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Twelve memorable stories by the famous Nobel Prize author

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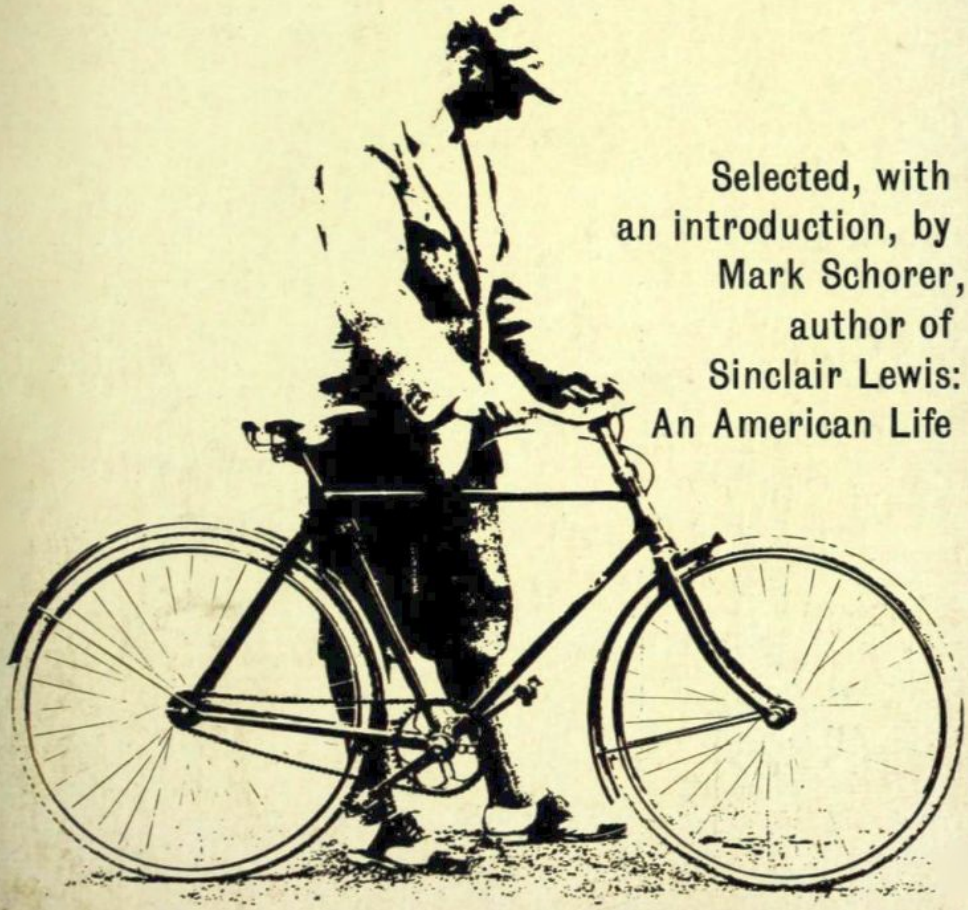
I'm a Stranger Here Myself

AND OTHER STORIES BY

Sinclair Lewis



Selected, with an introduction, by Mark Schorer, author of Sinclair Lewis: An American Life

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SINCLAIR LEWIS

I'm a Stranger Here Myself and Other Stories

Selected, with an introduction, by

MARK SCHORER

A LAUREL EDITION

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I'M A STRANGER HERE MYSELF
(*1916*)

Travel broadens the mind. It also quickens the sympathies and bestows on one a ready fund of knowledge. And it is useful to talk about when you get back home.

The Johnsons have now been broadened and quickened. The signature "J. Johnson & Wife," followed by "Northernapolis, G. C.," appears in hotel registers from Florida to Maine. "G. C.," of course, stands for their state, the state with the highest bank-deposits and moral standards of any in the Union—the grand old state of God's Country. Let me tell *you*, sir, whenever you meet a man from God's country, he's willing to tell you so. And does.

J. Johnson & Wife had raised their children and their mortgage, and had bought a small car and a large fireless cooker, when the catastrophe happened. Mrs. Johnson was defeated for the presidency of the Wednesday and Chautauqua Reading Circle by a designing woman who had talked herself into office on the strength of having spent a winter at Pasadena, California, observing the West. Mrs. Johnson went home with her hat-brim low and her lips tight together, and announced to Mr. Johnson that they would travel, and be broadened and quickened.

Mr. Johnson meekly observed that it would be nice to explore the Florida Everglades, and to study business conditions in New York. So, in December, they left their eldest son in charge of the business, and started on an eight-months' tour of the Picturesque Resorts of Our Own Land. In fact, they were going to have an itinerary. Mrs. Johnson's second cousin, Bessie, had suggested the itinerary. Cousin Bessie had spent two weeks in Florida. She said it was all nonsense to go to places like Palm Beach and St. Augustine—just because rich snobs from New York went there was no reason why independent folks from God's Country, that did their own thinking, should waste their good money. So, with Cousin Bessie's help, Mrs. Johnson made out the following schedule of the beauty-spots of Florida:

Jacksonville, East Palatka, South Daytona, North Tampa, West Miami, Sulphur Water, Jigger Mounds, Diamond Back Ridge, Flatwoods, New Iowa, New Dublin, New Cincinnati, and New New York.

It takes a lot of high-minded heroism to stick faithfully to an itinerary,

what with having to catch trains at midnight and all, but with the negligible assistance of Mr. Johnson, Mrs. Johnson stuck to it, though they often had to do two towns in one day. And oh! the rewards in culture! It is true they didn't have time to stop and look for orange-groves or Seminoles or millionaires, but they often felt as though they could smell the odor of oranges wafted to them on the gay breezes, though that may perhaps have been due to fellow-tourists eating oranges and peanuts. Certainly they saw plenty of palms, and at Jacksonville, in the Boston Museum of Curiosities, Including the Biggest Fish Ever Killed, in Fierce Marine Battle, by Capt. Pedro O'Toole, the Johnsons beheld a real live alligator.

After the trials and weariness of their explorations, Mrs. Johnson permitted them to settle down for a six-weeks' rest at the Pennsylvania House, in New Chicago, the City Beautiful of the Southland.

New Chicago may not be as old as St. Augustine and these towns that make such claims about antiquity, and heaven only knows if Ponce de Leon really did find any Fountain of Youth at all, and New Chicago may not be filled with a lot of millionaires chasing around in these wheel-chairs and drinking brandy and horse's necks, but New Chicago is neighborly, that's what it is, neighborly. And homey. It was founded by Northern capital, just for tourists. If a gentleman wishes to wear comfy old clothes, he doesn't find some snob in white pants looking askance at him. And New Chicago is so beautiful, and all modern conveniences—none of these rattletrap houses that you find in some Southern cities. It has forty miles of pavement, and nineteen churches, and is in general as spick and span as Detroit or Minneapolis. Why, when you go along the streets, with the cozy boarding-houses, and the well-built private houses of frame, or of ornamental brick with fancy porches and bay-windows and colored glass over the front door, and these nice new two-story concrete bungalows, you can scarcely tell you aren't in a suburb of New York or Chicago, it's all so wide-awake and nicely fixed up and full of Northern hustle. And there's very little danger of being thrown into contact with these lazy, shiftless, native Florida crackers, just fishermen and farmers and common, uninteresting people that have never heard about economics or osteopathy or New Thought or any modern movements. Not but what New Chicago is very Southern and resorty, you understand, with its palms and poinsettias and all sorts of exotic plants and beauty in general.

There isn't any liquor or dancing to tempt the men-folks, and there is an educational Chautauqua every January, with the very best entertainers, and finally New Chicago has, by actual measurement, more lineal miles of rocking chairs and nice women gossiping and knitting than Ormond and Daytona put together.

At first Mr. Johnson made signs of objecting to the fact that nobody at New Chicago seemed to go fishing. But the hotel and Board of Trade literature convinced him that there was the best fishing in the South within easy reach, and so he settled down and got a good deal of pleasure out of planning to go fishing some day; in fact, went so far as to buy some hooks at the drug store. He found some men from God's Country who were in the same line of business as himself, and they used to gather in the park and pitch quoits and talk about business conditions back home and have a perfectly hilarious time swapping jokes about Ford cars, and Mike and Pat, and Jakey and Ikey.

Mrs. Johnson also made many acquaintances, such nice, chatty, comfy people, who just took her in and told her about their grandchildren, and made her feel welcome right away.

You see, the minute you arrive at New Chicago, you go and register your name and address at the Board of Trade Building, and all the people from your state look you up immediately, and you have Wisconsin picnics, or Ohio card-parties, or New Hampshire parades, or Middle-West I.O.O.F. suppers. Almost every evening there is some jolly little state gathering in the parlor of one of the hotels, with recitations and songs—Gospel and humorous—and speeches about the state, if there are any lawyers present. Everybody has to do a stunt. Mrs. Johnson made such an impression at the God's Country Rustic Skule Party, when she got up and blushed and said, "I didn't know I was going to be called on for a piece, and I hadn't thought of anything to say, and after hearing all the nice speeches I guess I'll just say 'ditto'!" Mr. Johnson told her afterward that her stunt made the hit of the evening.

New Chicago was no less desirable from a standpoint of economy. For thirty-two dollars a week the Johnsons had three meals a day, nice, wholesome homey meals, with no French sauces and fancy fixin's, and a dainty room such as would, to quote the hotel prospectus, "Appeal to the finest lady of the land, or most hardened tourist, with handsome Michigan Chippendale bureau, two chairs in each room, and bed to lull you to happy dreams, after day spent in the jolly sports of New Chicago, strictly under new management, new linen of fine quality to appeal to heart of most fastidious, bathroom on each floor, ice water cheerfully brought by neat and obliging attendants."

If you were one of these nervous, strenuous folks who felt that you had to have a lot of young people, why, there were several nice young people in town, though it is true that there was quite a large proportion of older people who had reached the point where they were able to get away from business in the winter-time. Still there were some girls who played the piano, and knew pencil and paper games, and they were the life of the knitting circle with their gay young chatter, especially Miss Nellie Slavens, the well-known Iowa

professional reader, who scarcely looked a day over thirty, and was a college graduate, the South Dakota Dairy College. Then there was the clerk of Ocean Villa, right next door, such a sociable young man from Trenton, always in demand for parties, and looked so well in his West Palm Beach suit.

And if you wanted sports there were athletic exercises a-plenty, though there wasn't this crowd that show off their silk bathing-suits on the beach, and pay twenty-five dollars for an aeroplane ride, as they do at Palm Beach. Any bright day you could see eight or ten people in bathing at Rocky Shore. Almost every boarding house had a croquet ground, and three of them had tennis courts. The Mayberry sisters, Kittie and Jane, nice sensible girls of thirty or so, were often to be seen playing. And you could always get up a crowd and charter Dominick Segui's launch, when the engine was in repair, and have a trip down to the shell mound. So, you see, there was any amount of rational sport, and no need for anyone to go to these sporty places.

In short, the Johnsons found every day at New Chicago just one round of innocent pleasures. After a good, wholesome, hearty breakfast of oatmeal, steak, eggs, buckwheats, sausage, and coffee—none of these grits and cornbread that they have the nerve to offer you for breakfast some places in the South—the Johnsons read the *Northernapolis Herald*, which they got from a live, hustling newsdealer from Minneapolis, and had so much enjoyment out of learning about the deaths and sicknesses and all back home, though it did hurt Mrs. Johnson to see how the new president of the Wednesday Reading Circle was letting it run down. Then they went over to the drug store, run by a live, hustling Toledo man, and Mr. Johnson bought three Flor de Wheeling cigars, while Mrs. Johnson had a chocolate ice-cream soda and some souvenir post-cards. Then for the rest of the day they were free to walk, or talk, or just sit and be comfy on the porch of their hotel. And there was always such an interesting group of broad-gauged, conservative, liberal, wide-awake, homey, well-traveled folks on the porch to talk to.

For you who may not have been broadened and quickened, or had opportunities for elevating and informative talk, I will give an example of such a conversation as might have been heard on the porch of the Pennsylvania House at any time between seven-thirty a.m. and nine-thirty p.m., and I assure you it isn't a bit above the average run in New Chicago:

"Well, I see there's some new God's Country people come to town, Mr. Johnson—Willis M. Beaver and wife, from Monroe County. Staying at the Château Nebraska."

"Well, well! Why, I've met his brother at the state convention of Order of Peaweevils. Funny, him being here, way off in the Sunny South, and me knowing his brother. World's pretty small, after all. But still, it certainly is a

liberal education to travel."

"Oh, Mrs. Johnson, don't you want to come to our basket-weaving club? We make baskets out of these long pine needles, with raffia—"

Before Mrs. Johnson can answer her husband says, quick as a flash, with that ready wit of his, "Say, uh, Mrs. Bezuzus, I'm glad those pine needles are good for something anyway!"

"Ha, ha!" asserts Mr. Smith. "You said something there! Why, I'd rather have a West Virginia oak in my yard than all the pines and palms in Florida. Same with these early strawberries they talk so much about, not but what it's nice to write home to the folks that you're having strawberries this time of year, but I swear, we wouldn't feed 'em to hogs, up where I come from."

"You hit it right, Brother Smith." It is Dr. Bjones of Kansas speaking, and after Mrs. Bezuzus has suitably commented on the manners, garments, and social standing of some passing newlyweds, Dr. Bjones goes on in his forcible scientific manner: "Same with these Southern fish, not but what I like fresh sea-food and crabs, but I tell you these bass and whitings can't hold a candle to the fresh-water pickerel you get up North. Then these Floridians talk so much about how poisonous their darned old rattlesnakes are. Why, we got rattlers in Kansas that are just as bad any day!"

"But what gets me is the natives, Doc. Shiftless. What this country needs is some Northern hustle."

"That's so, Brother Snuck. Shiftless. And besides that—"

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, I want to show you the sweater I'm knitting."

"—besides being shiftless, look at how they sting us. Simply make all the money they can out of us tourists. Oranges two for a nickel! Why, I can buy jus' good oranges at home for that!"

"And the land! They can talk all they want to about rocky hill soil, but I wouldn't give one of my Berkshire Hill holdings for all the land south of Baltimore. I can sell you—"

"Pretty warm today."

"Yes, I was writing to Jessie, guess she wished she was down here. She wrote me it was snowing and ten below—"

Mrs. Johnson was always afire for accurate botanical information, and of the scientific Dr. Bjones she inquired, "What are these palmettoes good for?"

"Well, you know, I'm kind of a stranger in Florida, too, but I believe the natives eat the nuts from them."

"Oh, can anybody tell me what connections I make for Ciudad Dinero?"

"Why, you take the 9:16, Mrs. Bezuzus, and change at Lemon Grove—"

"No, you change at Avocado and take the jitney—"

"Is there a good hotel at Ciudad?"

"Well, I've heard the Blubb House is a first-class place; three-dollar-a-day house. Oh, how did you like the Royal Miasma at—"

"Oh, I suppose it's awful famous, and it's very dressy, everybody changed their clothes for supper, but I prefer Cape Cod Court, not an expensive place, you understand, but so homey—"

"Yes, but for table give me Dr. Gunk's Health Cottage, and the beds there —"

"Well, we started in on the West Coast and went to St. Petersburg and Tampa and Fort Myers, and then back to Ocala and Silver Springs, and took the Ocklawaha trip and all, and we stopped a day at Palatka—"

"Oh, Mrs. Bjones, how do you do that stitch?"

Often the crowd on the porch ceased these lighter divertissements and spoke seriously of real highbrow topics, like Bryan and Villa and defense and T. R. and self-starters and Billy Sunday and Harold Bell Wright. The Johnsons certainly had come to the right shop for being broadened and quickened, and Mrs. Johnson often told her husband that she would take back to the Wednesday Reading Circle such a fund of ready information and ideas as a Certain Person couldn't have gotten in California if she'd stayed there a hundred years!

So went the Johnsons' hours of gaieties many-colored and tropical, and when the long, happy day was over, New Chicago afforded them a succulent supper or a dainty repast, and then ho! for the movies, and no city has better movies than New Chicago, scenes from the whole wide world spread before you there on the screen, scenes from Paris and Pekin and Peoria, made by the best Los Angeles companies. At least once a week the Johnsons were able to see their favorite film hero, Effingham Fish, in a convulsing comedy.

How wondrous 'tis to travel in unfamiliar climes!

Spring was on its way, and at last the Johnsons were ready to bid farewell to New Chicago, the land of mystery and languor, adventure and dolce far niente.

Their trunk was packed. Mr. Johnson's slippers had been run to earth, or at least to dust, under their bed, and his razor-strop had been recovered from behind the bureau, when Mrs. Johnson suddenly exclaimed. "Oh! Why, we haven't studied the flora and fauna of Florida yet, and I don't know but what we ought to, for club-papers."

"Well, you haven't got all the time in the world left for it," said Mr. Johnson, who had a pretty wit.

"Well, we're all packed, and we have three hours before the train goes."

She dragged him out and they hired a surrey driven by a bright, hustling Northern negro—not one of these ignorant Southern darkies—and they galloped out to Dr. Bible's orange-grove, admission ten cents, one of the show-places in the suburbs of New Chicago.

There it was, trees and fruit and—and everything; a sight to broaden and quicken one.

The Johnsons solemnly gazed at it. "Yes," said Mrs. Johnson, "that's an orange-grove! Just think! And grapefruit. . . . It's very pretty. . . . I wonder if they sell post-card views of it."

"Yes," said Mr. Johnson, "that's an orange-grove. Well, well! . . . Well, I guess we better drive on."

They next studied the shell mound. There's something very elevating about the sight of such a relic of long-past ages—shows how past ages lived, you know—gives you a broader sympathy with history and all that. There she was, all in layers, millions of shells, just where the Indians had thrown them. Ages and ages ago. The Johnsons must have gazed at the mound for five or ten minutes. Mr. Johnson was so interested that he asked the driver, "Do they ever find tommyhawks in these mounds?"

"Don't know, sir," said the driver thoughtfully. "I'm a stranger in New Chicago."

"Yes," said Mr. Johnson, "I shouldn't wonder if they found relics there. Very, very ancient, I should say. When you think of how filling just one oyster-fry is, and then all these shells— Well, mama, I guess that's about all we wanted to see, isn't it?"

"Well, we might drive back by Mr. Capo's estate; they tell me he has some fine Florida shrubbery there."

They passed the Capo estate, but there wasn't much to see—just trees with kind of white berries, and tall shrubs with stalks curiously like the bamboo fish-poles that boys use, back home. Mrs. Johnson's eagle glance darted to the one object of interest, and she wanted to know something:

"Stop, driver. John, I wonder what that plant is there, like a little palm, with that thing like a cabbage in the center. I wonder if it isn't a pineapple plant."

We, having the unfair position of author, know that it was really a sago palm—not that we wish to boast of our knowledge of floras, and so, if you will pardon our interruption:

"Well," said Mr. Johnson helpfully.

“I understand they grow farther south. But even so this might be an exotic pineapple, just grown here in gardens.”

“Well, maybe. There’s a couple of people coming. Why don’t you ask them?”

They let the first of the two approaching men pass them—he was only a common, ignorant native. But the second was a fine, keen, hustling fellow on a bicycle, and Mrs. Johnson hailed him: “Can you tell me what that plant is?”

“That, madam—”

The Johnsons listened attentively, alert as ever in acquiring knowledge.

“—that plant? Well, I don’t just exactly know. I’m a stranger here myself.”

The Johnsons had to hurry back for their train, but they interestedly discussed all the flora and fauna on the way, including pines, buzzards, and pickaninnies. “Isn’t it nice,” said Mrs. Johnson, “to plunge right out and explore like this! I just bet that cat, with her winter in California, never stirred out of her own dooryard. Well, Florida certainly has been a novel experience, and improved our minds so much. Driver, is that a mocking-bird, on that skinny dead tree?”

“Yassum, that’s a mocking-bird. . . . Or maybe it’s a robin.”

II

Adding experiences in Georgia and Virginia and the Carolinas to their knowledge of Florida, the Johnsons saw and drank deep of Savannah, Charleston, Asheville, Richmond, and Newport News. They were able to do all five cities in six days, while the Bezuzuses had taken eight for them. In Charleston they saw Calhoun’s grave and learned all about the aristocratic society. They were so pleasantly entertained there, by a very prominent and successful business acquaintance of Mr. Johnson’s, a Mr. Max Rosenfleisch of New York, who had bought a fine old Southern mansion in Charleston and thus, of course, was right in with all the old families socially. Mr. Rosenfleisch said he liked the aristocrats, but was going to change a lot of their old-fashioned social ways, and show them how to have a real swell time, with cabarets and theater parties, instead of these slow dances, and teach them to dine at seven instead of three or four. The Johnsons were quite thrilled at witnessing the start of this social revolution—I tell you, it’s when you travel that you have such unusual adventures. They themselves would actually have met some of the inner social set of Charleston, but Mr. Rosenfleisch was having the den redecorated before giving any more of his smart, exclusive parties, and meantime the Johnsons had to be getting on—to a tourist, time is valuable.

At the beginning of spring, when the narcissi and the excursionists are out, the Johnsons arrived at Washington, where every good citizen should go, to show the lawmakers that we uphold their hands, and to give them our ideas about enlarging the army. The Johnsons found the nicest sightseeing car, with such a bright young man from Denver for barker, and he told how high the Washington Monument was, how much the Patent Office had cost to build, how long it had taken to decorate the Congressional Library in the Spanish Omelet style, how far the guns in the Navy Yard would shoot, where Joe Cannon lived, and numerous other broadening and quickening facts which filled them with pride in being citizens of the greatest country in the world.

The Johnsons' congressman received them with flattering attentions which would have turned heads less level than theirs; he rushed over and shook hands with them the minute they came into his private office, and while just for the moment he couldn't remember their name, he had it right on the tip of his tongue, and said, "Why, of course, of course," when Mr. Johnson refreshed his memory. He recalled perfectly having shaken hands with them once at Northernapolis. He was so sorry that he was expecting the Ways and Means Committee to meet in his office, right away, for he did so want to have them stay there and chat with him about the folks back home. As an indication of his pleasure in seeing them, he honored them with a special card which enabled them to hear the epoch-making debates in Congress, from a gallery reserved just for distinguished visitors and friends of congressmen. As they listened to a vigorous oration on the duty on terrapin, Mrs. Johnson said triumphantly: "John, I guess that cat never heard anything like that in her Pasadena that she's always talking about at the Reading Circle!"

Travelers have to be of heroic mold to endure the dangers and disasters of exploration; and the Johnsons showed the quiet dignity of *noblesse oblige* during a most disagreeable incident at Washington. . . . Mrs. Johnson wished to find the house in which Commodore Decatur had lived, as an ancestor of hers had been a very near and dear friend of one of the Commodore's gunswabbers. She asked quite a number of apparently well-informed tourists, but, with a pathetic lack of sound information, they all murmured that they didn't know, being themselves strangers in Washington. Then she had the original idea of asking the clerk at their hotel.

"Decatur House?" he said. "I know where the Ebbitt House is, and the White House, and Colonel House, but I pass up the Decatur House. Sorry . . . Here, boy, shoot this package up to 427."

"Why, I mean the historic old mansion of Commodore Decatur."

"Madam, I can tell you where to get your kodak films developed, and where to find the largest oysters in town, and where to pay your bill, and what

time the 5:43 train goes, but that's all I know. I come from Chicago, and if God is good to me, I'm going back there, where there's no congressmen, and they keep the tourists inside the Loop."

"Well, can't you tell us where we can find out?"

"Madam, you will find a guide-book at the news-stand."

From the news-stand they overheard the clerk saying to a fellow menial:

"—yes, I know, I oughtn't to be a grouch, but she wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. And ten minutes ago some other female wanted to know where Lincoln was buried, and just before that an old boy was sore because I couldn't tell him what is the sum total of all the pensions the Government is paying, and before that somebody wanted to know how much the dome of the Capitol weighs. These tin-can paper-bag tourists drive me wild. I ain't just an information bureau—I'm a whole bedroom suite, instalment plan."

Mr. Johnson said to his wife with that quiet force which all his associates in Northernapolis know and admire, "If he means us by 'tin-can paper-bag tourists,' I'm going to chastise him, I am, no matter what it costs! In fact, I'll speak to the manager!"

"Now, John," his wife urged, "he simply is beneath your contempt."

"Well, perhaps that's right."

The Johnsons decided not to waste a quarter on a guide-book, and strolled out to ask a policeman where the Decatur House was.

Although they found that Washington was like Florida in needing Western hustle, what with the service so slow that they didn't finish dinner before twelve-thirty, some noons, yet the Johnsons discovered a news-stand where they could buy the *Northernapolis Herald*, and there was the nicest big drug store run by a live, hustling Milwaukee man, where Mr. Johnson could get his favorite Flor de Wheeling cigars, while Mrs. Johnson had a chocolate ice-cream soda and some post-cards. And a movie-theater featuring Effingham Fish in comedies. So, altogether, in their Washington sojourn they had much homey pleasure as well as broadening insight into how public affairs are conducted. And the nicest souvenirs.

Again they took their staves and wardrobe-scrip and continued their pilgrimage to the ancient and historic spots of our own land. They were able to do Baltimore and Philadelphia thoroughly in two days, and would have finished up Atlantic City in another day, except that they found it was so much cheaper to get rates by the week. Then off for New York.

Mrs. Johnson was willing to sacrifice, to wear herself to the bone, studying the deeper esthetic, psychological and economic problems of New York, that she might bring home new ideas to the Wednesday Reading Circle. But New

York wouldn't let itself be studied. It was perfectly crazy. Everybody in New York, they found, spent all his time in cafés, tea-rooms, cabarets, or Bohemian restaurants where women smoke. The only homey, comfortable place they found was a nice quiet drug store where Mr. Johnson got his Flor de Wheeling cigars. And the prices—! They were glad to pass on to New Haven, to Hartford, the Berkshires, and Boston—where they saw several headquarters of Washington, and the most interesting graves, Emerson and Hawthorne and all sorts of people, and such nice artistic post-cards. Then to Maine, and, in mid-summer, down to Cape Cod, and Provincetown.

The Johnsons didn't plan to spend more than one day at Provincetown. They felt that Northernapolis was beginning to need them, and they had really seen everything there was to see in the East and South. But at Provincetown they had such a pleasant surprise that they stayed two whole weeks—they ran into Dr. and Mrs. Bjones of Wichita, with whom they had had the jolly times at New Chicago. With the Bjoneses the Johnsons picnicked on the dunes, and even went swimming once, and sat on the porch of Mrs. Ebenezer's boarding house, discussing various hotels and the Bjoneses' interesting itinerary. They didn't want to be mean, but they couldn't help crowing a little when they found that they had seen six graves of famous men which the Bjoneses had missed entirely!

The Johnsons didn't really like Provincetown. Of course the Bjoneses were interesting, and after a time they met some nice comfy people from Indianapolis and Omaha, and Mr. Johnson was able to get his Flor de Wheeling cigars. But Provincetown was filled with fishermen, acting as though they owned the place, and smelling it all up with their dories and schooners and nets and heaven knows what all, dirty, common Portuguese and Yankee fishermen, slopping along the street in nasty old oilskins covered with fish-scales, and not caring if they brushed right up against you. And the old wharves, all smelly. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were the first to be interested in any new phenomenon and once they went right out on a wharf and asked all about the fishing industry and whaling. But still—as Mr. Johnson said with that ready satire which made him so popular a speaker at the dinners of the Northernapolis Chamber of Commerce—they didn't care to associate with dead fish all their lives, even if they did like Effingham Fish in the movies!

When the Bjoneses left there was nothing more to study, nothing to observe.

Said Mrs. Johnson, "We've seen every inch of the South and East, now, and no one can say we haven't been unprejudiced and open-minded—the way we've gone into the flora and fauna, and among industries and all—but I must say we haven't seen a single place that begins to come up to Northernapolis."

“You never said a better thing in your life, mama, and what’s more, we’ll start for Northernapolis tomorrow!”

They were due to arrive in Northernapolis at two p.m. Mrs. Johnson was making notes for Wednesday Reading Circle papers about the Fruit of the Tropics, the Negro Problem, Fishing on Cape Cod, and How the Government Is Conducted at Washington.

“Guess that hen won’t talk so much about Pasadena after this,” Mr. Johnson chuckled. “Say, we’ll have time to say ‘howdy’ to the folks and go to the movies tonight, to celebrate our return. And I’ll be able to get a decent cigar again—can’t buy a Flor de Wheeling on a single one of these trains. Well, mama, it’ll be pretty good to get back where we know every inch, and won’t have to ask questions and feel like outsiders, eh?”

Such a surprise as it would be for the children! The Johnsons hadn’t wired them they were coming.

Northernapolis! The fine, big, dirty factories—evidences of Northernapolis’s hustling spirit! The good old-fashioned homey station! The Central House ’bus!

They stood out on Main Street, excitedly hailing a street car. Then—

You see, as a matter of fact this isn’t a satire, but a rather tragic story about two pathetic, good-hearted, friendly yearners, as you should already have perceived—

Then Mr. Johnson dropped his suit-case and stood amazed. A block down from the station was a whole new row of two-story brick stores. “Why,” he exclaimed, “I never read about that row going up!” He was bewildered, lost. He turned to a man who was also waiting for the car and inquired, “What’s those new buildings?”

“Dunno,” said the man. “I’m a stranger here myself.”

2
HE LOVED HIS COUNTRY
(*1916*)

Hugo Bromenshenkel had almost forgotten that he was born in Germany. Fifty years, now, he had lived at Curlew, where the woods ring the Minnesota lakes. His wife was Yankee, and his four sons were American business men of Minneapolis and Duluth and Chicago. Seventy-five years old was Hugo, wizened and fringe-bearded and elf-locked with gray, a fiery and affectionate little man, who could still plow all day and afterward whistle boyishly as he fed his cattle. On winter days when the thermometer was forty below and the trees shivered with the incredible cold, Hugo would still put on his coonskin coat and shoepacks, caper about the kitchen crying, "I am the dancing bear!" then take his tip-ups and axe and go down the appallingly snow-bright alleys of the woods to the lake and fish for pickerel.

A very simple man, common as earth and fruitful as earth, trusting much, enduring much, laboring unceasingly, and rejoicing in love for his wife, with her luminous eyes and clear cheeks and comforting hands, and hair that was black as woodland loam to his eyes, though to others it may have seemed ragged with gray. In awe Hugo watched the processional of the seasons and mutely praised the goodness of God, Who brought him the first stirring softness of spring and the shimmering old-gold of the July wheat-fields.

"I worship God with an axe and a plow—and with love for my *Liebling*," he told his wife, and she, who had never lost her bridehood's passion for the little man, answered: "You worship Him with everything you do, Hugo, and I worship Him because He gave me you, my soldier!"

Hugo Bromenshenkel loved his country, his America, because he was one of the men who had made it. Fresh from the Old Country he had fought through the Civil War, a chirping, dancing, daring private—and "Grant" was the name he later gave to his oldest boy. After the war he had hiked from St. Paul to Curlew by ox-team, and his wife, daughter of Sergeant Whipple of Maine, he had met among the settlers huddled in a stockade during a Sioux uprising. He had found his farm a chaos of woods; he had made it a paradise; he had whitewashed the outbuildings, and helped his wife in the planting of honeysuckle and geraniums. A grim home for wolves he had made into a gardenland, therefore he loved it—and loved America.

He had no German neighbors near by; the Germans of his section of Minnesota were mostly clustered on the prairies, while Hugo was, like the Scandinavians, a man of the woods, of stump-jagged clearings and hills and small hardy lakes. Norwegian and Yankee were his neighbors in Curlew, with half-a-dozen Irishmen and French Canucks, and the Englishman of mystery, Laxton the saloon-keeper, who read Greek and scowled. Good people, good Americans, all of them, and Hugo loved them, and forgot that he was German as well as American, except once a month or so, when he had a letter from his sister in Prussia. Then Hugo proudly and wistfully remembered that he also was of the good German blood.

In annual photographs he had watched his nephews in the Old Country grow to manhood. It was hard to believe that his tender, slender little sister was the mother of bearded sons; but there they were, ardent men of power: Franz, the chemist, who was none other than Herr Docent Franz Fritz Stegner of Bonn; Herman, who had stuck to the soil; and even the youngest, plump, laughing Ludwig, who was to be sent to South America, and was feverishly studying for his career. They were as real to Hugo as his own eldest son Grant, the curt and successful business man of Chicago. As he read of them on his ragged farm, more than four thousand miles away, old Hugo became a German again, and with pride remembered the house of his fathers. If America was his Brideland, Germany was, in no mere sentimental phrasing but in very fact, his Fatherland.

Sometimes on a summer Sunday evening, when the lake bore the flat notes of a church bell from Curlew and made them musical, and when a letter from his sister was still warm from her hands, Hugo would stand on the lake shore and in a dream that was like prayer remember the Old Country: land of rosy children, of Christmas cakes and carols and kindly greetings, of ancient towns where bells sounded down cobbled streets, of whispering woods and somber-haunted castles; land of his fathers, the warriors of old, grave, bearded men brandishing swords whose hilts were ponderous iron crosses. His fathers and his Fatherland Hugo loved no less because they were colored by memory and myth—far-off, venerable, not lightly to be forsaken.

II

To a certain American farmer, Hugo Bromenshenkel, the exploding of the great European war meant very little—at first. It couldn’t last. Three months and it would be over. Germany would take Paris and punish the impudent frog-eaters. Germany’s firm ally, America, would be glad—secretly however, for of course we had to be strictly neutral. All of this the American farmer demonstrated to his fellow-farmers and they uneasily accepted his

explanations, for he was a Grand Army man and esteemed as an authority on war.

Hugo said nothing when the two French Canucks or Laxton, the Englishman, were about, since they were his neighbors, his friends, his fellow-Americans, and he wished not to hurt their feelings. Hadn't he held Laxton in his arms all night, when the Englishman had struggled and foamed with delirium tremens? And hadn't Laxton in turn come grimly skiing over nine-foot drifts of snow to bring coffee and flour and bacon and a Sunday newspaper to the Bromenshenkels, the winter of the big snow? How could a neighbor, who loved them despite their alien blood, who knew every pathetic weakness in their games of cribbage and casino and life, be other than silent regarding the triumphant march of the Germans to cleanse with blood and iron those streets of Paris which, of course, puritan America and puritan Germany equally detested?

Then—

While the battles of the Aisne and the Marne incredibly began the war to destroy civilization, Laxton and the Canucks—and Sweep Monohan, the storekeeper, who in one week had changed from a Fenian into a British Imperialist—in their turn kept silence when Hugo Bromenshenkel rode anxiously in for the news. . . . Mrs. Bromenshenkel had suckled Mrs. Monohan's child when mother and child were edging toward the ease of death; and once Ladour, the Canuck, being crippled with rheumatism, had heard a clanking at the door, and found Hugo beginning to saw his wood.

Then—

The war became a world-habit instead of an illness, and the bright young cartoonists of the American press, in their ardent desire for honor and truth, pictured the Kaiser and his men as hogs, as Huns, as baby-killers, while Hugo and his friends began to argue about the war—just a little, not belligerently. It was a matter of history and geography: "Look here now; if the French come round here on the right—" All that these American neutrals said, some fifty or sixty millions of other American neutrals from Bangor to Calexico were also saying, over and over.

Laxton suddenly sold his saloon to a Dane from Dakota, and started for Canada, to see, as he said, "if I'm valuable to the Empire as anything but a specimen genus Oxonian well preserved in alcohol." Hugo didn't understand that—and he didn't quite realize that Laxton was going off to fight Hugo's own nephews. He pounded Laxton's shoulders at parting, and brought a little present down to the train for him.

Then—

The report of the Belgian atrocities, and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and a letter from Hugo's sister wailing that her baby, her ambitious Ludwig, who was to have made wealth for her in South America, had been killed, and Herman wounded, while Franz, the chemist, the zealot who had spent fourteen hours at a time in the laboratory, was glad to be out in the trenches, because he believed the life of Germany was threatened. Hugo wrote awkwardly to Grant, his eldest son, that the little cousin was dead. . . . Grant did not answer him, but then Grant was always very busy.

The Danish saloon-keeper, Laxton's successor, proved to be a man of wrath. He hated Germany, and he shouted "hog" and "Hun" and "baby-killer" to prove all sorts of things, and Hugo answered him savagely as, in bewildered reveries over the dead Ludwig, he began to believe that this really was a life-struggle for his own kinsmen. At first Hugo had lamented the sinking of the *Lusitania*, as a murderous error. Now, with stumbling unhappy phrases, he began to defend it, and to blame the Britishers for using passengers as a screen for munitions-carrying. Gradually his neighbors, his friends, began to join the Dane in arguments—and the American farmer Hugo Bromenshenkel began to change into a German-American.

He had read the *Twin City Morning Sun* for years, but, because its cartoons and editorials represented the dead Ludwig's comrades as fiends, he stopped it and took the *Volks-Zeitung* instead—though he scarce could read it, so deteutonized was he! But he labored over it daily, and daily he became more German-American.

Now for the first time in their years of perfect understanding, he was trying to befool his wife. He pretended that he was not worried. He finally resubscribed to the *Twin City Sun*, lest she think he was disturbed by its attacks. Whenever she rode into Curlew with him he avoided the Dane, and all mention of the war. He lauded the spirit of the Canadians who, from the country just a few score miles to the north, were going to join Kitchener, and he anecdotally recalled the Canadians in his own company in the Civil War.

He could not deceive her. She saw decay in the blue-brown crescents under his eyes, agony in his trembling prayer when they knelt together by their bed, his arm tight about her, as they had knelt every night for forty-eight years, ever since their wild bridal-night during a Minnesota blizzard. The clash between his love of the Fatherland and his love of the Brideland brought them together, as sorrows had always done.

It did not occur to Hugo that he must not be just what he now was, a German-American: but that he must be either an American or a German. It was the phrase "hyphenated citizen" which brought to him the doctrine of the red-blooded—that only traitors and weaklings can continue to love both sides in a

disagreement. It must, he felt, be evident to his friends that he was not a hog or a Hun or a baby-killer, and therefore that the other Germans were not. But the question of "hyphenation" could not be so settled.

At first he did not understand the phrase in all its force. The emphatic Dane saw to that, however. He was tremendous about Turn-Vereins. In fact the Dane became as fond of denouncing the sin of being hyphenated as he was of expatiating on the wickedness of not teaching the Danish tongue and history to all Danish-American children. But even when the Dane had made Hugo feel like a false husband to the Brideland, even when the *Twin City Sun* began to talk of defense, even when Hugo remembered that he himself had fought in an American War of Brothers, still it never seemed to his fixed old brain conceivable that Germany and America could have any contention which could not be settled by frank explanations. Why, they were both honest, manly; they were not trying to steal anything from each other. So he said, being very simple and not understanding about honor.

The great blow was dealt him suddenly, at a sacred hour.

There was no G.A.R. post at Curlew, and once or twice a year Hugo went down to the nearest post, at Joralemon, for a campfire. In November, 1915, the Joralemon G.A.R. was to have an anniversary meeting, with a special motion-picture show donated by the manager of the Joralemon Theatre, and an address by the young but Honorable Mr. Vickery, the state legislator who was slated to run for Congress. Hugo had constantly become more retiring, and his very seclusion brought signs of old age to his uneasy lips, to his more slowly bending joints. Strong he was, and healthy as a plowed field, but hesitant, doubtful. In a panic his wife urged him to go to the G.A.R. campfire: she pressed his blue coat and cleaned the black slouch hat with the gold cord, and drove with him to the station, and kissed him sideways in the hollow between chin and lower lip, a silly trick that these incurable lovers had never given up.

Hugo had not gone five miles on the train before he began to miss her, querulously, as the old do. But in Joralemon the sight of dozens of comrades from towns about made him as expectant as a small boy who is going to a party. The Women's Relief Corps had a supper for them in the basement of the Baptist Church—chicken fricassee, sweet potatoes, beans, coffee, ice-cream, sweet pickles, banana layer cake, and one of Mrs. Williams's famous chocolate cakes, with the chocolate on top as shiny as patent leather. Like most primitive people Hugo liked to eat, and he sampled everything and pretended to quarrel with old Mrs. Williams and cackled with her over memories of stockade days, while he kept glancing with affectionate satisfaction at his comrades, the lively white-pated men who were heroes—tonight—and could eat all they wanted to, and tell the ancient stories and the ancient jokes. Jig-time was in Hugo's step

as they marched to G.A.R. Hall together, frail old men—leaves before the winter wind.

All the stories of the Joralemon comrades he had heard, but there was a new comrade present tonight, Dr. James of Iowa, who told of following the trail of Mosby. Hugo had for weeks wondered if he ought ever to have fought in any war, and he was a little self-conscious in the big city of Joralemon with its three thousand people and its cement walks and three-story brick hotel. But he forgot his diffidence; he sprang up and narrated his adventures in patrol duty on the Rappahannock. He laughed; he felt safe, with a place of his own, an American among Americans.

He had stood too close to the hot stove, and when he sat down he felt faint. He heard the benediction through a sick blur, and when the others formed to march to the Joralemon Theatre, for the motion-picture in their honor, he quavered: "I'll join you in a few minutes. No, it's all right, doc—I just talk too much yet!"

He staggered behind them to the drug store. The November air restored him, but he sat for a few minutes in the cool space behind the prescription-counter. Half-drowsing, he was very happy. Yes, it was true; he was an American, a soldier of America. The Dane was a tenderfoot; he didn't know that Hugo's old friends were Yankee soldiers. In a dream of ancient days, walking through a vision of rattling harness, the charge of lean-faced young men in tilted forage caps, the evening choruses and the fantastic boyish cursing at dawn, Hugo rambled to the theatre, and was ushered to the section reserved for the G.A.R., whose silvery polls glimmered in the half-light—his friends!

He had missed the first reel of the film. The second was just beginning. He was excited. Hitherto he had seen only two motion-pictures, both cheap melodramas. This was his first feature film.

It was the highly successful photo-play "Columbia Awaken!" in which three army aeroplanes and a regiment of real soldiers were used. To Hugo Bromenshenkel it was overwhelming. He was startled to see before him, moving, real, the khaki-uniformed soldiers of America today. He was proud; these were his younger comrades.

On the screen a squad ran forward, scattering, and leaped into a trench. Above them burst a shell. They ducked, grinned, rammed clips of cartridges into their rifles, and began firing at a mass of trees.

Hugo leaned forward, his mouth open. His stringy horn-hard fingers clawed at the seat-arm. "Get 'em! Get 'em!" he was muttering. It seemed to him that he himself was there in the trench, fighting to hold it. They *had* to hold it, and keep back the enemies hidden in those woods! His hands twitched

and closed on an imaginary rifle-stock. He pulled breathlessly at a trigger. He groaned as the lieutenant commanding the squad slumped down, dead. He kept urging, “Get ’em! Get ’em! Hold the outpost!”

Now, foreign soldiers were sneaking out from the woods; were charging, in a dodging, bobbing, irresistible mass. They had to be kept back! To stop them Hugo was ready to die with the plucky, pitiful little bunch in the trench. He hated those rushing devils who were coming, coming—

With a gasp that could be heard three seats away Hugo recognized the nationality of the attacking force.

They were Germans. He was witnessing, he was actually sharing, the struggle between his own Brideland and his own Fatherland.

A very old, very tired, utterly heartsick lover of men, whose love was proven folly, crumpled in his seat, and no longer looked at the screen. He wanted to cover his eyes with his hands, but round about him were more people than the whole population of Curlew, and it was quite human of him that even in his agony he should not have dared to make so public a demonstration, or protest, or leave the hall. . . . Not yet. But black spirits circled over him.

The film ended. The lights came on. The Honorable Mr. Vickery, the silver-tongued siren of the state senate, arose.

Perhaps Hugo didn’t want to comprehend; at any rate he was slow in comprehending the fact that the orator, after a vague tribute to German-Americans in general, and a very definite tribute to all German-Americans who were voters in his district, was proceeding toward a declaration that Germany’s object in her submarine policy was to force America into the world-war.

Something, not of his conscious self, made the shy old man, Hugo Bromenshenkel, lift himself from his seat, a wrinkled, unheroic figure, and quaver, “That’s a lie! Germany, she is surrounded. She try to fight her way out with submarines.”

He stopped, appalled. The eyes of the crowd were a bed of coals about him. His comrades were gaping at him. He was condemned.

The orator was going smoothly on: “Far be it from me to contradict our friend who wears the sacred blue coat of the G.A.R., but—”

Hugo was weary of that oily voice, of the staring eyes. He picked up his black slouch hat and shabby ulster and tramped up the aisle. Then he was outside, in silence and cold air, and he was aghast to find that it was he, he himself, this self that was always with him, who was the fellow that had made a disturbance in a public hall. Curlew and Joralemon do not heckle speakers, except for covert foot-scrapings by tough, gum-chewing young men. All the

way home to Curlew, in the smoking-car, Hugo fancied that his fellow-passengers were watching him. He was alternately astonished—each time with a new sharp surprise—by what he had done, and galvanized with desire to make others see Germany as the high-breasted crusader, armed with the iron-hilted sword of righteousness. . . . Hugo knew less about Germany's modern economic and military system than did even the Honorable Mr. Vickery. In Germany there doubtless are silver-tongued jingoes and amateur defenders of honor, small, snug bureaucrats and journalists who shout: "Every red-blooded German—!" Hugo Bromenshenkel didn't know about that. He knew only that in a quiet valley, filled with bird sounds, was the grave of his father; and that somewhere in a putrid space between trenches was the body of his nephew Ludwig, the baby. Blood and tears and sweat of his own boyhood and of his own kin had fertilized Germany. With his blood and tears and sweat he loved Germany; and he believed—you can see from this just how simple he was—he believed that Germany was conceivably as honest and human in her warring as the North and the South had been in the Civil War.

Of one thing Hugo dared not think, while he hid behind the red-plush back of a seat in the smoker: he could never go down to the G.A.R., now, never see the boys again.

During the last two miles of the journey he prepared cheerful lies with which to meet his wife.

She was waiting for him at the station, with the democrat wagon and the old, warm buffalo-robe. After one look at him, she ran up and kissed his cheek, lingeringly, and put her arms about him. She asked no questions. As they entered the house he said, "There was a fellow—he spoke against Germany—" Nothing else was said regarding that evening, though for days she grieved that her boy had been robbed of the holiday to which he had gone forth so eagerly. About international policies she thought not at all; her patriotism consisted in keeping the wristlets on Hugo's thin wrists and the gaiety in his eyes.

Very much was said regarding that evening, however, in the two general stores and the saloon at Curlew; and the Dane blurted out to Hugo, the next time he came into town: "Well, you made a fine fool of yourself, they tell me."

Then came news from Germany that Franz, the chemist, the scholar, the creator, had been killed.

Hugo's eldest son, Grant, who lived in Chicago and owned a car, had heard a well-spiced version of Hugo's crime from some Joralemonite, and he wrote to his father with the harshness which the second generation often has for the first generation and Old Country ways: "You make me ashamed of you. What good did you think you were going to do?" Hugo did not answer, but he kept Grant's letter and read it often, and looked ashamed.

He was in Curlew on March seventeenth. The sight of the decorations in Monohan's store brought back all his indignation over the attacks on Germany in the motion-picture and in the speech of Mr. Vickery. He astounded the crowd in the store by shouting: "St. Patrick's Day! Green and allerlei foolishness. Irish-American! Hyphenated! It's only the Germans that mustn't be hyphenated!"

A week and a half later he was in Curlew again. People stared at him, curious. That doubtless got on his nerves. Otherwise he would never have disturbed the Norwegian-American parade, for he liked the Scandinavians; had been neighborly to them for two-score years. They were dedicating a new Lutheran church. Lines of lanky, tall, ash-blond men and little withered women formed in the muddy chaos of the village street, and marched singing toward the new white-steepled shack that stood in a grove of birches, virgin and rustic as the birches. Hugo listened to their chanting. Beside him was the Danish saloon-keeper.

"Not for a poor wicked boozing devil like me," said the Dane, waving his hand toward the procession. He, too, was beginning to feel a pathos in the growing bitterness of this man who had, even in stormy arguments, always kept a pleading affection for everybody. He tried to think of something diverting to say, while Hugo was complaining: "Norwegian-Americans! Hyphenated! They pray in Norwegian, even! Only the Germans that mustn't love their own flesh and blood, and Germany fighting for her life, and Franz dead—*Gott*!"

Suddenly Hugo bellowed: "Damn you all! Damn you! I hate you!"

The church procession heard, and their singing faltered. The town policeman ran up, caught Hugo's arm, led him off to the absurd lock-up behind the post-office. The Dane tagged behind them, begging: "He didn't mean it. Aw, he didn't say much of anything, Jim."

But the policeman left Hugo in the lock-up. Hugo stood in the middle of the room, his corded and rheumy chin up, and sang all that he could remember of "*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*."

In the justice's court he was fined ten dollars. He said nothing. Always he looked at something sacred and awful that stood behind the justice.

III

The ice was breaking in Curlew Lake, the mold smelled fresh with spring, ducks were calling of adventure, and the farm turned expectantly to its master. But Hugo followed the drill slowly. He said nothing to anyone. He was convinced that he had become a criminal, a traitor, in some manner which he

couldn't quite grasp though he went over and over it behind the drill. This seeding might be his last, he felt. His speech and his step were sluggish.

He was roused by an honor. In a letter in thin-looped German script he was invited to the pro-German city of St. Hilary, to attend a German Red Cross rally which was to be addressed by the famous German-American editor and propagandist, Peter Schiller Lechtner of Chicago. And Hugo was to sit on the platform!

"We have heard," wrote the committee, "of the persecution which you have undergone for the Cause, and we desire to pay you at least this small belated honor."

Hugo read the letter to his wife.

"Well, I must go," he sighed.

He did not want to go. He had got into confused trouble every time he had gone anywhere, lately, and he wanted to spend every moment of what might be his last springtime with her, his *Liebling*, and with the fields that needed him. He was afraid to go from the joyous shine of the spring sun on softly weathered barns, out into the blackness where people laughed at him and put him in jail and reviled his dead nephews as men who had been trying to drag America into the war. Someone—he didn't understand these things any more—had ordered him to come and do something for the Fatherland, and he would obey, of course. But he stared regretfully about the kitchen, at the broad old stove with the glow through its lower draft, at the padded rocking-chairs, the glass bowl filled with balls of darning cotton. Everywhere, in everything, was the spirit of his wife. The wrinkles of his crepe-paper skin were spread out to smoothness in his first smile for days.

"Why, you could go with me!" he cried.

"Yes, I will go."

They packed their pasteboard imitation-alligator-skin telescope. It was time to dress. Hugo reached for the garments which he had long associated with festal days—the blue coat and gold-corded hat of the G.A.R. He hesitated. Defiantly, glancing craftily at her while she pretended not to notice, he dragged on the coat and pulled the gold-corded hat low on his head.

"I will!" he quavered. "I got a right to."

"Yes, Hugo," she soothed.

He rested his forehead against her sturdy shoulder, and from her presence drew strength to join the enemies of his land, and hers. For he saw the rally at St. Hilary as actual rebellion against America.

At St. Hilary the Bromenshenkels were met by half-a-dozen young Germans, not long from the Old Country, and they were ceremoniously driven

to the house of an ardent writer of pro-German letters to the state press. In a dining room hung with German mottoes and pictures of Zeppelins, the young zealots laughed and argued and exploded in German songs. They courted Hugo. Because they were not exactly sure what it was he had "done for the Cause" at Joralemon and Curlew, they told him he was a hero, a lone outpost of the Empire, and aside from the large quantities of sauerkraut and leberwurst and hasenpfeffer which were pressed on him, they all kept handing him buttered compliments, which embarrassed him. Yet he reveled in the surging Germanism of everything about him. Not for years had he been in so Teutonic an atmosphere, or talked so volubly. . . . If you were a Princeton man, say, or Yale, and after scores of years in Petrograd you met some Princeton undergraduates, singing the old songs, would you not forget Russia for a little hour? . . . Hugo ranted and stammered in his glorification of Germany. The young men encouraged him, and he worked up to a high-pitched excitement that was not far from real madness.

He sprang up. Solemnly, in a cracked, trembling voice, he toasted the martyred Franz and Ludwig, and he loved the young men as they cheered and drank the toast—and understood.

Arm in arm with a perfervid young German schoolmaster, his wife stumping behind him, Hugo marched with the others to Turn Hall. After a dark passage through a rear door and among stacks of scenery his party came suddenly out on a platform, and were facing at least one thousand people, in sharply marked curving rows, all of them staring at him, all in a haze of lights and German flags and portraits of Von Hindenburg and the Kaiser. As Hugo's glance crept up to the great arched rafters, where hung an enormous imperial eagle, ringed with electric lights; he began to realize that this rising applause was for his own group—for him!

He sank down in the nearest chair, almost hidden in the wings, and appealingly grasped his wife's hand, to pull her down beside him, regardless of the polite efforts of his hosts to conduct him to a chair near the center of the platform. Hugo shrank into himself; he dared not peep out at the audience till the arrival of the speaker of the evening diverted the applause from his own group.

The audience was roaring, "Lechtner! Unser Peter!"

Hugo expected a bearded Teutonic warrior. He found a manikin, delightedly bobbing to the audience—Unser Peter. For the famous Peter Schiller Lechtner, editor of three new pro-German publications and friend of active German consuls, looked like a cross between a naïve child and a malicious monkey who would chatter his own praise from any bush that would lift him above the marveling bunnies of the wood. Hugo, being rustic and

ignorant, had never learned that Unser Peter was the New Bismarck. All he saw was a little, pimply young man, much like the sleazy youths who hang about the depot lunch-room at Joralemon. Hugo shook his head, puzzled.

The chairman announced that they were all about to derive high inspiration from that editor who had so valiantly defended Germany against the paid propagandists of France and perfidious Albion, that prophet of Teutonic supremacy, Herr Peter Schiller Lechtner.

Unser Peter darted up, raised his hands, demanded, "'*Die Wacht am Rein!' Zusammen*!"

With the others sang Hugo, stirred to tears.

Unser Peter Schiller Lechtner let a moment of silence creep through the hall, then leaped into shrill eloquence. He was, it seemed, violently in favor of the Germans using their combined vote as a weapon in this year's presidential election. Why? Did they ask him why? Because American munitions had made millionaires of the Americans and corpses of the Germans.

Hugo Bromenshenkel wasn't used to hearing his Brideland mentioned in quite such a tone of hatred. But he uneasily assured himself, "Yes, I don't like those munition-exports. *Gott!* Maybe my sister's boys were killed by American shells!"

Unser Peter was darting across the stage. With a hysterical jerk he pulled down an American flag that was twined with the German colors. He waved it frenziedly, bawling, "This Yankee rag! Do you know what it means? Red for blood! White for false neutrality! Blue for—"

Hugo Bromenshenkel half rose from his chair. He no longer saw the audience, the committee on the platform. He saw only the claws of Unser Peter clutching the flag he had worshiped for fifty years. He stooped, and picked up his G.A.R. hat. He carefully brushed the hat with his sleeve. He carefully put it on. He walked to the center of the platform. He snatched the American flag from the hands of Unser Peter.

Unser Peter stopped in mid-sentence. He clenched his fist, drew back his arm. Old Hugo faced him, quietly smoothing the folds of the flag, arranging it over his arm.

"Shame! The old mann iss all right!" a Germanic voice shouted from the audience.

Unser Peter's arm began to relax.

Hugo turned to look for his wife. She was just back of him, waiting, patient.

"Come, *Liebling*, we will go home," he said.

Still smoothing the torn flag, Hugo stalked down the steps from the platform, up the center aisle of the hall. His wife trotted beside him. They both ignored the crowd that hemmed them in. On either side of the aisle Germans began to rise, to clap, then to cheer. While Unser Peter shouted unheard on the platform, a vast-shouldered, red-faced German in a box led the audience in a thunderous singing of “America.”

At the door of the hall Hugo stopped. He folded up the flag. He began to laugh, and in his laughter was no madness, now. He said judiciously: “Unser Peter would make a fine scarecrow for the beggie-field, if he wasn’t so easy scared!”

The old lovers chuckled comfortably, and arm in arm they started happily for the station.

“It looks like rain. We’ll have a good crop this year, after all,” said Hugo.

3
A WOMAN BY CANDLELIGHT
(*1917*)

The heart of woman was hidden from Wilbur Cole; to him that secret beauty was as unfamiliar as great music. He was not hard, but he was young, and blind with first success. This January day he had finished his first trip as traveling salesman—as gripman for the St. Sebastian Wholesale Grocery Company.

He was a conqueror, and St. Sebastian was a city worthy to greet a conqueror's triumph. Snobs from the East, from Chicago and Eau Claire, say that St. Sebastian is a scattering of dumpy buildings; but in the silo country we consider it oppressively grand.

It has twelve thousand inhabitants and a round-house and a state normal school.

To Wilbur Cole, reared in a farm shanty concealed only by a willow windbreak from the devouring prairie, and trained in a crossroads general store, St. Sebastian was a metropolis crammed with fascinating people—people who had six-cylinder cars and knew about dress suits and auction bridge.

As soon as he had reported to the office he began to wait for half past seven, when he would be able to go and call on Myrtle Hillbridge, who wore a wrist watch and was the daughter of the head of the Hillbridge Farm Machinery Agency. He went to his room and tried to read the accumulation of St. Sebastian papers; but he fidgeted and spent an hour manicuring his nails, occasionally rushing to the window on the totally unreasonable chance that Myrtle might be passing. He pictured her, in the jumper and linen skirt she usually wore, as a combination of outdoor wholesomeness and city smartness. He saw clearly the triangle of cheek beneath each of her eyes. He would sit near her—this same evening!—just a few hours, now! Perhaps he would dare to touch her hand. Then she would become silent, and he would move nearer to her.

Though her house was luxurious, what did he care for the cabinet of cut glass, the lace table cover, or the expensive framed color photographs from Yellowstone Park, which proved that the Hillbridges had traveled? No; he would adore Myrtle if she were a squarehead on a cleared farm.

He could not sit through supper at his boarding house; to the grief of the landlady, he couldn't get down any of the lemon meringue pie. He wanted to be out and alone, thinking of the goddess. He may have been a bulky figure for a lorn lover, in the coonskin overcoat, sealskin cap, red flannel wristlets and knee overshoes of the region; but his chin was high and his breath made passionate puffs of steam as he tramped past the Hillbridge house, which he managed to do six several times. At first he went by on the theory that he was hastening to some important engagement a great distance off, and didn't even see the house. Then he half stopped, as though he were startled by the revelation of architectural charms in the front porch, which had turned columns and diamond-shaped shingles of red and green and yellow.

He was trying to keep himself from arriving before half past seven; but at twenty minutes past he could stand this exile no longer, and he rang the bell. . . . She herself was coming down the hall! He could see her shadow against the ground glass of the door. During the seven seconds while she put an inquiring hand up to her back hair and fumbled with the knob, he was boiling with anticipation. She was going to be more beautiful than he had pictured! She was going to look at him with tremulous shyness. Maybe she would be wearing the lovely yellow dress with that lace stuff at the neck.

He was frightened. He wanted to bolt. He wouldn't dare to look at her—much less touch her magnetic hand.

Then Miss Myrtle Hillbridge had opened the door and was saying:

"Oh, hello! Oh, it's Mr. Cole! Oh, I thought you were out of town! Oh, you must have got back!"

"Yes, I got back." He beamed fatuously.

"Oh! Oh, isn't it cold! Oh, do come in, so I can shut the door. Oh, you missed it, going away; we had the peachiest party at Hildy's! Oh, I wish I'd known somebody was coming tonight; I would have dressed up. Isn't this flannelette blouse dreadful! Oh, let me take your hat. Isn't it cold! Let's sit in the sitting room; it's so much warmer there. Papa and mamma have gone over to aunty's to play cribbage. Oh, did you have a good trip? Oh, let me tell you the latest—you mustn't tell a soul; it isn't supposed to be out—Bessie is engaged to Ben! Who would ever have thought it! Don't you think Bessie is a perfect fright in that pink charmeuse? Oh, listen; I've got a trade last for you."

"Well, I—uh—can I give you a compliment of my own for the trade last? I thought about you lots while I was on the trip. Say, by the way, I had a slick trip. I tell you, it's pretty darn' important—a fellow's first trip out on the road for a house. Of course I know the retail grocery business O.K., but I didn't know how it would be selling to dealers, but it went fine, and I landed a new

customer for the house—”

“That’s nice; it isn’t a trade last at all unless it’s something you heard somebody else say, all right, Mister Smarty; I won’t give you my trade last at all. Oh, I must tell you about the funny thing that happened at Hildy’s party: You know how her house is, with that dinky little conservatory—it isn’t really a thing in the world but a bay window, even if Hildy does call it a conservatory—you know, on the dining room—”

As Wilbur had hoped, they were sitting side by side. He told himself that she was an “awful cute kid—not many girls can jolly a fellow along like this.” Also, the Hillbridge house was of an even more gorgeous fancifulness than he had remembered, in its tapestry and velours rockers with carved arms, and the storm of light from the bracket lamps and from the electrolier of crimson, pearl and orange mosaic glass. But in the midst of these observations, so comforting to one recently returned from a round of smoking cars and uncarpeted hotels, Wilbur made two startling discoveries: He wasn’t afraid of trying to hold Myrtle’s hand, and he didn’t want to hold her hand, anyway!

While she was confiding to him—but he mustn’t tell a single soul!—that she could have snitched Ben from Bessie, Wilbur smiled politely, and nodded his head at regular intervals, and didn’t hear a word she said.

He was wondering how he had lost all that exquisite fear of her. He wasn’t in the least awed. To prove it he seized her hand.

She blushed and squeaked, though she let him keep the hand. But he did not wish to keep it. He was decidedly embarrassed by the possession of it. He did not know what to do with it. A plump hand—not a tingling electrode, but just an ordinary smallish hand, such as almost everybody had—seemed a foolish thing to be holding. Her knuckles were puffy and her fingers were fat, he noted.

She babbled “My, but you are the fresh thing!” and he tried to live up to this new role as a perfect devil with the ladies by stroking her hand. A point in the setting of her small turquoise ring jabbed his finger. He carefully laid the hand down on the couch. She left it there for a moment, then took it back, drooping her head toward him and sighing in a pleased manner: “Oh, aren’t you the bad one!”

He felt like different kinds of a fool and made an excuse to flee. She followed him to the door, and he combined an impression that he was highly honored with a desire to dodge.

His boarding-house room seemed as bare to him as the hotels. In it he began to remember how warm and filled with curtains and newish furniture was the Hillbridge mansion, and again he saw Myrtle as something costly and

beautiful.

Two days later, as he took the northbound train during the first gray blast of a coming blizzard, he was certain that he was longing for Myrtle.

II

Wilbur should have reached Gopher Prairie in seven hours, with a stop at Joralemon; but for twenty-four hours the train struggled in the blizzard. Between gusts it made a mile, two miles, gasped a little, balked, and stopped. Wilbur covered himself with his coonskin coat and a strip of coco matting from the aisle in the cold car and watched the outside world turn to roaring steam. Through the night he slept raggedly, and smoked till his throat was parched, and talked to the seven passengers and the trainmen till they reached religion and politics, and became personal.

The train was finally stalled three miles from Gopher Prairie. It would not move till the rotary plow dug its way through from Ferguston. The storm passed; the world was a level plain of snow, which covered the track from embankment to embankment, all achingly brilliant with sun from a blue porcelain sky. Farmers began to fight through with bobsleds. With his bags, Wilbur was bundled into the hay-covered bottom of a sled, and thus did he crawl into the town of Gopher Prairie.

The rows of two-story brick stores running off into straggling frame houses, which made up Gopher Prairie, were covered with snow like a counter of goods with a linen cover smoothly drawn across them. Lovely was the molding of the snow; it swooped in long curves from eaves to sidewalk; it was eight feet deep beside windbreak fences; it made of the squat buildings a series of Chinese pagodas. But none of this too-familiar beauty was interesting to Wilbur Cole. It meant only that he would be imprisoned here till the trains were running again. To north, south and east the service was shut off. Telephone and telegraph wires were down. There would be no mail, not one message from the world beyond the waste of snow, for two or three days. And Wilbur knew no one in Gopher Prairie. On his previous trip he had met two men in the grocery dealing with his house; but they had not warmed to him yet.

He stumbled along the paths that were being gouged through the drifts and spent an hour in the store. The clerks were affable, but they were too busy telling of their heroism in reaching the store to listen to his account of being stalled; and they did not invite him to supper. At last there was nothing to keep him from toiling to the hotel, mountain-climbing over drifts on the way.

He hoped to find a bunch of jolly fellow salesmen; but the only other

guests at the hotel were a cranky old jewelry salesman who regarded himself as in some way an artist, as a superior person entitled to glance at you over his eyeglasses, together with a silent man who seemed to Wilbur to have no purpose whatever in existing except to monopolize the warmest hot-air register in the office.

A floor which has been scrubbed for so many years that the knots stand up out of the soft pine boards can be more desolately bare than a dirty floor scattered with different interesting things; and the hotel office was nothing but a waste of scrubbed floor, dotted by a desk of grained wood, a brown writing table decked with advertisements of the bus line, and a row of wooden chairs. Even less adorned was Wilbur's bedroom, its bureau listed to starboard, its one chair, and the bed with the dirty red comforter—which was so much like the other dirty red comforters in all the other hotel rooms on his route that it might have been a pursuing haunt.

He walked up and down the office, made halting efforts to get acquainted with the two morose salesmen and the sleepy night clerk, and crept out into the cold, to go to the movies. It was like ice water, that cold; he was gasping and struggling with it the moment he plunged into it. He made his way a block down to the movie-theater only by darting in at stores to get another supply of warmth.

Over the theater was the sign "Closed tonight, acct. storm."

He struggled back to his room and made an occupation of getting ready to read. He did not undress—he took off his coonskin coat, and shivered, and hastily put the coat on again. He moved his chair two inches to the right, then an inch to the left, and sat with his feet on the bed. For two hours he solemnly read a two-days-old copy of the Minneapolis News. He turned the pages very carefully, exactly creasing the paper each time. He rattled it rather unnecessarily—the sound was cheerful in this room, surrounded by the bulky silence of the snowbound village. Now and then he looked up and said, aloud: "Let's see: Tomorrow the train might get through—I'll get to— No, I don't suppose there'll be a train—wish I could see Myrtle and sit and jolly with her! Oh, this is a sweet life! Let's see: Larsen took two cases of apricots this time. . . ." He was comforted by his own voice. But he hadn't much to say. His brain felt dead as a bone, dead as the silence packed in about him.

He read every obituary and want ad in the paper. He considered the desirability of jobs as textile chemist, curtain hanger, Italian-Greek salesman, actuary, oxyacetylene welding expert, designer of little gents' garments, and bright boy. He learned the diverting news that "peas, Scotch, choice, 100 lbs., were 13.50 @ 13.75"; that the "Fifth Race, for three-year-olds, selling, one mile and seventy yards," would be run by an amazing company consisting of

Garbage, Springtide Reverie, Oh You Kid, Tippytoes and Pink Suspenders; that "John Swan, Mary Ammond Swan, and their heirs-at-law, devisees, and next of kin, and other persons, if any there be, and their names are unknown to the plaintiff," were warmly invited to a guessing party; that "deb 5s, ctfs of dep, stpd"; that "1 do cvt 4s ser B55 55 55"; and that "J. B. Terrell as exrx &c of S. L. Barnes dec'd pltf."

In the midst of this last thriller he hurled the newspaper across the room and, as it fell in a shower of detached sheets, he cried:

"I want you so, my dear Myrtle—"

They are heroes, these salesmen and agents, who sit so quietly in trains and small hotels.

For all of another day the train service was interrupted, and Wilbur trudged through drifts, unnoticed, while about him were the shouting of men shoveling walks or driving horse plows down the street, and the laughter of children skiing. He managed to spend two hours in the grocery store, helping the clerks arrange a display of canned goods. As he returned to his hotel in the early darkness, he could see happy families in lighted homes, and the prospect of this second evening of loneliness was not boredom—it was fear.

He got to the hotel at five. He skipped when he heard the voices of Fred Oberg and two companions in the office!

Fred Oberg was one of the best-known traveling men in the state. He was a practical joker, a teller of stories, a maker of love, and an inspired player of poker. His two companions were noisy of tie and laughter. They had got through from Curlew by bobsled, and they were going to make a night of it. Would Wilbur join them in a little game, with a few bottles, in Fred's room? Wilbur thankfully would. He sat down with these older, more poised men, and laughed with them. He sounded a little hysterical.

Now it is a rule of the road that young traveling men must be broken in, and there are certain tricks that may lawfully be played upon them, to the joy and righteous approval of all beholders. . . . Fred Oberg slipped out of the hotel. He went to the drug store, next door, where there was a telephone. Fred Oberg could make his voice soft and feminine. . . .

While the other salesmen were encouraging Wilbur to tell them all about how successful his first trip had been, the telephone in the hotel office rang. It was a call for Mr. Wilbur Cole, said the night clerk, coughing and hiding his mouth with his hand.

Wilbur rushed to the telephone and heard a voice as of a large pleasant woman with a cold:

"Hel-lo-uh? Oh! Oh, is this Mr. Cole? Oh, Mr. Cole, this is Miss Weeks,

the milliner. I just heard that you were in town. I am a cousin of Mr. Gasthof, of your firm. I'm so sorry to hear of your having to stay at that horrid hotel. Won't you come over and have a homey supper tonight? I'd just love to have you! I live over my shop, one block down Main Street, toward the depot."

Wilbur did a two-step down the office to the other salesmen, who grunted: "What's the excitement, little one?"

"I'm invited out for supper!"

"The deuce you are! Gwan! Don't believe you."

"You bet I am! Oh, you fellows can stick to the roast pork and apple sauce. Watch little Wilbur wade into the fried chicken!"

"Who's the fall guy?"

"Never you mind who it is."

"Gwan—tell a fellow."

"It's Miss Weeks, the milliner. She's a cousin of a friend of mine."

"The little Weeks? Oh, you lucky dog! Why, she's the swellest skirt in town."

"Is she—honest?"

"Is she? Why, don't you know her? Why, say, she's pretty as a magazine cover—nice and round and plump, and not a day over twenty, and lively—Say, I bet you have some evening! Now ain't that luck for you! Some men are just nachly born lucky."

Wilbur's cheerfulness was in no wise lessened by the envy headlined in the faces of the two salesmen; and when Fred Oberg returned, and was informed of Wilbur's good fortune, Fred sighed that he wished he could make a hit with the ladies like that. Wilbur tried to look modest; but he cocked his hat over one eye and lit a cigar.

"Say, we got to help the boy dress up for the occasion." Fred tenderly proposed; and the three of them dragged Wilbur upstairs.

They insisted that he ought to wear a red necktie; and Fred produced from his grip a tie like a fireman's shirt. Solicitously Fred said:

"We got to brush your hair right, kid. Stand there in front of the bureau. I got a slick new patent hairbrush that shines 'em up like a St. Paul barber."

The three of them seemed to have a good deal of difficulty in getting just the right light on Wilbur's hair, and during an altercation as to whether he ought to stand on the right or left of the incandescent they almost rended him.

"Ouch! Say, quit! Quit, I say! You're almost tearing my arm off," wailed Wilbur.

The salesmen dropped his arms. In tones of deepest grief Fred Oberg

protested:

"Gosh, that's what you get when you do your best to help a brother knight of the grip make a hit with a squab! All right, sir. Sorry we bothered you."

"Aw, thunder, Fred; I didn't mean to be ungrateful."

"Well, stand there then."

He stood there, while Fred brushed his hair with an instrument of torture which dug its claws into his scalp. Wilbur tried to look patient, though he winced at every stroke. One of the salesmen had a fit of coughing that sounded somehow like laughing, and Wilbur became suspicious.

"That's enough, Fred. You don't need to take my scalp off."

"Well, maybe I was digging in a little more than I had to; but I had to get even with you for swiping the swellest little chicken in town. But you're wise to all these roughhouse stunts, all right, Wilbur. You're going to make a great hit on the road."

"Well, I hope I'm not entirely a darn fool," said Wilbur much pleased.

One of them polished his shoes with a dirty handkerchief. Another offered him a drink from a pint flask of rye; but he politely refused. The three kept up their sighs of envy: A home supper with a peach! Oh, but Wilbur was the society favoryte! And would Wilbur be so good as to join them in the poker game when he got back?

They accompanied him to the street door, bidding him hurry and not keep the fair one waiting.

Wilbur found Miss Weeks' Millinery Emporium in the Colby Block, a row of two-story brick stores adorned with a galvanized-iron cornice. It occupied half of a shop, the other half of which belonged to a jeweler and optician. Beside the shop was a stairway, an incredibly broad and dark stairway, smelling of yellow soap. He stumbled up it, and stopped under a small incandescent, which showed the K.P. Hall on one side and an attorney's office on the other. Miss Weeks' rooms must be at the back. Through the darkness he felt along the wall, stumbled over a door mat, and knocked at a door.

"Yes?"—in a weary voice.

"Is this Miss Weeks' residence?" said Wilbur elegantly.

"Yes."

The door opened. He saw a woman three or four years older than himself, a tired-eyed, restrained businesslike woman in a spinsterish blue-and-white wash dress. Gentle she seemed, but not round nor jolly.

"Miss Weeks?"

"Yes."

“This is Mr. Cole.”

“Yes?”

“Wilbur Cole.”

“Why—who were you looking for?”

“Didn’t you telephone me at the hotel?”

“I’m afraid there is some mistake.”

Then was Wilbur aware that down the hall was a rustle and a masculine giggle, as of two or three men. He was filled with fury that he had been tricked; that they had even followed, to watch him make a fool of himself. But he had to relieve Miss Weeks. She was holding the door tight, beginning to close, looking anxious.

He spoke softly, so that his tormentors should not hear:

“I know what it is now. I’m new on the road—salesman—and some of the boys at the hotel were kidding me, and pretended it was you telephoning to invite me to supper. I don’t care about myself—I can get back at them; but, honest, Miss Weeks, I’m terribly sorry it was you I had to bother. I guess maybe it must be kind of scary, living here alone; but don’t be scared. I’ll beat it now. It was a good joke on me—heh? You see, I been stuck in town, with the storm tying up the trains, and I was so proud of being invited to a home feed that prob’ly I boasted a little; so I guess I deserved all I got.”

“Your poor boy—you are only a boy—it was horrible of them!”

“Oh, I’m not a boy. I’m twenty-eight.”

Her weariness smoothed out in a darting smile as she mocked:

“Oh, so old; so very old! I’m older than that myself.”

“Say, sometime on some other trip, may I drop into the store and have a chat, and make up for those other fellows? But I know they didn’t mean to get you in Dutch. They were just kidding—they’re a wild bunch—but they don’t mean any harm; and a fellow sure is ready for any kind of a jamboree to break the monotony when he’s on the road.”

“Yes.” Her face lighted again, as though she had an inspiration.

“Well, good night.”

“Wouldn’t you like to really stay and have supper?”

“Do you mean it?”

“Yes. . . . I think I do.”

As he followed her in, she banged the door shut with a sudden nervous energy and sighed:

“There! Let’s shut out the loneliness. I know how it is at your hotels. I get

that way myself, living alone; and I've never dared to invite a man to supper, because people gossip so here. But we'll forget all that tonight, and I'll see what I can scratch up for supper. I was going to have scrambled eggs and tea; but we'll have to have something grander than that—for company."

While she searched the cupboard he sat on the edge of a chair and clung to his cap. No man feels entirely abandoned to a situation so long as he keeps hold of that symbol of his royalty, his headgear. Wilbur would have felt more independent had it been a derby; but still, a sealskin cap was a solid masculine thing.

He was puzzled by her and by her living room. He told himself that she was like a school-teacher. The room seemed bare. There was no carpet; only a large rag rug. The table was of reddish wood, with something like a double sets of legs. It seemed to be the dining table as well as library table. There wasn't a real sideboard, with the beveled glass and brass handles, and rows of cut glass, which spelled elegance in St. Sebastian, but only another reddish-wood thing, very plain, with small glass knobs, and covered with a plain blue cloth, set with two brass jars.

The only chairs were black wooden things—not even rockers. He "liked them, sort of," he announced to himself; "they were kind of pretty, but awful plain and old-fashioned."

Most curious of all was the fact that the room was lighted only by candles.

Even on the farm they had had lamps, and every nice house in St. Sebastian had so many electric clusters that you could read fine print in the farthest corner. Yet somehow it was "restful, the way the candlelight shone on the reddish wood, even if it was tabby."

"How do you like my candles and mahogany?" Miss Weeks interrupted his inspection.

"Oh, is that mahogany, that red wood? I've heard of that."

"Yes; my grandfather brought that table from Vermont to Minnesota. It's a gate-legged table."

"Oh, is it? I've read about them."

"Do you disapprove of my candles much? All my women friends here in Gopher tell me that candles are used only in the log cabins, way up North; but then an old maid needs a dim light to look attractive in."

"Oh, they're just envious. Don't get silver candlesticks like those in any log cabin, let me tell you! I like candlelight. It's—oh, it's—"

"Yes; it really is. Do you think you could stand some shirred eggs with canned mushrooms and some nice little sausages for supper?"

“That would be corking!” he breathed. He was telling himself “I bet she’s educated.”

While she prepared supper he was uneasy. He did not feel that he had a right to be here, and he pictured Fred Oberg and his confederates waiting for him in the hall, possibly knocking at the door or sending a foolish message to him. He did not gain confidence till he sat opposite to her at supper.

She still seemed to him of the forbiddingly bluestockinged sort who “expected a fellow to be interested in suffrage and all that highbrow stuff.” But his heart, which was so hungry for beauty without knowing that it was hungry, was pleased by her fine nose, her intelligent eyes, her quick and fragile fingers. He had a perplexed feeling that the supper table, with its four candles and thin china, was more impressive than even a Sunday dinner table of St. Sebastian. He tried to tell her his feelings:

“I’ve never been brought up to real pretty things much. I was raised on a farm; and then I got busy *mit* groceries at Jack Rabbit Forks; and then—oh, you know—a boarding house at St. Sebastian and out on the road. I guess I’m pretty ignorant about this decoration stuff, and so on and so forth, never being in the furniture line or anything.”

“Ignorant? Heavens, so am I!” Her eyes glowed. He had a sense of impersonal friendship such as he had never known with women.

She mused, while he was pleased by the turn of her wrist as she dropped lumps of sugar in his tea.

“Yes, I’m afraid I’m a bluffer about silver and candles. I talk so glibly about grandfather’s table—it was his; but, just the same, dear old granddad died in the poorhouse, and I never was able to get his mahogany back till a few years ago. A farm? Heavens, child, I lived on a farm for eighteen years. And taught district school, and made the fires every morning, and sometimes scrubbed the floor. But I always wanted to handle pretty things; and so, when mother died and I didn’t have to be a schoolma’am any more, I went to Winona and learned millinery, so I could play with pieces of velvet and ribbon and jet ornaments—and oh, things from Paris and Vienna, and all sorts of far, far-off places—long red feathers that make me think of the tropics—palms and parrots—”

“Yes, I know; I’ve always wanted to travel too.”

They laughed at each other—friends now, these children of the new settlements.

Because they did belong to the new settlements they could not keep up the strain of rhapsodizing. It didn’t seem to Wilbur quite decent to talk about beauty. As though the label on a tomato can had any use except to make it sell!

They gossiped about the blizzard, the governor, and the prospect for a good crop. Wilbur was permitted to smoke after supper, and he was in a state of fullness and friendly comfort, though not in any artistic fervor. But when she brought out a genuine Rue de la Paix hat ornament, set with brilliants, and laughed at herself because she could not bear to sell it, he began to confess that he had felt emotions in the presence of wild roses.

She read aloud a poem from a magazine—a slight verse with none of the boom and red-bloodedness of the verses he had approvingly read in newspapers. It concerned an English watering place and a seller of periwinkles. There was a line which Miss Weeks repeated:

"*The 'winkie woman's coming in the twilight by the sea.*"

Wilbur knew but little regarding periwinkles and the vending of periwinkles, and he had never thought of the sea except as a means of importing olive oil; but always he was enthralled by dusk, and wondered whether he wasn't a little "soft." Now he perceived that there might be others like himself.

He took leave in such a high mood of goodness and happiness as he had not known since Sunday afternoons on the farm. He thanked her for taking him in, and they shook hands at the door.

He crept into the hotel, avoiding Fred Oberg and his associated jesters. He could not endure the questions and rib-pokings with which they would soil his memory of the evening. Next morning the trains were running again, and he slipped away from town, the memory in his heart like something delicate and of pearl.

III

Through springtime and summer Wilbur covered his territory, not by train, but by a little runabout motor, such as traveling men were beginning to use everywhere. These were the good days of youth and first success, travel and discovery, dawns of starting and dusks of whistling arrival, great skies, and the vast and breathing land.

He issued early from frame hotels to rush to the garage and be chummy with the repair man, and wise about mixtures, and that heat pipe which was working loose. He started in the cool hour of dew and meadow larks.

He drove from the larger towns to German or Norwegian settlements, each with a large brick church, a large saloon, a small smithy, with the smith in wooden shoes, and a hum of flies about the hitching posts in the street.

His laugh became more confident; his cheeks resumed the tan of farm days; his eyes, pale amid the brick red of his flesh, were calm with visions. He

followed fenceless roads that were close in amid the grain, while overhead rolled the bellying clouds. He was alone most of the day, but he was not friendless now. The grocers had come to accept him; they liked his eagerness and truthfulness.

At one end of the route, which he covered once every two weeks, he had Myrtle Hillbridge for stimulant, and he was on first-name terms with her; he strolled with her beneath the lindens and box-elders, and laughed a good deal, and pretended he was going to try to kiss her.

Midway on the route he had an inspiration in a Gopher Prairie milliner named Miss Weeks.

He could not again have supper in her rooms. The little town, with its poverty of melodrama, was hungry for scandal, and she clung to her immaculate reputation. She scorned herself for her timidity, she said; but there it was. He called on her at the millinery shop and touched with his horny, blunt forefinger the bits of colored fabric she loved. They planned that some day, when he was the owner of a chain of five hundred grocery stores, they would buy a yacht and sail off to Hong-Kong and the isles of the sea, and bring back carved ivory and dusky opals, and the feathers of cockatoos.

Most of this fancy was hers; it was she who, from her yearning study of magazines, had garnered the names that studded their game: Taj Mahal and Singapore and Colombo, Kioto and the Hôtel du Chemin de Fer of Buitenzorg. His contribution was an insistence that the yacht should have stores of city food and enormous boxes of candy; and mahogany and candles, for which decorations he had come out strongly.

On a moonlit evening in August he begged Miss Weeks to walk out beyond the town to see the moon on the prairie.

He was excited; he was proud of her, as a treasure he had found. But he talked casually, trying to be very cultured. They passed a house on a hill. He knew it was a noble edifice, because it was like the Hillbridge mansion in St. Sebastian.

“That’s an elegant place—don’t you think so?” he said in selected accents of politeness and intellectuality.

“No; I’m afraid I think it’s pretty ugly. It’s—Oh, I wish I knew something about architecture! I don’t know why I don’t like it, except that it looks to me like a fat woman with lots of paste diamonds, and too dressy, and a stenciled garden hat on top of that. It’s so lumpy, and it’s got scrollamajigs all over the porch; and that round tower is just silly—don’t you think?”

“Yes. I guess—yes; that’s so,” he sighed.

He told himself that, after all, this monstrosity was not like the chaste

Hillbridge mansion. But he knew it was.

"Our towns aren't beautiful—not yet. Maybe they will be when they stop trying to be showy."

"Yes. I guess—yes; that's so. . . . Though, golly, the towns looked pretty good to me when I came off the farm. Oh, I'm an ignorant brat! I don't know how you can stand me."

"My dear, you're not! You're good and sweet and honest. It's myself who are ignorant. Look at me—old enough to be your grandmother; the perfect catty old maid, daring to criticize these towns that the pioneers built out of sweat and blood. And what am I? Just a small-town milliner, with half a shop—tinkering and making a few silly hats."

"You're not! You're not! You're—oh, so cultured and everything— And you're young; you aren't hardly a bit older than me by the family Bible; and your—oh—your imagination is so young; and— Oh, I don't know how to say it, but you know what I mean."

He put his arm about her shoulder, on a corner shadowed by a bank of lilac bushes. There was a hush, rhythmic with a distant chorus of frogs. The angel of quiet affection bent lulling wings about them. She patted his arm as they walked on.

The town broke off abruptly. One moment they were hedged in by one-story cottages; the next, with the town forgotten, they faced the splendor of the open prairie, brown and honest and elemental by day, but charmed now to an uplifted radiance. It was not a flat, dull plain, but dipping and winsome. Nothing save the stormy ocean could be so broad, so far-stretching to that pale shimmer of horizon.

They were on a slight rise, and they looked across ten miles of meadow and corn patch and fifty-acre wheat fields. The moon was still low and touched the veils of mist that rose from hollows. Beyond these apparitions the eye lifted till the spirit was swimming and dizzy with the sweep of the shining land. The groves of willows, the alder bushes marking a curving creek, and the eye of a slew were sparkling points on the plate of silver. The yellow light of a distant farmhouse stirred the poignant thought of home.

Unspeaking, with one strong emotion linking them, unconsciously hand in hand and their arms swinging together, they moved forward into that world of light. Their eyes were solemn. They passed from the road into a meadow. The long grasses whispered to their slow tread.

He ignored the heavy dew, which soaked his shoes, till he realized that he was not caring for her, and urged:

"Sakes alive! You'll catch your death o' cold. Let's sit on this gate."

He had spoken so softly that the charm was not shattered; and, swathed in glory, they perched on the three-barred wooden gate of a barbed-wire fence, which had been enchanged into a spider web. She sat on a lower bar and leaned her head against his knee. The faint pressure made him tender, conscious that she belonged to that wistful beauty.

He instinctively stroked her cheek. Slowly the full ecstasy of the holy hour welled in him till he could no longer be mute. He identified her with it, and demanded her.

"I've never felt—oh, so happy before! I don't want to ever lose you, dear. Can't we be married? I ain't—I am not worthy—"

She straightened up; stood by the fence.

"Boy, you don't love me! It's just moonlight and walking with a woman. You don't know what you want yet. I've always had such big visions of love that— No, no, no! You wouldn't propose to me if it were a hot afternoon, a muggy, wilty afternoon, and we were walking down Main Street."

"But you do like me; and when we're both lonely—"

"Probably no one will ever love me as I want. Oh, why should they? What am I but a little hat trimmer, with a love for tea and cats!"

"You aren't; you are the one person I could love—if you could only understand how much I mean it!" And as he said it he knew he didn't quite mean it; he knew he was merely living up to the magic moment, and he listened to his own high-pitched voice going on in poetic periods unnatural to him: "Your soul shines like the prairie there; and when I look into your eyes I see all the fairy stories my mother used to read to me—"

"But, my dear boy, you don't want a lady reciter. You want a nice home and somebody to send out the laundry for you. That's all right! I understand. I often want a home myself. But I'm a funny old silly. Frightfully sentimental. So distrust sentimentality. Wait. Think it over tomorrow. Oh—"

Suddenly she was crying, in sobs accumulated through years of loneliness. She crouched on the lower bar of the gate and hid her eyes against his knee. Her hat fell off and her hair was a little disordered. Yet this touch of prosaicalness did not shock him. It brought her near to him; made her not a moon wraith, but a person like himself. He patted her shoulder till she sat up and laughed a little; and they strolled toward the town.

The overwrought self that had sung of love was gone. But he felt toward her a sincere and eager affection.

Twenty-four hours later, back in St. Sebastian, he was calling on Myrtle Hillbridge. They put a humorous monologue record on the phonograph and laughed loudly over it and ate fudge; and he was perfectly sincere about that

too.

IV

He was to spend two weeks in St. Sebastian, helping take stock. It was his longest stay there since he had met Miss Myrtle Hillbridge at a church social. On his first call he criticized the Hillbridge house to himself for having a foolish little tower and a battlement. He was uneasy in the glare of electric light falling upon bright green velours upholstery in Myrtle's parlor, and he decided that Myrtle's smooth cheeks were stupid in that hot shine. He thought of the gentle vividness of Miss Weeks' ever-changing face. But he reasoned with himself:

"Thunder, they can't everybody have the same kind of a house! . . . Rats, they can't everybody be the same kind of a person! . . . Miss Weeks is the finest woman I know; but Myrtle is a mighty jolly girl. . . . Gosh, that's a funny record! I wonder if Myrtle has any of this jazz music."

He was invited to an Advertisement Party at Myrtle's, and by reason of much reading of magazines upon trains he won the guessing contest. He danced the fox trot with damages to the slippers of not more than one or two girls, and told a good story about the Chippewas at Cass Lake.

When the young married couples were departing, and the girls were being persuaded to let various young men take them home, Myrtle whispered:

"Don't go yet, Wilbur. Wouldn't you like to stay and help me eat up the rest of the cake and lemonade?"

She looked confidential; and he felt confidential and superior to the rest of the party as he whispered:

"Yes."

They sat in chairs drawn up to the polished expanse of the dining table and nibbled crumbs of coconut filling, and laughed at the rest of the guests. The least he could do was to hold her hand. This duty he performed to the perfect satisfaction of all immediately concerned. She hung her head; and, while she shyly traced the design on his cuff button with her finger, she murmured:

"Why am I so bad? Why do I let you hold my hand?"

He didn't know the answer, and he felt guilty that she was so moved by his caress. How could he, as a regular man, stop now when she was so innocently happy? He seized her hand more boldly; and, because the tension of the moment demanded that he should say something complimentary at once, he sighed:

"Pretty little hand!"

She glanced at him sharply and snatched away her hand.

"I don't believe you care a bit about holding my hand; and I'm not going to let you, either! You're nothing but just a lady-killer, going round playing make love."

"I am not, either!" he insisted, and tried to capture the hand again.

She would not let him, and informed him that she should never have yielded to his petition to be allowed to stay and finish up the cake if she had not supposed he would behave himself. He was crushed by her coldness and convinced that to hold the hand of Miss Myrtle Hillbridge was a very close approximation to heaven.

She sent him home; but relented at the door and let him kiss her good night, which he did with rapturous thrills, and went out exultant. When he got home, and began to smoke a cigar of triumph, he wondered whether Myrtle was entirely unwilling to be kissed. He informed himself that she was maneuvering, but that he was an ungrateful dog to think anything of the sort; that Myrtle would like to drag a promising young man to the altar, but also that she was just a kindly girl whom said ungrateful dog had sore offended; that she was more human than Miss Weeks, but that Miss Weeks' little finger was worth more than Myrtle's whole body. He repeated this highly consistent analysis over and over, and went to bed in a whirl of perplexity, out of which emerged only one fact—that he liked to kiss Miss Myrtle Hillbridge.

It was past one, three hours after the canonical bedtime in St. Sebastian, when he went to bed. He was sleepy next day, and all his opinions regarding women could have been summed up in "Drat them: they disturb a man's work!" But Myrtle called him up and invited him to drop in after supper. After having kissed the poor, trusting girl—why had he ever been such a scoundrel!—he couldn't be cold to her; and he thanked her ardently, though his warmest desire was to get to bed directly after supper.

He hoped that she wouldn't be too affectionate or talkative that evening. She wasn't. They sat on the front steps, upon flattened doughnuts of pillow, leaning against the porch pillars; and they talked drowsily of Ben and Bessie, and of how admittedly superior Myrtle was to Bessie. He found himself kissing her good night at the gate, and he went home feeling bound to her.

Never, he meditated, could he tell her that he hadn't really meant those kisses. Why, it would break her heart! He had to go on now. . . .

How come he had kissed her again? He certainly hadn't meant to. He didn't understand. Well, anyway, it wouldn't be so bad to marry Myrtle. She was a splendid girl and a normal-school graduate. . . . But he plaintively wished he had met Miss Weeks earlier. He wondered, with excitement, why he

couldn't correspond with Miss Weeks. Never thought of that before! . . . No; too late! . . . Besides all that—oh, that moonlight stuff was too highbrow for a jay like himself! Oh, well—

V

He was invited to supper at the Hillbridges. It was a party meal, with olives and candied orange peel. Mr. Hillbridge treated Wilbur as one accepted by the established set in St. Sebastian. He asked him questions about the grocery business outlook, and boomed: "Have some more of the lamb, Wilbur, my boy. And don't you two young people go holding hands under the table there!" Mrs. Hillbridge smiled, and said "Now, Chan!" to her husband; and, to Wilbur, "Don't mind him, Mr. Cole; he's a terrible joker."

Myrtle was moody, but she gave Wilbur secret smiles. And Mr. Hillbridge gave him a two-for-a-quarter cigar.

The Hillbridges were temporarily without a maid—most families in St. Sebastian are permanently temporarily without a maid. After supper Myrtle commanded her parents: "You two go off to the movies, and Wilbur and I will wash the dishes—won't we, Wilbur?"

Yes—Wilbur would, indeed; there was no sport he admired so much as the washing of party supper dishes. Mrs. Hillbridge protested for a suitable period, then winked at her husband and jerked her head backward at him; and they departed, leaving Wilbur in a comfortable fancy that this was his house and Myrtle his jolly little wife.

They laughed as they washed the dishes. He dropped some cold water down her neck, and she chased him about the kitchen, snapping the dish towel at him till he begged for mercy. They did not talk of solemn beauty or the misty plains; neither of silver nor of candlelight; but lustily sang together a pleasing melody:

Oh, myyyyyy E-GYP-shun queen,
You're the best I ever-rever-rever seen;
And your winks put the jinx on the sphinx,
so I thinks,
My dreamun Ejup que-en!

"Isn't that a dandy song?" glowed Myrtle. "Oh, I'd die if I could just write one song like that! They say this man made a hundred thousand out of Poor Butterfly; but I don't know—maybe it would be more fun to write movie scenarios. Oh, just think of being a scenario writer and going out to Los

Angeles and meeting Douglas Fairbanks! Isn't he a peach! I wonder if he is married. I was reading—why, just yesterday—it was an advertisement in the paper, where you can learn to write scenarios in six lessons; and you get from a hundred to a thousand dollars apiece for them. Think of that! Maybe I wouldn't buy an automobile that would put it all over Doctor Julian's! But still, think of writing a song like that—My dreamun Ejup que-en!"

"Yes; that's so," Wilbur agreed.

It had been a good supper. He certainly did like corn fritters.

He contrasted this big kitchen, its enamel refrigerator, its cabinet, its new range, with the closet which Miss Weeks called a kitchen and in which she cooked one thing at a time on a kerosene burner.

It was good to be on kitchen terms of intimacy after months in the bedrooms and offices of hotels. It was good to have Myrtle acknowledge that he was on such terms and to say, when they had gone out to the front porch: "Oh, do run in and get me a glass of ice water, Wilbur. You know where the ice-box is."

He swaggered through the hall, the dining room, the kitchen, as though all this were his. He was no longer a farm boy on sufferance in the great mansion of the great city.

He cheerfully let the tap run cold, chopped ice, filled the glass, made the ice tinkle, switched off the kitchen light, started toward the hall—and stopped.

Someone, a block away, was playing a violin. The kitchen window was open; and as he looked from the darkened room he was conscious of a honeysuckle bush rustling in the yard, of slumberous trees and the quiet night, while the music wound a thread of faint, fine emotion about him. And instantly he was identifying that mood with Miss Weeks; and he knew that he was doing it, and wanted to run away from the admirable young woman awaiting him on the front porch.

"It isn't Myrtle's fault—she's a lot better than I am. I'm a hound; but, Lord, I don't want to settle down yet! I don't want to look fat after supper, like Pa Hillbridge. I guess probably she is eight, maybe ten, years older than Myrtle; but still, she's so much younger; and she always will be. I want to play yet, like a kid—like her."

"Her" meant Miss Weeks to him. "Her" would always mean Miss Weeks to him, he knew.

Myrtle was waiting. He trailed out to the porch. She was cuddled on the porch swing. She patted a cushion and said amiably:

"Sit here and be comfy."

Then, because he was afraid he would kiss her, he did kiss her, and felt

himself to be a traitor and a fiend and a scared rabbit, all at once. Again he wanted to run. Also, he wished to kiss her. Suddenly he was standing beside the porch swing and listening to his own stammering:

"Oh, I mustn't kiss you—I mustn't—you're so good and bully; and—I guess I better go."

"I didn't—I didn't mind. I like you!" she whispered.

If she would only be angry—only tell him to go! He couldn't be churlish to her. But never again would he be so weak as to kiss her! She was a stranger to him; and always would be, though they were married with bell, book and candle. But he could say nothing. He was afraid of the serene power of commonplaceness in her. He could only stand in a cold numbness, wondering why he couldn't find anything to say.

"Wilbur, what is the matter?"

He did not answer; could not answer.

"Wilbur!"

Nothing.

She sat on the edge of the swing and stared at him. She drew an angry breath. He turned his head away. Then:

"Well, Mr. Wilbur Cole, if you think I am so crazy about you that I am going to stand for your being silent and queer and cranky, as if you had done me a favor by—by kissing me—and now you guess maybe you want to run along home, then I guess you have another guess coming, Mr. Wilbur Cole. You can go; and you can't go one bit too soon for me!" Her voice was round and resolute, young and hard.

He moved toward the gate.

"Wilbur!" It was a sound of relenting.

He turned back, and heard a queer vulgar little old man in him piping: "Darn it! I thought she was going to let me go now."

"Wilbur, don't you think you ought to apologize before you go? What is it, dear? Come, tell me the matter."

Terrified, he cried:

"I can't—not tonight. Oh, I'm so sorry, honey! You're sweet; and—I'll call you up tomorrow."

He bolted; and not for a mile did he slacken his half run.

He sat on a pile of ties overlooking a cindery railroad yard for three hours or more; and he was no longer young. He was suffering, and he was not enjoying the spectacle of himself. Youth makes a dramatic picture of itself as heroic in suffering. Past youth blames itself and wants either to heal or to cause

the suffering of others.

The moon came up in its last quarter—riding like a wrecked galleon in a lost sea of grasses. It seemed to bind him to Miss Weeks, up there, sixty miles away. The night breeze was ever cooler and more fresh. He muttered:

"Gee! I'm free! It isn't too late now, no more. Myrtle, poor kid! Hope she gets a new beau in couple of weeks. . . . Bet she does, too. . . . Why don't I go? I'll do just that."

He walked sedately to the garage. He awoke an irate night attendant. He cheerfully filled the tank of his little car, and even took care to fill a grease cup. At three o'clock he started due north, toward Gopher Prairie.

He no longer blamed himself or justified himself. He merely growled:

"Bet there's lots of fellows get married when they don't specially want to—just drift along, and see they expected to buy a ring; lots more than will ever admit it. Tell you, me, if I ever get married it's going to be—oh, like one of these here pilgrimages. Kind of religious. I've crawled up from a farmhouse attic to this little ole car, and I ain't going to stop with just being a solid citizen. No, sir! Read books. Not just selling talk, but music. Mahogany. Tropics. . . . Candlelight . . . All that stuff. . . . Motor sure does run a lot better at night!"

The road was free of traffic and there was exhilaration in slashing through villages barren with sleep; in chasing an imbecile of a jack rabbit that hadn't sense enough to get out of the road, but kept ahead for half a mile, humping itself ludicrously in the circle of gliding light.

The darkness trembled; the fields awoke in choruses of insects; the tremendous prairie sunrise boomed across the land; the early goldenrod was cheerful beside a red barn; a meadow lark fluttered up to a fence wire and caroled—and Wilbur came riding into Gopher Prairie.

He ran up the stairs in the Colby Block, past the K.P. Hall; pounded at her door. Miss Weeks opened it—yet somehow it was not Miss Weeks.

Love had performed its old miracle of alchemy—this ordinary human face had been changed; somehow; to him it had become beautiful and imperishably young. She exclaimed:

"Why, what are you doing here? I thought you had to stay in St. Sebastian for two weeks."

"Huh? Just a moment—gee, out of breath! Do you know how pretty you are? Especially when you smile? Just ran up here to tell you I want to try that stunt of walking up Main Street on a hot afternoon; and twice in every block I want to tell you about you and me and all kinds of things—Dear, will you listen? Will you?"

She searched his eyes; then stretched out her hands. There was a skylight in the hall. Morning sunshine fell upon the lovers.

4
AFTERGLOW
(*1918*)

Then, dusty and saddle-sore, and the eyes of every man big with the glare of sagebrush and sand, the column rode into a valley, and by the milky yellow river they found a clump of cottonwoods which offered shelter very pleasant to riders of death. A crooning spring was midmost of the grove, and in the distance a blood-streaked butte held the abiding peace of the afterglow.

Without command they halted and cried aloud. Captain McCumber, that lean, hard-bitten Yellowleg who had all day cursed dryly through his dust-caked mustache, spake gently now, and said he: "Gentlemen of Washington, alpaca-becoated bedamned gentleman afar in the War Office, may the Sioux get you and the Cheyennes use you for pemmican, as it is just and comely. Yet we shall give you this site for a post, the same having sweet water, and an evening light that brings to a sentimental soldier the memory of his yesterdays and the green hills of Ulster County. Fort Afterglow shall they call that post, and Afterglow Butte shall that hill be christened, I, James Stoudenberg McCumber, captain of the Xth Cavalry, so say, and may a rattler-coil round the creaking shank of any colonel or general that would have it named after himself—*dismount*!"

This was before Captain McCumber had himself become a somewhat creaking-shanked colonel. Long and long ago it was, but still does the afterglow seek that butte, and among the dry cottonwoods of the parade ground that spring still whispers beneath the brazen *zzzzzz* of the locusts. In the hazy golden air the paint-peeled quarters of Fort Afterglow bear witness unto a generation that know the Indians only as skilled harvesters, and know Jimmy McCumber not at all, that once the word of a Yellowleg was the only law in the sagebrush, and that to limb-racked men this place of lingering light was sacred.

Thirty-five or forty years ago Emmanuel Gilkes was a private, and chiefly noted for having nicknamed his fiery troop commander "Yumpin' Yiminy McCumber." In the course of the revolving years he became a regimental sergeant major so great and puissant that the sound of his voice at midnight

would cause a rookie to shoot four feet straight up from his blankets and come to attention in the air. So asserted his commanding officer, Colonel McCumber. The shave-tails fresh from the Point, Sergeant Gilkes's alleged superiors, young men who were learned in trajectories and bathing and French verbs, begged him for advice that they might not freeze those feet so dainty for dancing when Yumpin' Yiminy McCumber took the notion of chasing the Cheyennes through blizzards.

But in 1910, and after, he was merely A Man Named Gilkes—a job-lot consignment of a small handy thirst, a rather large white mustache, and enormous and tedious memories of Indian fighting. He was the doorman of the Service Club, in Washington, a city so used to men like Gilkes that it yawns from Anacostia clear to Rock Creek Park at the mention of ancient deeds.

The living moment of his day was at the arrival of Colonel James McCumber, retired. The colonel was due at the club at ten-seven, daily, and at ten Gilkes began to fuss about the door, to kick the mat straight and whisk cigar ashes under it, and peer down the street till he saw the colonel briskly dotting along the pavement. Then Gilkes's shoulders snapped back, and his hand went up to the salute, and for ten seconds he was not a doorman but a soldier. The colonel never said anything but: "Mornin', sergeant! How's the rheumatism?" But this was his colonel, The Colonel, Gilkes's only proof that it really was true—this fairy tale that each of us tells himself about his own lost golden age.

Like the sergeant, the colonel had a white mustache, but it was small and waxed, and his step was small and waxy, and his voice small and testy, and he was as trim and as totally obsolete as a dueling rapier. Like the sergeant, again, he was a widower. He lived in a boarding house on K Street, to be near the Service Club, and all day he sat in the club, read the papers, played solitaire, and talk-talk-talked to the other Old Files about plans for winning battles that had been won or lost decades before. Henever betrayed it—always he had been more formal than most of the bluff Indian fighters—but he liked Gilkes's salute. Not many people saluted him now.

Once he had almost showed his heart to Gilkes. He had not lived in a boarding house then, but in a home in Georgetown, with a wife and trees and servants and a view. For a month he had not come to the club. That was because his wife was slowly dying and he was sitting by her bed, biting his upper and lower lip alternately, and trying not to weep.

The papers said that she was dead, and one day he returned to the club. Gilkes, at the door, tried to say something, and at first could not. He looked at the colonel as one intimate friend looks at another, and the colonel returned the look, and was almost betrayed into losing his grip on himself.

“Colonel, I’m—She was—”

The colonel threw back his head, and shook it as though he were shaking off drops of water. His hand dropped on the sergeant’s shoulder, and “Thank you!” he said, and ran into the club.

The next day the colonel and the sergeant took up the question of the weather carefully, though they did not get beyond it. But when Gilkes was away for a week, with the rheumatism, the colonel took him a basket of quite injudicious fruit, and for ten minutes they talked about Congress and Fort Afterglow and General Miles and General Custer. In governors’ meeting, puffy General Toby asserted that Gilkes was decrepit and that the club needed a new doorman. Colonel McCumber, like the quiet Killer he was, proceeded to cut him up till General Toby begged: “You let me alone, Jim. You’ve raised seven welts on me.”

Winters and hot summers jogged past; sycamores and congressmen leafed out, heads of bureaus continued to endure new secretaries of departments, the years were a peaceful routine, and it seemed to the colonel and the sergeant that for the rest of their lives they would salute twice a day at the door of the club, and be bored. Then the War of Wars broke.

The Old Files forgot the Civil War and asked one another if they were too feeble to go abroad and volunteer. Presently the United States was in it, and the Service Club was stirred by strange uniforms, French and British and Italian, and the Old Files went back into the service—General Vance into depot work, General Toby to the War Department.

Colonel McCumber had news that Fort Afterglow, once the dominating post in Montana, but for years used only as a remount station, was to be abandoned. Suppose, he meditated, the Indians of the adjacent reservations took advantage of the absence of soldiers to rise? He snorted that he didn’t believe these stories about the new civilization of the Indians. Some one ought to be there to watch them, to foresee trouble. He sat in the club library for a long time, visioning Fort Afterglow—the parade ground splendid with a full regiment, his wife watching from the porch of Quarters No. 1, and the vesper light upon the butte. He rose, he thrust out his chin till the skin of his neck felt taut, and stalked into the hall.

Gilkes stood at attention. The colonel demanded: “How would you like to go out to Afterglow with me, sergeant?”

Gilkes’s eyes and mouth made three popping O’s of astonished longing, but he said only: “If the colonel please.”

“Ready to go?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Right! I’ll have an application for active duty put in for you.”

The colonel wanted to laugh and cry and dance with the sergeant; to stop and knit over every detail of his plan—knit one, purl one, slip one, repeat. But it was war time. “Discipline, sir, discipline!” he warned himself, and marched off, trying to make his neat bowed cavalry legs appear sturdy, while he snapped to himself: “Gilkes is a good soldier, but out of training. Have to whip him into shape if he is to be of any value to me in guarding Montana.”

James S. McCumber, colonel Xth Cavalry, ret., detailed to active duty by his own request, ordered to Fort Afterglow to supervise civilian caretakers and make a survey of the post as a possible future cantonment—that was his weighty official position, but to the eye he was merely a little old grig at a Pullman window, gloating over the passing land. The assistant secretary of war had said some vague things about sending out a troop of cavalry later, but at present the entire command of Colonel McCumber—aside from civilian employees awaiting him at Afterglow—was one bulky white-haired person named Gilkes, who was up ahead in the smoker, with his tunic open, smoking a large pipe and informing a young guardsman that Colonel McCumber was a better soldier than General Miles, and that General Miles was a better soldier than Napoleon, Alexander, Joffre, or Sergeant Gilkes.

Now and then, trying to appear casual, as though he were anything in the world except an old man hunting for familiar companionship, the colonel rolled up the swaying aisles to the smoker, whereupon Sergeant Gilkes took his feet down from the opposite seat, knocked out his pipe, and became respectful.

They pretended to each other that they weren’t excited, and they were lengthily discursive regarding the possible uses of Fort Afterglow. Between them there was no master-and-slave attitude, but something there was between them—that never-forgotten awe which a man may have for a former employer or teacher. They came nearest together when they forgot their plans for Afterglow, which were confused, and fell into memories, which were distinct; or when the sergeant cunningly hinted that the clerks in the War Department didn’t fully appreciate the discovery of the site of Afterglow. Then the colonel nodded his head a number of times, and drew in his lips, and looked confidential. It is written that a general manager will glance thus at a stenographer if the stenographer whisper that the board of directors are not all men of understanding.

But always they kept up the bar, and always they pretended that they were not thrilled at the prospect of action.

Indeed, their feeling was not as that of a boy with a new commission. They had passed the period when brass buttons and sabers and pictures in the papers meant much. Now it was something deeper—the service.

The service—magic word not to army and navy alone, but to revenue-cutter men, to foresters, to Associated Press men arousing at the flash of the big news, to telegraphers and phone girls, to wireless men in small lighted cabins upon the black sea at night. To such it is the service, that superperson which absorbs their individualities, to which they give love and labor, even when joy in reward has sagged away.

The colonel knew that there must be changes, but his memory insisted that Highwater, the point of departure for Fort Afterglow, would still be one dustheaped row of frame shacks, while the fort would be a glistening square of new quarters darting with busy men—with men he knew and liked—altogether more splendid and expansive than any place in Washington. The whole country would be filled with horses and ranchers and blanket Indians. True, Dakota did seem rather agricultural and tame, but it would be different in the morning, when they had arrived in Montana. They were due at Highwater at 5 a.m. During this one night, while they puffed up the enormous table-land that sloped toward the Continental Divide, they would go back thirty years, to youth. The colonel did not sleep. He lay in his berth, running his finger tips along the wire dust screen, staring out into the swimming darkness, telling himself that now they were passing the Bad Lands of the Yellowstone, where he had hunted Indians through coulees thick with rattler-haunted greasewood. In a few hours he would actually be at Highwater. Perhaps there would be a real buckboard at the station; perhaps the first man he saw would be some old-timer who would remember that it was McCumber who had first blazed a way through Highwater County.

Then it was time to dress. While he shaved he stooped to the low window of the swaying wash-room and peered out at the butte country sliding past in that early candid light. It was true! There were the buttes themselves, their strata of gray and red and yellow, their cones and pyramids, like a hundred Egypts. And once he saw a cow-puncher, in chaps of black-dyed sheepskin, riding the trail.

They were coming into Highwater. The porter calmed him and made him remember his bags and put him off the train as though he were an excited child.

For a moment he did not glance at the town he had come so far to regain, but with the lip-puckering anxiety of an old, lonely man he stared about for his

friend Gilkes, and felt deserted till he saw him lumbering down from the day-coach. He waved his hand with a nice combination of authority and comradeship, and in content turned to see Highwater of 1917.

He realized that there was not one buckboard, nor mule team, nor saddle horse drawn up at the station, but a line of jitneys. And this wasn't the expected red frame station, but a granite edifice, with a brick platform and a red-tilted restaurant. Above the waiting-room door was a terra-cotta bas-relief of a prairie schooner. Highwater was so far from pioneer days as to be romantic about them!

Almost meekly the colonel sat in a jitney beside the sergeant, and they forgot about being a military expedition as they whirled through town, as they saw the Drovers' National Bank, which was a Greek temple; the Christian Science Church, which was another; the Hippodrome Theater, which was a Hindu mausoleum; as they gaped at the trolley cars and six-story building and the new cement hotel with looped silk curtains, which made Main and Gallatin Streets a metropolitan corner.

"I knew I'd miss some of the familiar places, but— Miss them! I can't even make out where they stood! It doesn't seem as though we were in the right town," piped the colonel.

The sergeant seemed bewildered. "The Buckhorn Saloon is gone! It must have stood where that wholesale grocery warehouse is. I guess maybe it did. I don't know."

The two men drew a little nearer to each other in the bouncing back seat of the jitney. Their heads were shaking, bowed, unmilitary. The colonel directed the driver to take them out to Fort Afterglow without stopping.

On the train he had planned a triumphal breakfast at a hotel, with old settlers coming in and recognizing him.

The driver of the jitney was a young, swarthy prairie man, in shirt sleeves, and collarless, with a derby on one side of his head; very cheerful and competent, and not in the least impressed by their uniforms. As they took the long hill outside the town the jitney's radiator boiled, and in the most friendly way the driver turned and chuckled at his passengers: "The old hoss needs a drink."

"Ah?" said Colonel James McCumber.

The driver applied himself to driving for a while, but he was bored by it and, apparently steering entirely by good will, looked back again, and condescended: "You gents in the army?"

"Yes, but— If you wouldn't mind looking where you're going!" begged the colonel.

“Oh, don’t be scared, cap’n. I almost never run off the road, unless I skid.”

At the application of the word “scared” to his commanding officer, Sergeant Gilkes sat bolt up and glared, but the driver was unconscious of being rebuked.

“In the army, heh? Militia or regulars?”

There was vigor in the manner in which Colonel McCumber and Sergeant Gilkes disregarded the question.

“I used to take quite some few army fellows out to Afterglow, but there ain’t much doing out there now. You gents would be astonished, though, to know what an important post it used to be.”

The colonel cleared his throat and demanded: “Let’s see, who was the discoverer of Afterglow, do you remember?”

“Sure. It used to be an Injun fort, and there was an Injun fellow named—well, he was a chief, and he become a U.S. soldier, and started it.”

“Didn’t the whites have anything to do with it?”

“Not a thing”—affably. “He run it for years and years.”

The colonel hesitated, then blurted: “Wasn’t there a captain named McCommer or McCumber or something that had something to do with it?”

“Cumber? Never heard of him.”

“Have you lived here long?”

“Sure! All my life.”

The driver reluctantly drove some more, and Gilkes looked violent, while the colonel’s sense of humor slowly returned to him, and he grinned. But it was a wan grin, and when he shrugged his shoulders it was more for the effect on the morale of Gilkes than from any real enjoyment.

Half an hour—not three hours, as in former days—it took them to reach Fort Afterglow, and in that time they had a revelation of the new West. A range which had once swept unfenced over ten thousand acres touched the road to Afterglow. In the days when ranchmen and soldiers had been pals the colonel had ridden there in many an antelope hunt. Now the range was fenced, and scattered with the tar-paper shacks and lean-to barns of the honyockers, the steady, wheat-growing homesteaders. The cowmen had retreated to the hills. The friends of McCumber were defeated and gone.

“We might as well be back in Ioway or in Kansas,” grumbled the colonel.

“But,” said the sergeant, being an optimistic person and ingenious, “if there’s all these settlers, they’ll need army protection against the Indians all the more.”

“That’s so,” said the colonel brightened.

They passed an unusually fertile field, in which a man was hauling three binders with a gas tractor, and as they marveled at that science and magnificence they saw that the driver of the tractor was an Indian. They came to his white frame house. Behind it was a tepee, but beside it was a tarpaulin-covered seven-passenger six-cylinder motor car.

"Driver, don't you ever have any more trouble with the Indians?" complained the colonel.

"Naw, not a bit. There's still blanket Injuns on the reservation, and the squaws come into town with their kids on their backs, but they don't ever get bellicose, and lots of 'em are going to agricultural school, and planting Grimm alfalfa and fodder corn, and getting rich. I'm a quarter-breed Injun myself," said the driver complacently, and as they stared at his darkness and high cheek bones, the stricken adventurers realized that it was so, and they sat in a daze, wondering just why they were here.

Then, dusty and travel-sore, and their eyes big with the glare of prairie and road, they rode into a valley, and by the milky yellow river they saw a dingy scattering of frame buildings, with a tall flagpole, and in the distance a blood-streaked butte. "There's the post. It's smaller than I'd remembered," said the colonel in a little voice.

The sergeant said nothing at all. They rattled through the gate, past the log-cabin barracks of the original post, to the barren, dry-grassed, locust-loud parade ground, along which humped a line of story-and-a-half cottages, the paint blistered, the porches smooth with dust, cottonwoods baking before them, the whole place drowsy with heat, neglect, dead memories.

"I believe the caretakers live in Quarters Three and Four. You may take us to Three," said the colonel with what he believed to be a deceptive eagerness, but his voice trailed out forlornly on that still air, in that encampment that was as insignificant as a straw stack in the vast, silent valley.

They were cared for by the families of the two resident civilian caretakers —almost too well cared for! They were treated as though they weren't ever to venture into the evening dew without rubbers. By day they were permitted a certain freedom. The colonel could sit in his newly established office and write long letters to clerks in the War Department without interference from the womenfolks—provided he came to his meals on time. The men consented to take the sergeant's suggestions about cleaning out the old barracks, and making them ready for possible use in a cantonment, though they stolidly argued out every point. But the spirits of both warriors were being broken by unsoldierly fried chicken and cushioned rockers.

The colonel didn't have a car. He couldn't afford one. But the family of his subordinate, the chief caretaker, did have one, a creaking, rusty, tattered-curtained relic, and in this they went off to town to see the movies, the third evening of his command. He was glad, at first, to be left alone, but as he sat on the porch, as the moonlight showed Afterglow Butte like a mirage, and the parade ground before him like a bare floor of silver, he missed the chatter of the caretaker's family. He listened for footsteps. The fiddling of insects was only crystallized silence. He could not stand it. He leaped up and trotted out into the parade ground. He stood just where once he had been wont to stand at evening parade.

Suddenly the whole moon-shimmering flat was filled with ghosts, with the misty figures of the men he had known. He could hear their faint breathing. The spectral adjutant came to him, and again he heard in Sam Warrenton's ringing voice—stilled forever long ago—the old phrase: "Sir, the parade is formed." Involuntarily his arm came up as far as his waist, in the beginning of the salute, and yearningly he heard Sam Warrenton commanding: "Company officers to front and center." The belief overwhelmed him that he was really beholding his regiment again.

From the hills the howl of a coyote, the very voice of desolation!

The mirage vanished. The colonel was left pitilessly alone—an old man, his vision smashed, a make-believe soldier amid the shabbiness of a petty wooden ruin.

Then he started, and his back was chill, for there, in his proper position in the parade, did veritably stand the regimental sergeant major, Gilkes. The colonel had a dizzy sensation that all the world was fogged and ghostly, till he saw the apparition move and come toward him, solid and real. The sensation passed, and he stumped eagerly toward the one man to whom he—and Sam Warrenton and the invisible presence of the one-time Xth Cavalry—now meant anything.

It may be suspected that Sergeant Gilkes had also been lonely, in the dull house of the assistant caretaker. But he was highly correct and reticent in his salute, and the respect with which he queried: "Does the colonel want to have the barracks kitchen outfitted? I find that a good deal of the equipment is in good shape."

"I'll write Washington about it."

They couldn't think of anything else to be military and important about, and began to drift toward a pile of logs at the end of the parade ground from which they could see the strength of Afterglow Butte in the moonlight. The

sergeant had knocked out his pipe at the colonel's approach, and now his commander suggested, almost timidly:

"Uh, light up your pipe, sergeant. There—uh—doesn't seem to be any reason for—uh—much formality here."

They reached the pile of logs. The colonel sat easily down on them, dangling his thin legs, but the sergeant stood up, very temporary in his manner. The colonel had a sudden panic. Suppose Gilkes left him to face the loneliness again! There was no military regulation compelling sergeants to provide their commanding officers with evening gossip. He couldn't, like a small-town neighbor, say: "Oh, sit down! Stay round and chat a while." But he wanted to. Casually—"Sergeant, got some more tobacco?" He pulled out his own pipe. As Gilkes proffered his pouch, he suggested: "Let's go sit on my porch. Going to be a heavy dew out here."

The sergeant seemed uneasy, a bit too polite, in a rocker on the colonel's porch. They talked coolly of the favorite topic of all men in all places: the inferiority of other men; the others being, in this case, a crew of repair men whom the sergeant had picked up at Highwater. But when the sergeant observed that Troop A had been the finest body of men he had ever seen, and the colonel argued that he had preferred Troop D, the bar of discipline was lifted between them, and suddenly they were just two elderly neighbors, talking of the past—like the banker and his old friend, the conductor.

A tinny rattle announced the return of the caretaker's worthy chariot. The sergeant rose hastily. "Good night, sir," he said. But the colonel touched his shoulder: "I wish you'd drop in every evening, sergeant. To be frank, this is a rather lonely place, and—uh—sergeant, I think we've outlived rank."

He meant it, desperately. He wanted to say it just as he would have said it to General Toby, but couldn't keep his voice from sounding formal, and with formality the sergeant answered: "The colonel is very kind. I shall be glad to, sir."

With what funds and crew they had, they had done all that they could to make Fort Afterglow ready for use as the nucleus for a cantonment. But there were no signs that the department intended to use it or to send out troops as a guard against Indians. There was nothing more for them to do except to watch the caretakers keep the repaired barracks clean. Not only every evening, but every afternoon, when they had had their naps, which they took regularly, like nice, innocent, drowsy old men, and which they pretended never to take, they strolled across the patrol ground and through the cottonwoods to the bank of the river, talking together, silent together, comfortable together.

The colonel hired two saddle horses, and they jogged in stately exercise rides out as far as Afterglow Butte, where the sergeant shot a rattlesnake, to their great common admiration. Their pale indoor cheeks began to tan, and they panted less when they climbed hills. The sergeant's rheumatism—which had been two-thirds stiffness and inaction—wore away.

They were dully content. They had forgotten that there was another life, back East, or that they had ever planned to keep a watch on the Indians.

On a morning of early autumn the colonel was stirred by the news in the Highwater "Daily Lariat" that two bad Indians in the Bear Claw Mountains, fifty miles away, had left their reservation, got drunk, murdered a sheepman and family, and hid out in the hills. The sheriff of that county was a young chap, a politician, who had no reputation as rider or shot. He was out after them with a posse—in an automobile!

The colonel threw down the paper and held up his hands to heaven for justice. "After Indians in an automobile!" he submitted to the laughter of the gods, and went off to tell the sergeant about this outrage.

"I sort of wish we were after them, on horseback," said Gilkes.

"So do I, sergeant. Of course, by the act of 1877, Congress forbade the army to act as a posse comitatus to pursue Indians. But I suppose we could go as quasi civilians, in mufti. But oh, it isn't worth considering. Probably they'll catch these fellows some time today."

All morning they looked thoughtful, and found many excuses to see each other and discuss the fundamentals of the art of chasing Indians in the Bear Claw Mountains, which they had known foot by foot before the young sheriff of that county had been born. Toward evening they admitted that they wanted to save somebody from something if there was any opportunity. They rode into town, and at the newspaper office they learned that the two Indians were not only at large, but had shot another woman, and disappeared. The posse could find no trace of them.

"They would make for the Sinkhole. But no trailers in these degenerate days, no trailers," complained the colonel. "Sergeant, it's up to us—as civilians, of course, but—"

They were riding back to the post. The light was on Afterglow Butte, and the late breeze was filled with vigor. They looked temptingly at each other, and the one-time commander gave a real command: "Sergeant, we will start at daybreak, in civilian clothes, and go after those Indians. We ought to start right now, but— Well, you get a good night's sleep, and have some bacon, pork, coffee, and army biscuit ready, and call me at daybreak."

Creak of saddle leather and feel of spurs and glint of rifle—two young men slanting out of the gate of Fort Afterglow at the lope! Again they were of the desert riders, of the lean, tanned, mustached men in blue who had kept the peace through five hundred miles of sage and bone-dotted desolation.

They were thrilled to be on dangerous duty again; thrilled over everything; over being up early, over tearing out on horseback, over wearing stitched riding boots, over packing their rations, over their rifles and ammunition. The colonel pulled out his .44 revolver, and as vaingloriously as a boy he shot that venerable cannon in the general direction of a jackrabbit. He didn't exactly hit the rabbit, but the enemy went away hastily, and the morning was fresh, and they were going, and life was good, and he'd hit the mark next time certainly.

They loped for almost a quarter of an hour, after which, guiltily glancing away from each other, they slackened pace and began to jog. It was an hour before the Colonel's conscience made him order: "We must make better time than this, sergeant." They loped again for all of five minutes. Somehow, without either of them admitting that they were doing so, they went back to a slow trot.

But their eyes joyously searched the far land as they passed Afterglow Butte, filed along a shelf road high on a camel-backed hill, reached a pinnacle, and beheld a valley which stretched across hill spurs to the snow peaks of the Bear Claw Mountains. Their road was merely a thread which wandered in enormous curves below and beyond them. They seemed free from confinement to one road, one spot; they belonged to all that vastness.

"Glad to be away from the post for a while. It was getting to be just a bit constricted," owned the colonel.

Perhaps it was because of the view that they rode so slowly! One or the other of them was always sneakingly rubbing a sore thigh or a cricked back, and Sergeant Gilkes betrayed considerable relief when, at ten o'clock, the colonel suggested: "We had breakfast so early that perhaps we'd better stop and have a bit more coffee and bacon."

They had so far yielded to the effeteness of the time as to take a folding stove with solidified alcohol fuel, but as they squatted amid the sage with their tin cups of coffee, they were a throw-back to the days when they had been plainsmen, not a K Street widower and a club doorman. Their shadows on the hot sand did not image their wrinkles nor the tissuey delicacy of their cheeks, but only the bold masses of broad-brimmed hats and flannel-shirted shoulders and high-heeled riding boots.

The colonel was a little vague, as though he knew that he ought to give the command to mount, but could be influenced not to give it. The sergeant didn't

seem interested in anything connected with mounting. He deliberately turned his back on the horses, made himself comfortable in the sandy hollow, pushed up the sand to pillow his back, and drawled: “This makes me think of the time Corporal O’Dowd and Corporal Cohen got to tussling at the water hole—”

The colonel pulled his hat down to shade his eyes, luxuriously stretched out his stiff legs, and conspired with the sergeant against discipline by answering: “I’ve always wanted to hear you tell that story, Gilkes.”

Their talk turned into a droning; the delicate spirals of pipe smoke vanished; their restless blue and ivory hands were still. A hawk in the vast orb of sky saw only two men fast asleep, two dots in the waste.

The colonel awakened. He rubbed his eyes and staggered up, drunk with sun, dizzy and gasping. He shrilled, not very lustily: “Sergeant!” But still Gilkes slept on.

“Sergeant! This is preposterous!”

Gilkes stirred, grunted, sat up and looked blankly sheepish. “Why, I must have dropped off to sleep!” he said.

“You don’t really think you could have done anything like that, do you? Sergeant Gilkes, about how many Indians do you expect to capture at this rate? You ought to be court-martialed. Mount!”

The sergeant saluted very snappily and they rode on.

In about ten minutes, “Sergeant,” hesitated the colonel, “to—uh—to tell the truth, I was asleep myself, back there.”

They grinned at each other, and now they bobbed along without pretending that they were going to lope, and then fell into easy talk. The colonel was admitting to himself: “I was a fool to stay in Washington, when I could have all this fun. No more East for me! Just ride on— Though I am a little tired!”

They had only one more nap before evening. At dusk they came to a long range of hills surrounding an immense lake. A cold evening breeze blew through the defiles, and after their hot afternoon they shivered and hunched their shoulders in the chill. They were so weary that they swayed from side to side, and rode in glum silence. They had been as good horsemen as any in the Xth Cavalry, but now they grabbed unabashed at the hornless front of their McClellan saddles as the horses went jerkily up the rocky rises.

They had to ford a narrow, swift mountain stream. The ponies were almost as tired as the men, and they wallowed and plunged through the stream. Gilkes’s pony struck a smooth, flat rock, slid, went down, reared up violently. The sergeant shot off the saddle, sprawling through the air like a jumping frog, and disappeared in the icy water.

“Bbbbbbbbbbbbbb!” shivered the sergeant as he splashed out, and

crawled up the far side of the stream.

"Are you all right, old man?" called the colonel in genuine alarm.

"Yyyyyyyyyyes, but damn cold!" said Gilkes dourly as he chased his horse.

It is a human fact that of any two people the one who has just been injured has an enormous advantage and is likely to use it. There are few husbands who, having been so fortunate as to cut a finger, do not demand praise, sympathy, tolerance for their opinion, and approbation of their ties. It was the sergeant who was lofty now, and the colonel whose anxious, trim, ruddy face announced: "We strive to please!"

He petitioned: "We'd better find camping place as soon as we can. We follow up this stream, don't you think, and find a level space, and build a fire, and get you dried off?"

"Very well, sir," said the sergeant, dripping but dignified.

"Though it's going to be a little chilly tonight, up here in the hills. But we have thick blankets."

"As you wish, sir"—implying that his own wishes had not been consulted.

The colonel wanted his confidant to discuss blankets and a fire, or anything else that was vital and personal. He was more interested in Gilkes's opinions than he ever had been in General Toby's. But Gilkes refused to come out and play with him any more.

Also, the colonel wanted a soft bed!

As he wistfully admitted these desires to himself they rode over a rise. It was dusk, but the lake stood out below them like a mirror on black velvet. And, in a wide clearing beside it, ringed round with wilderness of hill and forest and rock, was an enormous hotel.

On its long porches, electric-lighted and smooth-floored, a crowd of girls in silk sweaters and men in white flannels were dancing. Above them the broad windows stretched in rows of brilliancy. On the drive was a huge motor bus.

"A hotel—tourist resort at that—in the backwoods. And I thought we were so nervy, riding away from civilization," grieved the sergeant.

The colonel said slowly: "Yes. So did I. Well, perhaps, after all, we'd better go down there and stay tonight. Don't like to, but—"

"No, sir, not me! I don't want all the crochet sisters laughing at me, all soaked like I am."

"But, Gilkes, I don't want you to catch cold."

"I guess I ain't going to catch cold no more than anybody else."

"But remember your rheumatism—"

“Rheumatism! Of course you can go to the hotel. You don’t like my cooking, anyway! You only ate half the bacon I cooked for you this noon!”

“Why, why, Gilkes, it was fine bacon. Though I advocate cooking it just a bit longer—”

“No plainsman wants his bacon burned to pieces like a tenderfoot.”

“Sergeant Gilkes, that will do!”

The sergeant became galvanized. His voice dropped four notes: “Oh, yes, sir. I just meant—”

“We will make camp right here, sergeant.”

“Yes, sir.”

The colonel tried to be highly offended. They ate silently, and when Gilkes was reduced from teeth-chattering wetness to mere ordinary coldness they curled up by the primitive camp fire, four hundred feet above the luxurious hotel, a rough crag dark behind them, but a glow of electric light below them.

The colonel had not slept out in the open for fifteen years. He told himself that the field of stars was wonderful, but he interrupted his observations on nature to yelp “Confound it!” as a small rock gouged his back. The ground was harder than a steel beam. It had no give beneath his sore thighs and lame shoulder blades. He could not keep his blankets tucked in. As the fire died down he found his feet, then his shoulders, getting cold, and in the hazy, agonized, never-ended struggle of a man half asleep he tried to cover himself. He had almost slipped off into sleep when a coyote let loose in a fiendish yipping behind them, and he started up.

He heard Gilkes cursing softly.

“Gilkes—sergeant—rats! Let’s go down and rest decently. We aren’t so young as we were, I guess.”

The two men rose as one, saddled, and sneaked shame-facedly down the hill to the “Grand Mountain Château—mud baths, electric treatments, golf, tennis, polo.”

The colonel slept till 10 a.m. in a Chippendale bed. While he was sleeping the young political sheriff, not riding a cow pony but driving a flivver, wearing not high boots but Snappistile $4 shoes, captured the two outlaw Indians whom the colonel’s expedition had been seeking, and neatly shot one of them with a small .32 automatic.

The colonel read the news in the hotel’s private multigraphed paper which was brought to him with his tray breakfast of coffee, honey-dew melon, and omelette confiture.

He was afraid to rise and seek out the sergeant and admit that they might as

well ride back to Fort Afterglow. He was sighing in a chintz-upholstered chair in his room when a servant came to summon him: “The gentleman that came in with you last night seems awful sick. The doctor thinks it’s pneumonia.”

“And I let him come on this crazy ride—he came because I wanted him to,” was all the colonel thought as he ran down the hall. . . .

A trained nurse had been brought from the hospital at Butte, but Gilkes, even in his delirium, could not abide her. He didn’t seem quite to know who the silvery, slender, erect man in the flannel shirt was, but he demanded his presence. If the colonel sat near, Gilkes was quiet, but if he went away, with a dreadful croaking Gilkes struggled to say: “Where—I want—”

For forty-eight hours the colonel stayed by the bed, humbly acting as nurse, caring for the sergeant, forgetting the rest of the world, while Gilkes cursed him continuously.

Once he seemed to know him. “You’re Yumpin’ Yiminy McCumber, that’s who you are!” he shouted, staring directly at the colonel. “And a whale of a soldier you are too. I’d do anything in the world for you if you’d only let me, only let me.” His eyes blazed, and he muttered: “Out of this, you Yellowlegs! We’re out after Red Blanket with Yumpin’ Yiminy. Hey, you!” He roared it straight at Colonel James McCumber. “Yes, you, with the lily mitts! What’re you staring at me for? Are you awake?”

“Yes, sergeant,” said the colonel meekly.

“Huh!” snorted Gilkes in a far-off, thick-throated echo of his regimental-sergeant voice.

This crisis came toward dawn. The nurse had gone to bed, but the hotel doctor and the colonel stood there, while the hard, gray light came through the windows, making the electric lamps seem wan and Gilkes’s face as yellow as sweet dough.

The doctor breathed long. “He wins. He’ll pull through. Colonel, you look pretty well done up yourself. You better go to bed now. I’ll rout out the nurse. Now—off to bed!” . . .

“I’m still weak, but I am, as you might say, a military man, and I won’t have that female nurse fussing over me and telling me I’m a ‘poor brave man,’ ” rumbled Sergeant Gilkes.

“Yes, certainly, Gilkes. I’ll take care of you.”

“Now, I can’t have the colonel doing anything like that,” said Gilkes most severely.

“Oh, not at all. I mean, I like it: it’s a rest”—humbly.

“Well—well, I’m afraid I’ll have to be retired again.”

“But what will we—what will you do?”

“The steward at the club promised to keep my place open.”

“Sergeant, to be frank, I don’t quite relish the idea of staying at Afterglow alone—those long evenings—”

Wistfully: “Could the colonel go back to Washington too?”

“Oh, I don’t like to become inactive. Look here, Gilkes—Manuel! Couldn’t we go up to Flathead Lake and build a shack and bach it and fish and just be a couple of happy fool old men together?”

“Oh, no, sir; we couldn’t, sir. You like your comforts, and you couldn’t ever forget that I’m only an enlisted man, which it wouldn’t ever be proper for you to be bunkies with, begging the colonel’s pardon, you being an officer and gentleman.”

“Can’t I get over being one?”

“Oh, no, sir, and, on the other hand, I wouldn’t ever consent to be one, having been brought up industrious and useful.”

“Well, perhaps we could walk together evenings in Washington.” Suddenly, as one who beholds a vision, the colonel raised his eyes, and he exulted: “It would be good to land at the Union Station and maybe run into Toby—”

“I would like to see the club again,” Gilkes was musing.

“I say! I wonder if Toby has appropriated my chair? He always was scheming to get it, confound him! Best chair in the club. If—he—has—”

But Gilkes did not hear him, for he was muttering: “I wonder if they’ve got a new mat for the door of the club yet? Very important to have a suitable mat.”

They pondered, silent but aware of each other, till Gilkes fell asleep and by the window the colonel nodded. The afterglow faded from the hills without and darkness gathered. But in that tranquil darkness were benediction and content!

5
THE CAT OF THE STARS
(*1919*)

The fatalities have been three thousand, two hundred and ninety-one, to date, with more reported in every cable from San Coloquin, but it is not yet decided whether the ultimate blame is due to the conductor of Car 22, to Mrs. Simmy Dolson's bland selfishness, or to the fact that Willis Stodeport patted a sarsaparilla-colored kitten with milky eyes.

It was a hypocritical patting. Willis had been playing pumpum-pullaway all afternoon, hence was hungry, and desirous of winning favor with his mother by his nice attitude toward our dumb friends. Willis didn't actually care for being nice to the dumb friend. What he wanted was cookies. So slight was his esteem for the kitten—whose name was Adolphus Josephus Mudface—that afterward he took it out to the kitchen and tried to see if it would drown under the tap of the sink.

Yet such is the strange and delicate balance of nature, with the lightest tremor in the dream of a terrestrial baby affecting the course of suns ten million light-years away, that the patting of Adolphus Josephus Mudface has started a vicious series of events that will be felt forever in star beyond mounting star. The death of exiled Napoleon made a few old men stop to scratch their heads and dream. The fall of Carthage gave cheap bricks to builders of dumpy huts. But the false deed of Willis Stodeport has changed history.

Mrs. Simmy Dolson was making an afternoon call upon the mother of this portentous but tow-headed Willis, who resides upon Scrimmins Street, in the Middle-Western city of Vernon. The two matrons had discussed the price of butter, the iniquities of the fluffy-headed new teacher in Public School 17, and the idiocy of these new theories about bringing up young ones. Mrs. Dolson was keeping an ear on the car line, for the Oakdale cars run only once in eighteen minutes, and if she missed the next one she would be too late to prepare supper. Just as she heard it coming, and seized her hat, she saw young Willis edge into the room and stoop to pat the somnolent Adolphus Josephus Mudface.

With a hatpin half inserted Mrs. Dolson crooned, "My, what a dear boy! Now isn't that sweet!"

Willis's mother forgot that she had intended to have words with her offspring in the matter of the missing knob of the flour bin. She beamed, and to Willis she gurgled, "Do you like the kittie, dearie?"

"Yes, I love our kittie; can I have a cookie?" young Machiavelli hastened to get in; and Aldebaran, the crimson star, throbbed with premonition.

"Now isn't that sweet!" Mrs. Dolson repeated—then remembered her car and galloped away.

She had been so delayed by the admiration of daily deeds of kindness that when she reached the corner the Oakdale car was just passing. It was crowded with tired business men in a fret to get home to the outskirts of Vernon, but Mrs. Simmy Dolson was one of those plump, amiably selfish souls who would keep a whole city waiting while she bought canary seed. She waved at the car and made deceptive motions of frantic running.

The conductor of the car, which was Number 22, was a kind-hearted family man, and he rang for a stop halfway down the block. Despite the growling of the seventy passengers he held the car till Mrs. Dolson had wheezed aboard, which made them two minutes late. That was just enough to cause them to miss the switch at Seven Corners; and they had to wait while three other cars took the switch before them.

By that time Car 22 was three and three-quarters minutes late.

Mr. Andrew Discopolos, the popular proprietor of the Dandy Barber Shop, was the next step in the tragedy. Mr. Discopolos was waiting for this same Oakdale car. He had promised his wife to go home to supper, but in his bacchanalian soul he desired to sneak down to Barney's for an evening of poker. He waited one minute, and was tremendously moral and determined to eschew gambling. He waited for two minutes, and began to see what a martyr he was. There would never be another Oakdale car. He would have to walk home. His wife expected too darn much of him, anyway! He waited for three minutes, and in rose tints and soft gold he remembered the joys of playing poker at Barney's.

Seven seconds before the delayed Oakdale car turned the corner Mr. Discopolos gave up the struggle, and with outer decorum and inner excitement he rushed up an alley, headed for Barney's. He stopped at the Southern Café for a Denver sandwich and cuppacoffee. He shook for the cigars at the Smoke House, and won three-for's, which indicated to him how right he had been in not going home. He reached Barney's at seven-thirty. He did not leave Barney's till one-thirty in the morning, and when he did leave he was uncertain of direction, but very vigorous of motion, due to his having celebrated the winning of four dollars by buying a quart of rye.

Under a dusty and discouraged autumn moon Mr. Discopolos weaved home. Willis Stodeport and Mrs. Simmy Dolson and the conductor of Car 22 were asleep now; even the disreputable Adolphus Josephus Mudface had, after a charming fight behind the Smiths' garbage can, retired to innocent slumbers on the soft folds of the floor mop in the corner of the back porch where he was least likely to be disturbed by mice. Only Mr. Discopolos was awake, but he was bearing on the torch of evil destiny; and on one of the planets of the sun that is called Procyon there were floods and earthquakes.

When Mr. Discopolos awoke in the morning his eyes were filmy and stinging. Before he went to his shop he had three fingers of pick-me-up, which so exhilarated him that he stood on the corner, swaying and beaming. Normally he had pride in his technic as a barber, but now all his more delicate artistry was gone in a roving desire for adventure. With a professional eye he noted the haircut of a tough young man loafing in front of the drug store. It was a high haircut, leaving the neck and the back of the head bald clear up to the crown. "Be a joke on some fellow to cut his hair that way!" giggled Mr. Discopolos.

It was the first time in a year that he had needed, or taken, a drink before afternoon. Chuckling Fate sent to him the next torchbearer, Mr. Palmer McGee.

Palmer McGee was one of Vernon's most promising young men. He lived at the University Club; he had two suits of evening clothes; and he was assistant to the president of the M.&D.R.R. He was a technical-school graduate and a Spanish scholar as well as a business-system expert; and his club-grill manners were as accurate as his knowledge of traffic routing. Today was his hour of greatness. He had, as the result of long correspondence, this morning received a telegram inviting him to come to New York to see the president and directors of the Citrus and Southern Steamship Company about the position of Buenos Aires manager for the company. He had packed in ten minutes. But he had an hour before his train, with the station only twenty minutes away by trolley. Instead of taking a taxi he exuberantly walked from the club to Selden Street to catch a car.

One door from the corner he beheld the barber shop of Mr. Discopolos, which reminded him that he needed a haircut. He might not have time to get one in New York before he saw the steamship directors. The shop was bright, and Mr. Discopolos, by the window in a white jacket, was clean and jolly.

Palmer McGee popped into the shop and caroled "Haircut; medium." Magnetized by Mr. Discopolos' long light fingers he closed his eyes and dreamed of his future.

About the middle of the haircut the morning's morning of Mr. Discopolos

rose up and jostled him and dimmed his eyes, with the result that he cut too deep a swath of hair across the back of Mr. McGee's sleek head. Mr. Discopolos sighed, and peeped at the victim to see if he was aware of the damage. But Mr. McGee was sitting with eyes tight, lips apart, already a lord of ocean traffic, giving orders to Singhalese planters and to traders in the silent northern pines.

Mr. Discopolos remembered the high-shaved neck of the corner loafer, and imitated that model. He ruthlessly concealed the too-deep slash by almost denuding the back of Mr. McGee's head. That erstwhile polite neck stood out as bare as an ostrich.

Being an artist, Mr. Discopolos had to keep the symmetry—the rhythm—correct, so he balanced the back by also removing too much hair from in front—from above Mr. McGee's Yalensian ears.

When the experiment was complete, Mr. McGee looked like a bald young man with a small wig riding atop his head. He looked like a wren's nest on top of a clothes pole. He looked painstakingly and scientifically skinned. At least it was thus that he saw himself in the barber's mirror when he opened his eyes.

He called on a number of deities; he said he wanted to assassinate Mr. Discopolos. But he hadn't time for this work of mercy. He had to catch his train. He took his maltreated head into a taxi, feeling shamefully that the taxi-driver was snickering at his haircut.

Left behind, untipped and much berated, Mr. Discopolos grumbled, "I did take off a little too much; but rats, he'll be all right in couple of weeks. What's couple of weeks? Believe I'll go get a drink."

Thus, as ignorant as they of taking any part in a progressive tragedy, Mr. Discopolos joined Willis Stodeport, Adolphus Josephus, Mrs. Dolson and the too-generous conductor of Car 22, in the darkness of unimportance, while Palmer McGee was on the Pullman—and extremely wretched.

He fancied that everyone from the porter to the silken girl across the aisle was snickering at his eccentric coiffure. To Mr. McGee, queerness of collar or hair or slang was more wicked than murder. He had rigidly trained himself to standards in everything. There were, for example, only three brands of whisky on which a gentleman could decently get edged. He was the most dependable young man in the general offices of the M.&D.R.R., and before that he had been so correctly pleasant to the right fellows and so correctly aloof with the wrong fellows, so agreeably pipe-smoking and laudatory of athletics, that he had made both junior and senior societies at Yale. He had had no experience to teach him to bear up under this utter disgrace of a variation from the standard of haircutting.

As the train relentlessly bore him on toward New York he now and then accumulated courage to believe that his haircut couldn't be so bad as he knew it was. He would stroll with noble casualness into the smoking compartment, and the instant it was free of other passengers he would dart at the mirror. Each time he made the same quaking discovery that he was even more ridiculous than he remembered.

By day, trying to read or scan the scenery or impress fellow smokers, by night, folded in his swaying berth—he could think of nothing else. He read only one paragraph of the weighty book which all persons carry on all Pullmans in the hope that they will be forced to finish it because they have nothing else to read. He grew more and more sensitive. Every time he heard a laugh he was sure that it was directed at him; and because he so uncomfortably looked away from the absent-minded gaze of fellow passengers he made them gaze the harder.

The beautiful self-confidence which had always concealed Mr. McGee's slight defects from himself and had helped him to rise to the position of assistant to the railroad president was torn away, and he began to doubt himself, began to feel that others must doubt him. When he finally crept up the cement incline in the New York station, after a writhing glance at the redcaps, to see if New Yorkers would notice his ludicrousness as much as people had on the way through, he wondered if he could not return to Vernon and wire the steamship directors that he was ill.

He was not exaggerating about the importance of this trip to New York. The directors of the Citrus and Southern Line really were waiting for him. They needed him.

It is a curious fact of psychological economics that there are almost as many large employers waiting and praying for the chance to pay tens of thousands a year to dependable young men as there are dependable young men waiting and praying for the chance to earn a thousand a year. The president of the Citrus and Southern, the pouchy blob-nosed dean of South American and West Indian shipping, had been in the hospital for six months, after peritonitis. From his bed he had vaguely directed the policies of the company. Things had run well enough, with the old clerks working mechanically. But a crisis had come. The company had either to expand or break.

The Green Feather Line, weary of litigation, wanted to sell all its ships to the Citrus and Southern, which if it bought them might double its business. If some other company bought them and vigorously increased competition, the Citrus and Southern might be ruined.

The Citrus and Southern held a five months' option. By the end of that period they hoped to have found the man who could connect the sick

president's brain with the general office's body—and they believed that in Palmer McGee they had found that man.

McGee did not know how carefully he had been watched. He had never met one of the directors or officers of the Citrus and Southern, had never seen one of them, and their correspondence had been polite but not exciting. But the two suave gentlemen who had been poking about Vernon lately had been commercial secret agents of the Titanic Rating and Credit Company; and they knew all about McGee, from the number of drinks he had at the club to the amount of his bank account and his manner of listening to the stories of the chief shippers of the M.&.D.R.R.

The Citrus and Southern chiefs were certain that they had found their man. McGee was to be sent to Buenos Aires, but only on test. If he was as good as they thought, he would in three months be brought back as vice president at a salary nearly four times as large as the one he had received in Vernon. In this crisis they had the generosity of despair.

They were to meet McGee in the president's suite at the hospital at four-thirty; and the train got in at three-fifteen.

McGee went to a hotel, and sat still, scared, looking at himself in a dressing-table mirror. He became momently more rustic, more tough, more skinned and awkward in his own eyes.

He called up the hospital, got the president. "Th-this is McGee. I—I'm coming right over," he quavered.

"Huh! That fellow sounds kind of lightwaisted. Not much self-confidence," complained the president to his old friend, the chairman of the board of directors. "Here, prop me up, Billy. We must give him a thorough look-over. Can't take any chances."

The note of doubt was a germ which instantly infected the chairman. "That's too bad. The Rating and Credit people reported he was a find. But still —of course—"

When Palmer McGee faced the president, the first vice president and a committee of four directors, three of the six had already turned from welcoming eagerness to stilly doubt. He felt that doubt. But he interpreted it thus:

"They think I'm a complete boob to have a haircut like this. Think I don't know any better. And I can't explain. Mustn't admit that I know there's anything wrong—mustn't admit I was an easy mark and let a drunken barber carve me up."

He was so busy with these corroding reflections that he did not quite catch the sharp question which the president fired at him:

“McGee, what’s your opinion of the future of the competition between Australian wheat and the Argentine crop?”

“I—I—I didn’t quite understand you, sir,” lamented poor McGee, victim of the cat of the trembling stars.

The president thought to himself: “If he can’t get as dead simple a question as that— Wonder if the first vice president wouldn’t do, after all? No. Too old-fogyish.”

While he meditated he was repeating the query without much interest; and without interest he heard McGee’s thorough but shaky answer.

And McGee forgot to put in his usual information about the future of New Zealand grain.

Two hours later the president and directors decided that McGee “wouldn’t quite do”; which meant that he wouldn’t do at all; and they wearily began to talk of other candidates for the position. None of the others were satisfactory.

Four months later they decided that they would have to go slow; wait for the president to recover. They could find no one adaptable enough to coordinate the president and the working management. So they gave up their option on the steamers of the Green Feather Line.

The best of the jest was that Palmer McGee had looked rather well in his flippant haircut. Because the Chapel Street barber had started cutting his hair a certain length when he had been a Freshman in Yale he had kept up that mode, which was respectable but dull. But the semi-shave had brought out his energetic neck muscles. Never had he looked so taut and trim. Though dozens of people between the Vernon barber shop and the New York hospital had noticed his uneasiness none of them had considered his coiffure queer—they had merely wondered whether he was an embezzler or a forger.

McGee returned to Vernon broken, and General Coreos y Dulce, ex-president of the Central American republic of San Coloquin, entered the train of victims of Willis Stodeport, of Scrimmins Street.

The general had colonized Ynez Island, lying off the coast of San Coloquin. Fields of cane and coffee he had created, and he was happily expropriating ten thousand melodious natives. The general was a merry and easy ruler. When he had accepted the presidency of San Coloquin, after certain military misunderstandings, he hadn’t even executed anybody—except a cousin or two, merely for politeness’ sake.

His colony on Ynez Island was served by the steamers of the Green Feather Line. The business was not yet sufficient to warrant a regular stop, but General Dulce had a private agreement with the manager of the Green Feather, as well as one with the sick president of the Citrus and Southern, which later

agreement was to take effect if the company took over the Green Feather boats.

But when the Citrus and Southern gave up their option the Green Feather fleet was bought, not by another Atlantic line but by a Seattle firm, for their Alaskan and Siberian trade. Consequently the general had to depend for service on a tin-can line which ran out of San Coloquin.

The owner of that line hated the general; had hated him when the general had been president, and had added to that hate with every meditative gin rickey he had sipped in the long years since. The general's fruit spoiled aboard the creaky old steamers; it was always too late to catch the boat north. His coffee was drenched, and his sugar short weight. When the general desperately bought a freighter of his own it was mysteriously burned.

Poverty and failure closed in on Ynez Island. The colonists hadn't enough to eat. When the influenza reached the island the weakened natives died in hordes. Some of them fled to the mainland, carrying the disease. The number of fatalities that would probably have been prevented by comfort and proper food and a supply of drugs has been estimated by Dr. Prof. Sir Henry Henson Sturgis at three thousand two hundred and ninety. One of the last to die was the broken-hearted general.

Before he died the wheel of Fate had turned past him and stopped at a certain European monarch. The general had in all his colonizing and his financial schemes been merely the secret agent of that monarch. The king was uncomfortable on his throne. It rocked and squeaked and threatened to give way at the seat. It was kept together only by many fees for repairs—jolly gifts to the duke who hypocritically led the opposition party, to a foreign agent, to certain clerics and editors and professors, even to the ostensible leader of the left wing of the radical party.

Five years before Willis Stodeport had patted Adolphus Josephus Mudface, the king had realized that he was in danger of using up all his private estate. He had speculated. He had called General Coreos y Dulce from Central America; and it was royalty's own money that had developed the colonization of Ynez Island.

It had been impossible for the king to keep in touch with the details of the colonization. Had he learned of the loss of the Green Feather service he might have raised funds for the purchase of the whole fleet when the Citrus and Southern gave up the option. But the proud, dogged general, with his sky-climbing mustachios and his belief that one Castilian was cleverer than four Andalusians or eight gringos, had been certain that he could pull through without help from the royal master.

It was not till the approach of death that he sent the coded cablegram which

informed the king that he could expect no income from Ynez Island. Then the monarch knew that he could not keep his promises to certain peers and ministers; that his wordiest supporters would join the republican movement; that the gold-crusted but shaky-legged throne would at any moment be kicked out from beneath him by rude persons in mechanics' boots.

So it came to pass that at a certain hour the farthest stars quivered with mystic forces from the far-off fleck of dust called Earth, forces which would, just for a sketchy beginning, change all the boundaries and customs of Southern Europe. The king had at that hour desperately called in the two ministers and the one foreign emissary whom he trusted, and with that famous weak smile had murmured: "Gentlemen, it is the end. Shall I flee or—or—You remember they didn't give my cousin the funeral even of a private gentleman."

At that hour, in a hovel in the Jamaica negro quarter of the capital of San Coloquin, General Coreos y Dulce, friend of composers and masters of science, was dying of nothing at all but sick hope and coldly creeping fear, and a belief that he had pneumonia.

A thousand and more miles away the president of the Citrus and Southern Steamship Company was writing his resignation. His old friend, the chairman of the board of directors, again begged: "But this means the ruin of the company, Ben. We can't go on without you."

"I know, Billy," the president sighed, "but I'm all in. If we could have found someone to carry out my ideas I could have pulled through—and the company could have. Shame we were fooled about that McGee fellow. If we hadn't wasted so much time looking him over we might have had time to find the right man, and he'd have taken enough worry off my shoulders so that—Well, I'll about pass out in three months, I reckon, old man. Let's have one more go at pinochle. I have a hunch I'm going to get double pinochle."

About half an hour after that, and half a continent away, Palmer McGee left the home of the president of the M.&D.R.R. He walked as one dreaming. The railroad president had said: "I don't know what the trouble is, my boy, but you haven't been worth a hang for quite a while now. And you're drinking too much. Better go off some place and get hold of yourself."

McGee crawled to the nearest telegraph office that was open, and sent a wire to the Buffalo & Bangor, accepting their offer in the purchasing department. The salary was not less than the one he had been receiving, but there was little future. Afterward he had a cocktail, the fourth that evening.

It cannot be authoritatively determined whether it was that evening or the one before that a barber named Discopolos first actually struck his wife, and

she observed, “All right, I’ll leave you.” The neighbors say that though this was the first time he had mauled her, things had been going badly with them for many months. One of them asserts that the trouble started on an evening when Discopolos had promised to come home to supper but had not shown up till one-thirty in the morning. It seems that, though he had forgotten it, this had been her birthday, and she, poor mouse, had prepared a feast for them.

But it is certainly known that at the same hour on the same evening there was much peace and much study of the newspaper comics in the house of the Stodeports on Scrimmins Street.

Willis stooped to pull the tail of Adolphus Josephus Mudface, now a half-grown cat. Mrs. Stodeport complained: “Now, Willie, do let that cat alone! He might scratch you, and you’ll get fleas and things. No telling what-all might happen if you go patting and fooling with—”

Mr. Stodeport yawningly interrupted: “Oh, let the child alone! Way you go on, might think something dreadful would happen, just because he strokes a cat. I suppose probably he might get one of these germs, and spread it, and before he got through with it, maybe be the cause of two-three people taking sick! Ha, ha, ha! Or maybe he might make somebody rob a bank or something just awful! Ha, ha, ha! You better hold in your imagination, Mamma! We-ell —”

Mr. Stodeport yawned, and put the cat out, and yawned, and wound the clock, and yawned, and went up to bed, still chuckling over his fancy about Willis having a mysterious effect on persons five or six blocks away.

At exactly that moment in a medieval castle about five thousand miles from Willis Stodeport, the king of an ancient nation sighed to the Right Honorable the Earl of Arden, K.C.B., special and secret emissary of the British throne: “Yes, it is the twilight of the gods. I take some little pride in saying that even in my downfall I can see clearly the mysteries of Fate. I know definitely that my misfortune is a link in a chain of events that impressively started with —”

“—with the loss of thousands of lives and millions of pounds, in San Coloquin,” mused Lord Arden.

“No! No! No! Nothing so earthy and petty. I have long been a student of astrology. My astrologer and I have determined that this evil chance of myself and my poor people is but the last act in a cosmic tragedy that started with an esoteric change in the magnetism of Azimech, the cold and virgin star. At least it is comforting to know that my sorrows originated in nothing trivial, but have been willed by the brooding stars in the farthest abysses of eternal night, and that—”

“Um. Oh, yes. Yes, I see,” said the Earl of Arden.

6
THE HACK DRIVER
(*1923*)

I dare say there's no man of large affairs, whether he is bank president or senator or dramatist, who hasn't a sneaking love for some rum-hound in a frightful hat, living back in a shanty and making his living by ways you wouldn't care to examine too closely. (It was the Supreme Court Justice speaking. I do not pretend to guarantee his theories or his story.) He may be a Maine guide, or the old garageman who used to keep the livery stable, or a perfectly useless innkeeper who sneaks off to shoot ducks when he ought to be sweeping the floors, but your pompous big-city man will contrive to get back and see him every year, and loaf with him, and secretly prefer him to all the high-falutin leaders of the city.

There's that much truth, at least, to this Open Spaces stuff you read in advertisements of wild and woolly Western novels. I don't know the philosophy of it; perhaps it means that we retain a decent simplicity, no matter how much we are tied to Things, to houses and motors and expensive wives. Or again it may give away the whole game of civilization; may mean that the apparently civilized man is at heart nothing but a hobo who prefers flannel shirts and bristly cheeks and cussing and dirty tin plates to all the trim, hygienic, forward-looking life our womenfolks make us put on for them.

When I graduated from law school I suppose I was about as artificial and idiotic and ambitious as most youngsters. I wanted to climb, socially and financially. I wanted to be famous and dine at large houses with men who shuddered at the Common People who don't dress for dinner. You see, I hadn't learned that the only thing duller than a polite dinner is the conversation afterward, when the victims are digesting the dinner and accumulating enough strength to be able to play bridge. Oh, I was a fine young calf! I even planned a rich marriage. Imagine then how I felt when, after taking honors and becoming fifteenth assistant clerk in the magnificent law firm of Hodgins, Hodgins, Berkman and Taupe, I was set not at preparing briefs but at serving summonses! Like a cheap private detective! Like a mangy sheriff's officer! They told me I had to begin that way and, holding my nose, I feebly went to work. I was kicked out of actresses' dressing rooms, and from time to time I was righteously beaten by large and indignant litigants. I came to know, and

still more to hate, every dirty and shadowy corner of the city. I thought of fleeing to my home town, where I could at once become a full-fledged attorney-at-law. I rejoiced one day when they sent me out forty miles or so to a town called New Mullion, to serve a summons on one Oliver Lutkins. This Lutkins had worked in the Northern Woods, and he knew the facts about a certain timberland boundary agreement. We needed him as a witness, and he had dodged service.

When I got off the train at New Mullion, my sudden affection for sweet and simple villages was dashed by the look of the place, with its mud-gushing streets and its rows of shops either paintless or daubed with a sour brown. Though it must have numbered eight or nine thousand inhabitants, New Mullion was as littered as a mining camp. There was one agreeable-looking man at the station—the expressman. He was a person of perhaps forty, red-faced, cheerful, thick; he wore his overalls and denim jumper as though they belonged to him, he was quite dirty and very friendly and you knew at once he liked people and slapped them on the back out of pure easy affection.

"I want," I told him, "to find a fellow named Oliver Lutkins."

"Him? I saw him 'round here 'twan't an hour ago. Hard fellow to catch, though—always chasing around on some phony business or other. Probably trying to get up a poker game in the back of Fritz Beinke's harness shop. I'll tell you, boy— Any hurry about locating Lutkins?"

"Yes. I want to catch the afternoon train back." I was as impressively secret as a stage detective.

"I'll tell you. I've got a hack. I'll get out the boneshaker and we can drive around together and find Lutkins. I know most of the places he hangs out."

He was so frankly friendly, he so immediately took me into the circle of his affection, that I glowed with the warmth of it. I knew, of course, that he was drumming up business, but his kindness was real, and if I had to pay hack fare in order to find my man, I was glad that the money would go to this good fellow. I got him down to two dollars an hour; he brought from his cottage, a block away, an object like a black piano-box on wheels.

He didn't hold the door open, certainly he didn't say "Ready, sir." I think he would have died before calling anybody "sir." When he gets to Heaven's gate he'll call St. Peter "Pete," and I imagine the good saint will like it. He remarked, "Well, young fellow, here's the handsome equipage," and his grin—well, it made me feel that I had always been his neighbor. They're so ready to help a stranger, those villagers. He had already made it his own task to find Oliver Lutkins for me.

He said, and almost shyly: "I don't want to butt in on your private

business, young fellow, but my guess is that you want to collect some money from Lutkins—he never pays anybody a cent; he still owes me six bits on a poker game I was fool enough to get into. He ain't a bad sort of a Yahoo but he just naturally hates to loosen up on a coin of the realm. So if you're trying to collect any money off him, we better kind of you might say creep up on him and surround him. If you go asking for him—anybody can tell you come from the city, with that trick Fedora of yours—he'll suspect something and take a sneak. If you want me to, I'll go into Fritz Beinke's and ask for him, and you can keep out of sight behind me."

I loved him for it. By myself I might never have found Lutkins. Now, I was an army with reserves. In a burst I told the hack driver that I wanted to serve a summons on Lutkins; that the fellow had viciously refused to testify in a suit where his knowledge of a certain conversation would clear up everything. The driver listened earnestly—and I was still young enough to be grateful at being taken seriously by any man of forty. At the end he pounded my shoulder (very painfully) and chuckled: "Well, we'll spring a little surprise on Brer Lutkins."

"Let's start, driver."

"Most folks around here call me Bill. Or Magnuson. William Magnuson, fancy carting and hauling."

"All right, Bill. Shall we tackle this harness shop—Beinke's?"

"Yes, jus' likely to be there as anywheres. Plays a lot of poker and a great hand at bluffing—damn him!" Bill seemed to admire Mr. Lutkins's ability as a scoundrel; I fancied that if he had been sheriff he would have caught Lutkins with fervor and hanged him with affection.

At the somewhat gloomy harness shop we descended and went in. The room was odorous with the smell of dressed leather. A scanty sort of a man, presumably Mr. Beinke, was selling a horse collar to a farmer.

"Seen Nolly Lutkins around today? Friend of his looking for him," said Bill, with treacherous heartliness.

Beinke looked past him at my shrinking alien self; he hesitated and owned: "Yuh, he was in here a little while ago. Guess he's gone over to the Swede's to get a shave."

"Well, if he comes in, tell him I'm looking for him. Might get up a little game of poker. I've heard tell that Lutkins plays these here immoral games of chance."

"Yuh, I believe he's known to sit in on Authors," Beinke growled.

We sought the barber shop of "the Swede." Bill was again good enough to take the lead, while I lurked at the door. He asked not only the Swede but two customers if they had seen Lutkins. The Swede decidedly had not; he raged: "I

ain't seen him, and I don't want to, but if you find him you can just collect the dollar thirty-five he owes me." One of the customers thought he had seen Lutkins "hiking down Main Street, this side of the hotel."

"Well, then," Bill concluded, as we labored up into the hack, "his credit at the Swede's being ausgewent, he's probably getting a scrape at Heinie Gray's. He's too darn lazy to shave himself."

At Gray's barber shop we missed Lutkins by only five minutes. He had just left—presumably for the poolroom. At the poolroom it appeared that he had merely bought a pack of cigarettes and gone on. Thus we pursued him, just behind him but never catching him, for an hour, till it was past one and I was hungry. Village born as I was, and in the city often lonely for good coarse country wit, I was so delighted by Bill's cynical opinions on the barbers and clergymen and doctors and draymen of New Mullion that I scarcely cared whether I found Lutkins or not.

"How about something to eat?" I suggested. "Let's go to a restaurant and I'll buy you a lunch."

"Well, ought to go home to the old woman. And I don't care much of these restaurants—ain't but four of 'em and they're all rotten. Tell you what we'll do. Like nice scenery? There's an elegant view from Wade's Hill. We'll get the old woman to put us up a lunch—she won't charge you but a half dollar, and it'd cost you that for a greasy feed at the café—and we'll go up there and have a Sunday school picnic."

I knew that my friend Bill was not free from guile; I knew that his hospitality to the Young Fellow from the City was not altogether a matter of brotherly love. I was paying him for his time; in all I paid him for six hours (including the lunch hour) at what was then a terrific price. But he was no more dishonest than I, who charged the whole thing up to the Firm, and it would have been worth paying him myself to have his presence. His country serenity, his natural wisdom, was a refreshing bath to the city-twitching youngster. As we sat on the hilltop, looking across orchards and a creek which slipped among the willows, he talked of New Mullion, gave a whole gallery of portraits. He was cynical yet tender. Nothing had escaped him, yet there was nothing, no matter how ironically he laughed at it, which was beyond his understanding and forgiveness. In ruddy color he painted the rector's wife who when she was most in debt most loudly gave the responses at which he called the "Episcopalopian church." He commented on the boys who came home from college in "ice-cream pants," and on the lawyer who, after years of torrential argument with his wife, would put on either a linen collar or a necktie, but never both. He made them live. In that day I came to know New Mullion better than I did the city, and to love it better.

If Bill was ignorant of universities and of urban ways, yet much had he traveled in the realm of jobs. He had worked on railroad section gangs, in harvest fields and contractors' camps, and from his adventures he had brought back a philosophy of simplicity and laughter. He strengthened me. Nowadays, thinking of Bill, I know what people mean (though I abominate the simpering phrase) when they yearn over "real he-men."

We left that placid place of orchards and resumed the search for Oliver Lutkins. We could not find him. At last Bill cornered a friend of Lutkins and made him admit that "he guessed Oliver'd gone out to his ma's farm, three miles north."

We drove out there, mighty with strategy.

"I know Oliver's ma. She's a terror. She's a cyclone," Bill sighed. "I took a trunk out for her once, and she pretty near took my hide off because I didn't treat it like it was a crate of eggs. She's somewheres about nine feet tall and four feet thick and quick's a cat, and she sure manhandles the Queen's English. I'll bet Oliver has heard that somebody's on his trail and he's sneaked out there to hide behind his ma's skirts. Well, we'll try bawling her out. But you better let me do it, boy. You may be great at Latin and geography, but you ain't educated in cussing."

We drove into a poor farmyard; we were faced by an enormous and cheerful old woman. My guardian stockily stood before her and snarled, "Remember me? I'm Bill Magnuson, the expressman. I want to find your son Oliver. Friend of mine here from the city's got a present for him."

"I don't know anything about Oliver and I don't want to," she bellowed.

"Now you look here. We've stood for just about enough plenty nonsense. This young man is the attorney general's provost, and we got legal right to search any and all premises for the person of one Oliver Lutkins."

Bill made it seem terrific, and the Amazon seemed impressed. She retired into the kitchen and we followed. From the low old range, turned by years of heat into a dark silvery gray, she snatched a sadiron, and she marched on us, clamoring, "You just search all you want to—providin' you don't mind getting burnt to a cinder!" She bellowed, she swelled, she laughed at our nervous retreat.

"Let's get out of this. She'll murder us," Bill groaned and, outside: "Did you see her grin? She was making fun of us. Can you beat that for nerve?"

I agreed that it was lese majesty.

We did, however, make adequate search. The cottage had but one story. Bill went round it, peeking in at all the windows. We explored the barn and the stable; we were reasonably certain that Lutkins was not there. It was nearly

time for me to catch the afternoon train, and Bill drove me to the station. On the way to the city I worried very little over my failure to find Lutkins. I was too absorbed in the thought of Bill Magnuson. Really, I considered returning to New Mullion to practice law. If I had found Bill so deeply and richly human might I not come to love the yet uncharted Fritz Beinke and the Swede barber and a hundred other slow-spoken, simple, wise neighbors? I saw a candid and happy life beyond the neat learnings of universities' law firms. I was excited, as one who has found a treasure.

But if I did not think much about Lutkins, the office did. I found them in a state next morning; the suit was ready to come to trial; they had to have Lutkins; I was a disgrace and a fool. That morning my eminent career almost came to an end. The Chief did everything but commit mayhem; he somewhat more than hinted that I would do well at ditch-digging. I was ordered back to New Mullion, and with me they sent an ex-lumber-camp clerk who knew Lutkins. I was rather sorry, because it would prevent my loafing again in the gorgeous indolence of Bill Magnuson.

When the train drew in at New Mullion, Bill was on the station platform, near his dray. What was curious was that the old dragon, Lutkins's mother, was there talking to him, and they were not quarreling but laughing.

From the car steps I pointed them out to the lumbercamp clerk, and in young hero-worship I murmured: "There's a fine fellow, a real man."

"Meet him here yesterday?" asked the clerk.

"I spent the day with him."

"He help you hunt for Oliver Lutkins?"

"Yes, he helped me a lot."

"He must have! He's Lutkins himself!"

But what really hurt was that when I served the summons Lutkins and his mother laughed at me as though I were a bright boy of seven, and with loving solicitude they begged me to go to a neighbor's house and take a cup of coffee.

"I told 'em about you, and they're dying to have a look at you," said Lutkins joyfully. "They're about the only folks in town that missed seeing you yesterday."

7
HE HAD A BROTHER
(*1929*)

It was the familiar morning guilt, the old-fashioned evangelical American sense of guilt, which oppressed Haddon even more than the anguish beating in his temples, the rancid taste in his mouth, the dryness of his hands. He could not escape; he had to admit that on the evening before he had again played the fool. But as long as possible he protected his aching mind from reviewing the especial sorts of idiocy he had committed, while he tried to protect his body—curious racked body that once had lived so peacefully and sweetly with him—from the tortures of every light-ray, every yammer of the street.

He smoothed his pillow; he beat it as though it were an enemy. In his temporary insanity of a hang-over he sat up and banged it with his fists. Then he collapsed against its cool smoothness and tried to find surcease from the agony of going on living.

He could not hide, even in the pillow's tolerance from last evening's folly—along with a few recollections of other evenings the past week. Was it possible that he, this decent, well-meaning Charles Haddon lying here, had got into a brawl with that filthy little bounder, Jalmers, had offered to fight him, had wept and gone on demanding a fight, while the other guests laughed at him and sneered?

Slowly, but inescapably as fire creeping into the cotton-wool that was his brain, he remembered standing in the butler's pantry of his host, offering to help mix another cocktail and having his help contemptuously refused; trying to fish an olive from a bottle, dropping the bottle and hearing it smash; hearing the hostess say, "Oh, it doesn't *matter*!" in a way which indicated that it did matter; and all the time weeping, "Jalmers insulted my bes' frien'. I'm going smash 'is face."

And who was it that had snapped, "Oh, do shut up"?

He felt cold to remember how many people had made that suggestion last evening. It seemed thousands.

Right now, at serene and sober breakfast tables, they were probably talking about him and saying, "Drinking himself to death."

Thank heaven, Micky McShea had taken him away from—

Now where the deuce had all this been, this party where he had rowed with Jalmers? Oh, yes, at Mrs. Oscala's. He remembered—his body motionless, his head still motionless in the depths of the pillow but his brain whirling like a propeller—that Micky and he had gone up to Mrs. Oscala's for a drink after the theater.

Neither of them had been too sober. There had been such a convenient drug store next door to the theater, a drug store that dealt in sodas, magazines, gin, and cannibal sandwiches, and possibly even in drugs. (For it is not true that there are no New York drug stores which handle drugs. I know several.)

And they had panhandled a drink from a friend's flask between acts.

He groaned. He, the highly respectable Mr. Charles Haddon, attorney, of the eminent New York firm of Arnault, Vexler and Haddon, had at forty-two become as much a panhandler as any hobo on the road. He had almost begged that fellow for a drink. And he was rather sure, now, that Micky and he had intruded upon Mrs. Oscala's party—that he would never again be invited to her gold-scarlet-purple-onyx-black-glass apartment.

How dry his mouth was!

And after Mrs. Oscala's, just where had they gone?

He realized that he did not know. The last he remembered was lacrimously shaking hands with little Jalmers, and being forgiven. Well! He was, for five seconds, almost proud. After all this, he had taken hold of himself and got himself home, had somehow performed the drunk's familiar miracle of mountain-climbing up into a taxi, giving the driver an address, paying him, getting himself through the lobby of his hotel and into the elevator, undressing himself and decently going to bed.

It was just then that Charles Haddon realized that—no hope!—he could not go back to sleep, however much his dizzy brain and shaky body wailed for it. He must face the new day's judicial realization of his idiocy.

And he realized that he had not, after all, undressed himself quite so neatly as he had believed. His trembly hand crept out and discovered that he was clad not in pajamas but in his undergarments, his socks and his dress trousers—he knew they were dress trousers as his fingers crept down the double braid at the trousers-seam.

He sat bolt up. He was perplexed to see that he had not gone to bed in his bedroom but in the living room of his suite at the Hotel Shropshire—the hotel where he had made a pretense of making a home ever since his wife had divorced him with an amiable and excoriating Paris divorce. Hm! He must have been even drunker than he had thought, to have fallen asleep here. He must—

And then Mr. Charles Haddon, of Arnault, Vexler and Haddon, attorneys at law, discovered that he was in a strange room, in an absolutely strange flat, partly undressed, lying on a couch, with a silken coverlet thrown over him. He hadn't the filmiest notion where he was, how he had got there. Had he passed out at Mrs. Oscala's? Was he still there? No. Her drawing-room was all "modernistic," galloping triangles and hysterical brass, while this room was serene with white paneling and old Chippendale.

He threw his legs over the side of the couch, gripping his forehead to keep it from bursting with sudden agony, and wrapped the coverlet around his silly undershirted shoulders. There was no one to be seen, no sound anywhere from whatever unknown rooms might stretch beyond. Was it night or day?

The damask curtains were drawn at the tall windows at the end of the long room, but a gap let in a pallid light like that of early morning. Haddon groped for his watch, in the evening waistcoat which lay in a messy heap with his dress shirt, his coat and collar and tie and one shoe, in a disdainful wing-chair beside the couch. It was only seven. Thank the Lord! He could escape before his unknown host came in.

He would have given a great sum for a long cold glass of water, for the chance to wash his stinging eyes, but he dared not prowl. Why! The owner of the apartment might not even know he was here! In his drunken somnambulism he might have come here after the owner had gone to bed. Staggering, groaning a little, he huddled into his wrinkled dress shirt, with a red wine stain across it, and, puffing, sat down to draw on his shoes.

He did not know how to find his way out of the apartment. There were three doors to the room. He decided on the door at the other end from the windows, but he stood before it uneasily for half a minute. Suppose it should open on a bedroom and a startled host—a frightened host reaching for a revolver—a screaming woman?

He edged the door open with hands nervous as snakes. Cheers! It led to a corridor and what must be the outer door. Creeping past closed doors behind which he imagined scores of enemies, he bolted into the vestibule and, as the elevator came to his ringing, he felt safe.

But, glancing into the elevator mirror, he almost snarled at his image—Charles Haddon, the immaculate, in wrinkled dress coat, streaked shirt-front, at seven of a June morning. And the elevator-runner seemed doubtful; the hallman in the pretentious Moorish-Gothic-Chinese lobby below almost stopped him. With a feeling of being reprieved from execution, Haddon scrambled through the bronze-proud doors, and into a taxi.

Then he faced his thoughts.

He told himself—no Salvation Army brigadier could have done it better—exactly how many kinds of a blasted fool he had been. But he had done that before, a good many times. Now there was a new agitation in him. If he had, he warned himself, actually so passed out that he had gone, or had been taken, to a strange apartment in his stupor, what else might he not have done? Why! He might have awakened this morning in a police cell, charged with murder; might have killed with no memory of it.

He shuddered. Then: "I've been saying I ought to go on the water wagon. No 'going to go on it' now! I'm *on* it, right this minute! Scared not to be. No tapering off! Quit cold! Not another drink, not one, for—"

All the way to his hotel he argued it out: whether to be dry for a week, for a month, or forever. With a gloating feeling of having accomplished vast victories, he fixed on three months.

It was much easier to be firm in his mind about the three months than about this same morning. All through his edifying resolves he was aching, "I wish I had a drink right now!" It was hard to keep from feeling for his pocket-flask to see if that useful object, empty before nine last evening, hadn't perhaps miraculously filled itself. But in a glow, ignoring the way in which the servants in the Hotel Shropshire lobby tried to ignore the spectacle of a guest arriving in soiled evening clothes at seven-thirty in the morning, he went up to his apartment and crawled righteously under a cold shower.

It hurt.

Feeling better, he tramped to the ice-box in his kitchenette and inaugurated his new life of temperance by having two stiff whisky-and-sodas, shuddering as they brought him to life again, changed him from an abject Mr. Hyde to a complacent Dr. Jekyll. He managed to keep from hearing his own scornful remarks to himself, and he was able to drink a cup of coffee and eat half of a fried egg without feeling sick—not very sick.

He was even able, after reading the newspaper, including the wantads and the summer-resort advertisements, to dress and go to the office and arrive there only an hour late.

By twelve, when he had had two more drinks—sneaking them down in the wash-room of the office—he was radiant enough to explain that he really wasn't a dirty dog and a traitor to himself and to his honor to take these drinks. He pointed out, as though he were judge, jury, and attorney for the defense all in one, that of course he had never for a second, in "going on the water wagon," meant to include today. Naturally, he couldn't! Not feeling the way he did after last night! But starting tomorrow—absolutely, and for three straight

months!

And at twelve o'clock he convinced himself again that it was entirely due to Prohibition and to having been divorced by his wife that he, the Charles Haddon who ten years ago had never been drunk in his life, had taken to hiding himself from the boredom of living in the pink clouds of alcohol.

And at twelve he telephoned to Micky McShea, his companion of the disastrous evening before.

They were curious friends, Haddon and Micky, and very good ones. Neither they nor anyone else understood why. Haddon was reticent, smartly dressed, grave, given to learned books, rather a snob, not very popular, an excellent corporation lawyer, and a hater of any sport more vigorous than motoring.

Micky McShea, otherwise Mr. Vincent Carruthers Van Valkenberg McShea, Princeton 1906, polo star and tennis champion till he had grown too fat and short-winded, inheritor and president of the exalted Rio and Eastern Importing Company, was the darling of any not-too-highbrow gathering. He knew all the off-color stories that had ever been told. His laugh was like subway blasting, and the liquor that was a lust, a longing and a torment to Charies Haddon was apparently only an agreeable tickler to Mick McShea.

About the only things that they had in common were their clubs, their mild wealth and the fact that both had been divorced by their wives with Whisky named as correspondent.

Haddon and Micky were not uncommonly agreeable to each other. At bridge, their remarks on overbidding would have caused a shooting, in the more correct days of Cripple Creek. Yet they were together almost every evening, and the only time when Micky became more violent than in his abuse of Haddon was when someone else dared to hint that he didn't like Haddon's vocabulary or his wrist watch. (Haddon wore a wrist watch. Micky didn't. But then, Micky had been only a major of artillery on the Western Front in the war, whereas Haddon had talked strongly about going into the intelligence department, if the war lasted till 1920 or so.)

When the psychologists have finally explained why men go to war, why men rave over one feminine nose and abhor another of precisely the same dimensions and pinkiness, why certain men are willing to endure the horrible limelight-soaked lack of privacy involved in being President of the United States, then they might turn to something really difficult, and explain why friends like each other.

Certainly there was nothing particularly amiable in the address of Mr. Charles Haddon to Mr. Micky McShea on the telephone:

“Say, where did you get to last night, anyway?”

And Micky sounded as though he were addressing a debtor:

“Yuh, and a fine guy you were! Oh, Lord, what a hang-over I had this morning!”

“Say, where did we go after— Uh, doing anything for lunch?”

“Certainly not!” growled Micky. “Suppose anybody that’s decent would be seen with me when they know I run around with you? Meet you at the Bond Club at one-fifteen. Try to stay sober till then!”

At one-twenty, when Haddon arrived at the club, he had a private snifter in the wash-room.

At one-twenty-five, when Micky arrived, he invited Haddon to have a drink, and Haddon, after being peculiarly snooty about “drinking so early in the day,” accepted the invitation—twice. Then they looked happy and slightly vague.

They lunched beside the half-block of windows in their peculiarly American sort of club, more American than sugar-corn or Will Rogers: the twenty-second story of a skyscraper looking down on North River, with tugs streaking across the harbor and freighters for Singapore and Saloniki trudging out to sea.

“Say, just where did we go after Mrs. Oscala’s last night, Micky? To tell you the truth, I’m a little hazy.”

Micky looked at him pityingly. For so plump and ruddy-faced and glossily bald a man, with his hectic striped scarf and his too-well-cut waistcoat, Micky sounded almost tender. “You poor kid, you did get it bad! Don’t you remember at all?”

“Of course I do!” testily. “But there’s some details—”

“Don’t you remember that Grout, the admiralty lawyer, was at Mother Oscala’s, and he and Mrs. Grout were going home same time we were, and you insisted on their taking us up to their place on Park Avenue and giving us another drink? They didn’t cotton to the idea much, but they took us along, and you said that if Grout had his rights, he’d be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and then you said his gin was rotten—as it was!—and then you tried to make love to Mrs. Grout, and you said you were a little tired and wanted to lie down just for a second, and you passed out, blam!

“When we tried to get you up, you wanted to fight the whole bunch of us. You said Grout was a ‘dirty little ambulance-chasing shyster.’ We finally had to let you stay there on the couch, and me—oh, golly, I wasn’t any too sober, myself!—I came home.

"Now listen, kid. The Grouts were awful nice about it. They knew you were drunk and not responsible. But same time— Mind you, I guess I've drunk as much hard liquor as most people in this town, and from *temps* to *temps*, as we say in Paris, I've tried to lick taxi-drivers. But same time, old boy, you've got to stop—"

Haddon did not hear Micky's temperance lecture. He was still with horror and self-hatred. Judge Grout, though not at all a teetotaler, was a dignified, restrained, rather irritable pundit who belonged to the Century Club and St. Thomas' Church; he was precisely the kind whose murmurs could turn Charles Haddon from a respectable and responsible attorney into a gutter-rat—into such a gutter-rat as he had felt himself to be at seven that morning.

All that afternoon he did not have a drink—oh, except the one or two that his twitchy nerves demanded before he could talk to weighty clients.

At five-thirty he bravely decided not to go to the cocktail-party given by Judge Rigadon (the one who gave those dreadfully stiff sentences to bootleggers). In fact, he went home and lonely though he found that brocaded barrenness of a hotel apartment, he endured it for several minutes, and so he did not arrive at Judge Rigadon's cocktail-party till almost six-thirty.

There he met a lawyer friend, Dick Souter, who was giving a party at the Vraie Vivienne night club, and—

Next morning, at ten o'clock, Charles Haddon awoke to discover that he was lying in dinner clothes across his bed—his own, this time—and to recall, between gripes of nausea and pangs of headache, that the night before he had tried to fight a waiter at the night club, that Dick Souter had said to him, "For heaven's sake, will you shut up, Haddon?" and that in a state of hurt and noble dignity he had wavered through the miles and leagues, the forests and hills and wide-flung steppes of the night club, and gone home.

But this time Haddon made no good resolutions. Neither did he try to go to the office. "I'm licked. I've got to do something," he muttered.

He made, now, no pretense of being lightly able to "go on the water wagon." He was frightened. He had a bromide, a high-ball, not as things he wanted but as horrible drugs for a sick man.

"Licked! Got to have someone to help me!"

It was June, and business at the firm was light. It was June, and in his boyhood town, Glen Western, there were meadows to quiet sick nerves. And in Glen Western was his brother, Ed Haddon.

He had not seen Ed for three years.

Ed was not, like Charles Haddon, a "success." He was the village druggist, and he had married Mildred Brown—you know Mildred Brown, the daughter

of the conductor on the Ragusa and Alfalalfa branch of the N.Y.C.? But Ed, Charles suddenly remembered, was the steadiest, honestest, soberest man living. Dirty shame he hadn't had Ed come down to New York for so long now!

With a not quite sane haste, his hand twitching, Haddon gave a long-distance call for Glen Western and for Mr. Ed Haddon. While awaiting it, he called his office, announced to the chief that he felt a little sick, that he was going away for a week, and that there was nothing on the cards that couldn't be handled by young Rufus Early.

With hot cheeks he imagined how the chief, old Arnault, would worry, and how that young beast Early would snicker about Haddon's "sickness." But—

Oh, hang 'em all! Better to be a little ridiculous than to be dead, as he would be, soon, if this kept up! And he was not coming back in a week. Perhaps never! Perhaps a year from now he would be a country attorney in Glen Western, a plodding, dusty fellow, but sane again and decent and kind.

Then on the telephone was Mildred, his sister-in-law, saying, "Why, that would be real nice if you could come. Oh, yes, sure, you bet, lots of room. Ed's off today, fishing at Purgis Lake. Yes, we'll be real glad to have you. I'll meet you with the car at the seven-sixteen."

He had the whole picture of the village street, the peace of maples, the friendliness of little stores and white houses with comfortable lawns, the smell of lake-breezes, the companionship of home-town boys who called him not Mr. Haddon or Charles or Charlie, but Chuck.

He was disappointed that Ed and Mildred no longer lived in the Grampa Haddon house, with the old "natural wood" rockers on the broad porch and the patchy lawn with a twine hammock between two box-elders. Their new house was a stuccoed bungalow, smelling of varnish and mail-order rugs, and instead of the slovenly, good-natured old porch, it had a perky little stoop with red-tiled flooring and four stiff wicker chairs.

As they drove up to the bungalow, Mildred said smugly, "You see, even poor *we* haven't done so *badly*, after *all*!"

Though he had been hysterically glad to see her dependable round face at the station, he disliked her then, and he disliked heartily the guest-room with its mean air of a hospital.

But in the June evening, after a supper of fresh fried pike and tea biscuits and scalloped potatoes and floating island, which tickled him with its memory of boyhood, as they sat out on the stoop there was a smell of unlaundered grass, a rustle of water from neighborhood hoses, a soft whir of motor tires on the dirt road and the immemorial village sound of dogs idly barking. It was

utter peace. It was his boyhood. It was the revival of the boy, Charles Haddon, who had been so ambitious and studious and untempted . . . And he definitely did not want a drink!

Then he heard New York.

In town, he had been too habituated to it to hear it. Now, in its absence, his ears suddenly caught the whole bedlam that for years had assailed him—elevated, clacking feet, river horns, insane riveters, voices indignant or boisterous or whining, and the harsh *grrrrrr* sound which motor tires made on hard pavements all day, all night, dawn and noon, noon and twilight. And he was safe from it! He was here!

They had been talking as becomes Home Folks.

"Say, what ever became of that Bill Tyler that used to be the implement dealer?" and, "Do you ever hear from Cousin Myron?" and, "I guess Old Man Warman must be pretty well fixed by now." These dronings had protected the kindred strangers one from another.

Now, as the village silence suddenly roared at Charles, he cried, "You don't know how nice it is to be here with you! New York has, uh— Well, it's kind of got on my nerves. You know. Overwork, and hard to sleep nights with all the racket and— But here I feel like a new human being, already."

With no defiance but with an infinite sisterly kindness, Mildred patted his arm. Ed, lounging against the stuccoed wall, stalked over to pat his shoulder.

Mildred murmured, "You poor darling! It must be terrible to fight the city all the time. Well, we want you to rest. We can't give you much in the amusement line, but we'll be awful glad if you find you can rest in our little home and—and you needn't get up till half past eight! If the girl is too busy, I'll fry you an egg for breakfast."

Then they talked almost as frankly as though they were not related.

Mostly it was Charles Haddon who talked. He had been longing for a father confessor. He had been ashamed to tell his troubles to that Micky McShea who went nightly through as arduous campaigns in the crusade for pleasure as himself, but came out of them with a Turkish-bath pinkiness and glow.

The ears of Ed and Mildred almost creaked with intentness as he bewailed the strain of city life: office politics, the demands of clients, the competition, the horrible expensiveness. He had very little to say about drinking and exactly nothing to say about finding himself in strange gutters at awakening, but it was clear enough, even to the innocence of Glen Western, that he had—oh, just now and then—found relief in a stray cocktail when the stress had been too great.

With the delight of the godly in the presence of sin, they snapped at this agreeable hint of scandal.

"Guess you people in the city do quite a lot of boozing, sometimes, don't you?" Ed urged.

He lost all caution and poured out. "Too cursed much altogether!" He might have been warned by their soft gurgles of delight at discovering the clay feet of their bronze brother, but recklessly he burned on:

"Of course I'm temperate. Take mighty good care not to drink too much. But same time— Oh, you can scarcely realize the tempo of the city. It *gets* you! And there's evenings when you've worked so hard all day that you haven't one ounce of strength left, when you're shaky with tiredness, and yet you have a frightfully important date for the evening. You'd give your left leg to be able to go to bed. And then, of course, a few cocktails keep you going."

"A few?" Ed groaned happily. "Do folks ever take more than one cocktail? Golly! Wouldn't want to tamper with *my* health that way!"

Just then the first neighbor arrived, to inspect the returned prodigal and look for the signs of husks in his hair. Charles was relieved to have the talk rescued from peril and turned into such familiar security as, "Well, Chuck, guess it feels pretty good to be back in a real town again, hey?" and, "Say, remember the time when Hal Evans licked you and you went home crying?"

Actually, Charles Haddon has not recalled that amiable incident for twenty-five years. Now he blushed and felt irritated—felt inferior to the Glen Western against which he had rebelled as a passionate, nervous child. But these smarting recollections were safer than the confession to which, he felt, he had almost been betrayed.

They talked on, the Haddons and intermittent neighbors, till a very late hour, almost till the bawdy hour of eleven, a full hour later than Ed Haddon's decent normal bedtime; talked on the porch, with the serene lights of village homes among lilac bushes and the maples. In the morning Charles slept till nine. He had awakened only to the sounds of cockcrow, of a train whistle far off in the gap of the hills, and these pleasant murmurs had been but assurances of regained security, of the miracle of turning from a nerve-tortured wreck into an eager boy again.

He tramped, he fished, he slept under trees. If there was no particular spice in the conversation at Ed Haddon's table, there was no jabbing worry. Now, when Mildred, as she would put it, "took little digs at him," he was amused.

He won another fortnight's leave from the office. He dropped, as though New York were but a myth and a passing dream, into the old relations with such of his boyhood friends as had not gone off to Buffalo, Schenectady, to the

corn lands of the West. And so it chanced that after a week when he had drunk nothing save rare, secret, shamed nips from the one quart of Scotch which he had brought from New York and which he had concealed behind the radiator in his room, he fell into Glen Western's version of a High Whoopee.

The same Hal Evans who had once sent him home bawling was now become Mr. H. Everett Evans, attorney surveyor and agent for the Bristol and Buenos Aires Assurance Co., Inc. But Hal had remained the village terror. "People say he drinks!" the village whispered.

Hal was, in fact, in his one lone bald self, the Monte Carlo, the Montmartre, the Broadway, of Glen Western. He had to work hard, in a village so sinless and so interested in sin, but he had by some magnificence kept up his position of Satan in Paradise, and he was proud of it, and they were proud of him for it.

When Charles Haddon arrived, this village terror of an Evans was away. The populace credited him with being occupied with purple orgies in the Roman splendors of Buffalo, though actually he was trying to persuade the farmers of Cattaraugus County to take out lightning insurance.

But when H. Everett returned, he bustled to Charles and he whispered, "Saaaaaay, boy, it's good to have a live one in this burg again! Say, I'll bet the I-Knew-Him-When Club have been calling you 'Chuck'! Well, say, you certainly are 'Charlie' to me, and no mean cracks about it, either! And tonight we throw a party!"

They did, and after this wise was the party.

It was composed of Mr. H. Everett Evans, Mr. Charles Haddon of New York, Mr. Hap Macbeth, undertaker and dealer in Fine Furniture, Mr. Pete Gallup, dealer in Shoes, Hats and Gents' Furnishings, and Mr. Mort Wheeler, motor agent and part proprietor of Ye Olde Glen Western Inn. First, as was proper, they bought two prescriptions from Doc Engel for two dollars apiece. In the interests of conviviality the doc knocked off fifty cents on each prescription, and he hinted that if his Aunt Emmy from Gowanda weren't staying with them, he cer'nly would be glad to come along and show Old Chuck a Good Time.

Since to cash in these golden prescriptions at Ed Haddon's, here in town, would be to betray their honor guest, they drove in Mr. Wheeler's second-hand sedan to the town of Melanchthon, ten miles away.

It was true that Melanchthon couldn't, as H. Everett so well said, "touch a candle to Glen Western for pep and looks." Glen Western had cement pavement on three streets, whereas Melanchthon was paved only on Main Street. And Melanchthon hadn't even a Carnegie Library, while Glen Western

—as H. Everett understood it, though he himself hadn't much time to waste with books—had one of the best libraries in that part of the country.

But one thing Melanchthon did have: a drug store whose proprietor was a "real guy." He did not split his prescription rye and, unlike that holier-than-thou Ed Haddon, he was pleased to have a drink with the boys after they had procured their remedy for 'flu.

With the two pints of rye from this haven, the party drove back to Glen Western and up to the side road by the I.O.O.F. Cemetery, which was the one safe refuge for merry fellows. There they passed the two pint bottles from lip to lip, and each of them, except Charles Haddon, told again all the dirty stories he knew. And it was during this orgy that Charles was completely won to virtue.

He drank what would, in New York, have been one-tenth of an evening's ration. He told no stories, and he was not greatly diverted by those he heard. When the mad merry-andrews dropped him at the residence of Ed Haddon, he sat by himself on the porch, rejoicing that he was free of his letch for drunkenness and quarreling, equally rejoicing that Ed and Mildred would never know of this, his one last evening of debauchery.

He went to bed at a quarter after eleven—Ed and Mildred had been snoring now for an hour. He awoke at seven, glad of his clear head and the end of his madness.

Now it is fabled by travelers that the inhabitants of India, Africa, and other heathen lands without bathtubs, luncheon clubs devoted to Service, theories of relativity and all the other blessings which we here daily enjoy, have mysterious ways of spreading news, probably by telepathy, so that five minutes after General the Honorable Sir John Spoggins, the esteemed explorer, has changed his shirt, in the jungle in N'Goynga, the incident is perfectly known in Prgzka, thirty-seven kilometers away. But it must be insisted, for the fair fame of these United States, that no jungle magic of telepathy can touch a Gopher Prairie or a Glen Western.

The party had been held in the distant reaches beside the Odd Fellows' Cemetery, from a quarter to ten to a quarter to eleven at night. And presumably there had been no great number of Pinkertons or newspaper reporters hiding there. Yet when Charles came down to breakfast at sixteen minutes after seven the next morning, Mildred looked at him with a curious, excited intentness which indicated to him that she knew all about it. She said nothing, and she said it noisily.

At eight, Charles started for the drug store, with the confiding intention of buying a pack of cigarets. Now, from the residence of Mr. Ed Haddon to his

drug store was no great distance; it was, in fact, three blocks, and in Glen Western the blocks are short and quiet. But in that small journey, old Mr. White cackled, “Guess you boys had quite a time last night”; old Mrs. Ebberle whinnied, “Well, I’m surprised to see you up so early after what happened last night”; and the Reverend Mr. Jonas, with the grass-stains on his knees, held Charles’ hand in the most uncomfortable manner and lamented, “Mr. Haddon, of course I’m practically a newcomer to Glen Western. Ain’t been here but two years. So I ain’t one of your older friends. But brother, do you feel that you’re giving the Younger Generation the Example that a City Lawyer like you had oughta?”

At the drug store, Brother Ed, after carefully ringing up the fifteen cents for the cigarets, grunted, “Say, Charlie, I want to see you in the back room!”

Far more uncomfortable than he had ever been in arguing a case before the Supreme Court, Charles followed him into that strange den of carboys and strawboard boxes and litters of excelsior.

“Now you look here, Charlie. I ain’t one to criticize anybody. ‘Live and let live’ is my motto. But same time, if you’re going to stay with Mildred and me, you gotta act nice!”

In the hundredth of a hundredth of a second, Charles Haddon went through rather an elaborate mental picture. He saw himself telling Ed what he thought. He saw himself—but so politely!—thanking Mildred for her hospitality and catching the nine-seventeen for New York. He saw himself back in New York—and he knew that he could not go back yet, even with the protection of Micky McShea.

With no apparent hesitation he said, “Do you mean our party last night, Ed?”

“You know what I mean, all right!”

“I’m sorry, Ed. There won’t be another.”

If Charles Haddon had nightly indulged in Babylonian orgies, he could not have been more closely watched. He did have the sense to hasten home and get rid of his now empty bottle of Scotch. He hid it on a beam over the furnace in the cellar. He knew, in the next two days, that Ed and Mildred were searching his room.

His notes on the Sancho case had been disturbed; his shirts, placed with his usual fussiness in the top drawer of the bureau, had been turned over. At midday dinner and evening supper he was sure, from the bright insect-like way in which they were watching, that Ed and Mildred were hoping to find him drunk.

And so it came to pass that because they so righteously suggested

drunkenness, he wanted to be drunken.

In the illusion of returning to his boyhood, he had for certain days escaped that strain of New York and of losing his wife which had expressed itself in alcoholic insanity. He had really believed that maple trees and lilac bushes could save him from the suicide which had inarticulately been behind his every thought. But now the leering, peering expectation of Ed and Mildred brought back to him hourly the alcohol which he had tried to forget.

They were convinced that he was somehow getting those several daily cocktails of which he had indiscreetly told, and so, it must regretfully be stated, here in the propriety of Glen Western he went to the devil.

He had no great admiration for H. Everett Evans, but H. Everett was sympathetic, as only fellow sinners can be. H. Everett steered him to the county bootlegger, an immensely fat farmer who had a still behind his corncrib. In the farmhouse kitchen, Charles sat between the pump and the rusty stove, every afternoon. It was a happy refuge.

The bootlegger, chuckling through each cell of his thick body, told of the time when his weighty wife had kept three officers at bay while he smashed every bottle in the house; he told merrily of his term in the penitentiary and how chummy he had become with the warden, and how he had made wine for the warden out of the grapes on the wall.

It was a peaceful place, and kindly. Yet every moment there, Charles Haddon felt guilty. And every moment that he was back in the righteous household of Ed and Mildred Haddon, he longed to return. Daily, either Mildred or Ed managed to remark, “Well, I guess you find it pretty slow here, but maybe if you’d try to lead a nice, decent life for a little while, it wouldn’t be so bad for you, even if it ain’t quite so gay as New York!”

Charles was conscious that every time he returned from the farmer-bootlegger’s they were sniffing at his breath. And now a curious thing happened. He started for New York, for its peace and anonymity—he did not merely start; he fled—yet that flight took him a week.

All that had been the highly reputable and responsible Mr. Charles Haddon of New York dripped from him. He was again little Charlie Haddon, young Chuck; he was again afraid of the power and magic of his big brother Ed.

It was simple, in the end. He used one of the oldest and stalest devices in the world. He borrowed H. Everett’s car, drove to Melanchthon, telephoned to his office in New York and had them telegraph to him that the office simply could not carry on without him.

He hoped, in a little-boy way, that Ed and Mildred would be impressed by the telegram with its suggestion that the entire court-system of New York State

was held up for his return.

They were not.

He said good-by to them at the station with all the proper drama. He waved and shouted. He pretended to listen while they said, “Now be sure and write!” And when the dusty and acrid day-coach had rattled away, Charles Haddon fell suddenly into an abysm of terror. This for him was death. He had gone to the only refuge he knew, and it had failed him. Was he now returning to nights of idiocy and mornings of horror?

The train arrived in New York at four of the afternoon, and Charles went directly to the office of Micky McShea. He was a most respectable-looking person as he came into the brown-leather decorum of the Rio and Eastern Importing Company; a rather slight, fragile man, with a curiously high forehead; a man most correct as to boots and tie.

He waited quietly till Mr. McShea should have finished his conversation with Don Antonio Lopez of Brazil; most quietly he entered Micky’s private office; most quietly he sat down in an enormous leather chair. And, still quietly, he said, “Micky, I guess I’m through. I got to drinking just about as bad, up in Glen Western. Shall I croak myself? No! I mean it! I can’t go on.”

And whatever quietness he displayed, it was noisy beside the stillness with which Micky McShea answered:

“Charles, I’m sorry to hear you say that. If you want to pop off, by all means do so. I could scarcely blame you, naturally! Because I’ve been planning to do so myself!”

“What?”

“Just that. My doc has given me six months to live if I— Oh, you know! And I don’t want to wait in the death-house! He says I could live for maybe another twenty years if I quit drinking, but I don’t see—” Micky’s voice rose in hysteria. “I can’t, Charles! I’m gone! I might as well quit right now. I’m finished. I might as well get it over. Nobody cares a hang. I’m—”

Charles Haddon rose, and there was nothing now of neatness in him. His fists closed while Micky raved:

“Oh, whatzit matter? Let’s go out with a bang! Come on, Haddon, let’s have li’l drink!”

From the upper left drawer of his desk, Micky produced a bottle of Scotch and flourished it wildly. Haddon snatched the bottle and coldly poured the contents down the wash-bowl.

“Now that’s a nice thing to do!” protested Micky feebly. “But what the deuce! I got ’nother bottle! Don’t you want drink, ’self?”

The truth was that Charles Haddon very much wanted a drink. He had thought about it all the way from that station.

But he said, and he almost believed it, “I do not want a drink! I’ve cut it out. I told you I was drinking up home but I decided to quit. Now come on. We’re going to get out of this.”

He persuaded the protesting, almost maniacal Micky to come with him for a taxi ride to the coolness of Long Beach. He became more and more testy as Micky suggested roadhouses at which they might stop. He took Micky back to Micky’s Louis Quinze au Moins apartment, fed him crackers and milk, and put him to bed.

When Micky was asleep, it came to Charles that he still wanted a drink. He knew all about Micky’s adequate booze cupboard. But he couldn’t play a dirty trick like that! He was going to save Micky, if it cost him his own life.

For a fortnight, the first fortnight in five years, Charles Haddon drank no alcohol whatever, though he felt that he needed it in the stress of caring for Micky McShea. Micky took every advantage of being an invalid. He became insanely cunning, he sneaked, he tried to get a drink when Charles was napping, so Charles finally had to pour out every drop of that admirable cellar.

And, to be able to manhandle Micky should he really become wild, he took exercise daily, he breathed deeply, he forgot his worries about his law-practice and about his divorced wife, and devoted himself to the care of Micky.

Charles was, fortunately, not quite alone in his care for Micky. The moment he had taken Micky home from the office, he had called for the doctor. Micky’s doctor, Bill Cady, M.D., was a sophisticated person who understood that a man could take a drink or let it alone, and in all probability would take it. He was a smiling, tired, jolly, exhausted man—the country doctor in New York, the man on whom all the specialists and costly surgeons battened. He had a small mustache and a steady hand.

He sat with Charles hour on hour after they had coaxed Micky into bed. Apparently he never slept, and when Micky awoke clamoring at five in the morning, Charles was able to get Doctor Cady to come around in half an hour.

With the help of the doctor, Charles had Micky in such beaming health in two weeks that he was able to forget his responsibility and to begin to think again for himself.

They sat, those two men, Charles and Doctor Cady, in Micky’s apartment on an evening of early July.

“Well, I think we’ve got the old boy into pretty good shape now,” said Charles. “In a few days I’ll drive him up to New England or some place and complete the cure. And I certainly need it myself! I’ve been giving him my

nights and days now for two weeks."

"Yeah," said the doctor.

"So have you, of course. But then, I guess that's just part of your job."

"Yeah, I guess it is," said the doctor.

"But me, of course, I'm not used to it. Well, we pulled it off! And now I'd rather like a drink myself! You see, I had to quit, in order not to show Micky a bad example. I even got rid of all his booze here. But now— I say! I could have my bootlegger here in ten minutes. Don't you think you'd like a drink? I looked in a moment ago, and Micky is sound asleep, so he won't know about it."

Doctor Cady rose from the wing-chair. He was young, and his mustache was rather unimportant, but he had the manner of one who deals with the sanctities of life and death. And said Doctor Cady, "Oh, the devil!"

"Eh?" said Charles Haddon.

"You blithering fool!" said Doctor Cady. "Haddon, I don't think I can stand it any longer," he continued. "Micky has a lot of endurance as an actor, but I haven't. Man, haven't you ever guessed—do you mean to say you've never guessed—that Micky hasn't needed me for one second, all this fortnight? That he's played at being shot to pieces so you would quit drinking yourself? That we're all of us sick and tired of trying to care for you? That the next time you call me at five in the morning, I'll kill you? Tumble to yourself, man, and quit being a blithering baby!"

Charles Haddon did four things. He managed to swallow such humiliation as he had never known. He shook hands with Micky and said only "Thanks." He went home to face his own soul, nor did he blink the smallness thereof. And he desired to take, and did not take, a drink.

He had found a brother, and for a brother one would do anything.

8
A LETTER FROM THE QUEEN
(*1929*)

Doctor Selig was an adventurer. He did not look it, certainly. He was an amiable young bachelor with thin hair. He was instructor in history and economics in Erasmus College, and he had to sit on a foolish little platform and try to coax some fifty young men and women, who were interested only in cuddling and four-door sedans, to become hysterical about the law of diminishing returns.

But at night, in his decorous boarding house, he sometimes smoked a pipe, which was viewed as obscene in the religious shades of Erasmus, and he was boldly writing a book which was to make him famous.

Of course everyone is writing a book. But Selig's was different. It was profound. How good it was can be seen from the fact that with only three quarters of it done, it already had fifteen hundred footnotes—such lively comments as "*Vid.* J. A. S. H. S. VIII, 234 *et seq.*" A real book, nothing flippant or commercialized.

It was called *The Influence of American Diplomacy on the Internal Policies of Paneuropa*.

"Paneuropa," Selig felt, was a nice and scholarly way of saying "Europe."

It would really have been an interesting book if Doctor Selig had not believed that all literature is excellent in proportion as it is hard to read. He had touched a world romantic and little known. Hidden in old documents, like discovering in a desert an oasis where girls laugh and fountains chatter and the market place is noisy, he found the story of Franklin, who in his mousy fur cap was the Don Juan of Paris, of Adams fighting the British Government to prevent their recognizing the Confederacy, of Benjamin Thompson, the Massachusetts Yankee who in 1791 was chief counselor of Bavaria, with the title of Count Rumford.

Selig was moved by these men who made the young America more admired than she is today. And he was moved and, in a most unscholarly way, he became a little angry as he reviewed the story of Senator Ryder.

He knew, of course, that Lafayette Ryder had prevented war between England and America in the first reign of Grover Cleveland; he knew that

Ryder had been Secretary of State, and Ambassador to France, courted by Paris for his wisdom, his manners, his wit; that as Senator he had fathered (and mothered and wet-nursed) the Ryder-Hanklin Bill, which had saved our wheat markets; and that his two books, *Possibilities of Disarmament* and *The Anglo-American Empire*, were not merely glib propaganda for peace, but such inspired documents as would have prevented the Boer War, the Spanish-American War, the Great War, if there had been in his Victorian world a dozen men with minds like his. This Selig knew, but he could not remember when Ryder had died.

Then he discovered with aghast astonishment that Senator Ryder was not dead, but still alive at ninety-two forgotten by the country he had helped to build.

Yes, Selig felt bitterly, we honor our great men in America—sometimes for as much as two months after the particular act of greatness that tickles us. But this is a democracy. We mustn't let anyone suppose that because we have given him an (undesired) parade up Broadway and a (furiously resented) soaking of publicity on March first, he may expect to be taken seriously on May second.

The Admiral Dewey whom the press for a week labeled as a combination of Nelson, Napoleon, and Chevalier Bayard, they later nagged to his grave. If a dramatist has a success one season, then may the gods help him, because for the rest of his life everyone will attend his plays only in the hope that he will fail.

But sometimes the great glad-hearted hordes of boosters do not drag down the idol in the hope of finding clay feet, but just forget him with the vast, contemptuous, heavy indifference of a hundred and twenty million people.

So felt Doctor Selig, angrily, and he planned for the end of his book a passionate resurrection of Senator Ryder. He had a shy hope that his book would appear before the Senator's death, to make him happy.

Reading the Senator's speeches, studying his pictures in magazine files, he felt that he knew him intimately. He could see, as though the Senator were in the room, that tall ease, the contrast of long thin nose, gay eyes, and vast globular brow that made Ryder seem a combination of Puritan, clown, and benevolent scholar.

Selig longed to write to him and ask—oh, a thousand things that only he could explain; the proposals of Lionel Sackville-West regarding Colombia; what Queen Victoria really had said in that famous but unpublished letter to President Harrison about the Newfoundland fisheries. Why couldn't he write to him?

No! The man was ninety-two, and Selig had too much reverence to disturb him, along with a wholesome suspicion that his letter would be kicked out by the man who had once told Gladstone to go to the devil.

So forgotten was the Senator that Selig could not, at first, find where he lived. Who's Who gave no address. Selig's superior, Professor Munk, who was believed to know everything in the world except the whereabouts of his last-season's straw hat, bleated, "My dear chap, Ryder is dwelling in some cemetery! He passed beyond, if I remember, in 1901."

The mild Doctor Selig almost did homicide upon a venerable midwestern historian.

At last, in a bulletin issued by the Anti-Prohibition League, Selig found among the list of directors: "Lafayette Ryder (form. U.S. Sen., Sec'y State), West Wickley, Vermont." Though the Senator's residence could make no difference to him, that night Selig was so excited that he smoked an extra pipe of tobacco.

He was planning his coming summer vacation, during which he hoped to finish his book. The presence of the Senator drew him toward Vermont, and in an educational magazine he found the advertisement: "Sky Peaks, near Wickley, Vt., woodland nook with peace and a library—congenial and intellectual company and writers—tennis, handball, riding—nightly Sing round Old-time Bonfire—fur. bung. low rates."

That was what he wanted: a nook and a library and lots of low rates, along with nearness to his idol. He booked a fur. bung. for the summer, and he carried his suit-case to the station on the beautiful day when the young fiends who through the year had tormented him with unanswerable questions streaked off to all parts of the world and for three tremendous months permitted him to be a private human being.

When he reached Vermont, Selig found Sky Peaks an old farm, redecorated in a distressingly tea-roomy fashion. His single bungalow, formerly an honest corncrib, was now painted robin's-egg blue with yellow trimmings and christened "Shelley." But the camp was on an upland, and air sweet from hayfield and spruce grove healed his lungs, spotted with classroom dust.

At his first dinner at Sky Peaks, he demanded of the host, one Mr. Iddle, "Doesn't Senator Ryder live somewhere near here?"

"Oh, yes, up on the mountain, about four miles south."

"Hope I catch a glimpse of him some day."

"I'll run you over to see him any time you'd like."

"Oh, I couldn't do that! Couldn't intrude!"

"Nonsense! Of course he's old, but he takes quite an interest in the countryside. Fact, I bought this place from him and— Don't forget the Sing tonight."

At eight that evening Iddle came to drag Selig from the security of his corncrib just as he was getting the relations of the Locarno Pact and the Versailles Treaty beautifully coördinated.

It was that kind of Sing. "The Long, Long Trail," and "All God's Chillun Got Shoes." (God's Chillun also possessed coats, pants, vests, flivvers, and watermelons, interminably.) Beside Selig at the campfire sat a young woman with eyes, a nose, a sweater, and an athletic skirt, none of them very good or particularly bad. He would not have noticed her, but she picked on him:

"They tell me you're in Erasmus, Doctor Selig."

"Um."

"Real attention to character. And after all, what benefit is there in developing the intellect if the character isn't developed to keep pace with it? You see, I'm in educational work myself—oh, of course nothing like being on a college faculty, but I teach history in the Lincoln High School at Schenectady—my name is Selma Swanson. We must have some good talks about teaching history, mustn't we!"

"Um!" said Selig, and escaped, though it was not till he was safely in his corncrib that he said aloud, "We must *not*!"

For three months he was not going to be a teacher, or heed the horrors of character-building. He was going to be a great scholar. Even Senator Ryder might be excited to know how powerful an intellect was soothing itself to sleep in a corncrib four miles away!

He was grinding hard next afternoon when his host, Iddle, stormed in with: "I've got to run in to Wickley Center. Go right near old Ryder's. Come on. I'll introduce you to him."

"Oh, no, honestly!"

"Don't be silly: I imagine he's lonely. Come on!"

Before Selig could make up his mind to get out of Iddle's tempestuous flivver and walk back, they were driving up a mountain road and past marble gateposts into an estate. Through a damp grove of birches and maples they came out on meadows dominated by an old brick house with a huge porch facing the checkered valley. They stopped with a dash at the porch, and on it Selig saw an old man sunk in a canvas deck chair and covered with a shawl. In the shadow the light seemed to concentrate on his bald head, like a sphere of polished vellum, and on long bloodless hands lying as in death on shawl-draped knees. In his eyes there was no life nor desire for it.

Iddle leaped out, bellowing, “Afternoon, Senator! Lovely day, isn’t it? I’ve brought a man to call on you. This is Mr. Selig of—uh—one of our colleges. I’ll be back in an hour.”

He seized Selig’s arm—he was abominably strong—and almost pulled him out of the car. Selig’s mind was one wretched puddle of confusion. Before he could dredge any definite thought out of it, Iddle had rattled away, and Selig stood below the porch, hypnotized by the stare of Senator Ryder—too old for hate or anger, but not too old for slow contempt.

Not one word Ryder said.

Selig cried, like a schoolboy unjustly accused:

“Honestly, Senator, the last thing I wanted to do was to intrude on you. I thought Iddle would just introduce us and take me away. I suppose he meant well. And perhaps subconsciously I did want to intrude! I know your *Possibilities of Disarmament* and *Anglo-American Empire* so well—”

The Senator stirred like an antediluvian owl awakening at twilight. His eyes came to life. One expected him to croak, like a cynical old bird, but his still voice was fastidious:

“I didn’t suppose anyone had looked into my books since 1910.” Painful yet gracious was the gesture with which he waved Selig to a chair. “You are a teacher?”

“Instructor in a small Ohio college. Economics and history. I’m writing a monograph on our diplomacy, and naturally— There are so many things that only you could explain!”

“Because I’m so old?”

“No! Because you’ve had so much knowledge and courage—perhaps they’re the same thing! Every day, literally, in working on my book I’ve wished I could consult you. For instance— Tell me, sir, didn’t Secretary of State Olney really want war with England over Venezuela? Wasn’t he trying to be a tin hero?”

“No!” The old man threw off his shawl. It was somehow a little shocking to find him not in an ancient robe laced with gold, but in a crisp linen summer suit with a smart bow-tie. He sat up, alert, his voice harsher. “No! He was a patriot. Sturdy. Honest. Willing to be conciliatory but not flinching. Miss Tully!”

At the Senator’s cry, out of the wide fanlighted door of the house slid a trained nurse. Her uniform was so starched that it almost clattered, but she was a peony sort of young woman, the sort who would insist on brightly mothering any male, of any age, whether or not he desired to be mothered. She glared at the intruding Selig; she shook her finger at Senator Ryder, and simpered:

"Now I do hope you aren't tiring yourself, else I shall have to be ever so stern and make you go to bed. The doctor said—"

"Damn the doctor! Tell Mrs. Tinkham to bring me down the file of letters from Richard Olney, Washington, for 1895—O-l-n-e-y—and hustle it!"

Miss Tully gone, the Senator growled, "Got no more use for a nurse than a cat for two tails! It's that mutton-headed doctor, the old fool! He's seventy-five years old, and he hasn't had a thought since 1888. Doctors!"

He delivered an address on the art of medicine with such vigorous blasphemy that Selig shrank in horrified admiration. And the Senator didn't abate the blazing crimson of his oration at the entrance of his secretary, Mrs. Tinkham, a small, narrow, bleached, virginal widow.

Selig expected her to leap off the porch and commit suicide in terror. She didn't. She waited, she yawned gently, she handed the Senator a manila envelope, and gently she vanished.

The Senator grinned. "She'll pray at me tonight! She daren't while you're here. There! I feel better. Good cussing is a therapeutic agent that has been forgotten in these degenerate days. I could teach you more about cussing than about diplomacy—to which cussing is a most valuable aid. Now here is a letter that Secretary Olney wrote me about the significance of his correspondence with England."

It was a page of history. Selig handled it with more reverence than he had given to any material object in his life.

He exclaimed, "Oh, yes, you used—of course I've never seen the rest of this letter, and I can't tell you, sir, how excited I am to see it. But didn't you use this first paragraph—it must be about on page 276 of your *Anglo-American Empire*?"

"I believe I did. It's not my favorite reading!"

"You know, of course, that it was reprinted from your book in the *Journal of the American Society of Historical Sources* last year?"

"Was it?" The old man seemed vastly pleased. He beamed at Selig as at a young but tested friend. He chuckled, "Well, I suppose I appreciate now how King Tut felt when they remembered him and dug him up. . . . Miss Tully! Hey! Miss Tully, will you be so good as to tell Martens to bring us whisky and soda, with two glasses? Eh? Now you look here, young woman; we'll fight out the whole question of my senile viciousness after our guest has gone. Two glasses, I said! . . . Now about Secretary Olney. The fact of the case was . . ."

Two hours later, Senator Ryder was still talking and in that two hours he had given Selig such unrecorded information as the researcher could not have found in two years of study.

Selig had for two hours walked with presidents and ambassadors; he had the dinner conversation of foreign ministers, conversations so private, so world-affecting, that they never had been set down, even in letters. The Senator had revealed his friendship with King Edward, and the predictions about the future World War the King had made over a glass of mineral water.

The mild college instructor, who till this afternoon had never spoken to anyone more important than the president of a prairie college, was exalted with a feeling that he had become the confidant of kings and field marshals, of Anatole France and Lord Haldane, of Sarah Bernhardt and George Meredith.

He had always known but till now he had never understood that in private these great personages were plain human beings, like Doctor Wilbur Selig of Erasmus. It made him feel close to King Edward to hear (though the Senator may have exaggerated) that the King could not pronounce his own name without a German accent; it made him feel a man of the world to learn the details of a certain not very elevating party at which an English duke and a German prince and a Portuguese king, accompanied by questionable ladies, had in bibulous intimacy sung to Senator Ryder's leadership the lyric, "How Dry I Am."

During that two hours, there had been ten minutes when he had been entirely off in a Conan Doyle spirit world. His notion of prodigious alcoholic dissipation was a bottle of home-brewed beer once a month. He had tried to mix himself a light whisky and soda—he noted, with some anxiety about the proper drinking-manners in diplomatic society, that he took approximately one third as much whisky as the Senator.

But while the old man rolled his drink in his mouth and shook his bald head rapturously and showed no effect, Selig was suddenly lifted six million miles above the earth, through pin-gray clouds shot with lightning, and at that altitude he floated dizzily while below him the Senator discoursed on the relations of Cuban sugar to Colorado beets.

And once Iddle blatted into sight, in his dirty flivver, suggested taking him away, and was blessedly dismissed by the Senator's curt, "Doctor Selig is staying here for dinner. I'll send him back in my car."

Dinner . . . Selig, though he rarely read fiction, had read in some novel about "candle-flames, stilled in the twilight and reflected in the long stretch of waxed mahogany as in a clouded mirror—candles and roses and old silver." He had read, too, about stag horns and heraldic shields and the swords of old warriors.

Now, actually, the Senator's dining room had neither stag horn nor heraldic shield nor sword, and if there were still candle-flames, there was no mahogany

to reflect them, but instead a silver stretch of damask. It was a long room, simple, with old portraits against white panels. Yet Selig felt that he was transported into all the romance he had ever read.

The dinner was countrylike. By now, Selig expected peacocks' tongues and caviar; he got steak and cantaloupe and corn pudding. But there were four glasses at each plate, and along with water, which was the familiar drink at Erasmus, he had, and timidly, tasted sherry, Burgundy, and champagne.

If Wilbur Selig of Iowa and Erasmus had known anything, it was that champagne was peculiarly wicked, associated with light ladies, lewd talk, and losses at roulette invariably terminating in suicide. Yet it was just as he was nibbling at his very first glass of champagne that Senator Ryder began to talk of his delight in the rise of Anglo-Catholicism.

No. It was none of it real.

If he was exhilarated that he had been kept for dinner, he was ecstatic when the Senator said, "Would you care to come for dinner again day after tomorrow? Good. I'll send Martens for you at seven-thirty. Don't dress."

In a dream phantasmagoria he started home, driven by Martens, the Senator's chauffeur-butler, with unnumbered things that had puzzled him in writing his book made clear.

When he arrived at the Sky Peaks camp, the guests were still sitting about the dull campfire.

"My!" said Miss Selma Swanson, teacher of history. "Mr. Iddle says you've spent the whole evening with Senator Ryder. Mr. Iddle says he's a grand person—used to be a great politician."

"Oh, he was kind enough to help me about some confused problems," murmured Selig.

But as he went to bed—in a reformed corncrib—he exulted, "I bet I could become quite a good friend of the Senator! Wouldn't that be wonderful!"

Lafayette Ryder, when his visitor—a man named Selig or Selim—was gone, sat at the long dining table with a cigarette and a distressingly empty cognac glass. He was meditating, "Nice eager young chap. Provincial. But mannerly. I wonder if there really are a few people who know that Lafe Ryder once existed?"

He rang, and the crisply coy Miss Tully, the nurse, waltzed into the dining room, bubbling, "So we're all ready to go to bed now, Senator!"

"We are not! I didn't ring for you; I rang for Martens."

"He's driving your guest."

“Humph! Send in cook. I want some more brandy.”

“Oh, now, Daddy Ryder! You aren’t going to be naughty, are you?”

“I am! And who the deuce ever told you to call me ‘Daddy’? Daddy!”

“You did. Last year.”

“I don’t—this year. Bring me the brandy bottle.”

“If I do, will you go to bed then?”

“I will not!”

“But the doctor—”

“The doctor is a misbegotten hound with a face like a fish. And other things. I feel cheerful tonight. I shall sit up late. Till All Hours.”

They compromised on eleven-thirty instead of All Hours, and one glass of brandy instead of the bottle. But, vexed at having thus compromised—as so often, in ninety-odd years, he had been vexed at having compromised with Empires—the Senator was (said Miss Tully) very naughty in his bath.

“I swear,” said Miss Tully afterward, to Mrs. Tinkham, the secretary, “if he didn’t pay so well, I’d leave that horrid old man tomorrow. Just because he was a politician or something, once, to think he can sass a trained nurse!”

“You would not!” said Mrs. Tinkham. “But he *is* naughty.”

And they did not know that, supposedly safe in his four-poster bed, the old man was lying awake, smoking a cigarette and reflecting:

“The gods have always been much better to me than I have deserved. Just when I thought I was submerged in a flood of women and doctors, along comes a man for companion, a young man who seems to be a potential scholar, and who might preserve for the world what I tried to do. Oh, stop pitying yourself, Lafe Ryder! . . . I wish I could sleep.”

Senator Ryder reflected, the next morning, that he had probably counted too much on young Selig. But when Selig came again for dinner, the Senator was gratified to see how quickly he was already fitting into a house probably more elaborate than any he had known. And quite easily he told of what the Senator accounted his uncivilized farm boyhood, his life in a state university.

“So much the better that he is naïve, not one of these third-secretary cubs who think they’re cosmopolitan because they went to Groton,” considered the Senator. “I must do something for him.”

Again he lay awake that night, and suddenly he had what seemed to him an inspired idea.

“I’ll give young Selig a lift. All this money and no one but hang-jawed relatives to give it to! Give him a year of freedom. Pay him—he probably earns twenty-five hundred a year; pay him five thousand and expenses to

arrange my files. If he makes good, I'd let him publish my papers after I pass out. The letters from John Hay, from Blaine, from Choate! No set of unpublished documents like it in America! It would *make* the boy!

"Mrs. Tinkham would object. Be jealous. She might quit. Splendid! Lafe, you arrant old coward, you've been trying to get rid of that woman without hurting her feelings for three years! At that, she'll probably marry you on your dying bed!"

He chuckled, a wicked, low, delighted sound, the old man alone in darkness.

"Yes, and if he shows the quality I think he has, leave him a little money to carry on with while he edits the letters. Leave him—let's see."

It was supposed among Senator Ryder's lip-licking relatives and necessitous hangers-on that he had left of the Ryder fortune perhaps two hundred thousand dollars. Only his broker and he knew that he had by secret investment increased it to a million, these ten years of dark, invalid life.

He lay planning a new will. The present one left half his fortune to his university, a quarter to the town of Wickley for a community center, the rest to nephews and nieces, with ten thousand each for the Tully, the Tinkham, Martens, and the much-badgered doctor, with a grave proviso that the doctor should never again dictate to any patient how much he should smoke.

Now to Doctor Selig, asleep and not even dream-warned in his absurd corncrib, was presented the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, the blessings of an old man, and a store of historical documents which could not be priced in coin.

In the morning, with a headache, and very strong with Miss Tully about the taste of the aspirin—he suggested that she had dipped it in arsenic—the Senator reduced Selig to five thousand, but that night it went back to twenty-five.

How pleased the young man would be.

Doctor Wilbur Selig, on the first night when he had unexpectedly been bidden to stay for dinner with Senator Ryder, was as stirred as by— What *would* most stir Doctor Wilbur Selig? A great play? A raise in salary? An Erasmus football victory?

At the second dinner, with the house and the hero less novel to him, he was calmly happy, and zealous about getting information. The third dinner, a week after, was agreeable enough, but he paid rather more attention to the squab in casserole than to the Senator's revelations about the Baring panic, and he was a

little annoyed that the Senator insisted (so selfishly) on his staying till midnight, instead of going home to bed at a reasonable hour like ten—with, perhaps, before retiring, a few minutes of chat with that awfully nice bright girl, Miss Selma Swanson.

And through that third dinner he found himself reluctantly critical of the Senator's morals.

Hang it, here was a man of good family, who had had a chance to see all that was noblest and best in the world, and why did he feel he had to use such bad language, why did he drink so much? Selig wasn't (he proudly reminded himself) the least bit narrow-minded. But an old man like this ought to be thinking of making his peace; ought to be ashamed of cursing like a stableboy.

He reproved himself next morning, "He's been mighty nice to me. He's a good old coot—at heart. And of course a great statesman."

But he snapped back to irritation when he had a telephone call from Martens, the chauffeur: "Senator Ryder would like you to come over for tea this afternoon. He has something to show you."

"All right, I'll be over."

Selig was curt about it, and he raged, "Now, by thunder, of all the thoughtless, selfish old codgers! As if I didn't have anything to do but dance attendance on him and amuse him! And here I'd planned to finish a chapter this afternoon! 'Course he does give me some inside information, but still—as if I needed all the tittle-tattle of embassies for my book! Got all the stuff I need now. And how am I to get over there? The selfish old hound never thinks of that! Does he suppose I can afford a car to go over? I'll have to walk! Got half a mind not to go!"

The sulkiness with which he came to tea softened when the Senator began to talk about the Queen Victoria letter.

Historians knew that during the presidency of Benjamin Harrison, when there was hostility between America and Britain over the seizure by both sides of fishing boats, Queen Victoria had written in her own hand to President Harrison. It was believed that she deplored her royal inability to appeal directly to Parliament, and suggested his first taking the difficulty up with Congress. But precisely what was in this unofficial letter, apparently no one knew.

This afternoon Senator Ryder said placidly, "I happen to have the original of the letter in my possession."

"*What?*"

"Perhaps some day I'll give you a glimpse of it. I think I have the right to let you quote it."

Selig was electrified. It would be a sensation—*he* would be a sensation! He

could see his book, and himself, on the front pages. But the Senator passed on to a trivial, quite improper anecdote about a certain Brazilian ambassador and a Washington milliner, and Selig was irritable again. Darn it, it was indecent for a man of over ninety to think of such things! And why the deuce was he so skittish and secretive about his old letter? If he was going to show it, why not do it?

So perhaps Doctor Selig of Erasmus was not quite so gracious as a Doctor Selig of Erasmus should have been when, at parting, the old man drew from under his shawl a worn blue-gray pamphlet, and piped:

"I'm going to give you this, if you'd like it. There's only six copies left in the world, I believe. It's the third one of my books—privately printed and not ordinarily listed with the others. It has, I imagine, a few things in it the historians don't know; the real story of the Paris commune."

"Oh, thanks," Selig said brusquely and, to himself, in the Senator's car, he pointed out that it showed what an egotistic old codger Ryder was to suppose that just because he'd written something, it must be a blooming treasure!

He glanced into the book. It seemed to have information. But he wasn't stirred, for it was out of line with what he had decided were the subjects of value to Doctor Selig and, therefore, of general interest.

After tea, now, it was too late for work before dinner, and he had Ryder's chauffeur set him down at Tredwell's General Store, which had become for members of the Sky Peaks camp a combination of department store, post-office and café, where they drank wild toasts in lemon pop.

Miss Selma Swanson was there, and Selig laughingly treated her to chewing gum, Attaboy Peanut Candy Rolls, and seven fishhooks. They had such a lively time discussing that funny Miss Elkington up at the camp.

When he started off, with Miss Swanson, he left the Senator's book behind him in the store. He did not miss it till he had gone to bed.

Two days afterward, the Senator's chauffeur again telephoned an invitation to tea for that afternoon, but this time Selig snapped, "Sorry! Tell the Senator I unfortunately shan't be able to come!"

"Just a moment, please," said the chauffeur. "The Senator wishes to know if you care to come to dinner tomorrow evening—eight—he'll send for you."

"Well— Yes, tell him I'll be glad to come."

After all, dinner here at Sky Peaks was pretty bad, and he'd get away early in the evening.

He rejoiced in having his afternoon free for work. But the confounded insistence of the Senator had so bothered him that he banged a book on his table and strolled outside.

The members of the camp were playing One Old Cat, with Selma Swanson, very jolly in knickerbockers, as cheer leader. They yelped at Selig to join them and, after a stately refusal or two, he did. He had a good time. Afterward he pretended to wrestle with Miss Swanson—she had the supplest waist and, seen close up, the moistest eyes. So he was glad that he had not wasted his afternoon listening to that old bore.

The next afternoon, at six, a splendid chapter done, he went off for a climb up Mount Poverty with Miss Swanson. The late sun was so rich on pasture, pine clumps, and distant meadows, and Miss Swanson was so lively in tweed skirt and brogues—but the stockings were silk—that he regretted having promised to be at the Senator's at eight.

"But of course I always keep my promises," he reflected proudly.

They sat on a flat rock perched above the valley, and he observed in rather a classroom tone, "How remarkable that light is—the way it picks out that farmhouse roof, and then the shadow of those maples on the grass. Did you ever realize that it's less the shape of things than the light that gives a landscape beauty?"

"No, I don't think I ever did. That's so. It's the light! My, how observant you are!"

"Oh, no, I'm not. I'm afraid I'm just a bookworm."

"Oh, you are not! Of course you're tremendously scholarly—my, I've learned so much about study from you—but then, you're so active—you were just a circus playing One Old Cat yesterday. I do admire an all-round man."

At seven-thirty, holding her firm hand, he was saying, "But really, there's so much that I lack that— But you do think I'm right about it's being so much manlier not to drink like that old man? By the way, we must start back."

At a quarter to eight, after he had kissed her and apologized and kissed her, he remarked, "Still, he can wait a while—won't make any difference."

At eight: "Golly, it's so late! Had no idea. Well, I better not go at all now. I'll just phone him this evening and say I got balled up on the date. Look! Let's go down to the lake and dine on the wharf at the boathouse, just you and I."

"Oh, that would be grand!" said Miss Selma Swanson.

Lafayette Ryder sat on the porch that, along with his dining room and bedroom, had become his entire world, and waited for the kind young friend who was giving back to him the world he had once known. His lawyer was coming from New York in three days, and there was the matter of the codicil to his will. But—the Senator stirred impatiently—this money matter was

grubby; he had for Selig something rarer than money—a gift for a scholar.

He looked at it and smiled. It was a double sheet of thick bond, with "Windsor Castle" engraved at the top. Above this address was written in a thin hand: "To my friend L. Ryder, to use if he ever sees fit. Benj. Harrison."

The letter began, "To His Excellency, the President," and it was signed, "Victoria R." In a few lines between inscription and signature there was a new history of the great Victoria and of the Nineteenth Century. . . . Dynamite does not come in large packages.

The old man tucked the letter into a pocket down beneath the rosy shawl that reached up to his gray face.

Miss Tully rustled out, to beg, "Daddy, you won't take more than one cocktail tonight? The doctor says it's so bad for you!"

"Heh! Maybe I will and maybe I won't! What time is it?"

"A quarter to eight."

"Doctor Selig will be here at eight. If Martens doesn't have the cocktails out on the porch three minutes after he gets back, I'll skin him. And you needn't go looking for the cigarettes in my room, either! I've hidden them in a brand-new place, and I'll probably sit up and smoke till dawn. Fact; doubt if I shall go to bed at all. Doubt if I'll take my bath."

He chuckled as Miss Tully wailed, "You're so naughty!"

The Senator need not have asked the time. He had groped down under the shawl and looked at his watch every five minutes since seven. He inwardly glared at himself for his foolishness in anticipating his young friend, but—all the old ones were gone.

That was the devilishness of living so many years. Gone, so long. People wrote idiotic letters to him, still, begging for his autograph, for money, but who save this fine young Selig had come to him? . . . So long now!

At eight, he stirred, not this time like a drowsy old owl, but like an eagle, its lean head thrusting forth from its pile of hunched feathers, ready to soar. He listened for the car.

At ten minutes past, he swore, competently. Confound that Martens!

At twenty past, the car swept up the driveway. Out of it stepped only Martens, touching his cap, murmuring, "Very sorry, sir. Mr. Selig was not at the camp."

"Then why the devil didn't you wait?"

"I did, sir, as long as I dared."

"Poor fellow! He may have been lost on the mountain. We must start a search!"

“Very sorry, sir, but if I may say so, as I was driving back past the foot of the Mount Poverty trail, I saw Mr. Selig with a young woman, sir, and they were talking and laughing and going away from the camp, sir. I’m afraid—”

“Very well. That will do.”

“I’ll serve dinner at once, sir. Do you wish your cocktail out here?”

“I won’t have one. Send Miss Tully.”

When the nurse had fluttered to him, she cried out with alarm. Senator Ryder was sunk down into his shawl. She bent over him to hear his whisper:

“If it doesn’t keep you from your dinner, my dear, I think I’d like to be helped up to bed. I don’t care for anything to eat. I feel tired.”

While she was anxiously stripping the shawl from him, he looked long, as one seeing it for the last time, at the darkening valley. But as she helped him up, he suddenly became active. He snatched from his pocket a stiff double sheet of paper and tore it into fragments which he fiercely scattered over the porch with one sweep of his long arm.

Then he collapsed over her shoulder.

9
RING AROUND A ROSY
(*1931*)

T. Eliot Hopkins was a nice young man at forty-two, and he had done nicely all the nice things—Williams College, a New York brokerage office, his first million, his first Phyfe table, careful polo at Del Monte, the discovery that it was smart to enjoy the opera and the discovery that it was much smarter to ridicule it. In fact, by the time he had a penthouse on Park Avenue, Eliot understood the theory of relativity as applied to the world of fashion—that a man is distinguished not by what he likes but by what he is witty enough to loathe.

As for Eleanor, his wife, she came from Chicago, so naturally she had a cousin married to a French count and another cousin who would have married an Italian marquis if it had not been discovered that he was already married and not a marquis. Still, he really was Italian.

Their first year in the penthouse was ecstatic. Thirty stories up, atop 9999 Park Avenue, looking to east and north and south, it had a terrace exclamatory with scarlet wicker chairs, Pompeian marble benches, and a genuine rose garden attended by a real gardener—at three dollars an hour, from the florist's. On the terrace opened the duplex living room, fifty feet long, its Caen stone walls and twenty-foot windows soaring up to a raftered ceiling of English oak. But to a nosey and domestic mind, to one who had known Eleanor when she lived in a six-room bungalow in Wilmette, these glories of city-dominating terrace and castle hall were less impressive than the little perfections of the apartment: The kitchen which was a little like a chemist's laboratory and more like the cabin of an electric locomotive; the bathrooms of plate glass and purple tile, and the master's bathroom with an open fireplace. Through this domain Eleanor bustled for a year, slipping out to look across the East River to the farthest hills and gas houses of Long Island, dashing inside to turn on the automatic pipe organ, plumping down at her most Art Moderne desk of silver, aluminum and black glass to write dinner invitations. And they entertained. Vastly. These gigantic rooms demanded people, and sometimes there were forty guests at the unique diamond-shaped dinner table, with five old family retainers sneaked in from the caterer's. With such a turnover of guests, there weren't always enough bank vice presidents and English authors and baronets

and other really worthwhile people on the market, and Eleanor had to fall back on persons who were nothing but old friends, which was pretty hard on a girl. So she was not altogether contented, even before things happened.

They were important things. Eliot sold short before the stock-market depression. His first million was joined by two others, and he immediately took up reading, art criticism and refined manners. He also bought new jodhpurs. I am not quite sure what jodhpurs are, but then T. Eliot hadn't known, either, six years before. They have to do with polo, though whether they are something you ride or wear or hit the ball with, I have not been informed. But I do know that Eliot's jodhpurs were singularly well spoken of at Meadowbrook, and whatever else they may have been, they were not cursed by being American. They were as soundly English as cold toast.

Now, selling short at a time when everyone else is dismally long is likely to have a large effect on nice people, and Eleanor agreed with Eliot that it was shocking—it was worse than shocking, it was a bore—that they should have to go on slaving their lives away among commercial low-brows, when in England, say, people of Their Class led lives composed entirely of beauty, graciousness, leisure and servants who didn't jiggle the tea tray.

The penthouse seemed to her a little gaudy, a little difficult. With the stupidity of servants, it took her hours a day to prepare for even the simplest dinner party. It was like poor Eliot's having to dash out and be in his office in the dawn, at ten o'clock, and often give up his afternoons of golf because his clerks were so idiotically dumb that he couldn't trust them.

When they had taken the penthouse, a friend of Eleanor's had been so conservative as to buy a quiet little house in Turtle Bay and furnish it with English antiques. Mahogany. White fireplaces. Just a shack. But now Eleanor found the shack restful. The drawing-room did not seem empty with but two of them for tea, and the little befrilled maid was not too humble, as she would have been in the vastnesses of the penthouse.

All the way home Eleanor looked wistfully out of the limousine. She wished that there weren't a law against her walking, this warm June evening. But she wanted to be walking, not on an avenue but in a real certificated English lane—rosy cottages, old women curtsying, nightingales rising from the hedges, or whatever nightingales do rise from; witty chatter at the gate with their neighbor, General Wimbledom, former C. in C. in India; not one of these horrid New Yorkers who talk about bond issues.

When Eliot dragged home, hot, his eyes blurred with weariness, he groaned at Eleanor, "I'm glad we're not going out tonight! Let's dine on the terrace."

“But we are going out, my pet! I’m restless. I can’t stand this private Grand Central. I feel like a redcap. Let’s go to that nice little French speak-easy on Forty-ninth and try to make ourselves believe we’ve had sense enough to go to Europe.”

“All right. I wish we had gone. If nothing begins to happen in the market—Maybe we’ll be abroad before the summer’s over.”

The Chez Edouard has, like all distinguished French restaurants, a Swiss manager, Czech waiters, a Bavarian cook, a Greek coat checker, and scenes from Venice painted on the walls of a decayed drawing-room, and, unlike most of them, it has German wine. Eleanor crooned over the thought of onion soup, chicken cutlet Pojarski, crêpes suzette, and Oppenheimer Kreuz Spätlese.

“America—New York—isn’t so bad after all, if you belong, if you know where to go,” exulted Eleanor.

Then the waiter wouldn’t wait.

Eleanor raised a gracious finger, Eleanor raised an irritated hand, Eliot sank so low as to snap his fingers, and the waiter merely leered at them and did not come. He was attending a noisy group of six business men, who were beginning a sound meal with six cocktails apiece—tip after each round.

“It’s absolutely dreadful what America does even to good foreign servants!” Eleanor raged. “They become so impertinent and inefficient! It’s something in the air of this awful country. They’re so selfish and inconsiderate—and yet so nice as long as they stay abroad. I wish we were there—in Europe—where we could lead a civilized life.”

“Yes,” said Eliot. “Little inns. Nice.”

When they were finally served with chicken cutlets Pojarski, and Eleanor had come to believe that after all she would live through it, she encountered the most terrible affliction of all. One of the so noisy interlopers wambled across and addressed her: “Sister, I just noticed we’re taking more of the waiter’s time than we ought to. You had to bawl him out before he brought your chicken croquettes. Excuse us! If you and the gentleman would come over and join us in a little libation— Excuse the liberty, but we’ve got some pretty decent, old-fashioned, house-broken rye, and if we could have the pleasure—”

During this shocking affront Eleanor had gaped at Eliot in terror. He rescued her in a brave and high-toned manner; he said dryly to the intruder. “Very kind of you, but we have quite enough to drink here, thank you, and we must be going immediately.”

“Imagine a dreadful thing like that happening in any other country! England, for instance!” Eleanor murmured afterward. “Simply no privacy

anywhere in America. Dreadful! Let's get out of this dreadful restaurant."

Nor was she any the more pleased when the checking girl, whisking her white flannel topcoat across the counter, gurgled, "Here you are, dearie."

"And no respect for their betters! Just Bolshiviks!" pronounced Eleanor.

They had sent away the car. Eleanor—as a girl she had often walked six miles on a picnic—suggested to Eliot, "It would be awfully jolly and adventurous to walk home!"

They came on the new Titanic Talkie Theater—Cooled Air—Capacity 4000. Eliot yawned, "Ever been in one of these super-movie palaces? I never have. Let's see what it's like."

"You know what it will be like. Dreadful. Vulgar. But let's see."

The lobby was a replica, but somewhat reduced, of Seville Cathedral. A bowing doorman, in gold lace, scarlet tunic and a busby with a purple plume, admitted them through gilded bronze doors to an inner lobby, walled with silk tapestry, floored with the largest Oriental rug in the world, and dotted with solid silver statues of negligent ladies, parrakeets in golden cages on pedestals of Chinese lacquer, a fountain whose stream was illuminated with revolving lights, lemon-colored and green and crimson, and vast red club chairs beside which, for ash receivers, were Florentine wine jars.

"Oh! This hurts!" wailed Eleanor.

A line of ushers, young men in the uniforms of West Point cadets, stood at attention. One of them galloped forward and, bending from the waist, held out a white-gloved hand for their tickets.

"I'm paralyzed! This is like an opium eater's dream of a mid-Victorian royal palace. Must we go in?" fretted Eleanor.

"No! Let's go home. Think how nice a cool Tom Collins would be on the terrace," said Eliot, and to the usher: "Thanks, I think we've seen enough."

The stateliness, the choiceness and aristocracy of their exit were a little crumpled by the military usher's blatting behind them, "Well, can you lay that! The Prince of Wales and Tex Guinan—that's who they are!" And at the door they heard from a comfortable woman enthroned in a tall Spanish chair, addressing her lady friend, "I always did like a good artistic talkie with Doug Fairbanks and some old antique castles, and like that. I can't stand this low-down sex stuff. Gotta have art or nothing."

Eleanor had lived in New York so long that she rarely saw it. She did tonight, with liveliness and hatred.

Broadway was turned into a county fair, with orange-juice stands, pineapple-juice stands, show windows with nuts arranged in circles and

diamonds, radio shops blaring, shops jammed with clothing models draped in aching brown suits with green shirts, green ties, green-bordered handkerchiefs. The people on Broadway Eleanor lumped as “impossible”—hoarse newsboys, Hungarians and Sicilians and Polish Jews guffawing on corners, tight-mouthed men with gray derbies concealing their eyes, standing in snarling conferences, silk-stockinged girls laughing like grackles.

“Dreadful!” she observed.

They looked east to a skyscraper like a gigantic arm threatening the sky with the silver mace that was its tower.

“Our buildings are so big and pretentious! Nothing kindly, nothing civilized about them. So—oh, so new!” complained Eleanor.

“Um—yes,” said Eliot.

At home, from their terrace, they looked across the East River, then south and west to the wriggling electricity of Broadway, where tawdry signs, high on hotels, turned crimson and gold and aching white with hysterical quickness. A searchlight wounded the starless dark. And the noises scratched her nerves. Once she had felt that together they made a symphony; now she distinguished and hated them. Tugboats brayed and howled on the river. Trains on the three elevated railways clanked like monstrous shaken chains, and street cars bumped with infuriating dullness. A million motors snarled, four million motor tires together joined in a vast hissing, like torn silk, and through all the uproar smashed the gong of an ambulance.

“Let’s get out of it! Let’s have a house in England!” cried Eleanor. “Peace! Civilized society! Perfect servants! Old tradition! Let’s go!”

In the offices of Messrs. Trottingham, Strusby and Beal, Estate Agents, London, Eliot and Eleanor, once they had convinced a severe lady reception clerk that, though they were Americans, they really did want to lease a house, were shown a portfolio of houses with such ivy-dripping Tudor walls, such rose gardens, such sunny slopes of lawn between oaks ancient as Robin Hood, that they wriggled like children in a candy shop. They had been well trained by reading fiction and the comic papers; they knew enough not to laugh when they read “16 bd., 2 bthrms., usual offices, choice fernery, stbling., 12, garge., 1 car.” So they were taken into favor, and young Mr. Claude Beal himself drove them down to Tiberius Hall, in Sussex.

“The Hall,” he said, “belongs to Sir Horace and Lady Mingo. You will remember that Sir Horace was formerly solicitor-general.”

“Oh, yes,” said Eliot.

“Quite,” said Eleanor.

“Sir Horace wishes to rent only because his health is not good. He is no longer a young man. He requires a hotter climate. He is thinking of Italy. Naturally Lady Mingo and he hate to leave so charming a place, you will understand.”

“I see,” said Eliot.

“Hush,” said Eleanor.

“But if they find really reliable tenants, they might—you see? But you understand that I’m not trying to do a bit of selling, as you Yankees say.”

“I see. Yes,” said Eliot.

They passed through the gateway of Tiberius Hall—the stone gateposts were worn by three centuries—and saw the gatekeeper’s lodge. On the shoulder of the stone chimney were gargoyles that had looked on the passing Queen Elizabeth, and before the latticed windows, with crocus-yellow curtains, were boxes of red geraniums.

Laburnums edged the quarter mile of driveway and shut off most of the estate, but they saw a glade with deer feeding in a mistiness of tender sunlight. “Not,” mused Eleanor, “like our dreadful, glaring, raw sunlight at home.” They came suddenly on the Hall. It was of Tudor, pure, the stone mellow. The chimneys were fantastically twisted; the red-tiled roof was soft with mosses; the tall windows of the ground floor gave on a terrace of ancient flagging. But what grasped at her, caressed her, more than the house itself was the lawn at one side where, under the shadow of oaks, half-a-dozen people sat in basket chairs at tea, attended by a butler whose cheeks were venerable pouches of respectability, and by a maid fresh as a mint drop in her cap and apron.

“We’re going to take it,” Eleanor whispered.

“We certainly are!”

“Here, we’ll really live!”

“Yes! Tea, with servants like that! Polo and golf with gentlemen, not with money grubbers! Neighbors who’ve actually read a book! Nell, we’ve come home!”

“This country,” said Sir Horace Mingo, “has gone utterly to the dogs.”

“It has indeed,” said Lady Mingo. “No competent servants since the war. Not one. The wages they demand, and their incredible stupidity—impossible to find a cook who can do a gooseberry trifle properly—and their impertinence! Did I tell you how pertly Bindger answered me when I spoke to her about staying out till ten?”

“You did, beloved. *In extenso,* if you will permit me to say so, I agree with you. My man—and to think of paying him twenty-two bob a week; when I was a youngster the fellow would have been delighted to have ten—he cannot press trousers so that they won’t resemble bags. ‘Higgs,’ I often say to him, ‘I don’t quite understand why it is that when you have given your loving attention to my trousers they always resemble bags’; and as to his awakening me when I tell him to, he never fails to be either five minutes late or, what is essentially more annoying, ten minutes early, and when your confounded Bindger brings my tea in the morning it is invariably cold, and if I speak to her about it she merely sniffs and tosses her head and—but—”

While Sir Horace is catching his breath it must be interjected that this conversation of the Mingos, before the James II fireplace at Tiberius Hall, had been patriotically enjoyed three months before Eliot and Eleanor Hopkins, on their penthouse terrace, had decided to flee from the land of electricity and clamor.

“But,” rumbled Sir Horace, in that port-and-Stilton voice which had made him the pursuing fiend to the sinful when he had been solicitor-general, “the fact that in the entire length and breadth of England today, and I dare say Scotland as well, it is utterly impossible, at any absurd wage, to find a servant who is not lazy, ignorant, dirty, thieving—and many of them dare to be impertinent, even to me!—this indisputable decay in English service is no more alarming than the fact that in our own class, good manners, sound learning and simple decency appear to have vanished. Young men up at Oxford who waste their time on Socialism and chemistry—chemistry! for a gentleman!—instead of acquiring a respectable knowledge of the classics! Young women who smoke, curse, go about exhibiting their backs—”

“Horace!”

“Well, they do! I’m scarcely to blame, am I? Have I ever gone about exhibiting my back? Have I caused whole restaurants to be shocked by the spectacle of my back? And that is not all. Everywhere! The pictures instead of Shakespeare! Motors making our lanes a horror and a slaughter! Shops that have electric lights and enormous windows and everything save honest wares and shop attendants with respectful manners! Shopkeepers setting themselves up to be better and certainly richer than the best county families! In fact, the whole blasted country becoming Americanized. . . . And cocktails! Cocktails! My word, if anybody had ever offered my old father a cocktail, I should think he would have knocked him down!

“England has always had a bad climate. But there was a day when the manners of the gentry and the charms of domestic life made up for it. But now I can see no reason why we should remain here. Why can’t we go to Italy?

That fellow Mussolini, he may not be English, but he has taught the masses discipline. You don't find impertinent servants and obscene gentlewomen there, I'll wager!"

"Yes. Why don't we go, Horace?"

"How can we? With this expensive place on our hands? If I were some petrol johnny, or a City bloke, or someone who had made his money selling spurious remedies, we might be able to afford it. But having been merely a servant of His Majesty all my life, merely devoting such legal knowledge and discernment as I might chance to have to the cause of Justice and—"

"But we might rent the place, Horace. Oh! Think of a jolly little villa at San Remo or on Lake Maggiore, with the lovely sunshine and mountains and those too sweet Italian servants who retain some sense of the dignity and joy of service!"

"Rent it to whom—whom? Our class are all impoverished."

"But there's the Argentines and Americans and Armenians. You know. All those curious A races where everyone is a millionaire. How they would appreciate a place with lawns! I'm told there isn't a single pretty lawn in America. How could there be? They would be so glad—"

"Though I couldn't imagine any American being trusted with our Lord Penzance sweetbriers!"

"But, Horace, a sweet little peasant villa at Baveno; just ten or twelve rooms."

"Well— After all, Victoria, why should people of some breeding, as I flatter myself we do possess, be shut up in this shocking country, when we might be in the sun of Italy—and Doctor Immens-Bourne says it would be so much better for my rheumatism. Shall we speak to an estate agent? If there are any honest and mannerly estate johnnys left in this atrocious country!"

On the terrace of crumbling pink and yellow tiles, sufficiently shaded by the little orange trees in pots, Sir Horace and Lady Mingo sat looking across Lake Maggiore to the bulk of Sasso del Ferro, along whose mountain trails perched stone villages. A small steamer swaggered up the lake; after its puffing there was no sound save goat bells and a clattering cart.

"Oh, the peace of it! Oh, the wise old peace of Italy!" sighed Lady Mingo, and the wrinkles in her vellumlike cheeks seemed smoother, her pale old eyes less weary.

"Yes!" said Sir Horace. He was not so pontifical as he had been at Tiberius Hall. "Peace. No jazz! No noisy English servants yelping music-hall songs and

banging things about!”

From the kitchen, a floor below the terrace, a sound of the cook banging his copper pots, and a maid yelping a few bars of Traviata.

“Yes! The sweet Italian servants! So gay and yet so polite! Smiling! And the lovely sun all day! Why we ever stayed— Oh, Horace, I do hope I shan’t be punished for saying such things. Of course England is the greatest country in the world, and when I think of people like my father and the dean, of course no other country could ever produce great gentlemen like them, but at the same time, I really don’t care if we never leave Italy again! And those sweet ruins at Fiesole! And the trains always quite absolutely on time since Mussolini came! And— Oh, Horace, it’s really quite too simply perfect!”

“Rather! Quite! You know, I’d thought I should worry about Tiberius Hall. But that’s a very decent chap—that Hoffman Eliot—Hopkins—Eliot Hopkins—what is the chap’s absurd name?—quite gentlemanly, for an American. I was astonished. None of these strange clothes Americans wear. I really quite took him for an English gentleman, until he opened his mouth. Astonishing! He hadn’t a red sweater or a great, huge felt hat or a velvet dinner jacket, or any of these odd things that Americans ordinarily wear. And now we must dress, my dear. Professor Pulciano will be here at half after seven. So decent of him to rent us this—this paradise!”

He was youngish and rather rich, but Carlo Pulciano had not remained in the Italian army after the war, though his brother was commanding general of one of the departments, nor would he listen to his sister-in-law’s insistence that he blossom in the salons of Rome.

He had previously scandalized them by teaching economics in the University of Pisa, by sitting over buckram-bound books full of tedious figures, and when the Black Shirts had marched on Rome and taken over the country, when it was not wise to speculate too much about economics, Pulciano had the more offended his people by buying this largish villa on the Pallanza peninsula at Lake Maggiore and retiring to his books and bees.

But in that still paradise he became restless and a little confused. All through the morning he would, in discussions none the less mad because they were entirely within his head, be completely pro-Fascist, admiring the Fascist discipline, the ideal of planned industry, the rousing of youngsters from sun loafing into drilling. Then, all afternoon, he would be Communistic or Social Democratic.

But whatever he was, here he was forever nothing. He had no one with whom to talk. It was not safe. And to Carlo Pulciano talking was life; talking

late at night, feverishly, over cigarettes and Lacrima Cristi; talking on dusty walks; talking through elegant dinners so ardently that he did not notice whether he was eating veal stew or *zabaglione*. Forever talking!

He would not have minded turning Fascist complete, provided he might have lived in a place where everyone hated Fascismo, so that furiously, all night, he might have defended it. He admitted, with one of the few grins this earnest young man ever put on, that he didn't so much want any particular social system as the freedom to discuss, in any way, at any time, over any kind of liquor, all social systems.

He longed for Germany, where he had studied economics as a young man. Germany! There was the land where he could talk unendingly! There was the land where, though the *Politzei* might harry you off the grass, you could say precisely what you thought or, greater luxury yet, say what you didn't think at all, just for the pleasure of it.

Pulciano cursed the fact that he had sunk most of his money in this villa and could not afford to go live in Germany. He had loved Italy; for it he had been wounded on the Piave. He had loved this villa and the peace of its blue lake waters. He had come to hate them both.

He hated the servants—so ready to promise everything and so unlikely to do anything; so smiling of eye and so angry in their hearts. He hated the climate. "It would be in Italy that we have the chilliest and wettest winters in Christendom, yet the mush-headed people insist it's always sunny and will not put in even fireplaces." He hated the food. "I'd give all the confounded pastes and fruits in the world for a decent *Mass* of dark beer and a pig's knuckle at Munich!" He hated funeral processions, policemen with cocks' plumes on their hats, plaster shrines, the silly wicker on wine bottles, wax matches that burned his fingers, and even—so far was he gone in treason against Italy—cigars with straws in them. But he did nothing about it. He was too busy hating to do much of anything.

He was delighted when the manager of the Grand Hotel d'Isola Bella came inquiring whether he might not care to lease his villa to a crazy English nobleman named Sir Mingo. Yes, for a year.

A week later, with many bundles and straw suitcases, Carlo Pulciano was on the train for Berlin and free talk, free thinking—long free thoughts over long cheap beers.

The doctrine of most American and British caricaturists, and all French ones, is that every German is fat, tow-headed, and given to vast beers, while every German woman is still fatter, and clad invariably in a chip hat and the

chintz covering for a wing-chair.

Baron Helmuth von Mittenbach, Silesian Junker and passionate mechanical engineer, had ruddy hair and blue eyes filled with light. He was slender, and looked rather more English than the Prince of Wales. The Baroness, Hilda, was slim as an icicle and as smooth, and she liked dancing in the night clubs off the Kurfürstendamm, in Berlin, till four of the morning. Neither of them liked beer, nor had ever drunk it since school days.

During the war, which ended when he was thirty, Helmuth had tried to join the flying circus of his friend Von Richthofen. He would have enjoyed swooping, possibly even being swooped upon. But he was too good a designer, and headquarters kept him improving the tank, and the one time when he sneaked off to try out his own tank at the front, they strafed him so that he stayed back of the line after that, fuming in a room verminous with steel shavings.

He was, therefore, more excited after the war than during it. Now he could take a real part! Now engineers were to be not assistants and yes men, like quartermasters or photographers or royal princes, but the real lords, shaping a new Germany.

He believed that the struggle to rebuild German glory would be a crusade holy and united. Now that the republic had come, with so little blood spilling, the political parties would join; the politicians would give up that ultimate selfishness of insisting on the superiority of their own ideals.

He was certain that the salvation of Germany was in industrial efficiency. They hadn't the man power and raw stuffs of America or Russia, nor the army of France, nor the ships and empire of Great Britain. They must make things more swiftly, better and more economically than any other land. They must no longer grudgingly adopt machinery when they had to admit that a machine could do the work of a hundred men, but take machinery as a religion.

Helmuth took it so. It is definitely not true that Helmuth and the youngish men who worked with him in those driving days thought mostly, or even much at all, about the profits they and their bosses might make out of machinery and rationalization. It was not true that they saw machinery as the oppressor of ordinary men. Rather, they saw it as the extension of man's force and dignity.

Here you had an ordinary human, with an ordinary, clumsy fist. Put a lever or an electric switch into it, and it had the power of a thousand elephants. Man that walked wearily, swam like a puppy, and flew not at all, man that had been weakest and most despicable of all the major mammals, was with motor and submarine and plane, with dynamo and linotype, suddenly to be not mammal at all but like the angels. So dreamed Baron Mittenbach, while he grunted and

hunched his shoulders over his drawing board, while in the best parade-ground manner he called a careless foreman an accursed-swine-hound-thunder-weather-once-again-for-the-sake-of-Heaven.

He had gone as chief engineer to the great A.A.G.—the so-called Universal Automobile Trust. His hobbies were light, cheap tractors for small farms, and light, cheap cars. He planned sedans which would sell, when exchange was normal again, for what, in American, would be a hundred and fifty dollars. By night, at home, he planned other devices, some idiotic, some blandly practical—eighteen-thousand-ton liners to leave out the swimming pools and marble pillars streaked like oxtail soup and to cross the Atlantic in three days; floating aviation fields, a string of fifteen of them across the ocean, so that a fallen plane would never be more than an hour from rescue; a parachute to ease down an entire plane, should the motor die or a wing drop off. Crazy as any other poet, and as excited. But happier.

He had reason at first for his excitement and his happiness. Though the Germans gabbled of every known political scheme, from union with Russia to union with England, they jumped into the deification of modern industry, as schoolboys into a summer lake. They worked ten hours a day, twelve, fourteen, not wearily but with a zest in believing that their sweat was cementing a greater Germany. They ruthlessly stripped factories and at whatever cost put in rows of chemical retorts a quarter mile long, conveyor belts, automatic oil furnaces, high-speed steel.

Helmuth was fortunate in being able to have a decent and restful house not too far from his factory, for though he drove at a speed which caused the police to look pained, he could not, he told himself, take all morning getting to work. There were too many exciting things to do. The factory was in the Spandau district of Berlin, and reasonably near, among the placid villas and linden rows of Grunewald, Hilda and Helmuth took a brick-and-stucco house with a mosaic eagle shining over the tile balcony.

The attic floor had been a private gaming room. Snorting at these signs of idleness and pride, Helmuth stripped out the card tables, roulette wheel, billiard table, dumped them in the basement, and set up a lathe, a work-bench, a drawing board, an electric furnace.

Here all evening, while Hilda restlessly studied Russian or yawned over cross-word puzzles, this grandson of a field marshal, in a workman’s jumper and atrocious felt slippers, experimented with aluminum alloys or drew plans of a monorail which would do the six hundred and sixty miles from Berlin to Paris in six hours, with carriages like drawing-rooms, glass walled, twenty feet wide.

It was a good time—for a year. The destruction of the currency did not

worry Helmuth; he was convinced that man should be saved by gasoline alone. But after two years, or three, he roused from his dream to see that the German recovery was not altogether a pure, naïve crusade; that the politicians would not forget their petty little differences. There were not two or three parties, as in Britain and America, but eight, ten, a dozen; and these parties clamorously advocated almost everything save total immersion. They advocated the return of the Kaiser, or immediate Communism; they advocated a cautious state Socialism, or wider power for the industrialists; they advocated combining with Austria, or the independence of Bavaria.

Outside the political parties, there were some thousands of noisy and highly admired prophets who had no interest in Helmuth's turret lathes and r.p.m.'s, but who shouted in little halls and little blurry magazines that the world was to be saved by vegetarianism, or going naked, or abolishing armies, or integrating spoken plays with the movie film, or growing carrots instead of wheat, or colonizing Brazil, or attending spiritualist seances, or mountain-climbing, or speaking Esperanto.

In his worship of clean, driving, unsentimental steel, Helmuth despised equally all cult mongers and all politicians, however famous. They talked; they chewed over old straw; they pushed themselves into personal notoriety. He didn't, just now, care a hang whether he lived under a democracy or a monarchy or a Soviet, so long as they would let him make more tractors.

The more eloquent the politicians were, in their bright oratory in the Reichstag or the jolly conferences at Lausanne and Geneva, the more he hated them. His gods were Duisberg and Citroen and Ford and Edison and the Wright brothers, and since most of the pantheon were Americans, he came to worship that country as his Olympus.

The German politicians talked—all the Germans talked, he snarled. They were so proud of having mental freedom. Yes, snorted Helmuth, and the Irish were so proud of having fairies! Freedom for what—for escape from discipline into loquacious idleness, or for the zest of hard work? He hated peculiarly—doubtless unjustly—the intellectuals whom he had known in the university, who gabbled that there was something inescapably evil about machines; that because the transition from handicrafts to machinery had certainly produced unemployment, this unemployment must always continue; who whimpered that we must all go back to the country and live perfectly simple old-fashioned lives—with, however, telephones and open plumbing and typewriters and automobiles and electric lights and quick mail and newspapers.

"Yah! My picture of those gentry," Helmuth grumbled to Hilda, "is that they sit in machine-made modernistic metal chairs, telephoning to one another that they want us to stop manufacturing telephones and just beautifully write

them! Good night. Tomorrow I must be up early and write a carburetor and sculp a grease gun."

Thus irritated, he looked daily more toward America. There, he believed, everybody was united in the one common purpose of solving economic injustices, not by turning every capitalist into a starved proletarian but by making all competent proletarians into capitalists. The more he read American magazines and yearned for American vitality and ingenuity, the more he grumbled about Germany. And his Hilda, who was most of the time happily ignorant of everything he was saying, here joined him.

In America, she had heard, there was no need of servants, because everything was done, and perfectly, by machinery. And she was so sick, she confided, of German servants since the war. What had got into them? Regular Communists! They no longer had respect for the better classes, and the government was supporting them in their demands. What with compulsory insurance and the law that you couldn't, without notice, kick out even the most impertinent maid, there was no running a house. She longed for electric dishwashers and washing machines, but their landlord was old-fashioned; he would not put them in.

America!

Just when Helmuth and Hilda were keenest about it, he met McPherson Jones, of the Engel & Jones High Speed Tractor Company of Long Island City, who was scouting about Europe looking for new efficiencies. Helmuth spoke a photographic English. Jones and he went to Essen, to the Ruhr, and argued about beer and about torque in aviation. Jones offered him a place high on the staff of Engel & Jones, with a breath-taking salary; and a month later Helmuth and Hilda were on the high seas—to the miserable Hilda it was evident why they were called high.

Helmuth had sublet his house to an Italian, a Prof. Carlo Pulciano, who was going to study something or other at the university. Helmuth did not leave Berlin till a fortnight after he had turned the house over to Pulciano. He called to say good-by, and Pulciano proudly showed him the changes he had made. On the top floor Helmuth did a little youthful suffering. Pulciano had ripped out the lathe, the work-bench, the drawing board, and fitted up the room in imitation of an old Bavarian inn, with heavy wooden tables, stone beer mugs, a barrel of beer, and painted mottoes announcing that men who gave earnest attention to anything save drinking, kissing, singing and snoring were invariably jackasses.

"I tell you," cried Pulciano, "here I shall have again the good free talk of my German student days! I am in your Germany so happy! You Germans realize that the purpose of life is not just doing, but thinking, and setting

thoughts in jeweled words—and again I get decent red cabbage!"

"*Ja?*" said Helmuth. It can sound extraordinarily like "Yeah?"

He groaned to himself, "Just the old, thick-necked, beer-steaming Germany we have been trying to kill! I want a race stark and lean and clear and cold bathed and unafraid of the song of flywheels!"

With Hilda seasick, Helmuth found solace in the smoking room of the steamer. By the end of three days he knew a dozen Americans—a banker, the superintendent of a steel plant, two automobile-foreign-sales men, a doctor who had been studying gross pathology in Vienna.

He expected them to resent his coming to America in rivalry with their earnings; he expected them to smile at his English. But they welcomed him to the tournament. "Come on! If you can get anything away from us in America, it just makes the game better," they said; and: "Your English? Listen, baron. The only trouble with you is, you went to a school where they let the teams weaken themselves by looking at books between the halves. By the way, will you happen to be in Detroit, time of the Michigan-Notre Dame game? Wish you'd come stay with us and I'll drive you down. Like to have you meet the wife and show her up—she thinks she can parley Deutsch."

"They are," Helmuth glowed to Hilda, "the kindest and politest people I have ever known. But just the same, *ich sage Dir bestimmt*, that Mr. Tolson is all wrong about the front-wheel drive. . . . I wonder about the market for speed boats in Norway?"

He had accepted invitations to Bar Harbor, Seattle, Moose Jaw, Gramercy Square, Franconia Notch, and Social Circle, Georgia, before he saw the skyscrapers from New York Harbor.

"They are my friends! I have never had so many friends—not in my life!" he rejoiced, and with a feeling that the towers of New York were his own, he pointed them out to a slightly shaky Hilda beside him.

"They are very pretty. They are not all worn, like cathedral spires," he said. "I wonder what the wind pressure per square meter is with a sixty-kilometer wind? I wonder if electric welding costs more than riveting? I wonder whether the marble here comes from Italy or Vermont? Yes, it is exciting; I am very thrilled. . . . I wonder what is the tensile strength of the steel in these buildings?"

But his friend, Doctor Moore, the Omaha surgeon, could not answer any of these obvious questions, though he was a real American.

A week after their arrival, Baron and Baroness Mittenbach leased a

penthouse atop the apartment house at 9999 Park Avenue. It belonged to some people named Hopkins, now living in the South of England.

They took possession on an autumn afternoon. Hilda raced through the great living room ecstatically. “I say to you, Helmuth, so a beautiful room have I never seen! Stone walls! And the rafters! Windows like a cathedral! And the organ, quite gold! It is no larger than the great Hall in my father’s *Schloss,* but so much more wonderful. Always I hated those tattered tapestries and the moldy stag horns! But this room is indeed something noble!”

Squealing, with Helmuth beside her and not much less childish, she explored the wonders of the kitchen and butler’s pantry—electric dishwasher and coffee urn and toaster and vacuum-cleaner and clock and egg cooker. She couldn’t quite make out the electric waffle iron; she wasn’t sure whether it was for cooking or pleating. But on the automatic refrigerator they both fell with shouts. This was a possession they had envied their richer friends in Berlin. They cautiously pulled out an ice tray and gazed with fatuous admiration on the beautiful cubes of ice.

“Much better than diamonds,” said Helmuth.

Refrigerator, gas stove, small electric range, luxurious enameled sink and kitchen cabinet were all finished in white and canary yellow; the kitchen was gayer than any boudoir.

“Already I am a—how is it called?—hunnerd-procent American,” observed Helmuth in what he believed to be English. “The old system, it was to make beautiful the salon and the chapel, and make hateful the kitchen, the heart of the house. Yes, I am a modern! We do something, we engineers. We do not believe that the more a room is used, the less *gemütlich* it should be. Modern, yes, and very old. We go back to medieval days, when men were not ashamed to eat and love, and when kitchens were more important than reception rooms, and when—”

“Here,” said Hilda, “I would be happy if we had no servants at all, and I did all the work. I shall cook the dinner—tomorrow. Tonight let us find that lovely spikizzy—is right?—of which the doctor has spoken on the steamer.”

When, on the wine list of the Chez Edouard, they found an Oppenheimer Kreuz Spätlese, they asked each other why anyone should go to Europe. Their only trouble was that the waiter was a bit slow. But they understood, for he was much engaged with a jolly group of six men at the next table.

One of the six noticed the plight of the Von Mittenbachs and, coming to their table, said, “Sorry we’re grabbing off so much of the waiter’s time. Afraid we’re holding up your dinner. So, meanwhile—if you’ll excuse the liberty—won’t you folks come have a drink with us?”

“That would be very nice,” said Helmuth.

He was, after all, a shy young man, and he was grateful for the way in which these strangers took him in. They were all, it seemed, in motor manufacturing. When they learned that he had just come from Germany to join them, instantly a card was out of every pocket, and address was scribbled, and each had insisted that when he went to South Bend, or Toledo, or Detroit, he must dine with them—“and I hope the missus will be along with you.”

In a glow that burned out of him all the loneliness he had felt that afternoon in the cold shadow of the monstrous skyscrapers, Helmuth returned with Hilda to their table and dinner.

“So kind to a foreigner, a poor unknown engineer,” said Helmuth. “No wonder no American ever wants to go abroad for more than a visit of a month!”

From the terrace before their penthouse they stared across the East River, then south and west to the wriggling electricity of Broadway. They were thirty stories up; they seemed to be looking on the whole world, but a world transformed into exultant light.

“It is as though we were in a castle on a huge sheer cliff, a castle on the Matterhorn himself, and yet in the midst of Berlin and London and Paris joined into one,” said Helmuth. “This is perhaps—not true, Hilda?—the greatest spectacle of the world! Why speak they of the Acropolis, the Colosseum, the Rhineland, when they have this magic?”

Tugboats shouted cheerily on the East River; liners roared gallantly from the North River; the elevated trains, streaks of golden light, chanted on their three tracks; and the million motor horns spoke of the beautiful and exciting places to which the cars were going.

“And it’s ours now! We’ve found our home! We shall know all this city, all those people in the lovely motors down there! I think we stay here the rest of our lives!” said Helmuth.

Hilda pondered, “Yes, except—except neither Germany nor America has any mystery. I want us some day to go to China, Japan. There it gives mystery. And I hear the servants are divine, and so cheap. Don’t you think we might go live in China—soon?”

10
LAND
(*1931*)

He was named Sidney, for the sake of elegance, just as his parents had for elegance in their Brooklyn parlor a golden-oak combination bookcase, desk, and shield-shaped mirror. But Sidney Dow was descended from generations of Georges and Johns, of Lorens and Lukes and Nathans.

He was little esteemed in the slick bustle of his city school. He seemed a loutish boy, tall and heavy and slow-spoken, and he was a worry to his father. For William Dow was an ambitious parent. Born on a Vermont farm, William felt joyously that he had done well in the great city of Brooklyn. He had, in 1885, when Sidney was born, a real bathroom with a fine tin tub, gas lights, and a handsome phaeton with red wheels, instead of the washtub in the kitchen for Saturday-night baths, the kerosene lamps, and the heavy old buggy which his father still used in Vermont. Instead of being up at 5:30, he could loll abed till a quarter of seven, and he almost never, he chuckled in gratification at his progress, was in his office before a quarter to eight.

But the luxury of a red-wheeled carriage and late lying did not indicate that William's Yankee shrewdness had been cozened by urban vice, or that he was any less solid and respectable than old George, his own father. He was a deacon in the Universalist church, he still said grace before meals, and he went to the theater only when Ben-Hur was appearing.

For his son, Sidney, William Dow had even larger ambitions. William himself had never gone to high school, and his business was only a cautious real-estate and insurance agency, his home a squatting two-story brick house in a red, monotonous row. But Sidney—he should go to college, he should be a doctor or a preacher or a lawyer, he should travel in Europe, he should live in a three-story graystone house in the Forties in Manhattan, he should have a dress suit and wear it to respectable but expensive hops!

William had once worn dress clothes at an Odd Fellows' ball, but they had been rented.

To enable Sidney to attain all these graces, William toiled and sacrificed and prayed. American fathers have always been as extraordinary as Scotch fathers in their heroic ambitions for their sons—and sometimes as unscrupulous and as unwise. It bruised William and often it made him

naggingly unkind to see that Sidney, the big slug, did not "appreciate how his parents were trying to do for him and give him every opportunity." When they had a celebrated Columbia Heights physician as guest for dinner, Sidney merely gawked at him and did not at all try to make an impression.

"Suffering cats! You might have been one of your uncles still puttering around with dirty pitchforks back on the farm! What are you going to do with yourself, anyway?" raged William.

"I guess maybe I'd like to be a truck driver," mumbled Sidney.

Yet, even so, William should not have whipped him. It only made him sulkier.

To Sidney Dow, at sixteen, his eagerest memories were of occasional weeks he had spent with his grandfather and uncles on the Vermont farm, and the last of these was seven years back now. He remembered Vermont as an enchanted place, with curious and amusing animals—cows, horses, turkeys. He wanted to return, but his father seemed to hate the place. Of Brooklyn, Sidney liked nothing save livery stables and occasional agreeable gang fights, with stones inside iced snowballs. He hated school, where he had to cramp his big knees under trifling desks, where irritable lady teachers tried to make him see the importance of A's going more rapidly than B to the town of X, a town in which he was even less interested than in Brooklyn—school where hour on hour he looked over the top of his geography and stolidly hated the whiskers of Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier. He hated the stiff, clean collar and the itchy, clean winter underwear connected with Sunday school. He hated hot evenings smelling of tarry pavements, and cold evenings when the pavements were slippery.

But he didn't know that he hated any of these things. He knew only that his father must be right in saying that he was a bad, disobedient, ungrateful young whelp, and in his heart he was as humble as in his speech he was sullen.

Then, at sixteen, he came to life suddenly, on an early June morning, on his grandfather's farm. His father had sent him up to Vermont for the summer, had indeed exiled him, saying grimly, "I guess after you live in that tumbledown big old shack and work in the fields and have to get up early, instead of lying abed till your majesty is good and ready to have the girl wait on you—I guess that next fall you'll appreciate your nice home and school and church here, young man!" So sure of himself was his father that Sidney was convinced he was going to encounter hardship on the farm, and all the way up, in the smarting air of the smoker on the slow train, he wanted to howl. The train arrived at ten in the evening, and he was met by his uncle Rob, a man rugged

as a pine trunk and about as articulate.

"Well! Come for the summer!" said Uncle Rob; and after they had driven three miles: "Got new calf—yeh, new calf"; and after a mile more: "Your pa all right?" And that was all the conversation of Uncle Rob.

Seven years it was since Sidney had been in any country wilder than Far Rockaway, and the silent hills of night intimidated him. It was a roaring silence, a silence full of stifled threats. The hills that cut the stars so high up on either side the road seemed walls that would topple and crush him, as a man would crush a mosquito between his two palms. And once he cried out when, in the milky light from the lantern swung beneath the wagon, he saw a porcupine lurch into the road before them. It was dark, chill, unfriendly and, to the boy, reared to the lights and cheery voices of the city, even though he hated them, it was appallingly lonely.

His grandfather's house was dark when they arrived. Uncle Rob drove into the barn, jerked his thumb at a ladder up to the haymow and muttered, "Y'sleep up there. Not allowed t' smoke. Take this lantern when we've unharnessed. Sure to put it out. No smoking in the barn. Too tired to help?"

Too tired? Sidney would have been glad to work till daylight if Uncle Rob would but stay with him. He was in a panic at the thought of being left in the ghostly barn where, behind the pawing of horses and the nibble of awakened cows, there were the sounds of anonymous wild animals—scratchings, squeaks, patterings overhead. He made the task as slow as possible, though actually he was handy with horses, for the livery stables of Brooklyn had been his favorite refuge and he had often been permitted to help the hostlers, quite free.

"Gee, Uncle Rob, I guess I'm kind of all thumbs about unharnessing and like that. Seven years since I been here on the farm."

"That so? G'night. Careful of that lantern now. And no smoking!"

The barn was blank as a blind face. The lantern was flickering, and in that witching light the stalls and the heap of sleighs, plows, old harness, at the back wall of the barn were immense and terrifying. The barn was larger than his whole house in Brooklyn, and ten times as large it seemed in the dimness. He could not see clear to the back wall, and he imagined abominable monsters lurking there. He dashed at the ladder up to the haymow, the lantern handle in his teeth and his imitation-leather satchel in one hand.

And the haymow, rising to the darkness of its hand-hewn rafters, seemed vaster and more intimidating than the space below. In one corner a space had been cleared of hay for a cot, with a blanket and a pea-green comforter, and for

a chair and a hinged box. Sidney dashed at the cot and crawled into it, waiting only to take off his shoes and jacket. Till the lantern flame died down to a red rim of charred wick, he kept it alight. Then utter darkness leaped upon him.

A rooster crowed, and he startled. Past him things scampered and chittered. The darkness seemed to swing in swift eddies under the rafters, the smell of dry hay choked him—and he awoke to light slipping in silver darts through cracks in the roof, and to jubilant barn swallows diving and twittering.

"Gee, I must have fell asleep!" he thought. He went down the ladder, and now, first, he saw the barn.

Like many people slow of thought and doubtful of speech, Sidney Dow had moments of revelation as complete as those of a prophet, when he beheld a scene or a person or a problem in its entirety, with none of the confusing thoughts of glibber and more clever people with their minds forever running off on many tracks. He saw the barn—really saw it, instead of merely glancing at it, like a normal city boy. He saw that the beams, hand-hewn, gray with sixty years, were beautiful; that the sides of the stalls, polished with rubbing by the shoulders of cattle dead these fifty years, were beautiful; that the harrow, with its trim spikes kept sharp and rustless, was beautiful; that most beautiful of all were the animals—cows and horses, chickens that walked with bobbing heads through the straw, and a calf tethered to the wall. The calf capered with alarm as he approached it; then stood considering him with great eyes, letting him stroke its head and at last licking his hand. He slouched to the door of the barn and looked down the valley. More radiant in that early morning light than even the mountain tops covered with maples and hemlock were the upland clearings with white houses and red barns.

"Gosh, it looks nice! It's—it's sort of—it looks nice! I didn't hardly get it when I was here before. But gee"—with all the scorn of sixteen—"I was just a kid then!"

With Uncle Rob he drove the cows to pasture; with Uncle Ben he plowed; with his grandfather, sourly philanthropic behind his beard, he split wood. He found an even greater menagerie than in the barn—turkeys, geese, ducks, pigs and, in the woods and mowings, an exciting remnant of woodchucks, chipmunks, rabbits, and infrequent deer. With all of them—uncles and grandfather, beasts, wild or tame—he felt at home. They did not expect him to chatter and show off, as had his gang in Brooklyn; they accepted him. That, perhaps, more than any ancestral stoutness, more than the beauty of the land, made a farmer of him. He was a natural hermit, and here he could be a hermit without seeming queer.

And a good farmer he was—slow but tireless, patient, unannoyed by the endless work, happy to go to bed early and be up at dawn. For a few days his back felt as though he were burning at the stake, but after that he could lift all day in the hayfield or swing the scythe or drive the frisky young team. He was a good farmer, and he slept at night. The noises which on his first night had fretted his city-tortured nerves were soporific now, and when he heard the sound of a distant train, the barking of a dog on the next farm, he inarticulately told himself that they were lovely.

"You're pretty fair at working," said Uncle Rob, and that was praise almost hysterical.

Indeed, in one aspect of labor, Sidney was better than any of them, even the pine-carved Uncle Rob. He could endure wet dawns, wild winds, all-day drenching. It seems to be true that farmers are more upset by bad weather than most outdoor workers—sailors, postmen, carpenters, brakemen, teamsters. Perhaps it is because they are less subject to higher authority; except for chores and getting in the hay, they can more nearly do things in their own time, and they build up a habit of taking shelter on nasty days. Whether or no, it was true that just the city crises that had vexed Sidney, from icy pavements to sudden fire alarms, had given him the ability to stand discomforts and the unexpected, like a little Cockney surprisingly stolid in the trenches.

He learned the silent humor of the authentic Yankee. Evenings he sat with neighbors on the bench before the general store. To a passing stranger they seemed to be saying nothing, but when the stranger had passed, Uncle Rob would drawl, "Well, if I had fly nets on my hosses, guess I'd look stuck-up too!" and the others would chuckle with contempt at the alien.

This, thought Sidney, was good talk—not like the smart gabble of the city. It was all beautiful, and he knew it, though in his vocabulary there was no such word as "beautiful," and when he saw the most flamboyant sunset he said only, "Guess going to be clear tomorrow."

And so he went back to Brooklyn, not as to his home but as to prison, and as a prison corridor he saw the narrow street with little houses like little cells.

Five minutes after he had entered the house, his father laughed. "Well, did you get enough of farming? I guess you'll appreciate your school now! I won't rub it in, but I swear, how Rob and Ben can stand it—"

"I kind of liked it, Dad. I think I'll be a farmer. I—kind of liked it."

His father had black side whiskers, and between them he had thin cheeks that seemed, after Uncle Rob and Uncle Ben, pallid as the under side of a toadstool. They flushed now, and William shouted:

"You're an idiot! What have I done to have a son who is an idiot? The way

I've striven and worked and economized to give you a chance to get ahead, to do something worth while, and then you want to slip right back and be ordinary, like your uncles! So you think you'd like it! You're a fool! Sure you like it in summer, but if you knew it like I do—rousted out to do the chores five o'clock of a January morning, twenty below zero, and maybe have to dig through two feet of snow to get to the barn! Have to tramp down to the store, snowstorm so thick you can't see five feet in front of you!"

"I don't guess I'd mind it much."

"Oh, you don't! Don't be a fool! And no nice company like here—go to bed with the chickens, a winter night, and no nice lodge meeting or church supper or lectures like there is here!"

"Don't care so much for those things. Everybody talking all the while. I like it quiet, like in the country."

"Well, you will care so much for those things, or I'll care you, my fine young man! I'm not going to let you slump back into being a rube like Ben, and don't you forget it! I'll make you work at your books! I'll make you learn to appreciate good society and dressing proper and getting ahead in the world and amounting to something! Yes, sir, amounting to something! Do you think for one moment that after the struggle I've gone through to give you a chance —the way I studied in a country school and earned my way through business college and went to work at five dollars a week in a real-estate office and studied and economized and worked late, so I could give you this nice house and advantages and opportunity— No, sir! You're going to be a lawyer or a doctor or somebody that amounts to something, and not a rube!"

It would have been too much to expect of Sidney's imagination that he should have seen anything fine and pathetic in William's fierce ambition. That did not move him, but rather fear. He could have broken his father in two, but the passion in this blenched filing-case of a man was such that it hypnotized him.

For days, miserably returned to high school, he longed for the farm. But his mother took him aside and begged: "You mustn't oppose your father so, dearie. He knows what's best for you, and it would just break his heart if he thought you were going to be a common person and not have something to show for all his efforts."

So Sidney came to feel that it was some wickedness in him that made him prefer trees and winds and meadows and the kind cattle to trolley cars and offices and people who made little, flat, worried jokes all day long.

He barely got through high school. His summer vacations he spent in warehouses, hoisting boxes. He failed to enter medical school, botched his

examinations shockingly—feeling wicked at betraying his father's ambitions—and his father pushed him into a second-rate dental school with sketchy requirements, a school now blessedly out of existence.

"Maybe you'd be better as a dentist anyway. Requires a lot of manipulation, and I will say you're good with your hands," his father said, in relief that now Sidney was on the highway to fortune and respectability.

But Sidney's hands, deft with hammer and nails, with reins or hoe or spade, were too big, too awkward for the delicate operations of dentistry. And in school he hated the long-winded books with their queer names and shocking colored plates of man's inwards. The workings of a liver did not interest him. He had never seen a liver, save that of a slain chicken. He would turn from these mysteries to a catalogue of harvesting machinery or vegetable seed. So with difficulty he graduated from this doubtful school, and he was uneasy at the pit of his stomach, even when his father, much rejoicing now, bought for him a complete dental outfit, and rented an office, on the new frontier of the Bronx, in the back part of a three-story red-brick apartment house.

His father and mother invited their friends over from Brooklyn to admire the office, and served them coffee and cake. Not many of them came, which was well, for the office was not large. It was really a single room, divided by a curtain to make a reception hall. The operating room had pink-calcimined walls and, for adornment, Sidney's diploma and a calendar from a dental supply house which showed, with no apparent appropriateness, a view of Pike's Peak.

When they had all gone, mouthing congratulations, Sidney looked wistfully out on the old pasture land which, fifteen years later, was to be filled solidly with tall, cheap apartment houses and huge avenues with delicatessen shops and movie palaces. Already these pastures were doomed and abandoned. Cows no longer grazed there. Gaunt billboards lined the roads and behind their barricades were unkempt waste lands of ashes and sodden newspapers. But they were open grass, and they brought back the valleys and uplands of Vermont. His great arms were hungry for the strain of plowing, and he sighed and turned back to his shining new kit of tools.

The drill he picked up was absurd against his wide red palm. All at once he was certain that he knew no dentistry, and that he never would; that he would botch every case; that dreadful things would happen—suits for malpractice—

Actually, as a few and poorly paying neighborhood patients began to come in, the dreadful things didn't happen. Sidney was slow, but he was careful; if he did no ingenious dental jeweling, he did nothing wrong. He learned early what certain dentists and doctors never learn—that nature has not yet been entirely supplanted by the professions. It was not his patients who suffered; it

was he.

All day long to have to remain indoors, to stand in one place, bent over gaping mouths, to fiddle with tiny instruments, to produce unctuous sounds of sympathy for cranks who complained of trivial aches, to try to give brisk and confident advice which was really selling talk—all this tortured him.

Then, within one single year, his mother died, his grandfather died on the Vermont farm, Uncle Rob and Uncle Ben moved West, and Sidney met the most wonderful girl in the world. The name of this particular most wonderful girl in the world, who unquestionably had more softness and enchantment and funny little ways of saying things than Helen of Troy, was Mabelle Ellen Pflugmann, and she was cultured; she loved the theater, but rarely attended it; loved also the piano, but hadn't time, she explained, to keep up her practice, because, her father's laundry being in a state of debility, for several years she had temporarily been cashier at the Kwiturwurry Lunch.

They furnished a four-room apartment and went to Vermont for their honeymoon. His grandfather's farm—Sidney wasn't quite sure just who had bought it—was rented out to what the neighborhood considered foreigners—that is, Vermonters from way over beyond the Ridge, fifteen miles away. They took in Sidney and Mabelle. She enjoyed it. She told how sick she had become of the smell and dish clatter of the ole lunch and the horrid customers who were always trying to make love to her. She squealed equally over mountains and ducklings, sunsets and wild strawberries, and as for certain inconveniences—washing with a pitcher and bowl, sleeping in a low room smelling of the chicken run, and having supper in the kitchen with the men-folks in shirt sleeves—she said it was just too darling for words—it was, in fact, sweet. But after ten days of the fortnight on which they had planned, she thought perhaps they had better get back to New York and make sure all the furniture had arrived.

They were happy in marriage. Mabelle saw him, and made him see himself, as a man strong and gallant but shy and blundering. He needed mothering, she said, and he got it and was convinced that he liked it. He was less gruff with his patients, and he had many more of them, for Mabelle caused him to be known socially. Till marriage he had lived in a furnished room, and all evening he had prowled alone, or read dentistry journals and seed catalogues. Now Mabelle arranged jolly little parties—beer and Welsh rabbit and a game of five hundred. If at the Kwiturwurry Lunch she had met many light fellows, West Farms Lotharios, she had also met estimable but bohemian families of the neighborhood—big traveling men whose territory took them as far west as Denver, assistant buyers from the downtown department stores, and the office manager of a large insurance agency.

Mabelle, a chatelaine now, wanted to shine among them, and wanted Sidney to shine. And he, feeling a little cramped in a new double-breasted blue serge coat, solemnly served the beer, and sometimes a guest perceived that here was an honest and solid dentist upon whom to depend. And once they gave a theater party—six seats at a vaudeville house.

Yet Sidney was never, when he awoke mornings, excited about the adventure of standing with bent, aching shoulders over patients all this glorious coming day.

They had two children in three years and began to worry a little about the rent bill and the grocery bill, and Sidney was considerably less independent with grumbling patients than he had been. His broad shoulders had a small stoop, and he said quite humbly, "Well, I'll try my best to fix 'em to your satisfaction, Mrs. Smallberg," and sometimes his thick fingers tapped nervously on his chin as he talked. And he envied now, where once he had despised them, certain dental-school classmates who knew little of dentistry, but who were slick dressers and given to verbal chuckings under the chin, who had made money and opened three-room offices with chintz chairs in the waiting room. Sidney still had his old office, with no assistant, and the jerry-built tenement looked a little shabby now beside the six-story apartment houses of yellow brick trimmed with marble which had sprung up all about it.

Then their children, Rob and Willabette, were eight and six years old, and Mabelle began to nag Sidney over the children's lack of clothes as pretty as those of their lovely little friends at school.

And his dental engine—only a treadle affair at that—was worn out. And his elbows were always shiny. And in early autumn his father died.

His father died, muttering, "You've been a good boy, Sid, and done what I told you to. You can understand and appreciate now why I kept you from being just a farmer and gave you a chance to be a professional man. I don't think Mabelle comes from an awful good family, but she's a spunky little thing, and real bright, and she'll keep you up to snuff. Maybe some day your boy will be a great, rich banker or surgeon. Keep him away from his Vermont relations—no ambition, those folks. My chest feels so tight! Bless you, Sid!"

He was his father's sole heir. When the will was read in the shabby lawyer's office in Brooklyn, he was astonished to find that his father had still owned—that he himself now owned—the ancestral Vermont home. His slow-burning imagination lighted. He was touched by the belief that his father, for all his pretended hatred of the place, had cherished it and had wanted his son to own it. Not till afterward did he learn from Uncle Rob that William, when his own father had died, had, as eldest son, been given the choice of the farm or half the money in the estate, and had taken the farm to keep Sidney away from

it. He had been afraid that if his brothers had it they would welcome Sidney as a partner before he became habituated as a dentist. But in his last days, apparently, William felt that Sidney was safely civilized now and caught. With the farm Sidney inherited some three thousand dollars—not more, for the Brooklyn home was mortgaged.

Instantly and ecstatically, while the lawyer droned senseless advice, Sidney decided to go home. The tenant on his farm—his!—had only two months more on his lease. He'd take it over. The three thousand dollars would buy eight cows—well, say ten—with a cream separator, a tractor, a light truck, and serve to put the old buildings into condition adequate for a few years. He'd do the repairing himself! He arched his hands with longing for the feel of a hammer or a crowbar.

In the hall outside the lawyer's office, Mabelle crowed: "Isn't it—oh, Sid, you do know how sorry I am your father's passed on, but won't it be just lovely! The farm must be worth four thousand dollars. We'll be just as sensible as can be—not blow it all in, like lots of people would. We'll invest the seven thousand, and that ought to give us three hundred and fifty dollars a year—think of it, an extra dollar every day! You can get a dress suit now, and at last I'll have some decent dresses for the evening, and we'll get a new suit for Rob right away—how soon can you get the money? did he say?—and I saw some lovely little dresses for Willabette and the cutest slippers, and now we can get a decent bridge table instead of that rickety old thing, and—"

As she babbled, which she did, at length, on the stairs down from the office, Sidney realized wretchedly that it was going to take an eloquence far beyond him to convert her to farming and the joys of the land. He was afraid of her, as he had been of his father.

"There's a drug store over across. Let's go over and have an ice-cream soda," he said mildly. "Gosh, it's hot for September! Up on the farm now it would be cool, and the leaves are just beginning to turn. They're awful pretty—all red and yellow."

"Oh, you and your old farm!" But in her joy she was amiable.

They sat at the bright-colored little table in the drug store, with cheery colored drinks between them. But the scene should have been an ancient castle at midnight, terrible with wind and lightning, for suddenly they were not bright nor cheery, but black with tragedy.

There was no manner of use in trying to cajole her. She could never understand how he hated the confinement of his dental office; she would say, "Why, you get the chance of meeting all sorts of nice, interesting people, while I have to stay home," and not perceive that he did not want to meet nice,

interesting people. He wanted silence and the smell of earth! And he was under her spell as he had been under his father's. Only violently could he break it. He spoke softly enough, looking at the giddy marble of the soda counter, but he spoke sternly:

"Look here, May. This is our chance. You bet your sweet life we're going to be sensible and not blow in our stake! And we're not going to blow it in on a lot of clothes and a lot of fool bridge parties for a lot of fool folks that don't care one red hoot about us except what they get out of us! For that matter, if we were going to stay on in New York—"

"Which we most certainly are, young man!"

"Will you listen to me? I inherited this dough, not you! Gee, I don't want to be mean, May, but you got to listen to reason, and as I'm saying, if we were going to stay in the city, the first thing I'd spend money for would be a new dental engine—an electric one.

"Need it like the mischief—lose patients when they see me pumping that old one and think I ain't up-to-date—which I ain't, but that's no skin off their nose!"

Even the volatile Mabelle was silent at the unprecedented length and vigor of his oration.

"But we're not going to stay. No, sir! We're going back to the old farm, and the kids will be brought up in the fresh air instead of a lot of alleys. Go back and farm it—"

She exploded then, and as she spoke she looked at him with eyes hot with hatred, the first hatred he had ever known in her:

"Are you crazy? Go back to that hole? Have my kids messing around a lot of manure and dirty animals and out working in the hayfield like a lot of cattle? And attend a little one-room school with a boob for a teacher? And play with a lot of nitwit brats? Not on your life they won't! I've got some ambition for 'em, even if you haven't!"

"Why, May, I thought you liked Vermont and the farm! You were crazy about it on our honeymoon, and you said—"

"I did not! I hated it even then. I just said I liked it to make you happy. That stifling little bedroom, and kerosene lamps, and bugs, and no bathroom, and those fools of farmers in their shirt sleeves—Oh, it was fierce! If you go, you go without the kids and me! I guess I can still earn a living! And I guess there's still plenty of other men would like to marry me when I divorce you! And I mean it!"

She did, and Sidney knew she did. He collapsed as helplessly as he had with his father.

“Well, of course, if you can’t stand it—” he muttered.

“Well, I’m glad you’re beginning to come to your senses! Honest, I think you were just crazy with the heat! But listen, here’s what I’ll do: I won’t kick about your getting the electric dental doodingus if it don’t cost too much. Now how do you go about selling the farm?”

There began for this silent man a secret life of plotting and of lies. Somehow—he could not see how—he must persuade her to go to the farm. Perhaps she would die— But he was shocked at this thought, for he loved her and believed her to be the best woman living, as conceivably she may have been. But he did not obey her and sell the farm. He lied. He told her that a Vermont real-estate dealer had written that just this autumn there was no market for farms, but next year would be excellent. And the next year he repeated the lie, and rented the farm to Uncle Rob, who had done well enough on Iowa cornland but was homesick for the hills and sugar groves and placid maples of Vermont. Himself, Sidney did not go to the farm. It was not permitted.

Mabelle was furious that he had not sold, that they had only the three thousand—which was never invested—for clothes and bridge prizes and payments on the car and, after a good deal of irritated talk, his electric dental engine.

If he had always been sullenly restless in his little office, now he was raging. He felt robbed. The little back room, the view—not even of waste land now, but of the center of a cheap block and the back of new tenements—the anguish of patients, which crucified his heavy, unspoken sympathy for them, and that horrible, unending series of wide-stretched mouths and bad molars and tongues—it was intolerable. He thought of meadows scattered with daisies and devil’s-paintbrush, of dark, healing thundershowers pouring up the long valley. He must go home to the land!

From the landlord who owned his office he got, in the spring a year and a half after his father’s death, the right to garden a tiny patch amid the litter and cement areaways in the center of the block. Mabelle laughed at him, but he stayed late every evening to cultivate each inch of his pocket paradise—a large man, with huge feet, setting them carefully down in a plot ten feet square.

The earth understood him, as it does such men, and before the Long Island market gardeners had anything to display, Sidney had a row of beautiful radish plants. A dozen radishes, wrapped in a tabloid newspaper, he took home one night, and he said vaingloriously to Mabelle, “You’ll never get any radishes like these in the market! Right out of our own garden!”

She ate one absently. He braced himself to hear a jeering “You and your

old garden!" What he did hear was, in its uncaring, still worse: "Yes, they're all right, I guess."

He'd show her! He'd make her see him as a great farmer! And with that ambition he lost every scruple. He plotted. And this was the way of that plotting:

Early in July he said, and casually, "Well, now we got the darn car all paid for, we ought to use it. Maybe we might take the kids this summer and make a little tour for a couple weeks or so."

"Where?"

She sounded suspicious, and in his newborn guile he droned, "Oh, wherever you'd like. I hear it's nice up around Niagara Falls and the Great Lakes. Maybe come back by way of Pennsylvania, and see Valley Forge and all them famous historical sites."

"Well, yes, perhaps. The Golheims made a tour last summer and—they make me sick!—they never stop talking about it."

They went. And Mabelle enjoyed it. She was by no means always a nagger and an improver; she was so only when her interests or what she deemed the interests of her children were threatened. She made jokes about the towns through which they passed—any community of less than fifty thousand was to her New Yorkism a "hick hole"—and she even sang jazz and admired his driving, which was bad.

They had headed north, up the Hudson. At Glens Falls he took the highway to the right, instead of left toward the Great Lakes, and she, the city girl, the urban rustic, to whom the only directions that meant anything were East Side and West Side as applied to New York, did not notice, and she was still unsuspicious when he grumbled. "Looks to me like I'd taken the wrong road." Stopping at a filling station, he demanded, "How far is it to Lake George? We ought to be there now."

"Well, stranger, way you're headed, it'll be about twenty-five thousand miles. You're going plumb in the wrong direction."

"I'll be darned! Where are we? Didn't notice the name of the last town we went through."

"You're about a mile from Fair Haven."

"Vermont?"

"Yep."

"Well, I'll be darned! Just think of that! Can't even be trusted to stay in one state and not skid across the border line!"

Mabelle was looking suspicious, and he said with desperate gayety, "Say,

do you know what, May? We're only forty miles from our farm! Let's go have a look at it." Mabelle made a sound of protest, but he turned to the children, in the back seat amid a mess of suitcases and tools and a jack and spare inner tubes, and gloated, "Wouldn't you kids like to see the farm where I worked as a kid—where your grandfather and great-grandfather were born? And see your Granduncle Rob? And see all the little chicks, and so on?"

"Oh, yes!" they shrilled together.

With that enthusiasm from her beloved young, with the smart and uniformed young filling-station attendant listening, Mabelle's talent for being righteous and indignant was gagged. Appearances! She said lightly to the filling-station man, "The doctor just doesn't seem to be able to keep the road at all, does he? Well, Doctor, shall we get started?"

Even when they had gone on and were alone and ready for a little sound domestic quarreling, she merely croaked, "Just the same, it seems mighty queer to me!" And after another mile of brooding, while Sidney drove silently and prayed: "Awfully queer!"

But he scarcely heard her. He was speculating, without in the least putting it into words, "I wonder if in the early summer evenings the fireflies still dart above the meadows? I wonder if the full moon, before it rises behind the hemlocks and sugar maples along the Ridge, still casts up a prophetic glory? I wonder if sleepy dogs still bark across the valley? I wonder if the night breeze slips through the mowing? I, who have for fortress and self-respect only a stuffy office room—I wonder if there are still valleys and stars and the quiet night? Or was that all only the dream of youth?"

They slept at Rutland, Sidney all impatient of the citified hotel bedroom. It was at ten in the morning—he drove in twenty minutes the distance which thirty years ago had taken Uncle Rob an hour and a half—that he drove up to the white house where, since 1800, the Dows had been born.

He could see Uncle Rob with the hayrake in the south mowing, sedately driving the old team and ignoring the visitors.

"I guess he prob'ly thinks we're bootleggers," chuckled Sidney. "Come on, you kids! Here's where your old daddy worked all one summer! Let's go! . . . Thirsty? Say, I'll give you a drink of real spring water—not none of this chlorinated city stuff! And we'll see the menagerie."

Before he had finished, Rob and Willabette had slipped over the rear doors of the car and were looking down into the valley with little sounds of excitement. Sidney whisked out almost as quickly as they, while Mabelle climbed down with the dignity suitable to a dweller in the Bronx. He ignored

her. He clucked his children round the house to the spring-fed well and pumped a bucket of water.

"Oh, it's so cold, Daddy. It's swell!" said Rob.

"You bet your life it's cold and swell. Say! Don't use words like 'swell'! They're common. But hell with that! Come on, you brats! I'll show you something!"

There were kittens, and two old, grave, courteous cats. There was a calf—heaven knows by how many generations it was descended from the calf that on a June morning, when Sidney was sixteen, had licked his fingers. There were ducklings, and young turkeys with feathers grotesquely scattered over their skins like palm trees in a desert, and unexpected more kittens, and an old, brown-and-white, tail-wagging dog, and a pen of excited little pigs.

The children squealed over all of them until Mabelle caught up, puffing a little.

"Well," she said, "the kits are kind of cute, ain't they?" Then, darkly: "Now that you've got me here, Sid, with your plans and all!"

Uncle Rob crept up, snarling, "What you folks want? . . . By gracious, if it ain't Sid! This your wife and children? Well, sir!"

It was, Sidney felt, the climax of his plot, and he cried to his son, "Rob! This is your granduncle, that you were named for. How'd you like to stay here on the farm instead of in New York?"

"Hot dog! I'd love it! Them kittens and the li'l ducks! Oh, they're the berries! You bet I'd like to stay!"

"Oh, I'd love it!" gurgled his sister.

"You would not!" snapped Mabelle. "With no bathroom?"

"We could put one in," growled Sidney.

"On what? On all the money you'd make growing orchids and bananas here, I guess! You kids—how'd you like to walk two miles to school, through the snow, in winter?"

"Oh, that would be slick! Maybe we could kill a deer," said young Rob.

"Yes, and maybe a field mouse could kill you, you dumb-bell! Sure! Lovely! All evening with not a dog-gone thing to do after supper!"

"Why, we'd go to the movies! Do you go to the movies often, Granduncle Rob?"

"Well, afraid in winter you wouldn't get to go to the movies at all. Pretty far into town," hesitated Uncle Rob.

"Not—go—to—the—movies?" screamed the city children, incredulous. It was the most terrible thing they had ever heard of.

Rob, Jr., mourned, “Oh, gee, that wouldn’t be so good! Say, how do the hicks learn anything if they don’t go to the movies? But still, we could go in the summer, Ma, and in the winter it would be elegant, with sliding and hunting and everything. I’d love it!”

Mabelle cooked supper, banging the pans a good deal and emitting opinions of a house that had no porcelain sink, no water taps, no refrigerator, no gas or electricity. She was silent through supper, silent as Sidney, silent as Uncle Rob. But Sidney was exultant. With the children for allies, he would win. And the children themselves, they were hysterical. Until Mabelle screamed for annoyance; they leaped up from the table, to come back with the most unspeakable and un-Bronxian objects—a cat affectionately carried by his hind leg, but squealing with misunderstanding of the affection, a dead mole, an unwiped oil can, a muck-covered spade.

“But, Mother,” they protested, “in the city you never find anything, except maybe a dead lemon.”

She shooed them off to bed at eight; herself, sniffily, she disappeared at nine, muttering to Sidney, “I hope you and your boy friend, Uncle Rob, chew the rag all night and get it out of your systems!”

He was startled, for indeed the next step of his plot did concern Uncle Rob and secret parleys.

For half an hour he walked the road, almost frightened by the intensity of stillness. He could fancy catamounts in the birch clumps. But between spasms of skittish city nerves he stretched out his arms, arched back his hands, breathed consciously. This was not just air, necessary meat for the lungs; it was a spirit that filled him.

He knew that he must not tarry after 9:30 for his intrigue with Uncle Rob. Uncle Rob was seventy-five, and in seventy-five times three hundred and sixty-five evenings he had doubtless stayed up later than 9:30 o’clock several times—dancing with the little French Canuck girls at Potsdam Forge as a young man, sitting up with a sick cow since then, or stuck in the mud on his way back from Sunday-evening meeting. But those few times were epochal. Uncle Rob did not hold with roistering and staying up till all hours just for the vanities of the flesh.

Sidney crept up the stairs to Uncle Rob’s room.

Mabelle and Sidney had the best bedroom, on the ground floor; young Rob and Bette had Grampa’s room, on the second; Uncle Rob lived in the attic.

City folks might have wondered why Uncle Rob, tenant and controller of the place, should have hidden in the attic, with three good bedrooms below him. It was simple. Uncle Rob had always lived there since he was a boy.

Up the narrow stairs, steep as a rock face, Sidney crept, and knocked.

"Who's there!" A sharp voice, a bit uneasy. How many years was it since Uncle Rob had heard anyone knock at his bedroom door?

"It's me, Rob—Sid."

"Oh, well—well, guess you can come in. Wait'll I unlock the door."

Sidney entered his uncle's room for the first time in his life. The hill people, anywhere in the world, do not intrude or encourage intrusion.

Perhaps to fastidious and alien persons Uncle Rob's room would have seemed unlovely. It was lighted by a kerosene lamp, smoking a little, with the wick burned down on one side. There was, for furniture, only a camp cot, with a kitchen chair, a washstand and a bureau. But to make up for this paucity, the room was rather littered. On the washstand, beside a pitcher dry from long disuse, there were a mail-order catalogue, a few packets of seed, a lone overshoe, a ball of twine, a bottle of applejack, and a Spanish War veteran's medal. The walls and ceiling were of plaster so old that they showed in black lines the edges of every lath.

And Sidney liked it—liked the simplicity, liked the freedom from neatness and order and display, liked and envied the old-bach quality of it all.

Uncle Rob, lying on the bed, had prepared for slumber by removing his shoes and outer clothing. He blinked at Sidney's amazing intrusion, but he said amiably enough, "Well, boy?"

"Uncle Rob, can't tell you how glad I am to be back at the old place!"

"H'm."

"Look, I— Golly, I feel skittish as a young colt! Hardly know the old doc, my patients wouldn't! Rob, you got to help me. Mabelle don't want to stay here and farm it—maybe me and you partners, eh? But the kids and I are crazy to. How I hate that ole city! So do the kids."

"Yeh?"

"Sure they do. Didn't you hear how they said they wouldn't mind tramping to school and not having any movies?"

"Sid, maybe you'll understand kids when you get to be a granddad. Kids will always agree with anything that sounds exciting. Rob thinks it would be dandy to hoof it two miles through the snow to school. He won't! Not once he's done it!" Uncle Rob thrust his hands behind his skinny, bark-brown old neck on the maculate pillow. He was making perhaps the longest oration of his life. The light flickered, and a spider moved indignantly in its web in a corner. "No," said Uncle Rob, "he won't like it. I never did. And the schoolmaster used to lick me. I hated it, crawling through that snow and then get licked

because you're late. And jiminy—haven't thought of it for thirty years, I guess, maybe forty, but I remember how some big fellow would dare you to put your tongue to your lunch pail, and it was maybe thirty below, and your tongue stuck to it and it took the hide right off! No, I never liked any of it, especially chores."

"Rob, listen! I'm serious! The kids will maybe kind of find it hard at first, but they'll get to like it, and they'll grow up real folks and not city saps. It'll be all right with them. I'll see to that. It's Mabelle. Listen, Rob, I've got a swell idea about her, and I want you to help me. You get hold of the ladies of the township—the Grange members and the Methodist ladies and like that. You tell 'em Mabelle is a swell city girl, and it would be dandy for the neighborhood if they could get her to stay here. She's grand, but she does kind of fall for flattery, and in the Bronx she ain't so important, and if these ladies came and told her they thought she was the cat's pajamas, maybe she'd fall for it, and then I guess maybe she might stay, if the ladies came—"

"They wouldn't!"

Uncle Rob had been rubbing his long and prickly chin and curling his toes in his gray socks.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, first place, the ladies round here would be onto your Mabelle. They ain't so backwoods as they was in your time. Take Mrs. Craig. Last three winters, her and her husband, Frank, have packed up the flivver and gone to Florida. But that ain't it. Fact is, Sid, I kind of sympathize with Mabelle."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I never was strong for farming. Hard life, Sid. Always thought I'd like to keep store or something in the city. You forget how hard the work is here. You with your easy job, just filling a few teeth! No, I can't help you, Sid."

"I see. All right. Sorry for disturbing you."

As he crept downstairs in bewilderment, Sidney prayed—he who so rarely prayed—"O Lord, doesn't anybody but me love the land any more? What is going to happen to us? Why, all our life comes from the land!"

He knew that in the morning he would beg Mabelle to stay for a fortnight—and that she would not stay. It was his last night here. So all night long, slow and silent, he walked the country roads, looking at hemlock branches against the sky, solemnly shaking his head and wondering why he could never rid himself of this sinfulness of longing for the land; why he could never be grown-up and ambitious and worthy, like his father and Mabelle and Uncle Rob.

11
THE MAN WHO CHEATED TIME
(*1941*)

You know, there are people that you love but don't like very much. You might die for them, and you might even put in a plodding lifetime of living for them; but you can't live with them.

Russell Spinrad has always been my private catastrophe. There isn't one of my patients for whom I have done more. But I wonder whether all the acts of kindness that I have jammed down his career may not have been extremely bad for him. If I hadn't thrown away at least three hundred dollars' worth of free medical advice on him every year, Russ might now, at forty-seven, be fit to associate with his young daughter, Amy. He wouldn't be so intelligent as Amy —not about anything, not about the stock market or boy friends or Prokofieff concertos, or anything else—but he might be worthy to play tennis with her.

I began my hobby of doing nice things for him in a not very nice way in Royal College, when he was a freshman and I a junior. His father and mine had been classmates at Royal before us. I spent six months getting Russ into my fraternity, and a year trying to get him out. The fraternity was too stimulating for Russ; it encouraged him to jig and holler even more than was natural. He was slim, with dark, lively eyes, and he had a large mouth, which emitted whoops surprisingly loud for such a little fellow. He could play the guitar a little, write doubtful limericks a little, dance a little, swim a little, and all this littleness he did much too largely, under encouragement of the plutocratic young gentlemen of Sigma Digamma.

They wangled for him the position of chief cheerleader, and they were always encouraging him to show off his freakish time-sense, by which, for example, after a two-hour tramp in the woods, he could tell you the time within a hundred seconds.

After college, when I was studying medicine in New York, I introduced Russ to my second cousin, May Hestrom, whom he married, after he had started law-practice in a firm in Manhattan. Probably May could never have been a model; but she was a good, practical girl. She could play the phonograph, and she could mend, and she could listen to men talking without correcting them too frequently.

Russ and she settled near me, in Tippany Manor, a Westchester suburb,

and at forty-five he had become a ripened commuter, with May and Amy and Eric for family, and he owned—almost owned—a house that was a very fine miniature of Windsor Castle, built of stucco, brick, and clapboards, and possessing a badminton court, a Japanese garden four feet square, a garage with two cars, and a library with two books, not counting the telephone and cook books. But he remained, inside him, a college cheerleader, who sang a little and practiced law a little more and drank a good deal more than that. He was a pleasant fellow, one of the best bridge players on the 5:27, and behind that, he was a dangerous gambler.

He gambled with stocks, with real-estate, with every new instrument of financial torture that proceeded from the inventive mind. Always he explained that it was to "provide for his family," and almost always he lost. The worst thing that had ever happened to him was that at twenty-three he had made a small stock-market slaughter, so that for twenty-two years he had been trying to repeat it.

That's one of the things that brings business to the family doctor.

Every fall, Russ and May and my wife, Peggy, and I drove up to Massachusetts for Royal's big annual football game against Rhode Island Tech.

Personally, I thought it was a kind of nuisance. Every year you remembered fewer of the names of classmates who were annually resurrected there; every year the players got younger, and it was harder to believe that some baby-faced dinosaur was a great, famous hero and that it really mattered how many feet he galloped before the other children leaped on him and throttled him. But Russ was right back cheerleading, and my wife and May actually carried Royal banners—hideous things and very inconvenient.

This day a couple of years ago, we four, with Russ' daughter, Amy—she was sixteen then—drove up to the game together, in his sedan. Getting Russ started was like war maneuvers. In succession he forgot and went back into the house for a road map, a bag of doughnuts—sugared—the gin flask, a muffler, his dyspepsia pills, and a cowbell. All through this he kept giving the college yell, and May kept gloating, "My, isn't he a caution!" and young Amy kept looking embarrassed.

During the mob scene, a messenger boy brought a telegram for Russ. I signed for it and absently stuck it in my pocket, and for seven hours I forgot about it. Later that seemed just as well.

We were off to a good bad start. Russ was a striking object in chamois jacket, a sweater like a Swiss tablecloth, and a green hat with a feather. He

drove up to and including seventy miles an hour. Every time he passed another car, which was once in thirty seconds, he snarled to me, “That so-and-so!”

He kept screaming, “Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, are we going to lick that Tech this afternoon!” I didn’t consider it anything like so certain; but I heard myself chuckling, “Are we!” And every half mile, Peggy or May would yelp from the back seat, “We’ll show up those clowns!” The general feeling was that Rhode Island Tech was not an educational institute, but a gang of scoundrels united to commit libel and barratry against the pure, high spirit of the sons of Royal, and that this afternoon we were going to smash the Tech menace forever.

We arrived in great zest at the Royal Bowl. We filed through dark passages, climbed flights of steps, came out into fall sunshine, and looked down into a canyon, in which all the people in the world were seated in rows, all waving things.

Even that sixteen-year-old cynic Amy crowed: “It’s swell! The crowd’s so exciting!”

We sat on those especially hard wooden planks that are laid along stadium seats because the cement alone wouldn’t be hard enough, and Russ yelped and beamed and began to buy things—programs, popcorn, cigars, straw mats to sit on, and a woolen hippopotamus in the college colors.

It was a good game. Amy and I found ourselves jumping up and yelling every two minutes, and then asking everybody why we had jumped up and yelled. Russ was ecstatic, and between halves he joined the undergraduates in the snake dance.

The fall day darkened, and in the second half we settled down to a curious homey feeling—20,000 of us cuddling together in mutual comfort against the unkind sky. Russ was quiet. He was staring at the enormous electric scoreboard.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Look—that clock on the scoreboard. It runs backward.”

“Of course it does. It shows how many minutes there are left for play.”

“And seconds! It’s the seconds that get me. They go by so fast.” He sounded strained. “I know what the clock’s intended for, of course. But I never—I don’t like it. It’s as if it were saying that our whole lives are limited—the seconds are going—we better hurry—we haven’t got much time left. Look at those seconds ticking off: forty-two, forty-one, forty—only forty seconds left out of this minute before it’s shot. I don’t like it. You will be executed in

nineteen minutes from now—no, it's eighteen, now. Is there anything you would like, prisoner?"

"Oh, quit it," I said, while May fluttered, "Why, Russ, what an idea!"

He explained: "It's that exact sense of time of mine that bothers me. Let it go."

But through the rest of the game, his head kept turning toward the expiring clock—and so did mine. Seventeen seconds, sixteen seconds, only fifteen seconds for the game to go on. And the last second blinked out, and the game was over, and Royal College was winner, 6 to 0, and Russ clogged and shouted, now that the menacing clock was still.

We drove back in the after-game traffic. I was glad when Russ grunted, "Let's stop and grab a bite and wait till the worst of this is over." He turned in at a roadside restaurant.

As I put my gloves in my overcoat pocket, I felt the telegram that I had forgotten to give to Russ. I was not comfortable. It's hard on a family doctor when he is caught in any of the crimes that he nags other people for.

"Here's a wire that came for you just as we were leaving," I said offhandedly.

He snatched at it with an anxiety unexpected in a man who received telegrams daily, and I noticed that May and Amy were looking at him with eyes watchfully blank. I thought, maybe there were terrors and subterfuges in this suburban household that even I didn't know. He read the message two or three times, folded it, laid it down, fussily squaring it with the corner of the table, then placed his knife along one side of it and his spoon along another.

"I don't think I'll eat my hamburger. Do you want it?" he said to May.

"Bad news?"

"Nothing much. Just that we're completely ruined."

"Oh, no!"

"I thought I'd have a nice surprise for you. Sure! I was in on the ground floor of an airplane-accessories company. I've put in everything I have, and quite a little I don't have. Well, the company is completely busted, that's all, and I don't know as I can cover my debts this time."

He faked a smile, while May whimpered, Amy protested, "Oh, Daddy!" and I apologized, "It was inexcusable, my forgetting to give you the wire."

"I'm glad you forgot it. I've had one good afternoon, anyway, and I guess it's the last good afternoon I'm ever going to have."

I was suspicious at the sound of that. It struck me that he was hinting at suicide, and he was a type who possibly might take that cowardly kind of flight.

Ever since 1929 I had been angry at the men whom I had known in college as brave, gay youngsters with excitement about many things, about sport and music and travel and building, yet who later killed themselves when they lost their money, and so gave away the fact that they had come to live for nothing but this same money and that, in losing it, they had lost everything that was now precious to them. I thought of them and watched Russ Spinrad being showily brave. Not a bravery that was going to last, I fretted.

You can bet I drove the rest of the way, that afternoon.

At home, Russ thought he'd better lie down. It wasn't his family that had lost their stake—oh, no, just he! May insisted on sitting with him and being sorry for him. I tried to get her aside, to work out some sort of plan—I'd even have been willing to go up to Canada hunting with him—but she refused to leave him.

I had sent my wife back home, and Russ' boy, Eric, was still off at the movies. I sat downstairs with Amy.

In green sweater and skirt, with a bracelet of colored beads, she was a simple-looking young woman. At sixteen, she was as hard and transparent and honest as a sliver of clear glass. She seemed to be lounging in the big chair; but her right fingers were pressing hard on her left hand, just back of her thumb. Ordinarily, her voice was light, crisp, a bit flippant. Now it was slow and twangy, with a strain of weariness in it that I hated to hear.

"Uncle Doctor, you've got to tell me what's going on here."

She sprang up suddenly, all in one piece, like a leaping kitten, and stared out of the window. "I've got to respect my father even when I don't respect him. I've got to help save him even when he thinks it'd be so much more romantic if he didn't get saved." She turned on me. "Do you suppose girls nowadays enjoy having to be the parents of their own parents? I'd like to run in the garden, like Mother must've. I'd like to feel secure."

It was a trivially pretty suburban sitting room in which we were talking, fresh and new: a square room with light-blue walls and sunny, yellow curtains. Through tall, steel-bound windows, we looked out on a brown, serene autumn night, and the street lamp showed a sundial against a smug, clipped hedge. Young Amy herself looked as gay and contemporary as a magazine cover.

"Uncle Doctor, is he going to get some idea about doing violence to himself?"

"Possibly."

There was certainly nothing to be said at the moment, so I went home. When I got there, I observed to Peggy: “I think I’m about the only nice person that I know. Don’t you?”

“No.”

“Well, neither do I, but. . . . And have you ever heard the old saying, attributed by many to Hippocrates, ‘Even a doctor has to sleep sometimes’?”

“Hippocrates was lucky. He didn’t have a telephone. That’s why he was celebrated and successful.”

“You are a woman of great sense. And let’s hope that tonight the telephone won’t ring.”

It did, though, about three a.m.

At night I always notice the time, on the radium-painted dial beside my bed, before I answer the telephone. If it’s about three, it’s often a crisis, and it was 2:45, and it was a crisis, and the crisis was May Spinrad.

“Billy, you’ve got to come over here, quick, and do something. Russ has a violent delusion.”

I said, hang Russ and his delusion. I said, certainly not, I wouldn’t come right over. I said, all right then. And scrambled into my clothes.

When I reached the Spinrads’ house less than ten minutes later, I expected to find Russ a little wild; but when May led me into the butler’s pantry, Russ, wearing a black-and-gold dressing-gown, with a towel around his neck to keep his confounded throat warm, was sitting at a table and was eating strawberry jam spread on crackers.

“What have you come back here for?” he said crossly.

“A valid question, Mr. Spinrad.”

“I suppose May has blabbed about my discovery. It will sound ridiculous to you; but it’s pretty tremendous. It’s something new in human history. You know my time-sense? Well, I’ve just found that I can tell to the second at what moment I’m going to die.”

“Nonsense.”

“I’m going to die on January thirteenth—not much more than two months from now—at eleven minutes and seven seconds past ten in the morning. Two months, eleven days, seven hours, sixteen minutes, and twelve seconds from the moment when I hold up my hand.” He held it up and sighed. “I had sixty-two seconds more of lifetime left before you came in here to waste it.”

There was no clock in sight. Afterward, I tried to time it by memory,

including pauses, and I guess sixty-two seconds was right.

His placid frenzy seemed like the sort of psychosis that could develop into a manic state in which he might grab a butcher knife; yet he sounded as matter of fact as if he were talking about his temperature. I was scared. I was grateful that Eric and that hard young lady, Miss Amy, weren't there to be scared along with me.

I mumbled: "Well, that's an interesting idea. I'll admit there's a lot of unexplored area in our minds that I don't know anything about. But would you mind telling the family doctor just what it is you're going to die from, two months, eleven days—"

"And seven hours and fifteen minutes and twelve seconds, it is just now. A hundred and twenty-two seconds of my life you've wasted now. I have so few seconds left, and you stand there and leer! I won't put up with it! I've got to *use* the seconds I have left, every one of them, in being happy and useful."

May was making a tiny wifelike sound, a mouselike sound. I tried harder than ever to be sensible.

"You still haven't let me in on the secret of what you're going to die of."

"That wasn't revealed to me."

"Eh?"

"I suddenly woke up and saw an illuminated clockface in the dark, only the clock ran backward, and there were different hands for the months and weeks and days and hours and minutes and seconds—six different hands, all moving counterclockwise, all moving backward and backward, and nothing could stop them, nothing ever can, and when they all get together at a certain position that's marked on the dial with a red spot—then I'll be dead!"

"You poor, dear old chump! Why, you were dreaming—you hadn't waked up at all, and you had a dream memory of that clock on the electric scoreboard we saw at the game yesterday afternoon."

He looked sorry for me. "Don't be silly. Of course I thought about that. Seeing that clock did release my power of sight; but it merely helped me to see what was in my mind all along. You pill peddlers may know something about stomachaches; but you ought to keep your clumsy hands off a man's soul!"

I grunted. Partly I agreed!

"No, I see those clock hands right now. I see them moving toward the finish. You think I'm a little crazy, eh? Do you, May? Well, what you two think won't matter to me, two months from now—two months and eleven days and—"

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, I know!” I snapped. Even doctors are human, between three and four a.m.

He said cheerfully, “Do you want to try how accurately I see the passing of time?”

Because I couldn’t think of anything sensible to do, I looked at the face of my watch while he told the seconds off. It was horrible—each second that much nearer to the end. And he was about 98 percent accurate. I’m glad he wasn’t any more accurate, or he might have convinced me. I wonder what a prowler would have thought if he’d looked in at the pantry window, to see a tousled doctor, with no tie and very little medical dignity, glaring at his watch, while a woman, wearing a fluffy tan negligee, sat quietly crying, and a self-satisfied man in black and gold waved his hand like a prize-fight referee, and gloatingly called out, “For’-sev’n, for’-eight, for’-nine. . . .”

Seconds dripping away like blood.

I tried to explain to him that all this was just a delusion, an escape, a substitution for the tedious reality of being financially broke; but he didn’t listen, May didn’t listen—hang it, I didn’t listen to myself. I went home, comfortably promising May to “do something about it first thing in the morning.” That’s the definition of morning: that portion of the day in which you’re certainly “going to do something about it.”

My mind didn’t believe one atom of Russ’ nonsense; but my emotions were just as shaky as his.

I knew that the hysterical strain might push him over into some psychosis that would cripple his mind for years. I wouldn’t say that that night he was “insane.” There’s no definite line between normality and insanity. Every single one of us is insane about something: love or patriotism or religion or the dignity and power of our own poor selves. The “insane” are those of us who are noisy enough to get caught at it.

You’re going to ask what I, a doctor, did about the case of Russell Spinrad. Well—nothing. There’s nothing you can do about an unbalanced man, even a drunkard or a gambler or a believer in totalitarianism, unless his family or his neighbors complain about him. My only thought was to get him off in a sanatorium for a while.

But May said no. She wouldn’t think of coaxing Russ to be shut up in a sanatorium. “The poor boy, I don’t think he’d like it. And it would be useless, because I’m beginning to believe that he really does see that clock in his brain.”

"What?"

"I am. And he's doomed by it."

I remembered that May had always been a pushover for fortunetelling, astrology, numerology, transmigration. And who knows? Maybe Russ did have his blasted little clock. But a doctor has to work on the hypothesis that it's specks and not spooks that his patients have been seeing.

I protested to May as pontifically as I could. "You mean to say you're going to sit here and watch him imagine himself to death?"

"Oh, I've talked that over with him, and we've both concluded that we can't prevent Fate's taking its course."

Isn't it curious that you can go on being quite fond of a person even when you know she's a good deal of a fool?

I saw only young Amy as a hope of saving Russ and his family—saving them against their will—one of the doctor's commonest jobs, and one for which he is paid only in anger and suspicion. Oh, yes, Amy was of the dreadful new generation that sages like Professor Mortimer Adler rail against: hard, realistic, doubtful of all the faiths and ideals that have sustained their forefathers, and unwilling to fight for them. But, I reflected, I could count on her being very honest.

I told her what her mother had said, and braced myself. She looked like a thin and active boy, angry on the playing field, and with a tanned hand she made a flapping gesture like that of a boy. But she began to smile, and with it she grew up instantly, she became all woman.

"Uncle Doctor, you and your whole gang are so childish. You're all sorry for yourselves, and you expect somebody to do things for you. You blame everything on that war they had way back in history, along about 1920. Postwar! But we kids don't know which war it is that we're post *of*. But all right. I'll make a try at taking care of Mother and Father. I'm so much older than they are. I've had to be. Talk about Father's 'time-sense' that he's so proud of—we kids have lived time fast, three years to his one. We've watched all the older folks in the world getting ready to give up; but we don't want to give up—we won't give up."

It was somehow comforting to hear her.

I had weeks of the most embarrassing plight a family physician can know: seeing that a patient needed me, but not being called in and not wanting to intrude. I dropped by at the Spinrads' often; but I kept away from the topic of medical assistance carefully—not so carefully as they did, at that. From these

visits and a good deal of skilled spying by Amy, I knew what was going on.

Russ never varied as to when his end would be: on January thirteenth, eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten a.m. It's a good thing he hadn't planned it for midnight, with a stage blizzard and a few witches practically guaranteed.

After a couple of days, he made an occupation of being doomed. Hourly he spoke of the ebbing seconds. He had gone into town, to his office, and apparently his firm had been astonishingly decent. They had given him time off to "rest" and had advanced him enough money to get by on. He stayed in Tippany Manor, and for a while he chattered to everybody he met of his remarkable gift of foresight—to the neighbors, the fellows at the golf club, even to the village taxi-driver, who meets all the suburban trains.

Russ was continuously excited about his own differentness, and rather vain over it, for a few days. But he turned morose as he realized that this wasn't a new game; that in no time at all now, according to his chart, he would hear the "dark thunders of eternity." Since he had so little time, he perceived that he must not waste even one second of it. He gave methodical attention to this problem, and so became unable to use even one second of it.

He would hasten indigestibly through breakfast—he couldn't be wasting time dawdling over food. He would pick up and throw away the morning paper. What was the use of reading, even about his acquaintances, when he would soon be out in a void, where they wouldn't be remembered? His muscles longed for golf; but he "couldn't afford the time." He would go for a walk, but come fleeing back after a block or two, and he was edgy with anybody who stopped him on the way for a good-morning. Soon he was able to do nothing at all but sit, stooped and cramped and wretched, trying to decide what was worth doing.

Once I broke my neutrality and begged him to talk with a psychiatrist or with his pastor, Mr. Horndean, a wise and solid fellow; but Russ sneered: "Those amateurs? I'm walking through dark mysteries that they never heard of, and besides, I can't take the time—I have so little to waste."

He wasn't smoking much or drinking much—in fact, he was almost too saintly and monastic for my New England taste—and out of his fog he would stare at you with infuriating forgiveness for your earthiness. I couldn't even talk with May, for daily she became more like him, daily spent more time sitting beside him, brooding on whether there was anything in the world that was really worth doing.

The eternal bank never gives you back the time that you save but don't invest.

Of course, all our friends kept saying to me, “Why don’t you *do* something about him?” Everybody always says that to the neighborhood doctor.

You can guess what Christmas was like in the Spinrad house. I saw them once: on Christmas Eve I slipped over with a couple of packages. I had always discouraged Russ’ drinking; but I thought that now a bottle of twenty-year-old liqueur Scotch would be good for him.

I tried to make myself believe that I was still good old Uncle Doctor, who was always welcome. I sneaked into their vestibule without ringing.

Amy, blank-face, was trimming the tree. May sat on the davenport. I could see she had been crying. Between them stood Russ, and in his hands was a shotgun.

I was startled. I almost jumped into the room. But here is what he was saying to Amy:

“I’ve been so busy getting my affairs straightened out that I haven’t had any time for Christmas shopping. Do you suppose Eric would like my shotgun? I got it on St. James’s Street, in London—you know, the time your mother and I went abroad. It’s very light, only twenty-gauge. It’s quite a sweet little gun, fine balance. And silver mounted! I always loved it. Do you think Eric would like it?”

Amy was saying, in a threadlike voice, as when you run a wet finger around the rim of a thin goblet, “Oh, yes—yes, I think he would.”

Then Christmas was gone, and New Year’s; it was January, and Russ had—he thought he had—only thirteen days. Amy said she felt as though she were hanging by her fingers from the top of a cliff. And in a sort of paralysis we all came to the afternoon of January 12th.

On the afternoon of January 12th, about four, some eighteen hours before Russ was supposed to go, I stalked into their house as if I were still welcome there. I found a perfectly ridiculous—and heartbreaking—group in the dining room, about the table: Russ looking like a scared martyr, with uncut, damp hair and a dirty shirt, though he did wear his best tweed jacket; May weeping; Amy in repressed fury; and Eric alternating, I guessed, between panicky bewilderment and a desire to sneak out and go skating.

Russ yelled at me: “There’s no use your coming in here! I don’t need you. I know what’s happening. I’m not a materialist, like you smart-aleck docs. And I don’t intend to have you ridiculing me and sneering and interfering in this hour of dread.”

I babbled back at him with phony cheerfulness. “No, no, Russ. I bow to the

inevitable." (Yes, I crawled that far down into the pit of clichés.)

"Oh. You do?" I didn't think he looked altogether gratified.

"Certainly. And we're old friends, Russ, and I want to give you as cheerful a farewell as I can. This shall be our white night, above and beyond all earthy companionship."

May and he swallowed that. They were under such a strain that it seemed to them natural for me to be talking like a Little Theater. But Amy winked.

I looked at her rebukingly, and in a stately way I commanded her: "And you, young lady, may I trouble you to take any telephone calls that come for me and tell them I'm not to be bothered? Wait—come out here in the hall, and I'll give you a list of the calls I'm expecting."

In the vestibule, I said quickly: "Look, Amy! I've got some sleeping stuff here. I'm going to give him a dose, so he'll sleep past the time when he thinks he's due to die. Otherwise, he might will himself into dying. But I'm not on this case. Have I your permission, as a relative?"

"Okay, Uncle Doctor, shoot!"

Not the Blessed Damozel, when she leaned out from the golden bar of heaven, sounded half so musical.

When we returned to the dining room, Russ held forth with noble but infuriating serenity about his control of time, about his unprecedented "secret powers," while May writhed with tender wretchedness, Amy pinched her hand, Eric looked increasingly frightened, and the maid, coming in with coffee, scuttled out in panic.

I noticed that Russ was drinking too much coffee. When he grudgingly offered me some, I had a base for attack.

"Look, old man, in an hour like this, coffee seems pretty tame. It may not seem suitable; but it's the old tradition to drink a stirrup cup with a knight who's starting off on a quest among hidden dangers. I want to have a last drink with you—a brave toast to the unknown. Have you still got some of that Scotch I brought you at Christmas?"

He nodded and looked pleased. I think he was horribly frightened and wanted an excuse for a drink.

"I'll get it," I droned.

I prepared our two drinks with care.

A few minutes later, while Russ was ambling on about his own remarkableness, he fell asleep. May was terrified. Then I turned loose on her. I

told her what I had done. I told her that if she interfered, I'd have him arrested for attempted suicide.

I thought we might as well make him comfortable. We got him upstairs, put him into pajamas, and into bed. May, with some idea that he might want them when—if—he awoke, dragged up an old tabouret that Russ had had since freshman year, and on it she put his favorite pipe and the book of Wodehouse stories he had been enjoying before the game with Tech. And, more for the family's sense of duty than for Russ, for over seventeen hours we kept vigil by his bed; the family and I and Mr. Horndean, their pastor—a sensible and well-read man, an M.A. of Yale—for whom I sent, that his prayers might comfort May.

Always there were at least two of us on watch, to keep each other awake. Whenever Russ threatened to come out of his beneficent coma, I gave him a hypo, carefully measured, just enough to keep him under. Mr. Horndean agreed with me that it was a good notion to have the light on full in the bedroom.

Amy, looking very young now and little, sat on the floor, pasting stamps in her album—to keep from being unmanned, I guess. Her mother inquired whether Amy didn't think this was irreverent, and Amy said no, she didn't.

At midnight I got the idea of turning on the radio, at its most jazzy. And all night we explored a superterrestrial world of gaiety and swing music.

Yes, and all of this cheery activity was phony!

Underneath the swing bands, out in the dark beyond the electric lights, we felt horror waiting. Every minute ran desperately fast toward this man's fate; yet every sixty minutes, taken together, seemed like a thousand in the intolerable waiting.

But dawn was the prelude to a particularly clear, derisively sunny January morning. I looked out, relieved, at the snowy suburban lawns, the proud elms, and a red sled in the yard next door.

Mr. Horndean mused softly to me, "One would think that God is refusing to humor Mr. Spinrad in his desire to be theatrical."

Yes, we were cheerful till, at something after eight, when Horndean and Amy and I were downstairs, Amy had a devastating idea. "Suppose," she said, "that when Dad wakes up—if he does wake—that he thinks we've played a practical joke on him. Will it make him feel so small that he'll really go mad?"

Mr. Horndean spoke sternly. "A man who dares to emulate God in the disposal of his fate ought to feel small."

"No!" Amy protested. "I think God wants us all to be proud—He doesn't want us to feel humiliated, no matter what we've done."

How sound Amy's guess was, only I, who had known Russ as the spoiled Bright Boy in college, could know. If he believed that we were laughing at him, he might fly right off center, and I would have a certifiably insane friend on my hands and have been responsible for his final push into madness.

That fear was with me during our last hour of waiting for his predicted moment—eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten.

Not one of us dared to leave the room—May, Amy, Eric, Horndean, myself. I was at one side of his bed, trying not to look at my wrist watch, but nervously doing so every thirty seconds. May sat across, and I constantly caught her glancing from his blank face to the traveling clock on the bedside table. Horndean was reading a magazine and trying not to look at the clock—and looking at it. Amy was on the floor, at her stamp album, and once I saw her carefully paste in a stamp upside down.

Ten o'clock—and on the click of it, Russ stirred on the pillow and May cried aloud. Amy sprang up and stood by her mother, hand on her arm. Russ was quiet again, and Amy spoke with the voice of a mother—she was truly her mother's mother, just now. "It's going to be all right, you'll see."

She hesitated. I think she wanted to stay beside her mother; but she was afraid they would both break down. She sternly took herself back to her stamps for that last eleven minutes and seven seconds—no, by now not more than ten minutes and forty seconds remained, trickling fast. Ten minutes and forty seconds, ten minutes and thirty-nine seconds, ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds. . . .

Seven minutes left to us, and Horndean rose and stood by the bed, so shaky that he could scarcely put his spectacles back into their case.

Four minutes to go, and I abruptly went for a glass of water. My mouth seemed full of ashes.

Two minutes, and May began to sob, unable to look at Russ, her head down on the bed, her hand groping for his.

Thirty seconds, and Horndean began to repeat the Seventy-Seventh Psalm.

At precisely the crisis, eleven minutes and seven seconds after ten, Russ stirred, half-rose, as though he were struggling against bonds, and collapsed again on the pillow, with stilled face, while they all cried out. I seized his wrist, felt his pulse. He was alive. He had lived on past the second of his false destiny.

Not Time or God is to be cheated; they will have their own at their own hour, and no man, no, nor any king or dictator, shall long defy them.

Russ was coming out of his anesthesia, strong and easy. It was the rest of us who suffered, and Amy who suffered most, for while Horndean and May

were praying together, Amy went off and was very sick, and then came back again.

Russ was entirely conscious by a little after eleven, and, for all of Amy's fear about his being humiliated, I followed a hunch of my own and told him, straight, what a fool he had been, what a conceited and insensitive devil to his family.

He didn't listen much. He looked down at Amy, who, reduced again to domestic insignificance, was trying to study her stamps—a thin kid, not very strong, peering through a reading glass at a stamp from Costa Rica.

Russ heaved himself up under the covers, struggled out of bed, sat on the floor beside Amy, and said to her amiably: "Is that a new issue, with the airplane? I'll have to take up stamps again. You and I will go buy up a whole stamp shop, as soon as I'm flush again."

May protested: "Russ! When you've just—come back—are you going to waste your time over stamps?"

"Yes! I have time enough now for everything! For talking to people, for writing briefs, for playing golf, for reading a book! I know now that I don't know what's going to happen, or when the end will come; so I have all of eternity to do whatever I want to. I have all of eternity, every day. That's all I know—that's all I want to know."

12
VIRGA VAY AND ALLAN CEDAR
(*1945*)

Orlo Vay, the Chippewa Avenue Optician, Smart-Art Harlequin Tinted-Tortus Frames Our Specialty, was a public figure, as public as a cemetery. He was resentful that his profession, like that of an undertaker, a professor of art, or a Mormon missionary, was not appreciated for its patience and technical skill, as are the callings of wholesale grocer or mistress or radio-sports-commentator, and he tried to make up for the professional injustice by developing his personal glamor.

He wanted to Belong. He was a speaker. He was hearty and public about the local baseball and hockey teams, about the Kiwanis Club, about the Mayflower Congregational Church, and about all war drives. At forty-five he was bald, but the nobly glistening egg of his face and forehead, whose arc was broken only by a pair of Vay Li-Hi-Bifocals, was an adornment to all fund-raising rallies.

He urged his wife, Virga, to co-operate in his spiritual efforts, but she was a small, scared, romantic woman, ten years his junior; an admirer of passion in technicolor, a clipper-out of newspaper lyrics about love and autumn smoke upon the hills. He vainly explained to her, "In these modern days, a woman can't fritter away her time daydreaming. She has to push her own weight, and not hide it under a bushel."

Her solace was in her lover, Dr. Allan Cedar, the dentist. Together, Virga and Allan would have been a most gentle pair, small, clinging, and credulous. But they could never be openly together. They were afraid of Mr. Vay and of Allan's fat and vicious wife, Bertha, and they met at soda counters in outlying drug stores and lovingly drank black-and-whites together or Jumbo Malteds and, giggling, ate ferocious banana splits; or, till wartime gasoline-rationing prevented, they sped out in Allan's coupé by twilight, and made shy, eager love in mossy pastures or, by the weak dashlight of the car, read aloud surprisingly good recent poets: Wallace Stevens, Sandburg, Robert Frost, Jeffers, T. S. Eliot, Lindsay.

Allan was one of the best actors in the Masquers, and though Virga could not act, she made costumes and hung about at rehearsals, and thus they were able to meet, and to stir the suspicions of Bertha Cedar.

Mrs. Cedar was a rare type of the vicious woman; she really hated her husband, though she did not so much scold him as mock him for his effeminate love of acting, for his verses, for his cherubic mustache, and even for his skill with golden bridge-work. She jeered, in the soap-reeking presence of her seven sisters and sisters-in-law, all chewing gum and adjusting their plates, that as a lover "Ally" had no staying-powers. That's what *she* thought.

She said to her mother, "Ally is a bum dentist; he hasn't got a single rich patient," and when they were at an evening party, she communicated to the festal guests, "Ally can't even pick out a necktie without asking my help," and on everything her husband said she commented, "Oh, don't be silly!"

She demanded, and received, large sympathy from all the females she knew, and as he was fond of golf and backgammon, she refused to learn either of them.

Whenever she had irritated him into jumpiness, she said judiciously, "You seem to be in a very nervous state." She picked at him about his cross-word puzzles, about his stamp-collection, until he screamed, invariably, "Oh, let me *alone*!" and then she was able to say smugly, "I don't know what's the matter with you, so touchy about every little thing. You better go to a mind-doctor and have your head examined."

Then Bertha quite unexpectedly inherited seven thousand dollars and a house in San Jose, California, from a horrible aunt. She did not suggest to her husband but told him that they would move out to that paradise for chilled Minnesotans, and he would practice there.

It occurred to Allan to murder her, but not to refuse to go along. Many American males confuse their wives and the policeman on the beat.

But he knew that it would be death for him to leave Virga Vay, and that afternoon, when Virga slipped into his office at three o'clock in response to his code telephone call of "This is the Superba Market and we're sending you three bunches of asparagus," she begged, "Couldn't we elope some place together? Maybe we could get a little farm."

"She'd find us. She has a cousin who's a private detective in Duluth."

"Yes, I guess she would. Can't we *ever* be together always?"

"There is one way—if you wouldn't be afraid."

He explained the way.

"No, I wouldn't be afraid, if you stayed right with me," she said.

Dr. Allan Cedar was an excellent amateur machinist. On a Sunday afternoon when Bertha was visiting her mother, he cut a hole through the steel

bottom of the luggage compartment of his small dark-gray coupé. This compartment opened into the body of the car. That same day he stole the hose of their vacuum-cleaner and concealed it up on the rafters of their galvanized-iron garage.

On Tuesday—this was in February—he bought a blue ready-made suit at Goldenkron Brothers', on Ignatius Street. He was easy to fit, and no alterations were needed. They wanted to deliver the suit that afternoon, but he insisted, "No, hold it here for me and I'll come in and put it on tomorrow morning. I want to surprise somebody."

"Your Missus will love it, Doc," said Monty Goldenkron.

"I hope she will—when she sees it!"

He also bought three white-linen shirts and a red bow-tie, and paid cash for the lot.

"Your credit is good here, Doc—none better," protested Monty.

Allan puzzled him by the triumphant way in which he answered, "I want to keep it good, just now!"

From Goldenkrons' he walked perkily to the Emporium, to the Golden Rule drug store, to the Co-operative Dairy, paying his bills in full at each. On his way he saw a distinguished fellow-townsman, Judge Timberlane, and his pretty wife. Allan had never said ten words to either of them, but he thought affectionately, "There's a couple who are intelligent enough and warm-hearted enough to know what love is worth."

That evening he said blandly to his wife, "Strangest thing happened today. The University school of dentistry telephoned me."

"Long distance?"

"Surely."

"Well!" Her tone was less of disbelief than of disgust.

"They're having a special brush-up session for dentists and they want me to come down to Minneapolis first thing tomorrow morning to stay for three days and give instruction in bridge-work. And of course you must come along. It's too bad I'll have to work from nine in the morning till midnight—they do rush those special courses so—but you can go to the movies by yourself, or just sit comfortably in the hotel."

"No—thank—*you*!" said Bertha. "I prefer to sit here at home. Why you couldn't have been an M.D. doctor and take out gall-bladders and make some real money! And I'll thank you to be home not later than Sunday morning. You know we have Sunday dinner with Mother."

He knew.

"I hope that long before that I'll be home," he said.

He told her that he would be staying at the Flora Hotel, in Minneapolis. But on Wednesday morning, after putting on the new suit at Goldenkrons', he drove to St. Paul, through light snowflakes which he thought of as fairies. "But I haven't a bit of real poet in me. Just second-rate and banal," he sighed. He tried to make a poem, and got no farther than:

It is snowing,
The wind is blowing,
But I am happy to be going.

In St. Paul he went to the small, clean Hotel Orkness, registered as "Mr. A. M. Romeo & wife," asked for a room with a double bed, and explained to the clerk, "My wife is coming by train. She should be here in about seventeen minutes now, I figure it."

He went unenthusiastically to the palsied elevator, up to their room. It was tidy, and on the wall was an Adolph Dehn lithograph instead of the fake English-hunting-print that he had dreaded. He kneaded the bed with his fist. He was pleased.

Virga Vay arrived nineteen minutes later, with a bellboy carrying her new imitation-leather bag.

"So you're here, husband. Not a bad room," she said indifferently.

The bellboy knew from her indifference and from her calling the man "husband" that she was not married to him, but unstintingly in love. Such paradoxes are so common in his subterranean business that he had forgotten about Virga by the time he reached his bench in the lobby. Six stories above him, Virga and Allan were lost and blind and quivering in their kiss.

Presently she said, "Oh, you have a new suit! Turn around. Why, it fits beautifully! And such a nice red tie. You do look so young and cute in a bow-tie. Did you get it for me?"

"Of course. And then—I kind of hate to speak of it now, but I want us to get so used to the idea that we can just forget it—I don't want us to look frowsy when they find us. As if we hadn't been happy. And we *will* be—we are!"

"Yes."

"You're still game for it?"

"With you? For anything."

He was taking off the new suit; she was tenderly lifting from her bag a nightgown which she had made and embroidered this past week.

They had all their meals in the room; they did not leave it till afternoon of the next day. The air became a little close, thick from perfume and cigarette smoke and the bubble baths they took together.

Late the next afternoon they dressed and packed their bags, completely. He laid on the bureau two ten-dollar bills. They left the luggage at the foot of their bed, which she had made up. She took nothing from the room, and he nothing except a paper bag containing a bottle of Bourbon whisky, with the cork loosened, and a pocket anthology of new poetry. At the door she looked back, and said to him, "I shall remember this dear room as long as we live."

"Yes. . . . As long as we live."

He took his dark-gray coupé out of the hotel garage, tipping an amazed attendant one dollar, and they drove to Indian Mounds Park, overlooking the erratic Mississippi. He stopped in the park, at dusk, and said, "Think of the Indians that came along here, and Pike and Lewis Cass!"

"They were brave," she mused.

"Brave, *too*!" They nervously laughed. Indeed, after a moment of solemnity when they had left the hotel, they had been constantly gay, laughing at everything, even when she sneezed and he piped, "No more worry about catching pneumonia!"

He drove into a small street near by and parked the car, distant from any house. Working in the half-darkness, leaving the engine running, he pushed the vacuum-cleaner hose through the hole in the bottom of the luggage compartment, wired it to the exhaust pipe, and hastily got back into the car. The windows were closed. Already the air in the car was sick-sweet with carbon monoxide.

He slipped the whisky bottle out of the paper bag and tenderly urged, "Take a swig of this. Keep your courage up."

"Dearest, I don't need anything to keep it up."

"I do, by golly. I'm not a big he-man like you, Virg!"

They both laughed, and drank from the bottle, and kissed lingeringly.

"I wonder if I could smoke a cigarette. I don't *think* C_2O_2 is explosive," he speculated.

"Oh, sweet, be careful! It *might* explode!"

"Yes, it—" Then he shouted. "Listen at us! As if we cared if we got blown up now!"

"Oh, I am too brainless, Allan! I don't know if you'll be able to stand me much longer."

"As long as we live, my darling, my very dear, oh, my dear love!"

“As long as we live. Together now. Together.”

His head aching, his throat sore, he forgot to light the cigarette. He switched on the tiny dashlight, he lifted up the book as though it were a bar of lead, and from Conrad Aiken’s “Sea Holly” he began to read to her:

It was for this
Barren beauty, barrenness of rock that aches
On the seaward path, seeing the fruitful sea,
Hearing the lark of rock that sings—

He was too drowsy to read more than just the ending:

Stone pain in the stony heart,
The rock loved and labored; and all is lost.

The book fell to the seat, his head drooped, and his arm groped drowsily about her. She rested contentedly, in vast dreams, her head secure upon his shoulder.

Harsh screaming snatched them back from paradise. The car windows were smashed, someone was dragging them out . . . and Bertha was slapping Virga’s face, while Bertha’s cousin, the detective, was beating Allan’s shoulders with a blackjack, to bring him to. In doing so, he broke Allan’s jaw.

Bertha drove him back to Grand Republic and nursed him while he was in bed, jeering to the harpies whom she had invited in, “Ally tried to—you know—with a woman, but he was no good, and he was so ashamed he tried to kill himself.”

He kept muttering, “Please go away and don’t torture me.”

She laughed.

Later, Bertha was able to intercept every one of the letters that Virga sent to him from Des Moines, where she had gone to work in a five-and-ten-cent store after Orlo had virtuously divorced her.

“Love! Ally is learning what that kind of mush gets you,” Bertha explained to her attentive women friends.

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 Note and Introduction by Mark Schorer (1908-1977) have been omitted due to copyright considerations.

[The end of *I’m a Stranger Here Myself and Other Stories* by Sinclair Lewis]