friend looked at me, and amended his statement. "Without, I

should say, his bodily presence. His spirit will continue here with other ghosts of the ages!" We moved very slowly down the nave. "You understand," said my friend, "you are quite right, in a way, about him. He has to some extent the power of all others most necessary to a consummate actor!" He looked at me solemnly. "Now what impressed you most as we went around?"

I thought of the minute marvels of carved woodwork, representing the lifetime of some monkish craftsman; of the great gothic vaultings in which, with their transitions, were written the partially fulfilled ambitions of medieval ecclesiastics; of the slippery roof, across which we had reached the bell-tower with its ropes that could so easily become writhing snakes; of the view of a grey, rain-soaked cathedral town, almost lost in burgeoning green; but this obtuse catalogue, when I ventured on it, rightly displeased my companion.

"No, no!" he cried reproachfully. "I mean in *him*. Let me answer for you. He did not describe things, he embodied history in himself, he assumed the rôles!"

"That's it, exactly!" I agreed.

"But that, you will pardon me, is not it. The important thing is not what he assumed. The important thing"—his voice rose into an eager thinness—"is that you and I forgot ourselves, and became *one with him*! You felt that, surely?"

"In a measure, yes—"

He caught that up.

"In a measure—quite so!" He sighed, considering me with more favour. "Have you ever thought," he asked, in a low voice, "what would happen if every soul in an audience became one with the preacher, the speaker, the actor? Well, in the preacher you'd get—according to his integrity, authenticity and spiritual power—a tremendous spiritual movement; in the speaker, as history has shown us, an inflamed, or tranquillised, or energerised populace; in the actor—but there, after all, lies the *nth* power. I have read somewhere a critic's statement that we appreciate a play only in so far as the actor's rôle becomes our rôle and we live in him!" We were now nearing the great West door, with its amazing effects in coloured glass above. He said: "There was one case—but perhaps you are in a hurry?"

I told him not at all. He motioned towards a little used chapel. We entered. Two short rows of rush-bottomed chairs emphasised the present emptiness. We sat down, flanked by recumbent knights and their ladies. Scarcely looking at them or at me, rather with some eager yet painful light in his eyes for the things of his mental vision, he began to tell his story. His voice had a peculiar cadence, close to a sweetness, that was rendered masculine and credible by an almost husky discordance at times.

I may be telling you (he said) in the main nothing you do not know already. But the newspaper reports, as usual, were garbled. After all, in this case, you can scarcely blame them. We who were nearest were inclined to silence. There are reticences demanded by friendship, and others by an instinct that makes one dislike being called a plain fool.

It was singular that I should run across Starlett again just at that time. I'd known him as a boy; we were close to each other at public school, then at University. At that time he hadn't found himself: it was a toss-up whether music, letters, or the stage would claim him. He dabbled in all creditably—but the fundamental thing, as I see it now, was his power not only to be creative, but to make other people believe in his creations. Then, one night, in nothing greater than a class play, he found himself. He'd played, of course, often before, but never, I fancy, in a rôle at once sympathetic and creative like this. Yet it was a play given breath of life then only for two nights—"Mr. Parmalee's Dilemma"—an undergraduate effort—you know the kind of thing? But there was a real spark in Parmalee, and in Starlett it blazed. The creature came alive on the stage—a creature on the borderland between comedy and tragedy. You forgot it was a stage, you lost yourself rather in a ridiculous fellow in whom *you* yourself suddenly came alive, because in him there was something which, however comic, was perhaps universal.

Afterwards I left Starlett to his congratulators; he came to my room quite late, perched on a corner of my desk, thanked me briefly for my own words, and suddenly spoke impulsively. "You know," he said, "it wasn't just me—to-night—it was you people out there. I felt carried along by—by something out there. I—I couldn't help myself!" He seemed as much frightened as exalted; his eyes looked beyond me to something to which he gave no words. At the time I paid little heed to it. However, after that, there was no question of his career. Graduation was just ahead; we parted at the station with his gay, "See you soon!" in my ears. But for years our ways ran, with a disproving pressure, in distinctly opposite directions.

It shows how much he had gone from my mind, how deeply other cares and interests had cut across, and how, in far portions of the globe, one can lose touch with matters of popular interest, that, landing home just on the eve of a University Reunion, and hurrying to share in it, I should be surprised to see—as I taxied from station to hotel—billboard announcements of

VINCENT STARLETT
in
"Mr. Parmalee's Dilemma."

I had wondered if Starlett would show up for the reunion, had dared dream he would, but this thing startled me like a vision of my own creating. I know that, for a poignant moment there in the taxi, I indulged in the futile but perhaps purging emotion of regret for lost youth. It was a prolonged moment; I could not easily shake it off. The streets were suddenly stripped of the progress of years; the trees on the campus—for I hurriedly made my arrangements and quitted the hotel—lost the growth of two decades, and whispered to me of days when I had walked these ways of scholarship and comradeship. And there, suddenly, at the rim of the campus, I met Starlett.

He did not, at first, know me, though I found in him no change save the confirmation of the years: deeper lines, a little heaviness, more experienced eyes. He was sitting on the slope of grass, staring over the cricket pitch, where even now two men and a roller were preparing for the Old Boys' Match. At sound of my voice he leaped up, seized me violently, and hauled me down so that, his arm around me, we might sit and, looking over the remembered green, talk together. We went afterwards to his hotel room. I must, he said, dine with him, and there were some things he wished to show me.

His room opened on a quiet street. It was a street familiar to us both. Further up, at one time, we had lodged together. The sound of children playing a game on the pavements reminded us. It was the very same game whose overtones of gaiety had sometimes interfered with our studies. "There weren't so many motors then!" he said, and we sat together, for a moment of silence, realising the sounds as alien ones, or echoes reborn in a generation not ours. I turned to the things we had been doing, to his career.

"You have been more successful than I realised!" I told him.

He took an empty pipe and sucked at it. He modestly admitted the success of his present rôle.

"Parmalee!" I cried reminiscently, "I'd no idea—"

"Parmalee," he said, "was too good to remain obscure. You remember Stoughton who wrote it? He got down on his luck later on; the writing game was bad for him—too much loose time to employ, and he got drinking. He looked me up once when he was flat. He had a fistful of manuscripts. Horrible things. He'd become cynical and clever—puppets stuffed with antic hay. I said I could do nothing, then I asked: 'What about Parmalee?' He told me the fellow was dead and deserved to be. I said he couldn't be killed. We got at him; we reconstructed him. I've played," said Starlett, "nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine performances with him. To-night's my thousandth!"

So, sitting there in his hotel room, we talked about Parmalee. You'd think, to listen to Starlett, the fellow had flesh and blood. It made me shiver a little,

as if, at times, I caught in Starlett a glimpse of Parmalee himself, impishly gleaming through sober eyes.

I asked: “How in the world can you play one rôle a thousand times and not kill the thing—not merely go through the motions?”

Starlett smiled.

“Every layman wants to know that. It’s your audiences, my boy. Every audience is different. So every introduction of Mr. Parmalee is an adventure. You can feel the atmosphere almost immediately: sometimes you have to fight to make him live in you, and you in him; other times—” He waved the pipe. “At other times,” he said, “you *are* Parmalee. They’re with you in the rôle, if you see what I mean! You can’t help yourself! By the conjunction of them with you, Parmalee is born, is so strongly brought to life it almost hurts—to—to get back to yourself. Not often like that, you know. But there’s ecstasy about it!” He went over and drew back the curtains, gazing out into a street now full of shadows. “You’ll think me fanciful,” said Starlett, “but I’ve grown to be almost prescient of the thing—occasionally, at least, to anticipate a triumph like that—as if I knew the people in their homes, at their dinners, wherever they may be before they come to see my poor ‘familiar’s’ dilemma, are in the right mood mentally. To-night—”

“To-night?” I prompted him, almost with impatience.

He swung on me, his eyes brooding.

“I don’t know! This place—this town—the old associations—have got me! And meeting old friends like you. The house will be full of ’em, and we’ll all be remembering the first performance in the old Hall—torn down now, they tell me. Odd that the thousandth performance should fit in with this reunion! The management, of course, have an eye to the box-office receipts.”

“It ought,” I suggested, “to be a tremendous success!”

“You can’t tell!” he objected curtly. “It’ll either be very much one thing or the other! I’ve never felt so nervous in my life—not excepting first nights in the old days when I was at the bottom of things. Not just nervous—half depressed, half exalted, too. Like when you’re sitting in the pavilion with your pads on, waiting to go in to bat, and knowing the whole school is banking on you to play the game—”

I nodded. I knew exactly that sense of what one can only call an exalted nausea. I determined to change his thoughts.

“You were going to show me something,” I began.

“Of course!” His eyes brightened. “A man,” he said, “in my game must have a hobby. I haven’t much with me—just a few plates and a volume or two. I found these in a second-hand shop only yesterday.” He began thumbing over

a large folio. I drew near to share it with him. This, I thought, is what every creative artist should have: a hobby, an exhaust-valve, a thing that makes for sanity. But, after ten minutes, he suddenly shut the folio, excusing himself with an abrupt: “You’ll forgive me! I’m not myself to-day!” He touched the worn covers of the folio. “That’s all dead to me just now. Look here, if you don’t mind, we’ll have a bite sent up to the room. I don’t want to face a lobby full of people rushing up to shake hands, nor yet a dining-room full of ’em whispering, ‘That’s Starlett. He’s playing Mr. Parmalee to-night for the thousandth time!’ Press that bell.”

I did so. We ordered. Over a discreet meal, Starlett suddenly grinned at me like his old self. “What a fanciful fool you must think me!” he said. “Now, we’re going to be full of a fine sanity, and you’re going to tell me about yourself, and I’m going to forget that this feels for all the world like my last meal on earth.”

He grinned again, boyishly, but I felt it to be a thing of deliberation, and through his smiling eyes was it fanciful of me, then, that I should see the impish yet appealing humour of Mr. Parmalee?

III

Directly after dinner he dismissed me. He did it, as it seemed to me, with an unnecessary sternness.

“I must be alone,” he said. “I make a point always of being alone.”

I do not know why that should have startled me. Yet, such a thing I might have looked for as natural in a preacher who must be, for a time, alone with his God. I stood outside his door for a moment of unhappy speculation. And, gazing at the commonplace exterior of that practical and material door, I had a queer feeling. I do not excuse it. I am only stating facts. It seemed to me that behind that door, in the room I had quitted, were two personalities, not one. The idea was too ridiculously fanciful. I was annoyed at myself. I said that Starlett had infected me with a disease that would overcome him if he did not take care. I told myself that no man should be allowed to play a single rôle for a thousand performances. It must either, I argued, reduce him to an automaton or—or what? There I stuck. And finding myself still before the door, and still housing my idea of duality, I hurried along the corridor and stormed an already crowded elevator. People in the lift, and below in the lobby, had hands of heavy, jovial greeting, for my back and shoulders. How was I, anyway? Was I up seeing Starlett? What a success old Vincent had made! Just fancy Starlett being here to recreate before us none other than Mr. Parmalee!

A classmate, his wife and daughter, shared a taxi with me. I remembered

him as a thin, cadaverous youth. Now he had put on flesh and a pontifical dignity. He gestured with a long-ashed cigar, and the follies of the world were unmasked. He returned his cigar to his mouth, between sure, even teeth, and you knew that, so long as he lived, soundness would not finally pass from the earth. His wife impressed one as a poor little creature who had been caught, by mischance, on his chariot wheel, and ever after been compelled to run breathlessly by his side. His daughter had some of the looks that this unending effort had wrung from her mother; she combined them with an echo of her father's sureness and an inanity all her own. I said but little. It was not required of me. I sat watching the slow procession of buildings, in the main unfamiliar to me, and thinking of Starlett solitary in his taxi. He had said he would go alone. It was his custom. He would leave by a side door, unnoticed. He must have a time alone in his dressing-room. I glanced at my watch. The traffic was holding us back. He would be there by now. I went at once to him. I appeared before him suddenly, breaking aside all barriers. I asked him angrily: "Do you always go on this way?" I told him, when he did not answer: "You're a fool! You're more of a fool than I could have believed you to be!" In my ear, the husband growled some imprecation at the traffic that would not sweep aside with a gesture from his long-ashed cigar; the wife murmured a breathless contribution; the daughter favoured, with a baby gaze, an impressionable youth at the wheel of a car choc-a-bloc with ours. I realised my body, and the limitations of a hired motor car.

Ahead was the theatre, Starlett's name winking electrically at us. The long line of cars moved up; we joined the gay, anticipatory crowds thronging into the playhouse.

IV

The papers described the scene as brilliant. No doubt it was. It is perhaps unfair to say that more came to impress than to be impressed. Doubtless the top gallery contained some who had not brought the world to their feet, or who, if they had not, did not make shift to give that idea for one night to men with whom they once looked forward to success in life. I know of one at least; a man who drained himself of every physical and material reserve for a lost cause. It was he who afterwards said a sapient word. "You know, I wondered how Starlett could act before that gathering of intelligence so largely gone to seed. I didn't reckon on several things: on the pull of memory, on a residue of self-criticism, on Starlett himself!"

I sat fidgeting for the thing to begin. The orchestra struck up. It was the undergraduate one—earnest young fellows doing their best for the great night. They played old tunes, a pot-pourri of songs I, at least, had not heard for years

and half forgotten. Then the curtain rose, and there was Parmalee. I was going to say Starlett, but that would be only half true. He made his entrance exactly as he had done on that class night years ago, standing staring with his detached, slightly timid, slightly pompous gaze, at the audience. Somebody cried out, "Good old Vincent!" The interrupter won others in quick discipleship. The theatre rocked with his name. Starlett gave no recognition; he was too thorough an actor for that. He, or rather Parmalee, stood quietly waiting for a moment, then, the pandemonium continuing, he moved over and stood looking up speculatively—quite lost in it—at a picture on his, Parmalee's, dining-room wall. Nobody but Parmalee would have stood just that way, regarding with proud possessorship a picture he knew he should be proud of without knowing why.

There was something hypnotic about it; the demonstration subsided. Then Parmalee, with never a glance at his audience, moved across the room, sat down to his breakfast, and rang importantly for the maid.

"*No kippers this morning, Jane. And—my morning paper?*" You could see the lift of his disapproving eyebrows.

"*It didn't come, sir!*"

"*Send the boy for it at once, Jane. And the bacon not too crisp, please!*"

The simple words do not convey the thing at all. But you felt, looking on, that for the affairs of the world to go forward a moment longer without review by Mr. Parmalee would be to court disaster. You saw, however, the soundness of the man: his bacon not too crisp—a nice sense of proportion, of permissible detail!

From that moment we lost ourselves in Mr. Parmalee, as he came to life in this, the thousandth act of his creation.

It was during the second intermission that, in the smoking-room, I ran across Stoughton. The author of the play was standing modestly in one corner. He had changed so greatly I did not wonder he should remain undiscovered by men who once were comrades at the University. He caught my arm: "Hullo!" he said. "I'm Stoughton! Don't tell anybody. Nobody is to know I'm here—even *he* doesn't. I'm trying to see the thing with other people's eyes. Gratten—you remember Tom Gratten?—is arranging a little supper party afterwards. He's the only one who knows. And he wants you, as a friend of Parmalee's, to go along!"

I stared at the author of the play, but only after a mental straightening.

"Parmalee?" I chided him.

He laughed.

"Did I say Parmalee? Well, it's all the same! I meant Starlett. There's the

bell. Meet you right afterwards!”

V

It is my own idea that an actor might, under any circumstances, have survived the two first acts. But the third was different. In the first we laughed at Parmalee; in the second we laughed with him and loved him; in the third we went with him into the shadows. Do not misunderstand me. The thing was never out of key. The tragedy that overtook Mr. Parmalee lifted its head and struck its fangs deep in the midst of the comedy of his life. If he had been sufficient instead of self-sufficient it would have been different. But to see a man sustain an illusion of greatness in the midst of defeat, to know him conscious at last of the hollowness of his pretensions, of the pitiful humour of his pomposity, and yet unable, or unwilling, or both, to strip himself of these and present himself naked to the lash of circumstance, but rather to gather, with a final gallantry, the shreds of his illusion about him—it was this that drew us to him, us who were willing to be drawn because he was an old friend and this was his creator’s night of nights, and because we could not help our minds—thus opened and receptive—from concentrating with hypnotic intensity upon a creation in whom we saw ourselves unmasked so starkly, yet so kindly, that in the midst of hysterical amusement we felt ourselves pulled into self-identification with the man.

Sitting there, as the last act drew to its inevitable end, I had at once this feeling only of Parmalee, and yet, as an overtone, a sense of positive terror. My eyes were chained upon Parmalee, so that I felt hypnotically incapable of turning even to regard my neighbours. Yet I was aware that they, too, were caught, that one first dare not turn lest one break the spell, and then could not turn even to break it. Some part of me got through for an instant to sit in my old room, and hear a younger Starlett saying, almost with a frightened exaltation: “It was you people out there—I felt carried along by it—I couldn’t help myself!” And, for an instant, a warning voice in me cried: “Hold back! Hold back! Parmalee’s too dreadfully alive! And you’re helping to create him!” I think I jogged my neighbour’s arm. I have a vague consciousness that both of us, for a moment of angry release, stared into each other’s eyes, and then—you may think of me what you will—the anger in his eyes died, and I saw the spirit of Parmalee faintly mocking me instead. I closed my eyes, opening them upon the stage which no longer was a stage, upon a Starlett who no longer was Starlett but a Parmalee whom I, in my obsession, could gladly have slain—but that I felt so sorry for him!

And then the curtain went down. It seemed more an intrusion than a release. We continued in an unbroken silence that remains in my mind as the

most perfect and terrible tribute ever paid. We seemed to be locked there, and no man had a key to our release. The integration of our minds was too complete. Disintegration could not come from one—it came from those mentally incapable of too strict concentration: from a woman giving a little hysterical laugh here, a youth essaying to clap there—and suddenly we were standing up, shouting, cheering, breaking into a storm of applause. The curtain went up; we cheered again, but the stage remained in an emptiness that presently, becoming ghastly, sent the curtain down at a run. It rose a second time, but there was no Starlett, only some muffled and urgent command from the wings. It dropped again; slowly the asbestos curtain descended into place; uncertainly we turned away and—the spell broken at last—dispersed.

Starlett had gone to his dressing-room. I found him there. The place had a confusion about it upon which I could put no finger, a confusion unlike him. In the midst of it he sat, sunk back in a chair. He looked at me with unseeing eyes. I remembered, too late, Stoughton's warning gesture as I entered—Stoughton and one other, I think, who tried to stop me going in. Instantly I felt the indecency of my intrusion. This man wanted to be alone. I say this man. It was not Starlett. No look of Starlett was in his eyes, nor was there recognition of me.

He said: "Will you be good enough to leave me?" I cannot convey to you how he said it; but there was a broken dignity about it, and an intense civility.

I withdrew. With Stoughton, and one or two others, I remained outside. Eventually, we said, he must come out of there. But time passed and we took counsel. Tom Gratten came and insisted he must go in. We stood in the doorway, watching. Tom Gratten touched the shoulder of this broken man, mentioning, with a specious brightness, the supper party. We heard the voice of Parmalee. "I'm sorry! You will, I hope, understand! There can be no supper party to-night! You will convey my thanks to—my friends—for wishing it—for standing by me?"

Tom Gratten, never too perceptive, dropped back apace. Then he began to laugh; he roared—he was always inclined to be boisterous—with laughter. He clapped Starlett on the shoulder, shouting his appreciation of an excellent joke, a fine but, surely at this stage, an unnecessary bit of acting. Parmalee rose a little, in his face an agony of which I do not like to think. Before the laughter his lip quivered; he stood there, this figure of tragi-comedy, clinging to the last shreds of his illusion. It was then the thing happened that to me is the most real—but least credible—of all. We stood there, hurt to our souls for the agony of the man before us, and suddenly Stoughton—Stoughton, the creator of the part, the man who first conceived, who pinned on paper, who gave the very words he spoke to this creation—ran forward with a choking cry, more

authentic because half hesitant, half timid, as if it were an intrusion upon a stranger: “No, no, Mr. Parmalee! You mustn’t feel like that. We’re all behind you, you know! We’re all behind you!”

VI

The feet of a party of tourists, whom impulse had directed this way, sounded hollowly in our empty chapel. My companion rose when they entered and, catching my arm, led me out into the nave, now filled with the vague mysteries of twilight gloom. He seemed almost in haste to get away, and half apologetic as if he had spoken unwisely or at undue length to a stranger.

“But you must tell me!” I protested urgently. “What happened to Parmalee —to Starlett?”

“A hobby,” said my friend, “is a man’s safeguard. Even at that, it took months. A slow process. To this day he has a horror of theatres, though they devilishly fascinate him. He passes them on the other side, as a reformed drunkard might a tavern—in fascinated fear!”

“But what,” I urged, “does your friend do for a living?” He turned and looked at me, as if unsure if I were worthy to ask, and know, the final secret. “His hobby,” he said briefly, and coughed, “was medievalism—and especially cathedrals!”

He nodded to me, still with that sense of almost guilty haste upon him, and vanished into the greenish gloom beyond the vestibule. I stood for a moment pondering the thing. Behind me a gate clicked, and the feet of tourists echoed. I saw our guide, through with another lot of sightseers, standing a little withdrawn, aloof, but civilly thankful for their gratuities. Once or twice, as if with a sense of authority, or because the habit had grown upon him, he jingled keys, mysteriously hidden in the folds of his black gown.

1930.

MR. PINADECK'S DAY

I

MRS. TIBBS, the housekeeper, was the first to greet him that morning. Of late, at Marchmont's private suggestion, she had been taking her meals with Mr. Pinadeck to keep his mind from wandering to things no one could quite fathom. He surprised her by being in the dining-room, gazing out the window into a dewy August morning, when she arrived down. "You're early, Mr. Pinadeck," she told him.

He seemed pleased. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Not seven yet. There—that's seven just striking."

He cupped his ear, listening.

"Voices!" said Mr. Pinadeck softly. "You hear them? Just behind the chime?" He drew near the elderly woman, who was about his own age. "You wouldn't say," he asked, doubtfully, "that they were reproachful, would you?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Pinadeck."

The words came out, not because they held any meaning for her, but because she was afraid of silence. She was wondering why Dr. Marchmont had to go away just now, and hoping he would fail in his golf tournament by way of punishment.

"Ah!" said Mr. Pinadeck, "I'm glad of that. Seven, you see—seven from twenty-four. That's seventeen, isn't it?" His mild blue eyes rested tranquilly upon her frightened dark ones, and she nodded, because again she couldn't help herself. She gritted her teeth, dubbing Marchmont a fool to pretend any longer it was just a nervous state that would improve with care. "Seventeen!" repeated Mr. Pinadeck. He passed a thin hand across his brow. "Mrs. Tibbs, you were to give me the address of your niece, weren't you?"

"Oh, you mustn't bother—" However, she yielded the information weakly. He made a note in a small red book. His gaze wandered to the windows. Beyond the deep embrasure with its white seats, gaudily cushioned, robins sought worms in the dewy velvet of the lawn, and morning mist dispersed under the brilliance of the August sun. "It's nice, you know," he said, "to have a day like this. It might have been the other kind. It might quite easily have been the other kind."

She caught at this topic, eagerly.

"It'll be fine all right. Such a heavy dew. I'm thinking those people we read about last night in the papers had a chill enough time." She knew instinctively she was saying the wrong thing, but something seemed to possess her tongue. "Poor demented creatures. Out on the hillside all night, done up in white nightie things, waitin' for the comin' of the Lord."

Mr. Pinadeck looked at her. Mrs. Tibbs felt a need of defence against his eyes. She put up her hand as if to ward off something, but that didn't help. So she fell back on words.

"It's wrong!" she accused. "It should be stopped."

"Wrong?" Mr. Pinadeck took up the word and seemed to weigh it. Suddenly, her defences became needless. "Last night, you said? Last night. Of course, Mrs. Tibbs. Quite wrong, as you say. Quite wrong."

The quarter hour struck.

Mrs. Tibbs had a queer feeling that the silvery note was not quite real; that it held its clear tone longer than it should, like the far, faint call of a trumpeter; which was a ridiculous thing for Mrs. Tibbs to conjure up out of a very wooden imagination. And then to fancy that the call was caught up and echoed by lesser trumpeters throughout the house annoyed her still more. She thought of things she would say, very straight-like, to Dr. Marchmont when she next got him alone! There were limits.

Mr. Pinadeck was gravely smiling.

"You heard it, too, Mrs. Tibbs?" He nodded. "Yes, I am going!" He spoke now, very evidently, not to her, though she found herself answering in a small voice scarcely under control: "But your breakfast. It won't do to neglect your eating!" He must have seen her troubled look, for he said quickly, "Of course, breakfast! They have been very pleasant, our little breakfasts together, Mrs. Tibbs. Don't trouble about toast, or anything hot! Rolls and milk—and I see there is some of that clover honey left." He sat down, helping himself. Mrs. Tibbs, about to call the maid, felt impotent. So she sat, like a disapproving gargoyle, opposite him. "Clover honey, that!" he said. He savoured it with his palate. "My earliest recollection, Mrs. Tibbs, is of lying flat on my back in a clover field. I told them, when they found me, I was watching the clover dance! It did," declared Mr. Pinadeck, persuasively. "Sometimes a few clover heads would dance, and then altogether; and then they would go skipping across the field, playing at leap-frog. But nobody would believe it! . . . A long time ago, Mrs. Tibbs—and a very short time. Queer how one clings!" He started up, laying aside his napkin. "A very nice breakfast, Mrs. Tibbs! But you will excuse me now. There is the garden first. It would be nice to have everything—just so!" She felt relieved at that. If he was going to the garden it

was all right. She watched him, through the window—wiping her mouth with the corner of her napkin until the scrubbing threatened an abrasion of the skin. When she saw old Joe touch his hat, she was satisfied. Flowers were a passion—a safe passion with Mr. Pinadeck.

Out in the garden, old Joe hazarded a conventional remark about the weather. "Very nice!" agreed Mr. Pinadeck. "The flowers look well this morning, Joe!" He gazed around him, almost wistfully. "Never saw them look better. The lawn could stand cutting. And trim the edges, Joe. I'd like to have it looking well!" Joe said, grinning: "It's a pretty decent earth this, sir! I can't see why people should be quick for to want to leave it. I suppose you seen where them johnnies set out waitin' for the end of the world?" He knew instantly he had done wrong, by the look on Mr. Pinadeck's face, which made him want to get on with his digging. Yet, when Mr. Pinadeck spoke, it was without reference to this subject. His eyes were upon the garden. "D'you see them, Joe?" cried Mr. Pinadeck, excitedly. "The poppies are dancing there in the sunlight! Watch 'em! And nobody will believe, Joe, nobody will believe!" Mr. Pinadeck sighed, his hand on old Joe's arm. The free arm Joe put up to scratch his head; this gesture he continued when Mr. Pinadeck nodded suddenly, set off at top speed down the garden walk, and was speedily lost to sight.

"Now!" said old Joe. "Now there you are!" He fetched the spade a kick with his foot, viciously, and said again: "Now there you are! What d'you know about that? Dancin'?" He spat on the ground. "Now," said Joe, addressing the spade, this time with confidential resignation, "now what are you goin' to make out of that, I'd like to know!"

II

Mr. Pinadeck, meanwhile, went on his way, which led him from his own front path to an avenue of elms, high branching, whose tracery fell in cool bluish-grey shadows upon the roadway. Behind the elms ran foot-pavements on either side, then hedges half hiding gardens and lawns, and, in the midst of these, houses that squatted, as it were, on their haunches, regarding Mr. Pinadeck—as possessively defiant as the dogs who similarly sat and watched him go by, their tongues dripping wet contentment, their tails wagging in restrained friendliness. Mr. Pinadeck waved a hand in salutation and passed on. Once a dog, forgetting the restraints of select breeding, ran out and licked his hand, and Mr. Pinadeck stopped for a few words with this friend. Then he glanced quickly at his watch, frowned mildly, shook his head, and hurried on—his eyes, for the moment, gazing upward, in almost childish concern, at the very tops of the elm trees, his hand cupped to his ear. But there was no voice in all that deserted avenue of sunlight and shadow; except within the houses, the

day's activities had not begun. No voice but the whisper of leaves, high up, where the feathery elm tops stirred, with a faint restlessness, under the movement of a perfumed wind from distant gardens, and still more distant cornfields, and, far beyond, the marshes that ran in saltily from the sea.

Presently, Mr. Pinadeck left all these things behind. Flowers and grass gave place to hard-baked pavements; the houses, instead of being set in gardens, thrust out their steps, like uncompromising chins, to the street line. Before one very ordinary place, Mr. Pinadeck, consulting his watch again, doubtfully halted. It was one of a long row of red-brick houses, unbeautiful had they not been creeper-covered here and there, and, above all, sunny. Mr. Pinadeck, indeed—oblivious to the agitated stare of a slatternly woman washing the steps of the very place—put his hand against the sun-warmed bricks with an obviously caressing motion. Where his hand touched the decaying mortar a fragment of the brittle grey substance came away. He poked with his finger and more fell—a little, dusty landslide.

"Hey, you!" said the woman.

Mr. Pinadeck turned, and eventually raised his hat. The woman rose heavily, and stood defiantly, hands on generous hips, her flat, slovenly feet splayed ungracefully. "Well, I like the nerve—" she began, and caught sight of his eyes. Her hand went up and wisped her straggling hair, with the half-pathetic gesture of ignorance that is quick to fear what it cannot comprehend.

"It was—warm—like that when we first came!" said Mr. Pinadeck, slowly, his hand against the wall. "I suppose it is—wrong—to cherish a—a temple so long discarded—a nest so long deserted!" A puckering appeared in his brow, the woman noticed. She was watching him uncertainly. "Our bodies, you know," he said. "Every seven years, they say. It is possible! You are familiar, Madam, with Holmes' majestic lines:

'Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul! While the swift seasons roll __' "

He passed his hand across his forehead, and the pucker there was smoothed. He smiled. "I'm getting—a trifle mixed, Madam! We were speaking of this house. The bricks were warm like this, that day—" He broke off, and, though his eyes were on her, she had an awful feeling of being looked through and not at.

She raised a soap-suddy hand accusingly. "Look here now, you!" she said quickly. "You get along! I won't stand it! I can't stand no more nonsense in this street to-day. As if it ain't bad enough to have all them dotty people paradin' up last night, and back this mornin', from the end of the world that didn't come—" She put her hand across her lips, wiping away the soapy froth

mechanically. “You get along, now!” she ordered. “You get along with the rest o’ them dotty critters, or I’ll call the perlice, so I will!”

Mr. Pinadeck was moved only to a deferential bow.

“Forgive the intrusion, Madam! I must thank you for recalling my attention to the time. I have—many things to do to-day!” He glanced at the sunny bricks. His hand pressed them again. “Warm—like that!” he said, sighing. “That very first day. Signed the lease the next! Moved in ten days later! Another sunny day—she put her hand beside mine there,” said Mr. Pinadeck. “The bricks felt very warm and sunny. You will forgive me,” he added hastily, “but we came here, you understand—our first home—after we were married!”

The woman looked after him as he moved off. “Dotty!” she said, but there was lack of conviction in her voice. She put up a big hand and brushed something angrily from her eye. Then she picked up the pail, the soap, the brush, and went in, leaving the steps half scoured, their soapy covering glinting with little fairy lights under the brilliant sunshine.

III

There was a buff-bricked chapel three corners down. It stood a little back from the street-line; weed-grown, foot-trodden grass ran up to it, and, under the shadow of dingy eaves, grew rank and coarse to a considerable height. Unkempt vine straggled to hide the smoky yellow walls, and became the habitation of nesting birds, whose droppings whitened the coarse greenery below. Undusted windows, with broken panes and some completely out, still caught and threw back with despairing courage the colours that once portrayed in vivid hues the form and flowing garments of apostle or saint.

Mr. Pinadeck, as if drawn by a magnet, approached this place. Others were there before him—a gaping crowd, under the eyes of two watchful policemen. Three cameramen hung about, one with a motion picture tripod. Every now and again, some stir within, some rising tumult of sound, caught at the crowd like a wave, and carried them up the rotting steps, to gaze within and be at last thrust back by the unemotional determination of the patient Law. As Mr. Pinadeck approached, a chant broke out; more like a wail than a song, it floated through the windows, and the crowd outside moved like seaweed caught by a rising tide.

> “I’m a pilgrim, and I’m a stranger,
> Heaven is my home!”

Something like that, it rose and fell, with a curious incoherence, a pathetic impotence—lifting, lifting at last to crash against the walls and carry beyond.

"O, Lord, we're a-waiting,
O, Lord, we're a-waiting,
Have mercy, Lord!"

A man standing by Mr. Pinadeck, his jaws busily moving on some undiminishing substance, suggested: "I guess that's why they don't try paint an' soap-and-water." Looking for Mr. Pinadeck to share his amusement, the fellow's grin died; his face crimsoned for some reason that it was not in him to understand, and Mr. Pinadeck, nodding pleasantly to the policemen, as if he knew them, passed on in.

There was a gloominess about the interior that caused Mr. Pinadeck first to blink, and then, as he stepped forward, to stumble, in a way that directed general attention to the first soul outside the elect who thus had dared to step right in. To Mr. Pinadeck's eyes, in turn, there was presented, as his vision cleared, a small, bare auditorium, not bad in its architectural lines, but utterly ruined by being stripped of all vestiges of that interior ornamentation that had passed with the sale of the building from one sect to another. Where once the upper timbering had quartered a decorative ceiling, whitewashing gave an effect that fell short of its evident intention of purity. Where once dark oaken pews had been, was a huddle of plain deal chairs over an uncarpeted floor. It is doubtful if Mr. Pinadeck observed fully these things; his eyes seemed rather to rest on a small sea of haggard, pitiful faces staring, straining at him in the gloom. Mr. Pinadeck moved a step forward, and, as if this were a signal releasing the silenced, curious crowd, the faces began to move, the bodies to sway. And, suddenly, Mr. Pinadeck held up both his arms as if to halt this eerie motion, or to shield himself from it.

"No! No!" he cried. "Not here! Only in the sunlight! Clover in sunlit fields! Poppies under the morning sun! There is no sun in here!"

A tall, bearded man, with flapping black clothes, went swiftly to Mr. Pinadeck and took his arm. This man's face was heavy with sleeplessness, but fire burned deep in the sockets.

"You must go!" he told Mr. Pinadeck. "You are interfering with us. We are waiting for the end. No one shall mock us! Last night we thought it was to be, but it is withheld for the testing of our faith. You must go, or I shall have you put out!"

Mr. Pinadeck remained. It was the tall man in black who moved back a pace, without knowing why.

"Last night?" said Mr. Pinadeck, after a moment, his voice very clear and definite. "No—it will be to-night!" Suddenly he inclined his head toward the doorway, and it seemed that the sea of white faces inclined with him. "You

hear?" said Mr. Pinadeck, when a clock had ceased speaking from its tower. "It is nine already! That leaves fifteen hours."

A shuddering sigh ran through the audience. The man in black seized Mr. Pinadeck's arm, ecstatically. "My brother, you bring us a message!" He turned, and lifted a great gaunt hand to his people. "A messenger from the Lord, my brethren! We must watch and wait. It is to be to-night! Rejoice, friends, it is to be to-night!" Instant pandemonium followed. Mr. Pinadeck stood like one stunned at forces he had loosed. A wailing chant, half exultant, rose about him like a wave. Outside, an urchin, evading the eye of the Law, slipped to the buff-bricked wall, and climbed the stout vine to a point of vantage. A young bird from a disturbed nest flew in through the window, where a broken pane invited . . . Mr. Pinadeck, looking up, saw it; poor, agitated creature, frightened by the noise within, it beat itself against an unyielding pane of blue that was not open sky, and fell, wings trailing, downward. Mr. Pinadeck caught it. Cries rang through the building; the little heart pulsating against the thin hands of Mr. Pinadeck seemed to quicken incredibly at the sound of voices shouting: "It is a sign! It is a sign, brethren! The bird descended—"

Mr. Pinadeck did not look again at the sea of faces. In his hands was a frightened young bird. With infinite care he carried it outside. A wave of sound, plaintive and terrible, leaped after him, but he was gone. He took the fledgling and, lifting it as high as he could above his head, placed it against the creeper on the wall. It fluttered once, poised for an instant on a barren twig, chirped, and flew, with strange strength of wings, high into the blue, and was lost to sight over the roof. Mr. Pinadeck was smiling when one of the policemen touched his arm.

"What d'yer make of it, sir?"

His thumb jerked towards the building Mr. Pinadeck had just quitted.

"Very frightening!" returned Mr. Pinadeck. "Out of the sunlight! Noises, that way!" His eyes lifted to the roof whither the bird had flown. He shook his head. "Noisy!" said Mr. Pinadeck. "And only fifteen hours! There is much to do. And I must have time, you understand, for quietness!"

He nodded pleasantly to the officer. As for the policeman, he scratched his head thoughtfully, gazing first at the retreating figure and then at the roof, as if some answer could be had from the birds that chirped there in the eaves, and, every now and then, flew with a gallant flash of wings up into the blue ether.

IV

The sun was now getting high in the heavens, and Mr. Pinadeck swung rapidly along familiar pavements of the business district. Occasionally,

someone would greet him: “Hullo, Pinadeck! Glad to see you about again!” and Mr. Pinadeck would nod, smile, shake hands, and be off at such a pace that the interrupter would mumble: “Now I wonder where he’s off to in such a hurry!”

Gregorly, of the Consolidated Mines, halted him for a little longer. “By the way, Pinadeck, you’ll not forget the meetin’?”

“Meeting?” said Mr. Pinadeck hastily. “No, no—of course, one doesn’t! A little vague, perhaps—we can’t just know. But you put the seeds in Gregorly, you know! Put the seeds in, and to-day the poppies were dancing there all together in the sunlight!”

Gregorly said bluntly, for he was a practical man in his way: “I don’t know what you’re drivin’ at, old chap, but the meetin’s at three to-day! A few of the shareholders have got their heads together and are objectin’ to our givin’ that ten thousand to the hospital campaign. General meetin’ called. Directors to face ’em all. There’ll be a merry whirr over it! We’ve been countin’ on you to say something to the point! They want us to withdraw our subscription.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Pinadeck. “Well now, that would never do. Never do! At three, you say? I must try and fit it in!”

Gregorly, moving on in the opposite direction, apologised to three people for bumping into them with blind clumsiness. At the corner drug-store, he drank off a bromo-seltzer; coming out, he met Watrous, a fellow director. “Just ran across Pinadeck,” said Gregorly. He coughed. “You know,” he said, “I don’t think we’d better count too much on him! You knew Marchmont had been treatin’ him for—something mental?” He’d forgotten about Marchmont until then; remembrance, and the bromo-seltzer, made him feel much better right away. Gregorly always said that he liked things you could get your fingers on, if you knew what he meant.

V

At the office, Miss Machin—Mr. Pinadeck’s secretary—greeted him.

“They were ’phoning you from your house, Mr. Pinadeck! I said we weren’t, of course, expecting you. Should—should you be down, Mr. Pinadeck, to-day?”

“To-day?” His gaze travelled from her piquant, anxious face to where a flowering window-box decorated the sill. Old Joe’s idea and gift, that was. The window was open, and the slightest current of air entered, playing about the flowers, and bringing the pungency of verbena to mingle with the faint odour of rose-leaves that always seemed a part of Miss Machin’s personality. He said, presently: “When I was taken ill, you know, I had to leave several loose

ends. Will you bring that current file, please?" Miss Machin hesitated, then obeyed. For an hour afterwards she sat making little pot-hooks in her notebook. She set them down without sense of their meaning, and a wonder whether she would be able to translate them came to her, and might have worried her, only that it didn't seem to matter, somehow, about afterwards. Once Mr. Pinadeck stopped, half eagerly, half fearfully, listening; she was relieved that the clock across the square boomed out the hour of eleven, and that she could hear it, too; but when she turned to her pot-hooks, two or three of them stood up on the next line, with military stiffness, refusing their natural contours, like—well, like buglers about to sound a call—which was ridiculous, as her natural good sense reassured her when they became again only pencilled symbols—straight lines, with little hooks and oblique dashes angling off at the top. Then, once more, Mr. Pinadeck paused in his dictation.

"Look, Miss Machin!"

He was pointing to the window.

"Old Joe's flowers!" said Mr. Pinadeck excitedly. "They're dancing together in the sunlight!"

Now, this fancy pleased Miss Machin, but she repressed it, saying quickly: "It's the breeze blowing them. It's just the wind!" She got up and shut the window with a decisive slam, and Mr. Pinadeck blinked and went on dictating as if he had never stopped. But the little pot-hooks danced now, dizzily, and she thought of oculists' advertisements that said not to neglect your sight too long. Just then the telephone rang for Mr. Pinadeck, so she looked away from her notes, and when she glanced back at them again they had fallen into orderly ranks, as the symbols of efficient commerce should do.

Mr. Pinadeck's voice penetrated her consciousness. "Not Jerry Turpin? Jerry, my dear boy! . . . I shouldn't, I'm—very busy . . . Lunch? At the club, then? Noon, sharp!"

Mr. Pinadeck hung up.

"A friend of old days, Miss Machin!" He looked distressed. "I suppose I shouldn't spend the time, should I? . . . One of the old crowd—we used often to lunch at the club together. Was that half-past eleven I heard?"

"Yes, sir!"

"One more letter, Miss Machin, please!"

When his voice came to "Faithfully yours," it trailed off in such a way that Miss Machin sat absolutely still, watching her employer. He said, at length: "That will be the last, my dear!" His voice seemed very small and far away. He tried to get up but, like his secretary, seemed held to the chair. "I'm a bit tired," he said. "A bit tired! I must go home and have time for quiet. A little quiet

time, when a man sits down with his soul! That is no more than fair, is it?"

Miss Machin said, almost harshly, because something had to be done, some words spoken:

"But the lunch, Mr. Pinadeck?"

He started.

"Eh? Yes, of course! Lunch at the club! At twelve, I said, didn't I?" He rose. His hands reached forward as if for support, but they ended in caressing the cleared surface of the desk. "A lot of business has passed over that desk, Miss Machin!" He paused and seemed to forget her. "The fellows gave me the desk when we were married. She used to come down to the office—I can see her sitting on the corner of it—just there—" He pitched a little forward, arms extended queerly; then straightened. "The names are all on the plate, Miss Machin. Six of them. They've all gone on—but Jerry. One thing and another—two in foreign lands, one at sea. And the date: 1888! See it there?" He suddenly began to hurry on his light fawn coat and his grey felt hat. Miss Machin felt impotent to say the things she wanted to. Then he came back. He touched the smooth top of the desk again. Coat on, he sat in the chair, swinging a little on the swivel. "A lot of business," he repeated. "And the chair is—an old friend." He rose with sudden briskness, took both her hands in his, said "God bless you!" quite cheerfully, and was gone. The impotence still remained upon Miss Machin until, when she ran out into the office and told the chief clerk something was terribly wrong, it was too late. Mr. Pinadeck had left. She telephoned the club after a while, and found he had arrived, and reproached herself for silly imaginings.

VI

The club to which Mr. Pinadeck belonged was pinched away in a narrow space, and made insignificant by high office buildings jostling it at either elbow. Young bloods, passing it, held their immature noses in the air and referred to it as "a mouldy old pest-house"—the pests, of course, being men of ripe years who frequented it and lapsed, on the least provocation, into interminable reminiscence.

Into its gloomy dignity, Mr. Pinadeck passed, as one quite at home. A very elderly man, in bottle-green breeches, and tailed coat that would have been shabby had the light been unkindly bright, acknowledged his presence with just the right degree of familiar yet obsequious greeting, and beetled, with bushy brows, at an impudent page who took Mr. Pinadeck's coat and hat.

"I'm expecting Mr. Turpin, Baynes."

"Mr. Jerry Turpin, sir? Hasn't come in yet, sir. It will be nice to see him

about the club again, sir."

Light answered light in the eyes of both men—reminiscent light. Mr. Pinadeck moved on, casually. He made, indeed, a round of the place, and, as the hour was still early for the main luncheon crowd, had hall and library and smoking-room largely to himself. High, panelled walls; period furniture; deep old carpets; pictures in great frames, indifferently lighted but cryptically alive because of that—nothing was changed. The same magazines on the same tables; not a modern note, only the best of the past that had weathered competition of the other sort. And, in it all, a subtle mustiness—not unpleasant—of fading things, of ancient leather, of stale smoke, blended like a trail down the years. This pungency from the past Mr. Pinadeck sniffed, as at a rich bouquet. He returned to the desk eventually.

"Is the Green Room taken to-day, Baynes?"

"No, sir."

"I shall require it, Baynes!"

"How many covers, sir?"

"Six."

Baynes' eyes opened, then the lids closed discreetly down. His shoulders, under their green epaulettes and tarnished braid, wriggled, then straightened.

"There's the menu, sir, if you would care to order in advance." He tendered a crested card.

Mr. Pinadeck ticked items with a gold pencil.

"I should like you to serve it yourself, Baynes!"

"Why sir, I'm afraid—"

And then Mr. Pinadeck looked at him squarely. And Baynes shifted under his green uniform, which was easy to do, because he had begun to shrink a little in flesh, and the green material was guaranteed.

"Very good, sir! I shall arrange it."

"I'll ring when we're ready for the soup, Baynes."

"Very good, sir!"

So, presently, there was the bell sending its summons; and Baynes, in a rôle from which he had long since been graduated, not without embarrassment carrying out his part. Mr. Pinadeck was seated at the head of the table in the privacy of the Green Room, where Baynes had, in the old days, often served a company of six. Holding the tray of soup high, Baynes entered, and stared.

"You rang, Mr. Pinadeck?"

"Yes. You may serve the soup, Baynes!"

“But, sir—”

Baynes got no farther. A lifetime of professional repression alone saved him. Gravely he went about his task; when he left the room, and the green door swung stealthily to behind him, his body felt moist all over, with a cold moistness, and on his immaculate serving napkin soup had been spilled like the palish blood of an old man. He sat in a gloomy corner, watching the chef, who was a full-blooded modern, very substantial, and therefore, for the moment, gratifying to Baynes. The bell rang again. Baynes stood up. He wiped his brow with the new serving napkin, a slip of which he had not been guilty since somewhere in the seventies, when he had been in cheap restaurant service and had learned no better. Then he hurried in, flinging open the stealthy green door.

“You may remove the plates, Baynes!”

“The soup was—all right—sir?”

He had to say that. It was professional jargon, and could be clutched at like the ridiculous straw it was.

“Quite, Baynes! Perhaps a trifle salty. I think Mr. Lansing found his a little too seasoned.”

Baynes’ tray, fortunately still empty, clattered to the ground.

“Mr. Lansing, sir? Mr. Lansing!” His face was grey-green, but perhaps the light struck back from the old furnishings. “Lost at sea, sir. In ninety-eight. Oh, my God, sir, what are you saying?”

The noise seemed to rouse Mr. Pinadeck. He raised himself a little, his thin, white hands clutching the arms of his chair. He got up, waving aside any help from Baynes. From place to place he went, touching the worn green leather of empty chairs. Five places; then back to his own. That, too, he touched in its emptiness, and Baynes was almost provoked to a little cry. Mr. Pinadeck put out a hand then and touched Baynes; and Baynes retreated, until suddenly he was granted sense to see that he must—of—of them all—stand firm!

A hand closed, grippingly, on Baynes’ arm. The other arm of Mr. Pinadeck, napkin still in hand, was flung up against his forehead.

“I’m afraid—I’m not—very well, Baynes! Things—things—your arm, Baynes! And a glass of water. Thank you, Baynes! I wonder if you’d call a cab!”

“Taxi, sir!” said Baynes, almost rebukingly. He was thinking of how all the gentlemen, in those days, came and went in—cabs.

Baynes helped him out, right to the street, to find a conveyance; there were always some about. A prowling hackney-cab, one of the remaining few, came

by. Baynes lifted his hand and signalled before he could stop himself. The cab drew up. Mr. Pinadeck was driven away. Baynes went greyly into the club, to find a telephone message for Mr. Pinadeck saying that Mr. Jerry Turpin was sorry but he couldn't make it for lunch that day.

VII

The cabman who drove Mr. Pinadeck—a forlorn fragment of a picturesque and passing day—hid a shrewd business instinct beneath a settled air of melancholy resignation. "The old boy," appraised the driver, "don't know where he's goin', but he's good for it all right. Looks as though he needed a good airin'. We'll take him to the Park, Daisy!" Occasionally, looking back, he confirmed this impression, though once a troubled flash crossed his face, like a startled rabbit scurrying across a melancholy and unkempt field. "We don't want nothin' like that on our hands, Daisy!" he mumbled. "Inquests is an awful waste of time—and they get to askin' uncomfortable things!" He spoke aloud: "I say, guv'nor, what d'ye think of them Johnnies who went on that end-of-the-world racket last night?" Mr. Pinadeck's head jerked up; encouraged, the driver went on: "It suited *me* all right. I managed four fares up there on the hillside for to see 'em. Though I don't say it weren't a bit creepy for to see 'em all there! Children too, along of 'em, poor little 'uns, chippin' away for all the world like a frightened bird does, and their parents tellin' 'em to keep quiet!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Pinadeck. "But it got away, driver. It flew right up into the blue."

The cabman coughed.

"Aw, come up, Daisy!" he said sharply.

They swung into the Park with a soft sound of wheels, beside and above them the foliage of chestnuts and the uprearing of leafy elms.

"It was the noise," explained Mr. Pinadeck, suddenly. "How very quiet it is here. Stop, driver!"

Mr. Pinadeck glanced at his watch.

"It is scarcely a quarter to two. I can have an hour of quiet. Wait here, driver!"

Mr. Pinadeck disappeared around the shrubbery. In a quiet aisle, between slender new trees, was a bench. Mr. Pinadeck sat down and took off his hat. Somewhere, nearby, water was given voice by passage over rocks—a tiny stream of silver droppings. Fragrance of unseen flowers drifted by on a wind unsuspected but for its perfume. A bumblebee swung past in a dizzy orbit, a little flash of gold against the green, and was gone. Two white butterflies hung as if on invisible wires, suspended but animated, above a pool of light on the

path. “This will do,” said Mr. Pinadeck gently. “It is very quiet here.” Not far away children’s voices sounded, but they did not disturb; they belonged as much as the murmur of innumerable insects, and the continuous subdued melody of unseen birds.

Mr. Pinadeck had just settled down when a new sound reached him. Someone was sobbing with subdued bitterness. A little child, a ridiculously tiny thing of blue and pink, came around the bend. One chubby hand was to this cherub’s mouth, another to an eye.

“Hullo!” said Mr. Pinadeck. “What’s the trouble, little girl?”

“M-my dolly fell in the water—and B-b-bobby can’t weach her, and she’ll be dwownded!”

“Well,” said Mr. Pinadeck, “that’ll never do! Here—you take my hand.”

The pool was quite large; the fountain in the centre drew all the flotsam to itself. Bobby, bare-legged, sailor trousers rolled high, was flirting with danger on the margin.

“If my—legs was longer I could get her!” he told Mr. Pinadeck. “But I’m —I’m kinda wet now.”

He looked approvingly at Mr. Pinadeck’s height. Mr. Pinadeck glanced around as if for inspiration. The Park seemed deserted here, not a soul in sight.

“My dolly’ll have all her nice pink cheeks off!” the cherub wailed.

Mr. Pinadeck regarded the pond dubiously. A small finger prodded him in the stern.

“Your legs is good and long,” hinted Bobby, helpfully.

There was a bench nearby. Mr. Pinadeck sat down, and began hastily to remove shoes and socks, and to turn up his immaculate trousers. Youthful sorrow had turned to excited joy.

The rescue was accomplished.

“Gee, the water was cold, wasn’t it? You’re kinda shiverin’, aren’t you?”

It took Mr. Pinadeck a long time to drag on his socks over his wet feet and restore his boots again. In the shelter of shrubbery, the cabman, a little worried over his fare, watched, whistling softly to himself. “Better get on with it,” he said, anxiously, “before the squirrels get him!” He moved out into the open.

“Ready, guv’nor?”

Mr. Pinadeck started.

“Why, what time is it?”

“Oh, about a quarter to three, guv’nor,” said the driver, stretching a point.

“The meeting,” said Mr. Pinadeck hastily, “is at three. Good-bye, my

dears!" He followed the cabman. "You must drive me at once to the Consolidated Transport Building."

At the door of that building, the cabman accepted a fat, generous fare, and felt faithless and vile when it was quite too late.

VIII

Not until he was actually in the Consolidated Mines office did Mr. Pinadeck consult his watch again. It said half-past two! Mr. Pinadeck shook it, held it to his ear, then proved it faithful by reference to the big office clock on the wall.

"You're early, Pinadeck," said Gregorly, as he passed briskly, papers in hand. "Have a chair."

Mr. Pinadeck, however, moved over to the window, high up above contemporary buildings; his eyes seemed to seek a patch of green in the distance, that was the Park. Perhaps, he was thinking of the quiet aisle between slender trees, of the sound of liquid music, of a faintly-perfumed wind, of two milk-white butterflies suspended in quivering sunlight. A director spoke his name. Mr. Pinadeck turned. The director had two jokes to tell and a question to ask about some stock that promised well; by that time three others joined them and the talk became general, and thick blue clouds of smoke curled up from fat cigars. Outside, the sound, as of innumerable insects, told of the shareholders assembling.

The cogs moved on: through a brief directors' meeting, at which Mr. Pinadeck said nothing; through the shareholders' meeting, at which Mr. Pinadeck spoke. That was later, when the infection of selfishness had spread through the shareholders like a disease, and an infection of self-righteousness through the directors. Recriminations became more heated; the chairman failing to get order, Mr. Pinadeck rose.

Gregorly whispered to a fellow director: "They're goin' to listen to him! Hope he don't spill the beans, though. Marchmont's treatin' him—a bit—humph!" They nodded, knowingly, uneasily.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Pinadeck, "you will forgive my being brief—but I am—very pressed for time to-day. I had been hoping to have the afternoon—a little to myself; but that, of course, does not concern you. The matter at stake is this: there are a good many who seem to doubt the authority of our directors to donate company funds, to the extent of ten thousand dollars, to local hospital work. Ten thousand dollars," said Mr. Pinadeck, slowly, "is a deal of money, gentlemen, but it means—it means the lives of little children, the health of men and women, sunlight, attention, fresh air—ten thousand dollars worth of life,

gentlemen." He seized an empty inkwell and turned it upside down. "If this were an hour-glass, gentlemen, in which the—sands of life—were running down, and you saw it ebbing, ebbing—for some soul—and you could provide more sand—" He broke off. "I think," he smiled, "you would be very quick to ratify this!" He looked about at the faces. "Perhaps," said Mr. Pinadeck, "in fact, naturally, you cannot see it just as I do. The sands of time—they run so fast—so fast when the grains get low in the glass!"

He broke off and stood as if, thought Gregorly, he were listening for the first shareholder to object. A clock struck four.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, if I—if I hurry off—" He looked about him, apologetically. "Mrs. Tibbs'—my housekeeper's niece—a little family trouble, you understand—I promised to see what could be done—" Gregorly, in alarmed annoyance, hastily pulled him down. But someone, for the shareholders, was speaking, something about ratifying the deal; he was sure the shareholders, under the circumstances—

Mr. Pinadeck, meanwhile, had gone. Gregorly, putting the motion, promptly adjourned the meeting. With the director next to him, he hurried out. From a window they looked down upon the street. Mr. Pinadeck could be seen issuing from the door. He looked up and down the street, and then set off at a queer, quick pace, almost like a run.

"One of us," said Gregorly, haltingly, "should, perhaps, go with him—wherever he is going. What say, Croft? I'll be tied up for a few minutes more—but—"

"Got an engagement myself," said the fellow director hastily. They both looked out again, then drew their heads in, and their eyes met and fell. Gregorly whistled tunelessly, and the fellow director spoke. "It's too late now, anyway," he said.

IX

At eight o'clock, when Mr. Pinadeck reached his own doorstep again, Mrs. Tibbs was awaiting him. She would have it out with him! She would put an end to this! As she stood aside for him to pass into the hallway, the dining-room clock began to strike. And, in the dining-room, eight trumpeters, one after the other, blew on silver trumpets, which again was a very ridiculous thing for Mrs. Tibbs to conjure up out of a wooden imagination.

"Dinner is all ready!" announced Mrs. Tibbs, sternly.

"I'm not very hungry."

"Had a good lunch?"

“Yes, at the club. With some old—” He put his hand, suddenly, to his heart. She caught his arm.

“You’re done out, that’s what! You’d better eat.”

He allowed himself to be led into the room; she took hat and coat from him and saw him seated. There were candles burning on the table; green candles a little faded from long standing in occasional sunlight—faded bottle-green, like the livery of Baynes, or the chair-leather in the Green Room at the club. “Lights are off,” said Mrs. Tibbs. “I telephoned the company. There’s some electrical disturbance interfering with their lines.”

The candle-light dealt gently with Mr. Pinadeck’s face, filling up the tired lines with mellow, intangible colour. A vagrant wind stirred the curtains in the window-embrasure, moved restlessly about the room, and tilted the candle-flame into oblique, smoking torches.

“Shall I close the window? There’s a chill in the air to-night.”

“No, please! But a lovely evening, Mrs. Tibbs. The promise of the morning is fulfilled. It might have been so different—wild and blowy, that kind of thing!”

Mrs. Tibbs felt the need of practical speech.

“Joe was taken quite sickish this afternoon,” she said.

“Joe?”

“They think it’s appendicitis. We got him home in a taxi.”

“Poor old Joe!” Mr. Pinadeck, wiping his mouth on the napkin, rose hastily. “Why—I—I must go and see him—at once—no, no—you don’t understand! The morning won’t do.” He moved towards the door. “Oh, by the way, Mrs. Tibbs, I arranged that matter for your niece to-day!”

Mrs. Tibbs tried to thank him. By the time she had regained her aplomb, he had gone. He went down by the gravel path, and, turning the corner by the hedge, was accosted by a large man in black.

“I have been waiting for you,” said the man in black, eagerly. “You have a further message for us from the Lord, brother? My people have sent me.”

Mr. Pinadeck stared at him.

“Yes, yes,” he said, gently. “You are the man. I remember now. But you must not detain me. There is a sick man I must see. I’ll be back later. You really will have to excuse me!”

“But, brother, the time grows short!”

“Very short!” said Mr. Pinadeck, moving off quickly.

The man in black waited. A throbbing, excited impatience stirred in him; an emotion that deepened into fanatical expectancy when he discovered that

the darkness, into which Mr. Pinadeck had vanished, was being slowly overhung and shot through with an unusual greenish light.

X

The trees in Mr. Pinadeck's garden were standing very straight and still, like sentinels in uniform of silvered green. Once or twice, as when Mr. Pinadeck, coming from the gate and crossing the velvet stretch of lawn, sank wearily into a garden chair, a shiver passed through their ranks.

The man in black slipped stealthily forward. He touched Mr. Pinadeck's arm.

"Brother, it's coming soon?"

"Very soon," said Mr. Pinadeck, less eagerly, and then, "It's been a crowded day. It's gone so quickly. I haven't had much time to think! So many things! And yet—" He relapsed into meditation that the man in black felt impelled to interrupt. "You have, perhaps, a last message, brother? I must go back to my people!"

Mr. Pinadeck opened his eyes.

"A last message? Of course! A watering-pot," said Mr. Pinadeck, with evident effort. "Ask Mrs. Tibbs, please—if you will be so kind."

The man in black sprang away, stiffening.

"Blasphemy!" he shouted. "Blasphemy!"

Mrs. Tibbs, hearing the sound of voices, came running out. She eyed the man in black suspiciously.

"Well, what do you want?" she questioned.

He was silent, but Mr. Pinadeck answered: "The watering-pot, Mrs. Tibbs, please. I promised old Joe—one of his flower beds, you know—left unwatered when he was taken sick—"

Mrs. Tibbs, against her will, obeyed. She brought the heavy vessel of water, filled from the outside tap.

"Now, you just tell me which, Mr. Pinadeck—"

Above them, the greenish light had expanded, and now, like an army of lancers, with fiery pennants waving, shrouded figures moved across the sky in weird manoeuvre.

Mr. Pinadeck did not see them. He was eyeing the watering-pot. He had struggled to his feet. Mrs. Tibbs, to disconcert him in his determination, said: "Look at the sky, Mr. Pinadeck. Did you ever see them Northern Lights so lovely?" He did not seem to hear. He was speaking to himself. "I promised old

Joe, I'd do it. And I've a fancy to give the flowers—a drink—myself." She relinquished the pot; he moved forward unsteadily, and slow rain fell from the sprinklered spout. A scent of moist earth and growing things floated up. Mr. Pinadeck smiled. "Look!" he cried suddenly. "They're dancing! They're dancing together in the sunlight!" He paused; the pot was running more slowly. "But it's night," he said, his free hand to his forehead. "It's the end of the day—and they're dancing in the light!" The watering-pot spilled its last contents, unheeded. Mr. Pinadeck was gazing up raptly. Splinters of light ran across the sky: a shifting pageant of red and blue and rose, and always that queer bottle-green, shimmering, dancing, growing, dominating.

The pot fell from Mr. Pinadeck's hand, and a last gurgle of water escaped to touch the root of a neglected flower. "Mine eyes—" said Mr. Pinadeck, and stopped, swaying. Mrs. Tibbs caught him by one arm, the man in black by the other. Mr. Pinadeck seemed to be reaching for words that would not come; an agony possessed both watchers lest they should fail him. And then his voice came clear:

" 'Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord—' "

They got him into the chair; his eyes were still fixed on the heavens, but the man in black, with a sudden movement, went forward and gently closed them. His own eyes had lost something of their burning hardness, the fire in them softened, as now, above, the lights of the aurora faded slowly into an ordinary sky.

"The Lord is good!" said the man in black. "He has tarried! There was only one ready for His appearing."

Mrs. Tibbs had fled into the house. She must call a doctor. The man out there might be wrong. As she hurried—even on this desperate, vain mission—she stopped, cupping her hand to her ear to listen, as if she had caught this trick from her employer. But no sound of silver trumpeters filled the empty house. It was only a clock striking the hour of ten.

1927.

I SHALL SEARCH AGAIN

I

LAST week-end I went down into the country. It was hard to find. The roads were full of tourists hurrying here and there; the sides of the roads had hoardings where the views were best, advertising this and that in which I had no interest; at every turn was a barbecue or a stand for hot-dogs; and on ancient cottage steps were antiques, false and true, exposed for sale.

But, in a wood, I found Deirdre.

I must, of course, have wandered off the beaten track. Yet I am convinced it was not far away. One moment there was the hooting rush of cars, the fumes of petrol, the smell of harassed dust; almost the next there was the quiet of trees stirred faintly by the wind, a subtle scent of lilacs, and everywhere the pungency of unhurried and productive earth. One moment there were the strained faces of motorists behind dusty windshields, the goggled heads of motor-cyclists, the occasional wary pedestrianism of a wayfarer afoot like myself—and then there was only Deirdre.

She was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, reading. There was a brook nearby; you could, if you listened, hear its voice, though you could not see it. Her feet were on a carpet of moss, starred with some flowers I did not recognise, very small and perfect, and not unlike anemones. I came upon her so suddenly I was afraid I had startled her. But her eyes looked into mine only with expectancy and pleasure.

"Why did you not come before?" she said.

I asked her, a little dazed, whom she meant. She smiled, as if delighted at a joke.

"You, of course!"

It was absurd that I should feel gratified. But I was in no mood to rectify a mistake. Here was a place only for acceptance.

"I am sorry to be late!" I said humbly.

She nodded her forgiveness. Was she, I asked myself, a child precociously mature, or was hers a maturity that had remained childlike? Her age? I could not fix it, nor did I wish to; it was sufficient that she stirred in me something that no mere child could stir. Her face? Her form? Her dress? It is queer that even now I cannot give these, though psychologists tell me that the face of the

one most loved is the last to obey a mental summons. Oddly, I can remember the book she was reading, but then a copy of it is in my own library. I asked her about the book, partly to see her face light up with interest, partly to hear her voice again, partly to conquer my last embarrassment. “It’s here,” she said eagerly, “about you!” She read—but her eyes did not require the aid of the printed lines—

“ ‘And the wind
Is everywhere
Whispering
So urgently!

‘You will die
Unless you do
Find a mate
To whisper to.’ ”

She closed the book. Her eyes sought mine, almost in reproach.

“I was afraid,” she whispered, “you were going to let me die! And then you came!”

“Yes,” I said, and some haunting fear, nebulous and untouchable, quietened my voice. “Yes,” I said, “I came, my dear.”

“You may call me Deirdre,” she smiled.

“Deirdre!” I said.

And then we were silent, listening to the urgent whispering of the wind in the trees, even in the leaves of the low bushes, even in the grass hiding close to the earth, though I swear there was no movement of air perceptible to break the stillness of that wood, and the essence of earth and flowers seemed too pervasive to be wind-blown.

II

She sprang up at last.

“Shall we go now?” she cried.

“But where?” I asked, troubled. I had no desire to leave this wood.

“But I have so many things I want to show you!” said Deirdre.

She took my hand; at touch of it, I felt the slightest recoil.

“I’m afraid,” I apologised, ruefully considering my fingers, “that I’m rather soiled. The roads are so beastly crowded, you know, and dusty at week-ends—everybody on the go—hurrying off—”

She looked at me with interest.

"Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere! Places, you know!"

"Why?"

"To see them, I suppose."

She looked puzzled.

"But how can they see things when they hurry so?"

"Well—" I shrugged.

"And do they come back rested?"

I laughed.

"Not that kind. More likely hot, and cross, and tired!"

Her laughter joined mine, then ended suddenly in a sigh.

"But what a pity!" she said. She considered me. "And they've dirtied you, too!" She looked doubtful but eager. "There's a brook right near here. We could wash you there, you know!"

"We?" I caught up the word.

"Oh, but you'll let me help, won't you?"

I reclined on the bank of the tiny stream. There was a pool in the rock, basin-shaped, into which, one at a time, she dipped my hands. The ecstasy of her touch at first made me dizzy; then, rested and sleepy, I half closed my eyes. She must have taken off her shoes and stockings, for I am sure that what I saw whitely in the brook was the movement of her feet. My hands finished, she laved my face, bringing water, soaked from the brook, in her handkerchief. An intolerably happy drowsiness overtook me. Then I became conscious of her leaning over me, her face close to mine, her breath upon me; and my eyes, when I opened them, were held by hers.

"Aren't you going—to kiss me?" she whispered.

I was afraid. My heart raced in me like an engine, pumping the hot blood. I tried as best I could to hint those things a man, knowing the world, might hint when he would not take even slight advantage of a child. Her eyes, wide-opened, regarded me.

"But why?" she asked.

I drew her down and kissed her. Her lips were cool against my hot ones; they stilled the racing blood in me. I cannot explain it, but for the moment I was one with the tranquillity of stream, and earth, and of a wood pregnant with beauty-haunted, bird-populated spring.

We talked again, I lying lazily on one elbow watching her with gratitude; she seated nearby, her young bare arms—amazingly beautiful in their sculptured, half-hinted-at maturity—clasped about her knees.

She said, happily: “And you’ll never leave me again, will you?”

I replied, unwillingly, that I had things to do; that in the city I was grappling with a problem. I told her that in the city there were granaries full to bursting, but men walked the streets haunted by the spectre of hunger.

She said, “But why?”—and took me to where things grew in the soil. I think we went through a field and down over a hill, but there, at any rate, was a gate through which we passed, and a cottage guarded by a dog who barked welcome, jumping up and spilling a cascade of brown-eyed puppies, who rolled like drunken sailors down the path to greet us, too.

Deirdre gathered half-a-dozen of the creatures in her arms and offered them to me.

“Aren’t they dears?” she challenged me, and I envied the remaining one that was nestled against her cheek. “Do you like my house?”

I looked.

“Immensely,” I told her. “But—you don’t live here alone?”

She broke a sprig of lilac from one of the trees that stood each side of the doorway. She loved lilacs, she said, even when they weren’t in flower, even in the coldest weather, for at the least excuse they budded fatly, green and promising. Then she answered my question, smilingly. “At least we have this week-end all alone. Isn’t it nice—just you and me?” She pulled the sprig into my buttonhole, patting it into place.

“Deirdre!” I cried. She sprang away. I tried to catch her, to kiss her again, but this time, laughingly, half-teasingly, she eluded me, running—the dog and one puppy at her heels—down the path and around the side of the house. Encumbered with my puppies, I followed.

“Come and see my garden!” she called. She was out of sight now; I could not find her, but her voice kept calling until at last it led me to Deirdre’s garden.

She waited now until I caught up to her, allowing me to take her arm. Through an arbour of budding vine she led me, to the vegetable garden beyond.

“We can grow everything we need here,” she said, explaining the allocations. In forcing-beds, now freed from glass, I could see the tender tips of lettuce and other young greens. “In the autumn,” said Deirdre, “we can put

away all we shall need for winter use." I wanted to question the pronoun, but was content to accept its inclusiveness. There was a warm, pleasant odour of earth, of plant life, of mouldy straw, of fresh fertiliser. I recalled, vividly, a score of farmyards I had known in childhood. At one side, adequately fenced in with wire, were fluffy blobs of yellow, chirping, poking, pecking with immature bills, under the absurdly important tutelage of mother hens. Deirdre let me hold one little bright ball; its heart beat throbbingly against my palm, until the steadiness and harmlessness of my hand were assured it.

"Put it back now," ordered Deirdre, childishly eager. "Oh, my pigs! You really must see my little piglets!"

She took me back through the garden itself. Lilacs rioted everywhere, and with a strange inclusiveness overhung late and early flowers. I am certain I can recall narcissi, tall and slender on their high green stems, the profusion of staunch and multicoloured hyacinths, and, everywhere, the variegated flame of tulips.

"You really must see my roses when they come!" cried Deirdre, pleased with my delight. "You'd hardly believe—to look at them now—how many there'll be! You will, won't you?"

Her eyes, I thought, were full of an eager but wistful entreaty, as if, perhaps, someone had failed her before. I glanced at the rose-bushes, close-pruned almost to the crown, and I recalled the tyranny of time. I must in some way have spoken of this, for I heard Deirdre's voice saying:

"But what is time?"

I stared at her. She was perfectly grave and questioning. I had an odd feeling, a mad whimsy, that perhaps she was one who had found escape from the twin tyrannies of time and space. I tried to shake this, but it persisted. With it came a poignant loneliness, as of one left behind by inexorable limitations.

"Deirdre," I cried, like a fool, "take me with you there!"

She smiled at me and took my hand. I clung to hers, as to my mad fancy, trying to believe—even believing. For once my body seemed unimportant and perfectly docile, obeying only mental and spiritual laws. So we went down the garden path, so we went together beyond the garden. I looked to the ground beneath me to make sure of my footing, lost hold of Deirdre's hand, and stumbled.

She helped me up, her voice reproachful.

"Oh look! You've got earth all over you!"

I tried to brush it off, but the stains were on my knees. She shook her head a little, as if at a child. I felt clumsy and inept.

"Well, come along," said Deirdre, sighing. "I was going to show you my

pigs, wasn't I? Here we are! Aren't they perfectly adorable?"

I tried to imagine that in her voice was a wistfulness, a disappointment, a sense of balked adventure, but my mad fancy had come to grief. I saw only a litter of little pigs, the most ridiculously clean, pink little pigs I have ever seen.

IV

By way of the garden, we returned to the house. She led me, not to the front door, but to a more intimate entrance at the side. Flower boxes, holding some early crimson bloom with which I was not acquainted, were on either side of the steps, overshadowed by three tall, sentinel trees.

"Listen!" said Deirdre, catching my arm. The poplar leaves were moving. She quoted again, softly:

" 'And the wind
Is everywhere
Whispering
So urgently!

'You will die
Unless you do
Find a mate
To whisper to.'

If you hadn't come to-day," she said simply, "I should have died."

I tried laughter that was not valid. Something was suffocating me.

"Let's go in!" said Deirdre.

I shook my head, wishing with all my heart to enter with her.

"Why not?"

"I—I mustn't!"

"But why?" asked Deirdre, puzzled.

How could I tell her that if I went in with her one or other of us would not come out again? I did not know why I was sure of this. I could not talk to her of a sublimation that I would gladly risk, and its opposite which I would not risk for her. I was not certain myself of what I meant; it was intuition, perhaps —or inhibition. The dog and her puppies came, and two of the brown-eyed youngsters licked the polish on my boots, and one smelt the mudstains on my knees, raising itself with difficulty on unstable hind legs. The wind was now perceptible; it was restless and in voice, calling from far places.

Deirdre stood up suddenly; she had been sitting with me on the step.

“I know,” she said, “you’re going away!”

I faced her.

“Yes, Deirdre, I’m going away! But how did you know?”

She turned her face from me. I fancied I caught the sound and meaning of words. I was jealous. I took her by the shoulders roughly.

“Deirdre,” I accused, “what did you say? Why did you say, ‘They always go away?’ Are there others? Deirdre, look at me, have there been any—others? Answer me, Deirdre!”

She seemed to come back from a distance.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she said. “I’ve always been here, alone, waiting!”

“For me?”

“For you!” said Deirdre.

The wind blew dust in the nostrils of one of the puppies; it sneezed.

“You’re afraid of me!” said Deirdre, sadly.

“Deirdre!” I cried, seizing her and kissing her again and again. “I love you, Deirdre! All this hour that we have had together I have loved you with a passion too deep—too deep,” I said, a sense of suffocation, of limitation upon me, “for an earthly love. Oh, Deirdre, if I did not love you so much I would stay! Some day, perhaps, I will come again and see your roses!”

I turned then and ran. There was a field, there was a wood, there was a road along which a wind blew the dust, there was a shrieking horn warning me to get out of the way, and an angry voice shouting anathemas to day-dreamers on the highway.

• • • • •

Deirdre, I have given you your hour, and you have given me eternity. I shall lose it again, as I have lost you. I shall not give up the search. Some day, when I have time and am at a loss again, I shall go and seek for you. I shall look for the wood, for the house, for the garden, for the poplars that stand sentinel, and the lilacs that bud fatly even when there is no hint of bloom, and the yellow chickens, and the pigs that are so ridiculously pink, and the dog with the brown-eyed puppies. But I shall look with pain prophetic in my heart, knowing you are not there.

1931.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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.

[The end of *One Generation Away* by Leslie Gordon Barnard]