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Author: Elizabeth Dejeans

Illustrator: Arthur Ignatius Keller

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOBODY'S CHILD ***

NOBODY'S CHILD

***By* ELIZABETH DEJEANS**

***Author of* THE TIGER'S COAT, ETC.**

**FRONTISPIECE BY
ARTHUR I. KELLER**

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NOBODY'S CHILD

I

ANN

The quietude of winter still lay on the land, the apathetic dun of field and woodland unstirred as yet by the hint of spring that was tipping with eagerness the wings of the birds and, under their brown frost-dulled blanket, was quickening into fresh green the woody stems of arbutus. The mid-morning sun had struggled out of a gray March chill and was setting a gleam the drops of moisture on trees and grass, drawing little rivulets from the streaks of snow which hid in the corners of the rail-fences and in the hollows of the creek. Winter was reluctantly saying farewell.

The girl, who a mile back had turned in from the old Fox-Ridge Post-Road and had come up through the pastures to the edge of the woodland, looked with smiling understanding at the slow yielding of winter. Another winter added to her sum of seventeen. Or, rather, as youth always looks forward and counts much upon the future, perhaps a joyous spring to be added to her sum of experience.

As she sat, swaying gently to the jerky motion of the creaking buggy, the reins lax in her hands, her eyes from beneath the shadow of her brown hood traveled over the reaches of pasture, the slopes of reddish soil freshly turned for oats, the trails of the snake-fences strangled by brown undergrowth, the twists and curves of the creek that divided the pasture from the upward slopes of grain-land, and, beyond, against the horizon, the red scars and dull patches of scrubby growth that marked the "Mine Banks," the ancient, worked-out, and now overgrown and abandoned iron-ore bed that a hundred and fifty years before had yielded wealth to its owners.

"Spring will make even the Mine Banks lovely," Ann Penniman was thinking.

She had come up now to the woodland, a wide half circle of tall oaks and chestnuts, which, like the bend of a huge bow, touched the Mine Banks in the distance, and behind her reached to the Post-Road. She skirted the woods for a time, the horse straining through sand, a rough road, in the winter rarely traveled, but in summer a possible short cut from the Post-Road to the Penniman farm, which was just beyond the woods.

A short distance ahead, this side of where the creek came out into the open, the road turned and led into the woods, and Ann had almost reached the turn when a streak of red, a fox running swift and low, darted across the road, slid over the corner of pasture that lay between the woods and the creek, reappeared beyond the creek, then sped up the slope of plowed ground, making for the shelter of the Mine Banks.

Ann drew up and waited a moment, until the woods awoke to the deep bay of the hounds as they picked up the scent, followed by the halloo of the huntsmen. The next moment the whole pack swept almost under her horse's nose, over and under and through the rail-fence, across the bit of pasture, checked for a moment or two and casting along the bank of the creek, then were over and off up the plowed slope, after their quarry.

The color came into the girl's cheeks and she sat taut. A bag-fox! If a game fox, he would mix up the hunt in the Mine Banks, and be off to the denser woods and rock-holes above the river, an all day's sport for the Fox-Ridge Hunt Club. The woods rang and rustled now to their approach. Some took the fence, some came out by the road, and one and all cleared the creek and galloped up the opposite slope. Here and there fluttered a woman's dark skirt, a somber note amid the cluster of men in pink.

Ann knew the meaning of it all well. The Hunt Club was just beyond the woods, half a mile or so from the Penniman farm. They had loosed the fox at the edge of the woods, given him his start, then set on the hounds. She looked with tingling wistfulness after the aristocracy of the Ridge, embarked on its Saturday of excitement and pleasure, then with lifted lip at the thin rump of the mare she was driving, and gathered up the reins. The animal had pricked its ears and quivered when the hunt swept over it; it had life enough in it for that, but that was all.

Then with a revulsion of feeling, pity for the beast commingled with self-pity, she let the reins drop. It had been a hard pull of four miles up the muddy Post-Road and through the sand of the Back Road, and the wait here was pleasanter than the return to the farm would be. The hunt had passed, leaving her behind; everything bearing the name of Penniman or belonging to a Penniman was fated to be left behind; why not sit in the sun for a time?

But it seemed she had not seen the last of the hunt, for her ear caught now the gallop of horses, even before she saw them: two horsemen who cleared the fence at the lower end of the pasture with a bird-like lift and dip that brought the light into Ann's eyes, and who now galloped up and by her, headed for the creek, two belated huntsmen come cross-country from the Post-Road and evidently intent upon joining the hunt. Ann recognized the foremost rider first from his horse, a long-necked, clean-limbed sorrel, then from the fleeting glimpse of the man's profile, dark and

clear-cut, the face that for months had played with her fancy: Garvin Westmore, the most indefatigable sportsman of the Ridge. The other young man's heavier-jawed and rougher-featured face she did not know. A guest of the club, probably, out from the city for the day.

Then she saw again, with a choke of delight, the light lift and dip of the riders as they cleared the creek—stood up in her ramshackle buggy to see it.... Saw one horse go down, pitching his rider over his head, and the other horseman, not Garvin Westmore, go on—wheel when well up the slope and start back; saw that the horse was struggling with nose to the ground, but that the man lay motionless.

II

THREE MEN AND A GIRL

Ann had crossed the creek and reached the prostrate man before the other horseman had time to dismount. She was bending over Garvin Westmore when the other stood over her.

"Hurt?" he asked tersely.

Ann looked up at him, meeting fairly a pair of keen eyes, grayed into coldness by an excitement that his manner did not betray.

"He doesn't move—his eyes are shut—" she answered breathlessly. Her own eyes were dark and dilated, her face a-quiver.

"Wait a minute."

He plunged down into the creek and came up with his cap filled with water, and, kneeling, dashed it over the unconscious man's face—and over Ann's hovering hands as well. "It's probably only a faint. The ground's soft—he's had the breath knocked out of him, that's all."

He appeared to be right, for Garvin Westmore stirred, and, when Ann had wiped the wet from his face, looked at the two with full consciousness; at Ann's frightened face and her companion's questioning eyes.

"He threw me—the damned brute."

"Lucky if you've broken no bones," the other returned. "See if you can stand."

Ann moved aside and he helped Garvin to his feet, watching him critically as he stretched his arms and felt his body. "All right?" he asked.

"I think so."

"You're lucky."

"Lucky, am I—" Garvin said through his teeth. Then his voice rose. "Look—!"

Ann looked, and caught her breath. The horse had at last struggled up and stood quivering, nostrils wide and head bent, nosing the leg that hung limp. He had essayed a step, then stopped, grown suddenly moist. There was something very human in the eyes he lifted to the two men when they came to him, and even under their handling he shifted only a little.

Then they drew back, and their voices came sharply to Ann as she stood with hand pressed to her lips and eyes wide with pity.

"Broken, Garvin—and the shoulder strained—I've seen them like that."

"He went down in that rabbit-hole, Baird!"

"Yep—poor beast."

"What's to be done?" Garvin's voice was strained.

"Nothing—he's done for."

There was silence for a moment and Ann saw that the color had flamed in Garvin's white face. He was suddenly as violently a-quiver as the suffering animal, curiously and tensely excited. He glanced behind him, then to either side, an uncertain look that passed over Ann and his surroundings, unseeing and yet furtive. Then he took a step backward, and the hand that had gone to his hip-pocket was swiftly upflung.

Ann's shriek rang out almost simultaneously with the shot, at one with the leaden fall of the horse and the sharp echo sent back from the Mine Banks and the chattering lift of the birds in the woods. A crow cawed wildly as it rose; all about was the stir of startled and scurrying things.

Baird had whirled to look at Ann, who stood bent over and with arm hiding her face, and his angry exclamation were the first words spoken: "God, Garvin, are you mad? What a thing to do—before her!"

He strode to Ann and touched her shaking shoulder. "Come away," he said with a note of shame. "The idea of his doing such a thing before a girl! His fall must have knocked the sense out of him!"

But Garvin Westmore was almost as quick as he. He also had turned, with brows raised high and eyes wild. Then on the instant his face was swept of expression. He was pale again, collected, even protective when he drew Ann from Baird's touch. "Don't be frightened, Ann," he said softly, with the air of one who knew her well. "I'm sorry. I forgot you were here. I couldn't see the animal suffer—that was all." Then meeting over Ann's head the commingling of disgust and anger and something else, the touch of aversion in Baird's eyes, he continued even more softly, his softness a little husky: "Why should anything that's done for be allowed to go on suffering a minute more than is necessary? That's what I was thinking.... Wasn't I right, Ann?"

He addressed the girl, but he was answering Baird's look.

"You looked as if you enjoyed doing it," Baird retorted bluntly.

A flash of expression crossed Garvin Westmore's face, a gleam menacing and dangerous, like the momentary exposure of a dagger. It came and went. "I wanted the beast out of pain—if that is what you mean," he said with hauteur. "Ann knows me better than you do," and he bent over her. "Don't cry, Ann; the horse is better off than any one of us."

He continued to bend his height to her and to talk in low tones, until she consented to look up at him. "I don't see how you could—" she said, in a smothered way. "I—I want to go home—"

"You shall in a minute—but not like this." In her run down to the creek her hood had slipped off, and he tried now to draw it up over her fallen hair. She lifted shaking hands and began hurriedly to coil the dark mass about her head.

Baird watched them curiously. The girl was something more than pretty. The brown cape with hood attached had concealed her, but when she lifted her arms he saw that she was slim and rounded, very perfectly so, and not too tall. Her hair was noticeably black, a dense black, heavy and with a tendency to curl. As she gathered it up, Baird noticed how beautifully it grew about her low forehead—that her features were regular, and that, contrasted with black hair and brows and lashes, her skin was very white, luminously white. She was certainly very young; her cheeks and chin were as softly rounded as a baby's. And Garvin was a particularly good-looking man, of the unmistakably inbred type, tall, slender, dark, with clear-cut features, well-marked brows and fine eyes. His were the Westmore features refined into nervousness by inbreeding, the features of his great-great-grandfather, colonial aristocrat and owner of the Mine Banks.

Nickolas Baird, as noticeably but one generation removed from the ranks and of the type that carves its own fortunes, watched the two curiously.

He was not the only onlooker. A man had ridden out of the woods just as the shot was fired and had come slowly down to the creek. His horse had leaped when the report came and had sidled nervously as if eager for a run, but his rider had reined him sharply, held him to a walk, while he eyed the group in the distance. Though well mounted and in faultless riding attire, he was evidently not of the hunt; he wore no signs of haste or eagerness. He had crossed the bit of pasture deliberately, and had come to the other side of the creek. Then, as if he considered himself breakable, he had dismounted deliberately and, dropping the reins, slowly crossed the creek, selecting and testing his footing in the same careful fashion. His eyes alone, gloomy under their lowered brows, showed interest in what was passing.

He stood just behind the group before he spoke: "What's all this, Garvin?"

The three started and turned and Garvin stepped back hastily from Ann, who with hands still lifted to her hair and eyes wet with tears stared at the new-comer.

It was Garvin who answered quickly. "It's plain enough what's happened, Ed. The sorrel went down in a rabbit-hole and broke his leg—incidentally, he nearly did for me too."

"And you shot him without giving him time to say his prayers. I was in time to see that."

"He was no gift of yours—I raised him," Garvin answered, with an instant note of antagonism.

There had been stern rebuke in the elder man's remark, though so quietly spoken. But they were very evidently brothers. Their features were the same, the Westmore features; only the elder man's black hair had streaks of gray about the temples and his face was sallow and his eyes somber. Garvin at twenty-eight looked less than his age, and his brother, ten years his senior, looked full forty.

Edward Westmore made no answer. He had looked from his brother to Ann, at her wistfully moist eyes and air of distress. But if his caught breath and slowly heightening color indicated the same anger Baird had felt, he restrained himself well. He said nothing at all, simply looked at her steadily, flushing and breathing quickly. Then he turned abruptly and looked up the slope of pasture at Ann's ramshackle buggy; then, turning more slowly, he gazed an appreciable moment at the looming Mine Banks.

Possibly it was his way of gaining self-control. Possibly he was looking for an explanation of the girl's presence and discovered it in the waiting buggy. At any rate, his manner was calm and courteous when he faced them again.

"It's too bad it happened," he said, more to Baird than any one else. "But it can't be helped.... You'll have to get the animal off this land, it's not ours—unless you can get permission to bury him, Garvin?"

"Not likely," his brother said in an undertone. "It's old Penniman's land. He hasn't learned to hate us any less these years you've been away."

Edward Westmore's brows contracted sharply. "I'll take her to her buggy, and come back," he said, and turned hastily to Ann, who was clambering down into the creek.

Garvin looked after him in surprise. Then, conscious of his brother's backward glance, he turned away. Nevertheless, he listened intently to Edward's low-toned courtesy.

"Let me help you—the bank is slippery."

Both he and Baird could hear distinctly Ann's soft rejoinder, the slurred syllables that marked her a southern child, but without the nasal twang usual with the country-folk of the Ridge. "Don't you come, suh—I can get up easily." She was more embarrassed than distressed now; her face was rosy red under her hood and her eyes were lowered.

But Edward went on with her, up the stretch of pasture. They saw him help her into the buggy and stand for a time, evidently talking to her. And, finally, when she drove off, he bowed to her, as deeply as he would to any lady on the Ridge, standing and looking after her as she drove into the woods.

Baird had observed the whole proceeding with interest. The Westmore family interested him. Ann interested him also, perhaps because he "couldn't place her," as he himself would have expressed it. During his two weeks' stay on the Ridge he had assimilated its class distinctions. There were three classes on the Ridge: the aristocracy, depleted and poverty ridden as a rule, clinging tenaciously to bygone glory while casting a half-contemptuous and at the same time envious eye on the sheer power of money; the second somewhat heterogeneous class developed during the forty years since the "war," and that, on the Ridge, had as its distinctive element the small farmer who, in most cases, though not so well-born, possessed wide family ramifications and an inbreeding and a narrow jealous pride quite on a par with that of the descendants of governors and revolutionary generals; and the third class, the class that had always been, the "poor-white-trash."

In which social division did Ann belong? Certainly not to the latter, and not to the first, either, Baird judged, for he had watched Garvin's manner to the girl closely. And he had also noted Garvin's look of surprise when Edward had followed her. He saw that while Garvin was audibly considering the best means of getting rid of the dead horse, his real attention was given to the two at the edge of the woods.

Baird asked his question a little abruptly. "Who is she, Garvin?"

Perhaps Garvin expected the question. "Ann Penniman," he said, without looking up from the horse.

"One of your people?" Baird asked, conscious that he was expressing himself awkwardly.

Garvin caught his meaning at once. "Heavens, no! Her people are farmers. She's old Penniman's grand-daughter. His farm runs down through the woods there, and this field is part of it—up to the Mine Banks. They're ours, worse luck—just waste ground. I wish the sorrel was up there in one of the old ore-pits."

Baird felt that Garvin wanted to lead off from the subject. "She's the prettiest girl I've seen in a year," he declared.

"Ann is pretty, but I don't see what good it's going to do her," Garvin answered carelessly. "She'll marry some one of the Penniman tribe—they're all inter-married—and go on working like an ox. Old Penniman would take a shotgun to any man who came around who wasn't a cousin, or a Penniman of some sort. Ann's just a farm girl and has been brought up like all of them about here." Garvin nodded in the direction of the disappearing buggy. "She's back now from taking butter and eggs to the village in exchange for a few doled-out groceries—they're hard up, the Pennimans." He looked down then at the horse, bent and stroked its tawny mane. "Poor old Nimrod!" he muttered. "You had a short life of it—though between us we sometimes had a merry one." His voice had changed completely, deepened into genuine feeling. "I raised him from a colt," he remarked to Baird, with face averted.

In the light of what had happened, Baird found it difficult to explain the man's present emotion. Baird had had a good deal of western experience which had taught him to regard thoughtfully any man who was as quick with his pistol as Garvin Westmore had been.

But Baird's real interest was elsewhere. He asked no more questions. In his own mind he decided that the dormered roof, crisscrossed by naked branches, which he could see from his window at the Hunt Club, covered the Penniman house. And he also reflected that he had plenty of spare time in which to reconnoiter.

III

PENNIMAN AND WESTMORE

Ann drove on through the woods, with the color still warm in her cheeks. She could not have told just why she was still trembling and felt inclined to cry. As Garvin Westmore had said, it was best to put the sorrel out of pain at once. She did not feel, as the young man Garvin had called Baird had felt, that it was an outrageous thing for Garvin to have shot the horse while she was there, for Ann had never been shown any particular consideration by anybody; she was well acquainted with the hard side of life.

But Garvin's look had been so strange. It had shocked and puzzled her.... And then Edward Westmore's manner to her? He had been so "nice" to her, a protective, considerate niceness. He had asked her about her family and about herself. He had been away from the Ridge for many years; he had never brought his foreign wife to Westmore. But, now that she and his father were gone, he had returned to Westmore with the fortune she had left him and was head of the family. And yet he remembered them all, her grandfather and her Aunt Sue and her father, who had been away from the Ridge as long as Ann could remember, and her mother, whom Ann had never seen. Edward Westmore had not referred to the life-long enmity that had existed between his father and her grandfather, and yet he had made her feel that he did not share in it; that it was a bygone thing and should be buried. Ann had liked him, as suddenly and as uncontrollably as she had liked Garvin.

For Garvin Westmore had also been "nice" to her, though in a different way. Back in the days when she used to disobey her grandfather and steal off to the Westmore Mine Banks for fascinating visits to its caves and ore-pits, the tall boy who galloped recklessly up hill and down, always with several hounds at his horse's heels, was one of Ann's terrors. Then there had been the vague period when she had been "growing up" and had seen him only very occasionally and had not thought of him at all.

But ever since the day, a few weeks ago, when he had met her and had ridden up the Post-Road beside her buggy, he had become a vivid entity. Under his smiling regard she had quickly lost the Penniman antagonism to any one bearing the name of Westmore. His had been an astonishing and exhilarating "niceness" to which Ann's suddenly aroused femininity had instantly responded. Ann had learned that day, for the first time, that she was pretty and that it was possible for her to arouse admiration. And during the last two weeks.... It was not merely pity for the sorrel that had set her cheeks aflame and made her eyes moist; it was excitement, the stir of commingled emotions and impressions. Her nerves were always keyed high, vibrant to every impression. And during the last weeks she had been hiding from every one something of graver import than her usual thoughts and feelings. Those she had always kept to herself, partly because she was inclined to be secretive, partly because of native independence.

Ann had reached the end of the woods now and stopped to compose herself. Her grandfather would not notice that she had been crying, but her Aunt Sue would. She would have to tell of the tragedy in the Mine Banks field; news of that sort had a way of traveling. She would have to say that she had seen what had happened, but not a word of Edward Westmore's talk with her or of Garvin—not even to her Aunt Sue. Sue, in her quiet way, hated the Westmores as bitterly as her grandfather did. Ann's swift liking for these two men who had, each in his own fashion, been nice to her, and her swift determination to be nice in return, was a thing to be carefully concealed. As she had come through the woods, she had looked at the dead chestnut tree in the split crotch of which there had once been a flicker's nest. Garvin had not said so, he would not with the other man standing by, but it probably held a message for her. This was not the best time to get it, however. Some one might see her and wonder.

Ann took off her hood and smoothed her hair and pressed her hands to her hot eyes; sat still then and let the wind cool the ache in them, her face settling into its usual wistful expression, eyes dark under drooping lids, lips full but smileless, cheeks and chin so rounded and infantile that they were appealing. Life might make hers a voluptuous face, there was more than a hint of the probability in the desirous mouth and full white throat. It was the straight nose with its slightly disdainful nostrils and the arched and clearly penciled brows that gave her face its real beauty—a nobler promise than was suggested by lips and chin.

Through the few intervening trees Ann could see the Penniman barn, a low wide structure with a basement for housing cattle, an arrangement that the sharply sloping ground made possible. The house, a little to the left and beyond, even in winter was obscured by trees. Two tall Lombardy poplars guarded the kitchen entrance and the woodshed, towering high above a steep-pitched roof and the alanthus and locust trees that in summer shaded it. The woods through which Ann had just passed semicircled the upward sloping field that lay between her and the farm buildings. To the right, the slope was crested by an orchard, and to the left, stretching from the house like a long line of melancholy sentinels, was a double row of magnificent cedars, guarding the road that led straight across open country, past the Hunt Club and to the Post-Road. That was the way by which Ann should have come had not the hint of spring tempted her to take the Back Road, through the pastures and the woods.

There was no one in sight. In the bit of marsh made by a spread of the creek several pigs were wallowing, as if glad to find the ground soft, and in the enclosure behind the barn a horse and

three cows stood in the sun amid a clutter of chickens. Beyond the marsh, under a group of weeping-willows, was the spring and the usual accompaniment, a spring-house. Ann had expected to see her aunt's red shawl either at the spring or on the path that led up between the double row of grapevines, a full three hundred yards of upward toil to the kitchen door, for it was the hour for carrying the day's supply of water. But there was no one in view, not even her grandfather moving feebly about the barn.

Ann took up the reins with a sigh, and drove on. She always sighed when she approached her home, and tingled with the sensation of embarking on an adventure when she left it, for Ann possessed in abundance the attributes of youth: faith, hope, imagination and the capacity to enjoy intensely. Home meant work, work, work, and few smiles to sweeten the grind. But for her Aunt Sue, the smoldering rebellion the farm had bred in Ann would have flared dangerously. As long as she had been too young to understand, and had had the fields and the woods, it had not mattered so much. In a vague way, Ann had always felt that she was nobody's child, a nonentity to her grandfather except when her high spirits, tinged always by coquetry, and her inflammable temper aroused in him a sullen anger. And Ann knew that to her aunt she was more a duty than a joy; Sue Penniman appeared to have an enormous capacity for duty and a small capacity for affection. But, with the necessity to cling to something, Ann clung to her aunt. For Sue she worked uncomplainingly. For Sue's sake she hid her resentment at being a nonentity.

For in the last year of rapid awakening Ann had realized that she had never been permitted an actual share in the narrow grinding interests of the family, though, of necessity, she was tied fast to the monotonous round and, together with her grandfather and aunt, lay between the upper and nether millstones. The clannish pride that lay in every Penniman lay in her also, and yet, Ann had felt, vaguely as a child and poignantly as she grew older, that she was of them and yet not of them. Her grandfather, even her aunt had made her feel it—and above all the father who had forsaken her when she was barely old enough to remember him. Ann never thought of her father without an ache in her throat that made it impossible for her to talk of him.

At the barn Ann hitched the horse. Her grandfather might want the buggy; it was best not to unharness until she knew. She took the bundles of groceries and went on to the house, past the basement door, to the stairs that led up to the kitchen, for the house, like the barn, was built on the slope, its front resting on the crown of the slope, its rear a story from the ground, permitting a basement room and a forward cellar that burrowed deep into the ground.

Ann had glanced into the basement, but her aunt was not there. The kitchen, an ancient-looking room, whitewashed and with small square-paned windows, was also empty. Ann put down her parcels and went into the living-room. It and the kitchen and the two rooms above were all that remained of the colonial house that antedated even Westmore. It was low-ceilinged, thick-walled, and casement-windowed, and had a fireplace spacious enough to seat a family. Built of English brick brought to the colony two centuries before, the old chimney had withstood time and gaped deep and wide and soot-blackened. This room had been one wing of the colonial mansion, and, because of the solid masonry that enclosed the cellar beneath it, had not fallen into decay like the rest of the house.

But it had not been built by a Penniman. A hundred years before, a Penniman, "a man of no family, but with money in his pocket," had bought the house and the land "appertaining" from an encumbered Westmore, and had become father of the Pennimans now scattered through three counties. The first Penniman and his son's son after him had been tobacco growers on a small scale and slave owners, but they had never been of the aristocracy.

It was Ann's grandfather who, some thirty years before, ten years after the war, had torn down the other two wings of the old house and had built the porch and plain two-storied front that now sat chin on the crown of the slope and looked out over terraces whose antiquity scorned its brief thirty years; looked over and beyond them, to miles of rolling country. The narrow, back-breaking stairs that led from the living-room to the rooms above, a back-stairs in colonial days, was now the main stairway. The mansion had become a farmhouse, for the first Penniman had been the only Penniman "with money in his pocket."

There was no one in the living-room, and Ann paused to listen, then climbed the stairs, coming up into a narrow passageway, at one end of which were three steps. They led to the front bedrooms, her grandfather's addition to the old house. One room was his, the other had been Coats Penniman's room, Ann's father's room. Like many of the Pennimans, Ann's mother had married her first cousin, a boy who had grown up in her father's house.

The stir Ann had heard was in this room, which, except when it had accommodated an occasional visiting Penniman, had been closed for fourteen years. The door stood wide now, the windows were open, and her aunt was making the bed.

Ann stopped on the threshold, held by surprise. She had not known of any expected visitor. For the last six years they had been too poor and too proud to entertain even a Penniman. And there was something in her aunt's manner and appearance that arrested Ann's attention. Sue Penniman was always pale, Ann could easily remember the few times when she had seen color in her aunt's cheeks, and, though she always worked steadily, it was without energy or enthusiasm. But there was color in her cheeks now, and eagerness in her movements. She was thin and her shoulders a little rounded from hard work, but now, when she lifted to look at Ann, she stood very erect and the unwonted color in her face and the brightness in her blue eyes made her almost pretty.

"Is some one comin', Aunt Sue?" Ann asked.

Her aunt did not answer at once. She looked at Ann steadily, long enough for a quiver of feeling to cross her face. Then she came around the bed, came close enough to Ann to put her hands on Ann's shoulders.

"Cousin Coats is comin', Ann," she said, her nasal drawl softened almost to huskiness.

Her *father* coming! The color of sudden and intense emotion swept into Ann's face, widening her eyes and parting her lips, a lift of joy and of craving combined that stifled her. It was a full moment before Ann could speak. Then she asked, "When—?"

"Sunday—to-morrow."

"When did you know?" Ann was quite white now.

"Last night—Ben Brokaw brought the letter."

"And you-all kept it to yourselves!" All the hurt and isolation of Ann's seventeen years spoke in her face and in her voice.

Sue was surprised by the passion of anger and pain. It was a tribute to Ann's power of concealment; she had not suspected this pent feeling.

"I didn't know you'd care so much," Sue said in a troubled way. "It seemed like you didn't care about anything, you're always so—gay. An' Coats has been away since you were a baby. I didn't think you'd care so much. I wanted to tell you, but your grandpa didn't want I should till we'd talked it over. And I was worried about your grandpa too—he was so excited."

"Grandpa hates me! And father must hate me, too, or he wouldn't have left me when I was a baby and never even have written to me!" Ann exclaimed passionately, restraint thrown to the winds.

"*Ann!* What's come over you to talk like that! Your grandpa doesn't hate you! If you only knew!... You see, Ann, you've got a gay, I-don't-care way with you, and it worries your grandpa. He's seen a terrible lot of trouble. And since the stroke he had four years ago he's felt he was no good for work any more, and what was going to become of the place. It's all those things has worried him."

Ann said nothing. She simply stood, quivering under her aunt's hands.

Sue's voice lost its warmth, dropped into huskiness again. "You don't understand, Ann, so don't you be thinking things that isn't so." She drew Ann to the bed. "Sit down a minute till I tell you something.... It's always seemed to me foolishness to talk about things that are past, so I never told you, but now Coats is comin' you ought to know: your mother died when you were born, Ann, and it almost killed Coats. He loved your mother dearer than I've ever known any man love a woman. Every time he looked at you it brought it back to him. We went through a lot of trouble, Ann—dreadful trouble. It was too much for Coats to bear, an' he just went away from it, out west. But he wasn't forsakin' us—it wasn't like that. Why, all these years his thoughts have been here, and he's sent us money right along—we couldn't have got on if he hadn't." Sue's voice rose. "There's no better man in all the world than Coats Penniman, Ann!... And I *know*. He was your mother's own cousin and mine—we grew up with him, right here in this house—and I know like no one else does how fine Coats is!" Sue was shaken as Ann had never seen her, flushed and quivering and bright-eyed.

Ann's eyes were brimming. "But I wasn't to blame."

"Of course you weren't to blame," Sue said pityingly. "I'm just telling you because I want you to understand and be patient if Coats seems like a stranger. Don't you feel hard to him. Just you remember that you're a Penniman and that the Pennimans always stand together and that there never was a better Penniman walked than Coats.... Just you do your duty and be patient, Ann, and your reward will come. I've lived on that belief for many years, and whether I get my reward or not, I'll know that I've done the thing that's *right*, and that's something worth living for."

Sue had struck a responsive cord when she called upon the family pride. Ann's shoulders lifted. And hope, an ineradicable part of Ann, had also lifted. She looked up at Sue. "Perhaps father will get to love me," she said wistfully.

Sue drew an uneven breath. Then she said steadily, "Perhaps he will, Ann.... Just you do right, like I tell you—that's your part." She got up then. "We won't talk any more now—I've got too much to do. An' there's something I want you should do, an' that's to talk to Ben Brokaw. He says he's goin'. He's sitting down in the basement glum as a bear. When your grandpa tol' him Coats was comin' he up an' said he'd go—there was goin' to be too many men about the place. I couldn't do anything with him. But he's got to stay—anyway till Coats gets some one else. You see if you can persuade him."

"Yes, I'll try—" Ann promised absently, for she was thinking of something else. "Aunt Sue, does father hate the Westmores too?"

Sue's start was perceptible. She stared at the girl. "Why are you askin'?" she demanded sharply.

Ann grew crimson, and there was a touch of defiance in her answer. "You and grandpa hate them—I wondered if he did."

"Have any of them spoken to you?" Sue asked. In all her knowledge of Sue, Ann had never heard her speak so sharply.

It frightened her, though it did not alter the sense of injustice to the Westmores which Ann had been cherishing. She gave her version of what had happened that morning, and Sue listened intently. When Ann had finished, she bent suddenly and smoothed the bed, averting her face.

"Just like him!" she said in a voice that was not steady. "Just like every Westmore I've ever known. 'Do-as-I-please' and 'what-do-I-care!' They've heart neither for woman nor beast. It's brought them to what they are. Edward Westmore may think his wife's money'll build up the family, but it won't. Coats will do more with his little twenty thousand than Edward with his big fortune." She lifted and brushed the fallen hair from her face, a gesture expressive of exasperation. "And to think they dare ride over our land!" She looked at Ann as Ann had never seen her look before. "The next time a Westmore tries to break his neck, just you drive on, and if any one of them ever speaks to you, turn your back on him."

"But what have they done to us?" Ann persisted.

Sue quieted, a drop to her usual patient manner. "Never mind what they have done," she said wearily. "There never was a Westmore who was friend to a Penniman. But I don't want to think about them—least of all to-day.... Just you go on and talk to Ben—that'll be helping me, Ann. There's a world of things to be done before to-morrow.... And go quietly—your grandpa's lying down in the parlor."

Ann went, still flushed and unconvinced. What was the sense of hating like that, just because one's father hated before you? And it was plain that her father shared in the family enmity.

Then defiance slipped from Ann. Her father was coming! Would he be nice to her? It was not natural for a father to be cold to his child. And she was grown up now, and pretty. This recently discovered asset of hers meant a great deal to Ann. And if her father was bringing money with him to the farm everything would be changed. To Ann, anticipation was one of the wonderful things in life.

IV

BUT IF HE FAILED HER?

Ann had learned early that with every one except her grandfather smiles won far more for her than argument. When she put her head into Ben Brokaw's room she was smiling, though her eyes were observant enough. The basement was the "wash-room" and the "churning-room," with one corner partitioned off for the combination of boarder and hired man that, for the last four years, her grandfather's disabilities had made necessary. As was customary on the Ridge, the negroes lived in their cabins, "taking out" their rent in work. Ann had tiptoed in and studied Ben and his surroundings through the half-open door.

There was no furniture in the little room. Ben's bed was a canvas hammock, and the decorations of the place were of his own design: several dozen mole-skins neatly tacked to the walls; coon-skins and opossum-skins, a fox-skin and a beautifully striped wild-cat-skin were all stretched in the same fashion. A gun, a pistol and fishing tackle hung above the hammock, sharing the space with a wide-winged, dried bat. The hide of a Jersey cow, its soft yellow stained by marks of muddy feet, carpeted the floor, so much of it as was not occupied by traps, bird's nests and other woodland litter, and the entire place smelled of animals.

On the hammock, feet firmly planted on the floor, sat a phenomenally long-armed, broad-chested, squat man who rolled his huge head and shoulders gently from side to side, while his hands deftly whittled the figure-four intended for the box-trap at his feet. His heavy face, circled by a shock of rough brown hair, suggested the hereditary drunkard, it was so reddened and ridged and snout-nosed. It was his appearance that had earned him the sobriquet, "Bear Brokaw." He rolled like an inebriate when he walked, yet never in his forty years on the Ridge had Bear Brokaw been known to "take a drink." He knew and was known by every soul on the Ridge, and by many in the adjoining counties, for he had worked, in intermittent fashion, on almost every farm and estate on the Ridge, more that he might be free to shoot and snare than for the wages he earned. Ben knew the intimate habits of every wild thing, and the family secrets of mankind as well, and plied a thrifty trade in skins. He was adored by the children on the Ridge, and in spite of his queer personality was respected by their elders.

"What are you doin', Ben?" Ann asked.

The small brown eyes he raised to Ann were as bright as a squirrel's and at the same time shrewdly intelligent. Just now they were reddened by an angry light and he looked as morose as the lumbering animal he resembled.

"Fixin' this here trap." His voice was a growling base; his manner indicated that he wished to be let alone.

Ann selected the cleanest spot on the cowhide and seated herself with arms embracing her

knees. Ever since she could remember Ann had conversed with Bear Brokaw seated in this fashion, at his feet, and many had been the secrets each had told the other. For Ben had worked on the Penniman farm, or, rather, had shot and trapped there, as the desire took him, for thirty years. He and Ann were fast friends; both were of the open country.

Ann had cast about in her mind for a topic that would be arresting. "Ben, Garvin Westmore's sorrel is dead," she announced dramatically.

Ben stopped both his work and his rolling motion. "What you sayin'?"

"He broke his leg, Ben."

"Whee—ee—" he whistled, through his teeth. "How, now?"

Ann told him the story, as she had told it to Sue.

"An' Garvin up an' shot him—I can jest see him at it," Ben muttered, more to himself than to Ann.

"It was better than having the poor thing suffer," Ann declared with some warmth.

Ben shook his head in a non-committal way. But he did not take up his work. He looked down, still shaking his head.

Bear Brokaw had solved many problems for Ann; he had reasons for most things. She changed her tone. "Why did he do like that, Ben? I wondered why?"

"'Cause he couldn't help it."

"You don't mean—because he liked doing it?" Ann asked; Baird's remark had clung to her memory.

Ben looked up quickly. "Why you askin' that, Ann?"

Ann was silenced. She would have to tell too much if she explained. She was usually quick-witted. "Why, you spoke like that."

"Don't you be seein' meanings where there ain't none," he growled.

Ann knew that he did not mean to explain. But she had succeeded in drawing him from his grievance, and that had been her first object. He did not take up the figure-four again; instead, he was meditative.

"That there sorrel was the best hunter in the county," he said regretfully. "He was great grandson to ole Colonel Westmo's white Nimrod. That was one horse, Ann! A regular fightin' devil! He jest naturally loved the smell o' powder. The colonel took him to the war when he was a colt, an' fifteen years after the colonel was still ridin' ole Nimrod—ridin' him to the hounds, too. The colonel jest lived on his back, an' Nimrod were faithfuller than a dog. When there weren't no huntin', the colonel were in the habit of takin' in every half-way house fo' miles, an' Nimrod always there to tote him back to Westmo', whether the colonel was laid acrost his back like a sack o' oats, or sittin' shoulders square like he always did when not soaked through an' through. Nimrod knew when to go careful.... I mind one night—that was the year I was huntin' on Westmo' an' helpin' Miss Judith run the place—I was bringin' Miss Judith back up the Post-Road from the station, an' where the Westmo' Road cuts into the Mine Banks we come plumb on a white objec'. I don't take no stock in ghosts, all I've ever seen has turned out to be a human or a' animal or a branch wavin' in the wind. But that bit of road has got a bad name. Them convicts the Westmo's worked to death over a hundred years ago, over there in the Mine Banks, is said to come out an' stand clost to the Post-Road, waitin' for a Westmo' to do for him. 'Twas in that cut the colonel's grandfather was shot down from his horse, an' nobody never did find out who done it. An' it was there the Ku-Klux used to gather—guess the colonel had his share in that, though.... Well, there was that white thing, an' our horse give a snort an' stopped, an' my heart come up in my mouth. But Miss Judith, she stood straight up in the buggy.

"'Who's there?' she called out, quick an' clear.

"An' the Banks called back, sharp, like they do, 'Who's there?' but it was Nimrod whinnied.... It was the colonel gone to bed in the road, an' Nimrod standin' stock-still by his side, like he always did, till some one passin' would lay his master acrost his back again.

"Miss Judith sat down when we knew, an' she sat straight as a rod; there's all the pride of all the Westmo's in Miss Judith, and was then, though she weren't no older than you. 'Some gentleman has met with an accident,' she says, very steady. 'Help him to his horse, Ben,' an' I did.

"But the colonel weren't too far gone not to recognize a petticoat—he had a' instinc' for anything feminine an' his manners couldn't be beat. I'd put his hat on his head, but he swep' it off.

"'My grateful thanks to you, Madame,' he says in his fine voice. 'I met with a little accident. I shall hope to thank you in person to-morrow.' He were too far gone to know his own daughter, but he hadn't forgot his Westmo' manners.

"An' Miss Judith sat straight as ever, an' all she says was, 'Drive on, Ben.'... That's Westmo' for you!" Ben concluded, with deep admiration.

Ann had heard the story before, and always it had brought the color to her cheeks, for it stirred

her imagination, but she had never flushed more deeply than now. "You like Garvin, don't you, Ben?" she asked softly.

Ben eyed her in his shrewd way, "Yes, he's got feelin' for the woods—a born hunter. Trouble is, everything's game to Garvin, Ann."

Ann was afraid to say anything more. "It was a bag-fox they had this morning," she remarked for diversion.

"Shame!" Ben said curtly. Then, irrelevantly, "I reckon I'll choose Westmo' fo' my nex' shootin'. I mean to tote my traps over there to-night."

Ann was recalled to her errand. "You mean you'd go away from us, Ben?" she asked in well-simulated surprise.

Ben's eyes twinkled. "I'm tellin' you news now, ain't I! What did you come down here for?"

Ann laughed; she knew it was no use to pretend. "You're so smart, Ben—you know what's in people's heads ... Aunt Sue told me. She's just heart-broken, an' I said I'd come an' beg you. How could we have got on without you this winter, and how are we going to get on without you now? Don't you go, Ben!"

"Reckon Coats can run this place without me," Ben said determinedly.

"I don't believe he can," Ann persisted. "I know he'll want you."

"Not he. I know Coats Penniman."

"Of course you know him better than I do," Ann said wistfully. "Don't you like my father, Ben?"

Ben moved restlessly. "He's a Penniman an' awful set in his ways—Coats Penniman's a fearful steady, determined man—though that's not sayin' anything against him."

"Aunt Sue says he is the best man who ever walked," Ann said earnestly.

"She's reason to think that way.... I reckon I don't like too much goodness, Ann—not the kind that's unhuman good. That's because I'm jest 'Bear' Brokaw, though.... No, I'm goin'."

Ann could not puzzle out just what he meant. She let it drop, for thinking of it made her unhappy. She moved nearer and put her hand on Ben's great hairy paw, stroking it as she would have stroked the collie. "You stay, Ben?" she pleaded softly. "Just stay a while and see how it will be. Stay 'cause I want you to. What'll I do without you to talk to—if my father doesn't care about me?... An' maybe he won't, you know—I can't tell.... You think he will, though, don't you, Ben?" It was the anxiety uppermost in Ann and must out.

Ben's little animal eyes were very bright as he looked down at her, and, whatever his thoughts, his expression was not unkindly.

"You reckon if you smiled at the spring the water would run up hill to you?" he asked. "You sure could bring the birds down from the trees, Ann." This was certainly one way of avoiding her question.

Ann knew Bear Brokaw as well as he knew her. She knew she had won. "And we'll make the swimmin'-pool down in the woods—soon as it's warm," she coaxed. "We'll have fun this spring, Ben." This was a project that lay close to Ben's heart. His room might be redolent of animal skins, but Ben himself was not; he had a beaver's love for the water.

"Um!" he growled, his eyes twinkling.

It was complete surrender, and Ann sprang up. "I've got to help Aunt Sue now," she announced brightly. "And, Ben, I didn't put the horse out."

"Want I should, I reckon."

Ann only laughed as she pirouetted out and danced up the stairs to the kitchen.

She did not go back to Sue, however; not immediately. She caught up her cape and a bucket and, as soon as Ben was on his way to the barn, started for the spring. But it was evidently not her ultimate destination, for she dropped the bucket there and, after a cautious study of the barn and the house, sped like a rabbit across the field and into the woods.

From their shelter she again studied her surroundings, then darted for the dead chestnut tree. She climbed as agilely as she had run, and quickly gained the split crotch. The flicker's hole was bored deep in the dead wood, and Ann brought up from its depth a folded slip of paper. She curled up in the crotch and read it:

"DEAR ANN:

"You are the sweetest and the most beautiful thing I know. Did you mean what you said when you promised to be friends? I hope you did. I've been living on that hope for the last two weeks. Will you come to the Crest Cave at the Banks on Sunday afternoon, at four, and tell me again that our great-grandfathers' quarrels don't matter to us? Please come, dear! Please!

Though the color came warmly in Ann's cheeks and a smile lifted the corners of her mouth, she looked grave enough when she sat thinking over what she had read. So far her meetings with Garvin Westmore had had the excuse of chance; he knew on what days she drove to the village, and the chestnut tree had treasured only notes expressive of pleasure over the meeting of the day before. But this was different.

Sue Penniman had done her duty; Ann was not altogether ignorant; less ignorant and far more imaginative; more eager for life and at the same time more certain of herself than most of the girls on the Ridge. Beneath her coquetry, the new and intoxicating realization of her allure, was the craving for the certain something that distinguished the Westmores from the Pennimans; a "niceness" Ann called it, for want of a clearer understanding. She had been immediately at home with Garvin, and with his brother also. They were not beyond her intelligence. Something in her had arisen and met, on a footing of equality, the thing in them that delighted her.

In her ignorance of much that would have been clearer to a more sophisticated girl, Ann was not nearly so self-conscious or so afraid of this more plainly revealed attitude of the lover, and of the sanction she would be giving to secrecy, as she was doubtful of her duty to the Penniman cause. It was that troubled her most. She felt no great sense of duty to her grandfather, and Sue's blind clinging to the family quarrel seemed senseless. But there was her father? Ann wanted his love more than she wanted anything else in the world; the tenderness that would cherish her, against which she could nestle and that would caress her in return. She longed for it, and would joyfully give implicit obedience in return.

Ann thought the matter out as she sat there. When she put the note in the bosom of her dress and climbed soberly down from her perch, she had decided: if her father loved her—and she would know instantly if there was about him the something that had always held her apart from her grandfather and even from her Aunt Sue—she would not meet Garvin Westmore. She would tell her father every circumstance, and if he willed that it must be so, his quarrel would be hers.

But if he failed her? Ann's full lips set and she put her hand over the note in her bosom.

V

IN COLONIAL FASHION

The Westmores were giving a dinner after the hunt, as had been customary in the days when Westmore was noted for lavish hospitality. It was by no means a Hunt Club dinner, however, for, according to Westmore standards, the Hunt Club had become a lax institution. In order to exist it had taken in members, excellent people, of course, who, because of their money or because of prominence acquired during the last few years, had partially compelled their way into Ridge society. The men affiliated fairly well, their clan spirit rarely stood in the way of sociability, perhaps because many of them had been forced into the city, into business relations with the newcomers.

But the feminine aristocracy of the Ridge still clung to traditional usage. Changed conditions had partly demolished traditional barriers; they were forced to countenance, in a formal way, women who were not of "the family connection," but as every member of the old Fox-Ridge aristocracy was related to every other member, Fox-Ridge society was quite sufficient unto itself.

And the newcomers on the Ridge bore their partial exclusion from the intimate circle with equanimity. As a general thing they possessed more money than the old Ridge families and had numerous friends in the city whom they entertained at their Ridge homes. They were the gayest element on the Ridge, nearly all of them merely summer residents; in the winter appearing only at the Hunt Club meets.

Nickolas Baird, who had been "put up" at the Hunt Club by a city member, and who, for reasons of his own, meant to remain where he was for some time, was decidedly gratified by his invitation to the Westmore dinner. He had formed a casual friendship with Garvin Westmore which had been furthered by his purchase of a Westmore horse. Then he had met Judith Westmore, and from that moment had been welcome at Westmore.

"It will be just a family gathering," Judith had explained to him the week before, as she stood on the top step of the entrance to Westmore, whipping her riding-skirt lightly with her gold-handled crop. "You, of course, will find it endlessly dull, Mr. Baird—still we want you."

Baird had assured her that no gathering of which she was a part would be dull; that he was beyond measure pleased.

"You are to bring your dress clothes strapped to your saddle, in true colonial fashion, and spend the night here," Judith had continued. "Be sure to bring your dancing shoes," and, with a lithe turn and a smiling nod, had vanished into Westmore.

Baird had cantered off down the two miles of impossible road that led across Westmore to the Post-Road, smiling to himself, or, rather, at himself. How old was Judith Westmore, anyway?

Certainly in the thirties. "Bo'n sho'tly after de war," the old negro who curried his horse at the Hunt Club had told him, for Baird had his own methods of making discoveries. She looked possibly—twenty-eight; slim, with the bust of a young Venus and the hips of a Diana. She certainly carried her head like a goddess. Baird had never seen a more graceful creature on horseback. And she walked as she rode, gracefully, spiritedly. Hers were the Westmore features at their best: a face not too long to be beautiful; arched brows, straight nose, a very perfectly molded chin, eyes a dark hazel and thickly lashed, a dainty head bound about by ink-black hair. Time had barely touched her. She was vivacious, yes ... but a little cold?

Baird was not certain. He thought, with slightly heightened color, of that quick turn at the door that had drawn her riding-skirt taut over the curves of hip and leg; and of her easily dilated eyes. Hers was not a warm mouth, too perfectly chiseled for that, but her hand was a live warm thing. Why in heaven's name hadn't she married?

Baird was twenty-six. He had reached the age when youth's first missteps lay in retrospect; the turning point, when analysis enters into the pursuit of the feminine. That he would endeavor to capture masterfully and in headlong fashion was legibly scrolled upon him. Whether faithfulness was any part of his composition was not so easy to determine. Certainly there was far more admiration than desire in his thoughts of Judith Westmore. What imagination he possessed had been busied with her for the last three weeks. She was wonderful! A belle that would have swayed three states—in colonial days. She had told him that the gold handle of her riding-whip had been presented to her grandmother by Henry Clay, and that the comb which sometimes topped her black coronet had frequently courtesied to General Washington. She had simply not had her grandmother's opportunities.

It amused Baird that his hard sense had been captured by the glamour of it. Backgrounded by Chicago or Wyoming the thing would have been ridiculous. But where people rode to the hounds and talked easily of governors and generals, their great-grandfathers, it was quite a natural thing.

"In true colonial fashion," Baird quoted, on the afternoon of the hunt, as he prepared to strap his Gladstone bag to the back of his saddle. "The damned thing'll bounce about like hell and I'll have a runaway if I'm not careful. Wonder how Mistress Judith's ancestors managed it? Saddle-bags, of course.... Hey, Sam?" he called to the old negro who was leading two of the returned hunters up to the stable, "haven't got any colonial saddle-bags about the place, have you?"

"Yes, suh, suttently, suh," Sam assented promptly. He came up with face beaming. Baird's joking, accompanied as it was by shining half-dollars, delighted every negro on the place.

"Let's have them, then."

"Yes, suh—dey sho' is about de place, suh—tho' I don't 'zactly knows where."

Baird laughed. "Of course.... Take in those horses and bring me a piece of rope—I don't trust these straps."

Sam came back with a hitching-strap and between them they did their best to make the bag fast.

"Where does that road between the cedars come out?" Baird asked when he had mounted. "Can't I get to Westmore if I go that way?"

Sam looked dubious. "Yes, suh—hit comes out to de County Road, an' from there am de road thro' de woods to Westmo'. Hit's the shortest way, but hit goes thro' de Penniman place."

"I thought it did—I'll go that way."

"But ole Mr. Penniman, he done built a gate by his house, suh, an' put on a padlock an' set up a sign. He don't 'low Hunt Club folks ridin' thro'."

"But he wouldn't mind my going through, would he?"

Sam looked grave. "I dunno, suh. He done had Mr. Garvin 'rested 'cos he rode thro'. He had him up to co't—yes, suh."

"Fined him, did he?" Baird asked with interest.

"Yes, *suh!* He done fin' him, an' when Mr. Garvin paid, Mr. Penniman, he refuse' to take de money. He give hit back to de co't, an' tol' 'em to give hit to the first orphan they seen, dat he don' want no Westmo' money."

"He did!"

"Yes, suh.... I reckon tho' 'twas mostly 'cos of Mr. Garvin bein' a Westmo'," Sam added cautiously.

"Well, I'm not a Westmore—I'll chance it," Baird said decidedly.

VI

BAIRD RECONNOITERS

When he had turned in between the cedars, Baird was glad he had come. They were set close and now, in their middle-age, stood with branches interlocked, forming a canopy dense enough to shut out the sun. The sougning gloom through which Baird rode was mournful on a March day, but he had some conception of what it must be like in summer, cool and sweet-scented and perpetually whispering. The branches drooped so low in places that they shut out the country, nooks into which one could crawl and, with a tree-trunk and big roots forming a couch, dream away an entire day. And, protected from the dew, sleep through the night as well.... What a trysting place for lovers, thought Baird.

The gigantic hedge ended abruptly at the foot of what had evidently once been a lawn, but overgrown now and too much shaded by locust trees. The Penniman house showed through the trees, a steep-pitched roof broken by dormer windows. Clumps of lilacs topped the bank which partially hid the road from the house, and, as he came up under their shelter, Baird eyed his surroundings keenly. But there appeared to be no one about.

The road passed within a few yards of the front porch, yet he saw no one. He could see, a short distance ahead, just beyond where the road forked, leading off to the barn, the gate and sign of which Sam had spoken.

Baird had planned this intrusion upon the Pennimans' privacy; he had no intention of going on, at least until he had searched for the person he wanted to see. He went on to the gate, then dismounted, having decided to attempt the barn first. The wide door, the entrance to the wagon-shed, stood open, and Baird looked in. Beyond was another door through which Baird glimpsed a pile of hay. He stood listening for a moment, then tiptoed across to it, for there were sounds here, a voice humming lightly.

It was the hay-loft he had come upon, a wide space half filled with hay; the remainder of the floor swept clean, a sweet-scented, airy space warmed by a broad band of sunlight. Not ten feet from him, beside a basket of eggs, sat a huge collie, forepaws planted, tail impatiently beating the floor, intent on what was passing. Baird looked on also.

It was Ann playing in the sun. She was without her cape and hood now; a slender thing in warm brown, some indeterminate garment without a belt, a sheathe-like apron, possibly. She appeared to be playing with the band of sunlight, moving in and out of it, in time to the minor, negroesque thing she was singing:

"Mr. Frog, he went a-courtin',
A-hung—a-hung.
Mr. Frog, he went a-courtin',
Sword an' pistol by his side,
A-hung—a-hung."

The excited collie barked and whined, but Ann went on, absorbed in the joy of motion, a bit of the cake-walk with its suggestion of abandon carrying her the length of the sunlight band; a waltz step backward and forward, from sunshine into shadow; a gliding turn and sweeping courtesy that might have been stolen from the minuet:

"He rode right up to Miss Mousey's den,
A-hung—a-hung.
He rode right up to Miss Mousey's den,
'I say, Missy Mouse, is you within?'
A-hung—a-hung.
'Yes, here I sits, an' here I spin,
Lift the latch an' do come in.'
A-hung—a-hung."

Her voice leaped suddenly into a joyful note:

"Suh! He took Miss Mousey on his knee,
'Say, Missy Mouse, will you marry me?'
A-hung—a-hung!"

She had swept into a pirouette that spun her like a top, stopped abruptly at the hay, and clapped her hands teasingly at the quivering collie: "A-hung, suh—*a-hung!*"

The dog was on her with a bound. The two came down on the hay and rolled over and over, the collie snarling in mock ferocity, Ann rippling with laughter, an ebullition of sheer animal spirits, a child at play, the gaiety Sue deplored.

But Ann was soon spent. She sat up then, flushed, panting and disheveled, the dog held at arm's length. She looked at the animal, for a full moment, into the creature's affectionate eyes, and her laughter died suddenly. She put her arms about the dog's neck and buried her face. "Oh, Prince!" she said, with a sob in her voice, "I reckon you an' Ben are the only ones that love me."

Baird had watched Ann dance with the delight one feels in a stolen pleasure—she was so utterly pretty and graceful, and so unconscious. When she rolled about in sheer abandonment on the hay he almost laughed out, in spite of the warmth that rose to his face. But, at the sob in her voice, he felt ashamed, like one caught eavesdropping. Baird was not overburdened with fine feelings, in

some respects he was coarse-fibered, but there was too much genuine sorrow and longing in the girl's voice. It made him uncomfortable; he had no right to be there. He drew back into the wagon-shed, uncertain just how to present himself.

Ann solved the difficulty. She came out carrying the basket of eggs and with the collie at her heels. At sight of Baird, the dog barked furiously, and Ann stopped dead; the look she gave Baird was scarcely more friendly than the dog's bark; she was so evidently startled.

"I'm afraid I'm trespassing," Baird said promptly. "I thought I might come through this way to Westmore, but the gate is locked. I'm sorry I frightened you." He made his apology with the best air possible to him, cap in hand.

Ann quieted the collie, and when she looked at Baird again a smile had dawned in her eyes. "You're a stranger—you couldn't be expected to know about the gate," she said in her soft drawl. "I'll let you through."

"Thank you," Baird said, "but I hate to give you trouble."

Ann said nothing, yet Baird observed that she was not embarrassed. She put down the basket of eggs and led the way, her head carried quite as spiritedly as Judith Westmore bore hers. Not a vestige of the playful child remained; she was collected, polite. And she was lovely. Judith could never have been as pretty—she had never had this girl's ripe lips and warm throat, or her trick of lowered lashes. Baird saw now why her eyes appeared so dark; her lashes were black and the eyelids blue-tinged, giving her eyes both brilliancy and languor. The eyes themselves were a gray-hazel, and, except when surprised or smiling, their expression was wistful, almost melancholy. A facile face, capable of swift changes, and captivating because of it. Baird knew now why he had thought her something more than merely pretty.

He made his observations as he walked on beside her. "It must be a nuisance—having people come through in this way," he remarked, in order to be saying something.

"I don't mind, but grandpa does," Ann answered. "Perhaps when my father comes he will let the gate stay open."

"Your father doesn't live here then?"

"He hasn't been here for a long time—he's coming home to-morrow." There was anticipation in her voice.

"I was thinking this morning that if I owned land about here I'd kick at having my crops ridden over as we were doing."

"It's always been done, you see. Around here the best reason for doin' things is because they've always been done." Her tone was faintly sarcastic; she glanced at him, a swiftly intelligent look.

"She's bright," was Baird's mental comment. Aloud he said, "And in my part of the world the best reason for not doing things is because they've been done before—every one's looking for a newer and better way."

"Your part of the world?" It was the first sign of personal interest she had shown.

Baird was not supersensitive, but he had felt polite antagonism in her manner. He attempted to capture interest. "I came here from Chicago. Before that I was in Wyoming for a time. I've ranched, and done a lot of other things. I spent two years in South America—got rid of fifty thousand dollars down there and nothing but a year of fever to show for it. I could tell you a few tales that would make your hair rise."

He had won her wide look. "Were you on the Amazon? Are there flowers there that catch insects and snakes that make hoops of themselves an' chase animals?"

"Yes, I've been on the Amazon—worse luck. I don't know about the hoop-snakes, but I've seen plenty of insects that are flowers and flowers that are insects—everything in nature preys on something else.... How do you come to know about the Amazon?"

"I read a story about it."

"Do you like to read?"

"I like it better than anything else," she said brightly.

They had come to the gate, and she looked at the bag strapped to his saddle, then laughingly at Baird. "Looks funny, doesn't it?" he remarked. "I'm taking my dress clothes over to Westmore—they're having a dinner-dance to-night."

Ann's smile vanished. "Oh—" she said, her face grown wistful. Then with a flash into gaiety she sprang lightly to a notch in the gate-post, swung herself up by the foothold, and took a key from the niche in which it was hidden.

"Here!" Baird exclaimed. "Why didn't you let me do that?... Let me help you!"

Ann looked at him, innate coquetry in her eyes. "If you'll stand aside, suh, I can step down."

Baird answered the look in the fashion natural to him. He took her by the waist, held her up long

enough to prove the strength of his arms, then set her down; his lips pressed her cheek and his breath warmed her neck as he did so. "Arms like mine are made for reaching—and for holding," he said.

The color swept into Ann's face, and her eyes widened into brilliancy. For an instant Baird did not know what to think. Then her lashes dropped and she held the key out to him. "You know where to find it now," she said softly.

"I'll come again—I'm staying at the Hunt Club," he answered swiftly. He took her hand as well as the key; he had flushed as deeply as she.

The tacit invitation had struck Baird as involuntary, and so did her answer, a sudden inclination and as quick a shrinking; the color fled from her face. "*No!*" she said decidedly, and pulling her hand away sped to the house.

Baird started in pursuit, the first step, before he remembered where he was. Then he stopped. "Whew!" he said, under his breath.

He went back to the gate and unlocked it, led his horse through, and returned the key to its hiding-place. Before he mounted, he gave the house a long scrutiny. "We'll see!" he said, his eyes grayed to coldness, his cheeks still hot.

He rode for half a mile before he regained his usual aspect. Then he laughed shortly: "That was funny—she regularly took hold on me."

VII

THE WESTMORES OF WESTMORE

Baird thought, when he sat down to dinner that night, that he had never looked on a better favored company or on a more interesting setting.

They were twenty-five in all, with the great mahogany table drawn crosswise of the room to allow passage between silver-laden sideboards and china-cupboards whose aged mahogany was brightened by arrays of dull blue and gold-banded Worcester and the pinky red of platters and plates of Indian Tree pattern which Judith told him had been presented, in 1735, by Lord Westmore to his colonial cousin, the first Westmore of Westmore. From where Baird sat he could look across the hall into the drawing-room, a glimpse of dark paneling, wide fireplace, and above it the two portraits, Edward Stratton Westmore, first Westmore of Westmore, and his cousin, Lord Edward Stratton Westmore, of Stratton House, Hampshire, England.

Westmore was typically a southern colonial mansion, a spacious central building with two wings and with a collection of outbuildings for the housing of servants. The ballroom and the plantation office were in one wing, the kitchens in the other. Westmore's massive brick walls had withstood time, as had the heavy oak paneling of dining-room, hall and drawing-room. There were no modern touches to disturb the Georgian atmosphere; this was 1905, yet Westmore was still the Westmore of 1735.

And with the picturesque additions of frilled wrist-bands, perukes, looped skirts and powdered coiffures, Baird thought this might well have been a clan gathering of a hundred years ago. In the hour before dinner, Baird had met them all, Westmores, Copeleys, Dickensons and Morrisons. The Dickensons were from the city, the others were all of the county—had always been of the county, and all were interrelated.

Conscious of his own too muscular neck and shoulders and massive jaw, Baird had noticed that there was not a paunched or bull-necked man in this family. He was not fat, thank heaven! and did not intend to be, but he would never be able to attain the nice muscles and graceful carriage that, in this family, seemed to be inherent. Even old Colonel Ridley Dickenson had a perfect boot-leg. Most of the younger men were too long-backed for great strength, good horsemen but poor wrestlers, Baird judged, and the two boys of twenty who represented the third generation were inclined to be weedy and hatchet-faced; but, on the whole, they were a clean-limbed and exceedingly well-featured collection.

The women struck Baird as delicately pretty rather than beautiful or handsome. Though in several delicacy was pronounced enough to suggest ill-health, the Westmore features predominated, fine brows, dark hair, clear skin, slimness and roundness combined. The only golden-haired girl of the company was Elizabeth Dickenson, and it was easy to see how she came by her fairness; her mother was not of the clan, a somewhat hard-faced, blonde New Yorker, who had brought money to her husband, and modern social proclivities as well. Elizabeth Dickenson was more like the Chicago girls Baird had met, more striking and self-assertive than her county kin, and far more fashionably gowned.

But Judith Westmore was easily the beauty of the entire collection. There was something joyous about her mien this evening; perhaps because for the first time in many years Westmore was like the Westmore of old. Baird had gathered from the conversation he had over-heard between Mrs. Dickenson and Mrs. Copeley that this was the inauguration of a new era at Westmore.

"Edward's money—" Mrs. Dickenson had said significantly. "Judith will make the best of it."

"And who deserves it more than Judith!" Mrs. Copeley returned warmly. "When I think of all Judith has gone through! Where would Westmore be but for Judith? Sold to some carpetbagger, years ago! It nearly went, I can tell you, Cousin Mary."

"If Garvin would follow Edward's example now, and marry a girl with money," Mrs. Dickenson had remarked.

Mrs. Copeley had said nothing.

"But, then, Garvin Westmore is not Edward—any more than Sarah Westmore is Judith," Mrs. Dickenson had concluded dryly. From the cloud that settled on Mrs. Copeley's face, Baird judged that the reference was not a happy one. Who Sarah Westmore was he did not know; she was not of the assembled party.

Mrs. Dickenson was evidently giving thought to Westmore's new prosperity, for it was she who asked Edward, across the table, "Ed, while you are getting things, why don't you get an automobile? You'd look particularly well in an automobile." She had a carrying voice; it reached Baird at his end of the table.

Edward sat at the head of the table, Judith at the foot; Baird was at Judith's left, with Elizabeth Dickenson as his dinner partner. Garvin was on the other side of the table, and both he and Elizabeth Dickenson ceased to talk and waited for Edward's answer.

Baird thought that he had never seen a more smileless and at the same time a more attentive host than Edward Westmore. The man's white face was carven, his eyes melancholy, yet he talked easily and gracefully. In spite of his pallor, he was the most distinguished-looking man in this gathering of well-favored men, perhaps because he lacked their local flavor. He looked what he was, a much-traveled man with a fund of experience.

He did not smile at Mrs. Dickenson, though he answered pleasantly, "Not for me, Cousin Mary—but Garvin may have a machine if he wants it."

Garvin flushed but said nothing. It was little Priscilla Copeley who exclaimed, "Do you mean it, Cousin Ed?"

"Take him up on it, Garvin! Take him up quick!" Colonel Dickenson cut in mischievously. "By George, suh, you'd be the most popular spark in the county—with the ladies! Every man whose horse you scared could cuss you all the way to limbo. Hot water you'd be in! and that's what you like.... Go ahead, suh!" He might have been hallooing on the hounds. The colonel was a keen sportsman, and a bon-vivant, a member of two hunt clubs and several city clubs—his wife's money had given him both the leisure and the opportunity.

Garvin was not allowed an immediate hearing. "Oh, Garve! I can see you making a Nebuchadnezzar of yourself under that machine!" Elizabeth Dickenson exclaimed, and one of the Copeley boys added: "I'd rather have it than the sorrel, Garve. George Pettee told me there were two hundred automobiles now in the city—every fellow wants one. Yours would be the first out here—unless father'll get us one. Will you, suh?"

Mr. Copeley was a tall white-haired man, second cousin to the Westmores, and markedly a Westmore. He had looked his surprise at Edward's offer, then had looked thoughtful. "No, suh," he said quietly. "I don't like them. If the county's goin' to be overrun with them, I'll move.... Garvin, you'll have to get to work on that two miles of road from here to the Post-Road befo' you can run a machine over it—that would be the most sensible thing you've done in years. I reckon Edward would like you to get to work at something—it doesn't matter much what.... You wouldn't be furnishing a chauffeur, would you, Ed?"

"No," Edward said.

Baird had watched his opportunity. It was only in his sleep that Nickolas Baird lost sight of business, and not always then. "I can get you a good machine, straight from the factory, and at trade price, Garvin."

Garvin had given his, cousin Copeley a flaming glance, but he answered his brother courteously. "Thank you, Ed. I'll take the machine—and I'll put the road in shape."

"Very well—we'll thank Mr. Baird to-morrow for his kind offer."

"Will you take me riding, Garve?" Priscilla Copeley asked softly, under cover of the remarks that followed.

Baird had noticed her, the pretty, dark-eyed girl who sat beside Garvin. She nestled against his elbow for her half-whisper, and Baird saw the look her mother gave her and the sharp gesture that made her daughter straighten and flush. Baird did not know why he felt sorry for Garvin at that moment; possibly his sensing of the general disapproval. He did not like the man, but that was mainly because of his wild act that morning. But it was a little hard on a fellow, having every one down on him. And it was plain that Garvin mourned his horse. The hunt and Garvin's mishap had been thoroughly discussed in the drawing-room, and Garvin had been restless under it. All they knew was that Garvin had had to shoot his horse. There had been a touch of desperation in Garvin's aside to Baird: "God! I wish they'd let up on the subject—I've had about enough for one

day!"

And now Mr. Copeley was giving him another thrust. "You're in for it now, Garvin—are you going at the road pick and shovel?"

Judith spoke for the first time since the subject had been introduced. "Bear Brokaw would be the best man to help you, Garvin," she suggested brightly.

She had been watching the serving of dinner, a word now and then to the three negroes who bore around the best viands Baird had ever tasted. Soup had been followed by roast oysters, terrapin and turkey, and accompanying vegetables and hot breads. The evening had turned very mild, as warm as a May night, and the mint-juleps taken in the drawing-room had been soothing. Edward was evidently a connoisseur, the wines were of the best and the array of glasses were not allowed to languish; the men one and all appeared to be good drinkers.

But Judith had evidently not been too absorbed to follow the conversation and to note Garvin's curled lip and angry eyes, for her remark instantly created a diversion. Mrs. Morrison, Judith's aunt, a stately woman with proudly-carried head, spoke from Edward's end of the table. "I'm surprised at you, Judith—after the way that white-trash robbed me! Ben's nothing but a common thief!"

The young people smiled covertly, but Edward asked with genuine concern: "Bear Brokaw rob you, Aunt Carlotta! Why, I remember Bear—I used to go hunting with him. I thought there wasn't an honest man living than Bear Brokaw."

"He is a thief, Edward," Mrs. Morrison reiterated decidedly.

Edward looked his surprise.

"Ben Brokaw bought a tree of Aunt Carlotta Morrison," Judith said demurely. The look she flashed on Baird was a-gleam with mirth.

Edward glanced casually about the table and caught the covert smiles. "Well?" he questioned more equably.

Baird had discovered that the interests of the clan were entirely local and centered in themselves; he had not heard a single remark that ventured beyond their native state. They evidently criticized one another freely, but Baird judged that any stranger who essayed the same freedom would be set upon by the entire connection, with the ferocity of a pack of hounds.

"It was a thoroughly thievish transaction, Edward," Mrs. Morrison maintained warmly. "You know I never approved of the man—a creature that climbs trees like a monkey and sleeps out in the woods like a savage. Your uncle would have known better, but I consented to sell him that tree—you know, one of the big chestnuts down by the cabins. It was dead, and I wanted it down, and I didn't tell Ben I thought he was crazy when he wanted me to sign a slip of paper, just sayin' that I'd sold the tree to him, half shares on the wood. I thought the lumberin' old thing had got some funny notion. But he knew what he was about.... Edward, it was a honey-tree! He'd been watching and had seen the bees goin' in and out. He got forty buckets of honey out of that tree!... If that's not stealing, I don't know what is, and I think the family ought to boycott him."

Edward kept his countenance in spite of the titter about him. "Did he cord his wood according to agreement?" he asked.

"Yes, he did," Mrs. Morrison admitted.

"He was doing up-to-date business—that's all, Aunt Carlotta," Judith remarked.

"Something more than that," Edward said. "I remember Uncle Morrison broke up some of his traps and warned him off the property. You urged him to it, if I remember, Aunt Carlotta."

"But think of such revengefulness—after all these years! And your uncle dead, too!"

"There's a good deal of such undying hatred about," Edward answered evenly. "It's a pity." He looked down at his plate.

But the younger people were still smiling. "Don't worry, Aunt Carlotta, Bear isn't going to work for any of us," one of the Copeley boys said. "I saw him this evenin' on my way here—he's at the Pennimans'.... By the way—he said Coats Penniman was coming home."

It was Judith's perceptible start and Edward's quick lift of the head that arrested Baird's attention. But neither of them spoke; it was Garvin who asked swiftly, "When is he coming?"

"To-morrow, Bear said."

Garvin made no comment, but Mr. Copeley exclaimed, "Why didn't you tell your bit of news sooner, my boy?... It means Coats will take hold of the place. I'm afraid it does, Ed."

His remark had some significance that was evidently not clear to other members of the family, for Mrs. Morrison asked, "Why, what difference does it make to you who runs the Penniman place, Edward?"

Edward paid no attention to her question; he was motioning to one of the servants to bring him more wine, and when his glass was filled he emptied it at a draft. It did not flush him, however; if

anything, he looked paler. It struck Baird that the man must be ill, there must be some reason for such persistent pallor.

The dinner was nearing an end, and Baird himself was warmed through and through. He had been well treated. Priscilla Copeley had played prettily with him across the table, and not been reproved by her mother; she had promised to ride with him the next day. And Elizabeth Dickenson had said that his name would be on the list for the next Assembly Ball. Baird was not particularly fond of dancing, and a formal ball was a nuisance, but he welcomed her invitation to the next Fair Field Hunt Club meet. Colonel Dickenson was president of the club, and Baird knew that he would be well presented to a group of sportsmen who would be useful to him.

But it was Judith who stirred him. He was alive to his finger tips with admiration, and fully conscious that he had given himself up to a new experience; delighting in it. In the last few days he had merely touched the fringe of the new thing. He had seen very little of society, nothing at all of people such as these, and Judith was the embodiment of caste. Her ancestry spoke in every atom of her. She was a thoroughbred. She was superb; so truly a part of that old Georgian house with its indelible history.

And Baird loved to see good generalship. Judith had handled that long tableful of people as a gambler would a pack of cards. She had attended to every one's needs, been observant of every face, and at the same time had devoted herself to him. She had furthered the two girls' play with him, and then had drawn him back to her again. She was wonderful and very beautiful. He was giving her the first adoration he had ever experienced.

This was the first time Baird had seen Judith with shoulders bared, the tantalizingly perfect shoulders and bust of a mature woman, but that realization did not stir him half so much as his capture of the brilliant glance with which she swept the table. It softened into intimacy when he caught it; took him into her confidence. When, on their way to the ballroom, the negro fiddlers paused under the dining-room window and played the first bars of a waltz, and the young people sprang up to follow, leaving their elders to coffee and wine, Baird was as eager as any one of them. Judith had promised him the first dance, she would be in his arms for the first time, but Baird was thinking less of that than he was of what she was going to say to him, a favor she had said she meant to ask.

VIII

THE COLONEL IS SUSPICIOUS

Like most big-framed men who have a sense of rhythm, Baird danced well, though a little lazily. He found Judith an exhilarating partner. A touch of languor would have made her an exquisite dancer, but Baird discovered that her apparently soft curves covered muscles of tempered steel; there was subdued energy and swift grace in every movement of hers; no wonder she was a perfect horsewoman.

During their first dance Baird told Judith, in his downright fashion, that she was the most delightful hostess he had ever known and the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; a "wonder-woman" he called her, which, for Nickolas Baird, was a poetic flight. When they danced again, he begged her to set him his task: "What is it you are going to ask of me, Wonder-woman?... I've never had the least inclination to become a knight until I met you. I'm aching to swear allegiance—what is it I'm to do for you?"

Baird was accustomed to making love somewhat roughly and altogether carelessly, he merely yielded a little to habit when he held Judith closely and spoke in her ear. Nevertheless, it was plain to even an onlooker that the spell of profound respect was upon him. It made his rough strength appealing, the sort of appeal a young man of Baird's virile type usually makes to a woman older than himself. What he was asking was how best to please her; his forgetfulness implied restrained impetuosity, not presumption. And evidently he pleased Judith; her occasional upward glance was not disapproving.

So Colonel Dickenson thought as he watched them dance. He had forsaken the dining-room for the moment, and, avoiding the drawing-room where the elder women were gathered, had come by the veranda to the ballroom. He had a jovial remark for each couple as they circled by him, and for Judith and Baird also:

"I couldn't trip it more lightly myself—damme if I could!"

But Judith had caught his eye. "I see Cousin Ridley over there—I'm afraid I'm wanted," she said, when the dance was over. "That's the penalty I pay for being 'a delightful hostess.'" If her lips had been fuller they would have pouted.

"Can't you be allowed a little respite?" Baird exclaimed. "I want another dance—and another after that!"

Judith smiled and shook her head.

"But you haven't told me what I'm to do for you, yet, Wonder-woman?"

"It must wait.... There will be some square dances by and by, and an even number of couples without us."

"And we can go to the porch—somewhere where we can talk—where it is cool?"

Judith made a little affirmative gesture.

"I'll do my duty till then," Baird said brusquely. "I hate dancing—except with you."

She allowed him to capture her intimate glance, but the instant she had turned away her face settled into gravity, an expression both hard and apprehensive. It made her look more nearly her age.

"What is it, Ridley?" she asked sharply. "Anything wrong—up-stairs?"

"No, no!" the colonel said. "I just wanted a word with you befo' I've lost my feet—Edward's goin' to have us all under the table befo' mo'nin'." The colonel usually abbreviated his syllables when warmed.

Judith drew a quick breath. "Oh—well, come out to the veranda—"

The entrance to Westmore was the usual Georgian portico; the veranda crossed the back of the house, a gallery, really, overlooking the terraces and connecting the two wings of the house, affording an entrance to the ballroom at one end, to the kitchens at the other, and a rear entrance to the main hall. There were high-backed benches here, and Judith led the way to one of them. She sighed inaudibly as she sat down.

The colonel began promptly: "I wasn't meaning to spoil your dance, Judith, but Mary's been telling me to ask that young friend of Garvin's to our Fair Field meet. Of co's' you can be relied on to choose your friends sensibly, but Garvin's not so certain. Who is this Nickolas Baird? If I introduce him, I've got to stand fo' him. I want to know a little more about him than Mary could tell me. I'll be damned if I'll present him—knowin' no more about him than I do! What's his family?"

"I doubt if he has any," Judith answered equably. "In fact, I know he hasn't—he told me that both his father and his mother were dead."

"You know what I mean, Judith!" the colonel objected warmly.

"Of course the first question would be, 'What's his family?' and the next, 'Has he money?'" There was amusement in Judith's voice. Then she added more seriously, "I really know very little about him, Ridley—except that he seems to be a nice, clever sort of boy. Edward approves of him, so I asked him here. Edwin Carter can tell you more about him than I can. He put him up at the Hunt Club and introduced him to Edward and Garvin. Edwin Carter spoke highly of him."

The chill of the veranda had cooled the colonel somewhat. "Edwin Carter, eh!" he said more quietly. "Well, he generally knows what he is about. He has more social sense than most of his money-makin' crowd—but then he would have—he's a Carter. He certainly has a deal more business sense than any Westmore born, and if he's back of this young fellow, there's some business reason fo' it. Has he money, Judith?"

"Mr. Baird? I think so. He seems to make money easily, at any rate. He speaks of losing fifty thousand dollars with far more lightness than you would of dining, or of being deprived of the meal. His brain appears to be stored with schemes, and all sorts of useful knowledge as well. He is entertaining, for he has been everywhere and knows all kinds of people. Get him to tell you about South America some time, Ridley, and you'll be repaid for the trouble."

"Well, I hope he's not scheming to relieve Edward of some of his money," was the colonel's frank comment.

"Now, Ridley!"

"Oh, you're a clever woman, Judith, that's sure, but you don't know anything about promoters. I know too much about 'em. I'll wager my best horse this young man's a promoter—in with the Carter gang and out here at the Hunt Club fo' a purpose. What does he mean—givin' away automobiles. He spoke up like a flash at dinner; there's something in it fo' him, I'll wager." The colonel expressed himself with all the astuteness of the man who had never in his life handled a dollar of his own making, and whose business ventures had been confined to a lordly interest in his wife's safety-deposit box.

Judith laughed. "I hope there is something in it for him, I'm sure.... I wish he would teach Garvin his secret," she added with a sigh.

"He'll probably lead Garvin into mischief," the colonel returned severely. "There are too many of this young man's kind bein' received into our first families. I'm continually at odds with Mary over the young men she recommends to Elizabeth. I don't feel inclined to countenance this young man, Judith."

"Would you have Elizabeth marry a cousin?" Judith asked coldly. "There has been a little too much of that in our family, don't you think?"

The colonel said nothing.

Judith continued more brightly: "I'll tell you, Ridley, exactly what I think of Mr. Baird: I think he is a very clever young man, with no family background and not much money, but with influential men behind him. They know he is a financial genius. If you're wagering a horse, I'll wager Black Betty that in ten years Mr. Nickolas Baird will be worth a million.... And your discountenancing him will not make a particle of difference. Christine Carter told Elizabeth that he was going to be asked to the next Assembly Ball, and you know that that places him. If he wants to go to the Fair Field meet, he will go—he is the sort of man who'll always get what he wants. It's just as well for people like ourselves to realize that Mr. Baird's type is becoming plentiful—right here in our stronghold—and adapt ourselves to the inevitable. If we are sensible, we'll draw what advantage we can from it.... I'll tell you what I should do, if I were you, Ridley: I'd ask Mr. Baird to dinner at your club and study him a little—you are an excellent judge of character"—Judith's voice was soothing at this point—"and if you don't like him, drop him.... As for me, I have no intention of dropping him—principally because Edward likes him." She concluded firmly enough.

"It's not so much Edward who likes him, is it?" the colonel blurted out. "The young man's pretty well smitten with you, if I'm any judge, and if I should see Elizabeth at your tricks I'd say that she was something more than flirting."

Judith was plentifully endowed with Westmore temper; the colonel was wont to say that there had never been a more imperious Westmore than his Cousin Judith; he grew uncomfortably warm during the perceptible pause that followed his hasty speech.

Then Judith's laugh rang clearly. "My dear Ridley! You are amusing!... Yes, that clever boy is scheming to take Edward's money, and I am helping him to it! Either that, or he is in love with me and I am forgetting that I am thirty-four and he twenty-six—a little romance snatched at in my old age!" She rippled into more subdued mirth as she rose. "You go on in and talk to Edward—he'll give you the best of reasons for *our* countenancing Mr. Baird." She changed then suddenly to sternness. "I'd advise you, though, not to make any such remarks to him as you've just made to me, Cousin Ridley. Edward is head of our family, remember, and you're more Westmore than Dickenson—at least I've always thought so. I'm certainly Westmore enough to set the family interest before everything else—I've always done so in the past, and am likely to do so in the future."

The colonel had been entertaining a jumble of thoughts, among others, that women of thirty-four were sometimes emotionally erratic, particularly if they had had so barren an emotional existence as Judith; and also, that young fellows of twenty-six were apt to be dangerously impressionable. But at Judith's reproof he came up standing:

"I beg your pardon, Cousin Judith," he said, in his old-fashioned, florid manner. "Edward's hospitality has been a little too much fo' me—my tongue has run a little too loose. That happens to me sometimes, as you know. I beg yo' pardon. What I really think is that you are a woman in a million, Judith—a very splendid woman, my dear. Westmo' owes everything to you—we all know that, and I'm on my knees to you—I always have been."

Judith Westmore was not demonstrative, so her answer to his apology surprised and vastly pleased the colonel. She framed his tanned face with her hands and kissed his cheek. "You are a dear," she said brightly. "Now go in to Edward and be nice to him. He's worried over Garvin—and a number of things.... I'm going in now to talk to Cousin Mary, and after that I'll have to go up-stairs. If any one wants to see me, just say I'm busy."

The colonel did as he was bidden; Judith was usually obeyed. She had her own methods with each member of the clan, and it was a rare thing for one of them to venture upon criticism of Judith. The colonel had been, as he said, a little overcome by Edward's hospitality.

IX

A FEMININE PROCEDURE

But Judith did not go up-stairs.

After nearly an hour spent in the drawing-room, she left her elder cousins engrossed in whist, saying that she was going up until time for supper. She went to the foot of the stairs, then half-way up, to where the stairs made a turn, and stood for a time, listening. Everything was quiet above. In the dining-room the men were still talking, and the drawing-room was silent except for an occasional remark. Smothered by the intervening walls, the music and the stir in the ballroom seemed distant.

Judith listened to the conclusion of a waltz, then to the chatter on the veranda—until it was drawn back again into the ballroom by the less rhythmic measure of a square dance. Then she crept down, went quickly through the hall and out to the veranda.

Baird was there, waiting for her. He sprang up from a bench. "I hoped you'd come!" he said. "I didn't like to go in and ask for you."

They stood for a moment. "Have you been enjoying yourself?" Judith asked.

"No, you didn't come back."

Judith laughed softly. "You are not polite to my party, suh."

"Never mind." He touched her bare arm. "Where can I get something to put around you?"

"My cape is in the hall—behind the stairs—and my overshoes.... It is so warm—we might go down to the walk."

"Down to the terraces," Baird said with the quickness of the man alert to every advantage.

Possibly Judith had the terraces in mind, but she demurred. "Oh, no—the ground is too damp."

Baird's answer was to dive into the hall. When he came out he had Judith's cape on his arm and a pair of overshoes in each hand. He held up the larger pair. "I've jumped some one's claim!... Think any one will want these before we get back?"

"They'll certainly not guess where to look for them.... You know how to surmount a difficulty, don't you?" She had planned for this adventure, and her cheeks were warm.

"By helping myself to some one else's belongings—if there is no other way.... Sit down and let me make sure you will be dry."

Baird had also planned for an hour on the terraces, and was elated. He knelt and put on Judith's overshoes with much care, a caressing clasp for each foot before he planted it on the floor. "They are so small," he said. "There are not many women whose feet are kissable." Then dashed by his temerity, he added quickly, "You must descend on me if I talk—nonsense. I am apt to be forward—I need training badly. I'm in your hands, you know."

Judith thought, as she looked down at his massive jaw with its suggestion of animal force, that undoubtedly he spoke from much predatory experience; his air of deference sat oddly on him; he was most attractive when presumptuous. Her reflections caused her a pang. Retrospective jealousy over affairs that were none of her concern? She shrugged mentally. She was foolish! For the first time in her life she was deliberately tampering with forces which she knew were dangerous.

She thought it best to say gravely, "You are a little—assured, Mr. Baird."

"I'm afraid I am," he assented ruefully; then added with native shrewdness and candor combined, "I suppose because I've usually found it paid."

"I suppose it does—with some people," Judith returned with instant hauteur. She was glad he could not see her flush.

Baird got to his feet. "May I help you with your cape?" he asked so humbly that the prick of his previous remark ceased to smart. Why take offense at his candor; his respect for her was apparent enough.

She regained her usual manner as Baird helped her down the steps and, on reaching the walk, dropped her arm, and vented his discomfort by criticizing the moon. "The stars are doing their best—why doesn't the silly thing choose the end of the month to be full in?" he complained. "I'm afraid you will stumble."

Judith did stumble a few moments afterward, and, as a matter of course, Baird took possession of her arm. Judith judged that he had been sufficiently rebuked and also that she had proved that she needed guidance and yet was not eager to accept it, a truly feminine procedure.

And Baird was evidently bent upon gaining the terraces without offending her by too much urgency. They had come to the verge of the first terrace, and he tested the ground. "It's not muddy," he announced. "The sod is too heavy.... Shan't we go down?"

"I ought not to go so far away—some one will be wanting me," Judith objected.

"That is one reason you should go," Baird said decidedly. "You've been on duty all evening. Come, shunt it all for a few minutes." Baird had regained his assurance; it never deserted him for long.

"I should like to," Judith confessed, and her sigh was genuine enough.

"Of course you would. Isn't there a bench down there—somewhere?"

"On the edge of the last terrace—under those two cedars."

"Let's go to it—please, Wonder-woman! They'll all be out after that dance and I won't have a moment with you. Come!"

He pleaded a little masterfully, Judith thought, but as long as he did not suspect that it was his forcefulness that attracted her, all was well. "I suppose I can hear down there, if any one called," she said doubtfully.

"Certainly you can."

They went down to where the two cedars loomed, a dark mass, and groped their way to the bench. It was dark beneath the trees and quite dry. Below them was a hollow and beyond it a steep slope crowned by a group of trees, their outlines distinct against the sky. In every direction

but this the country dropped away from the house, affording views for miles. Except for the music in the house behind them and the occasional snort or stamp of a horse in the stables, it was very still.

"This is splendid," Baird said, "but are you warm enough? You have nothing on your head—there's a hood to your cape ... may I?"

He drew it up over her hair, restraining his impulse to touch her cheek as he did so. The cape reminded him of Ann Penniman and his afternoon's adventure, and he smiled a little to himself. That had been so natural a performance, and this enforced deference was so entirely a new experience. He was enjoying it; he liked the way in which Judith kept the distance between them. She sat well against her corner of the bench. He could see her face now, black and white and rounded into girlishness by the encircling hood, again reminding him of Ann.

"I like those hooded capes," he remarked. "I don't know that I ever saw one till I came here."

"Haven't you? Almost every woman here has one—they are so convenient. Do you know what sun-bonnets are? If you're here in the summer you'll become acquainted with them, too. But I suppose you will be off befo' then." She spoke more lazily than usual, slurred her words more, another reminder of Ann.

"I shan't be able to get away when I go—if you continue to be kind to me."

Judith laughed. "Do you happen to be Irish?"

"Of course I'm Irish! Haven't you noticed my long upper lip? My father was a pretty successful Chicago ward politician and I have the gift of gab and manipulation too. I can talk money out of a man—any hour of the day. Now that I have had enough of adventure, I mean to settle down to handling people and making money. I was born to it.... But that sort of thing is contrary to all your traditions, isn't it?" he added.

Judith thought that he judged himself rightly; his voice alone would accomplish for him; it had both a persuasive and a compelling quality. "It is, but I admire it," she returned decidedly. He had offered her the opportunity she wanted.

"You do?" Baird said, surprised. Then his shrewdness added, "No, you only think you do. I don't believe there is a man in your family who would thrill over making money. I mean, thrill at the fight one must make in order to gain power over men and circumstances, for that is really the thing that buoys the money-maker, sheer joy in the tussle. There is the miser, of course, but he's rarely a genius. Any one can be a miser, if so inclined."

"You are right—the men of my family have very little business ability," Judith answered. "Garvin is the only one who has. He would be a success, if given the opportunity. He is tremendously interested in anything he undertakes and is capable of concentration—and he wants to make money."

It was not Baird's reading of Garvin Westmore, but he answered promptly: "He seems to be an energetic, wide-awake sort." Baird's alertness warned him that there was purpose in Judith's remarks.

Judith continued. "Yes, and I should like Garvin to have his chance.... You see, ever since he was a child he has been tied down to this place. They will tell you about here that I have run the farm—for it is that now—the days of tobacco growing were over long ago—but it is Garvin, really, who has done all the buying and selling. He has made quite an income from his horses, simply because he has been interested in it. He would be just as interested in manufacturing automobiles, for instance—if he could get a position in some promising company."

Baird understood now. He had thought swiftly while Judith talked. So that was the reason he had been welcome at Westmore! That was the favor Judith meant to ask—he was to find a place for Garvin.

It did not trouble Baird in the least that he was expected to make a return for what he received—his experience had taught him that life was run largely on that basis—but he was stung by the thought that Judith had smiled on him for a purpose. He had mentioned his plans to no one; it spoke well for her keenness that she had divined the industry he had selected for his own advancement. But if she expected to gain more from a bargain than he did, she was mistaken.

It was perhaps as well that Judith did not see his expression. His voice did not lose its pleasing quality, however. "Garvin has some capital, I suppose?"

"Very little, I am afraid," Judith said regretfully.

Baird did not say, "But his brother has." He looked down at her, studying her clear-cut features closely. Evidently he had been right when he had decided that she was cold; she had simply unbent for a purpose. Aloud he said, "The manufacture of automobiles is going to be a tremendous industry. I have some automobile connections—I'll talk to Garvin a little."

It was not his voice that acquainted Judith with the chill he felt; she simply sensed it. She looked up at him. "That was the favor I was going to ask of you," she said softly. "Just to talk to Garvin a little and interest him in some plan that will get him away from all this." She indicated their surroundings by a gesture. "The family traditions have very little hold on Garvin—they make him

impatient and dissatisfied. You see, I am older than my brother and I have had a great deal of responsibility. I feel more like a mother than a sister to him. His dissatisfaction worries me terribly. It would be doing me a very great favor if you would interest yourself a little in Garvin.... We Westmores rarely ask favors, Mr. Baird, and only of those whom we really like. I have so much confidence in you." Judith's voice was sweet and pleading at the end; her hand stole out from her cape and touched his arm.

She had lifted him quickly out of coldness into something warmer than admiration. His doubts had melted like a fog under sunshine. He took her hand and kissed it. "There are few things I would not do for you, Wonder-woman.... Thank you, dear."

He would have kept her hand, but she drew it away, and Baird was almost instantly glad that she did. He was forgetting himself. The thing he liked best in her was her aloofness. "I've often wanted to thank you for the way you have taken me in and made me feel at home," he declared. "I've never had much of that sort of kindness shown me—I appreciate it."

"I want you to feel at home at Westmore," she answered. "You must come often—and always be nice to me." She had regained her usual graceful vivacity. "Some day we will ride all over the place and you shall become really acquainted with it.... Do you see that group of trees beyond there, against the sky? That is our family burying-ground—generations of Westmores. There are several quaint tombstones up there."

"You keep even your dead to yourselves, don't you? In a way, I like the clannishness of it. You keep everything to yourselves, birth and marriage and death.... I think there's too much fuss and ceremony over all three. The first is generally a misfortune, the second is apt to be no cause for rejoicing, and the end of it all no real reason for mourning."

It was the first time Judith had heard this note from him. "Mr. Baird! How unlike you!... It might be Garvin talking."

Baird did not want to talk about Garvin, so he made no reply. There was silence for a time. For some unaccountable reason Baird was touched by depression. This family with their close interests reminded him that no one would care particularly how he lived or when he died.

He was aroused by Judith's sudden movement. She was sitting taut, her hood flung back. "What is it?" he asked.

Her hand caught his arm, a grip of steel. "Hush!" she said sharply. "Listen!... There are voices at the barn—and don't you hear galloping—on the road? Don't you hear it?"

Baird could hear it distinctly, furious galloping, now a thud on soft ground, then the click of hoofs against stones, and several men's voices at the barn.

"Yes, I hear it—what has happened?"

But Judith was off and away, running up the terraces, and her exclamation of distress reached him indistinctly, "Oh, *why* didn't I stay at the house!"

X

THE INFINITELY PAINFUL THING

Judith was not running to the house; she cut across the terraces to the stables, and Baird followed her with all the speed possible to him. And yet he did not catch up with her until after she had reached the group of men and horses. When he came up they had just parted, four horsemen off at a gallop down the road in the direction of the Post-Road, two men and Judith left standing beneath the stable lantern.

Baird recognized Edward and the colonel as he came up, and he was near enough to hear Edward's more distinct answer to Judith's indistinct question: "Yes—Garvin—to the Mine Banks.... My *God!*"

"What has happened?" Baird asked breathlessly.

All three turned on him, and Baird saw Judith's white hand grip Edward's arm. He was answered by a curious silence, a portentous silence that conveyed a sense of tragedy. It was Judith who spoke finally:

"They are after Garvin's horse, Mr. Baird," she said evenly and clearly.

Garvin's horse? Baird looked from one to the other, three white faces carved into sudden and violent self-control. There was something in the way in which they faced him that affected Baird queerly. They stood together as if they hid something infinitely painful from him that the light of the lantern failed to reveal; something that hurt and shamed them, and yet about which they rallied determinedly—as Judith had lied, clearly and resolutely; as if they stood guard over a painful secret, and appealed to him to respect it.

Baird heard himself say in a voice that was robbed of everything but assumed relief: "That was

what we heard then—the horse making off. Can I help?"

"I think not, Mr. Baird—thank you—Copeley and the others—have gone," Edward answered, his pauses marking the steadiness of each word.

Judith's clear voice followed her brother's effort instantly. "We may as well go in, I think, Edward. There is nothing we can do." She still had her hand on his arm, and she turned with him, as if guiding him, and kept by his side, leaving Baird to follow with the colonel.

The colonel spoke for the first time. "That's true. There's no good of our standin' about—not a bit.... It's a pleasant enough evenin' to be out in, though, Mr. Baird—like May, suh. You'll not know Westmo' by the middle of next week—the trees and the lilacs setting out green. It takes only a few days fo' spring to come here, on the Ridge, and this is an early year—a very early year, suh."

If Baird had not been sobered by a sense of tragedy, he might have been amused by the colonel's attempt to follow Judith's lead. But the old gentleman's determinedly hearty voice failed him sadly, and Baird hoped that he had played the part he had instinctively chosen better than the colonel was playing his. And at the same time Baird's quick brain was trying to solve Edward's agonized, "My *God!*" What had Garvin done? Baird saw the man as he had looked that morning, with pistol raised.

He was answering the colonel. "I have been looking forward to spring here. I suppose you don't hunt after the crops are up."

"No, suh—we do have a little consideration fo' others, though we are not given credit for it. Now at Fair Field—"

The colonel had stopped abruptly. They had come to the veranda and from its lowest step a huddled heap had got to its feet, a big negress whose black hands were torturing her white apron. "Miss Judith—?" she said whimperingly.

Judith stopped dead. "What are you doing here?" Her voice was as sharp as the lash of a whip.

"Miss Judith—I didn't go fo' to do it—" the woman begged humbly.

Judith cut her off. "Go up-stairs and stay there!... Go!"

The woman slunk by them and around the corner of the house like a whipped dog, and Judith went on, her head high, her hand still on Edward's arm. As they went up the steps and the light from the hall shone on her, Baird saw her face distinctly, immobile as a death-mask, but with restless eyes glancing at the ballroom, which was lighted but silent, then searching the hall. The front door stood wide, and on the portico the family were gathered, all except Mrs. Dickenson and her daughter, who were in the drawing-room.

If Baird had needed confirmation of his fears, he had it in Mrs. Dickenson's face. She was clinging to her daughter, her face chalk-white and her eyes terror-stricken. The truth might escape from her at any moment; she looked on the verge of hysteria.

But Judith had noticed more quickly than Baird, and she spoke to the colonel in the same clear way in which she had spoken from the beginning. "Take her up-stairs, Ridley. She's frightened at all this galloping about, and no wonder." Then dropping Edward's arm she went straight on to the front door, her voice raised somewhat more, like an officer giving his orders, and at the same time conveying a warning:

"Come on in, all of you, and get ready for supper. I dare say Mr. Baird is hungry—I am—and we can't get Garvin's horse back by staring after it.... Aunt Carlotta Morrison, come help me get every one together. Come!"

It was all for him, Baird knew it—all this bravery. He was the stranger among them; the one person from whom the painful thing, whatever it was, must be kept. They could not gather together in grief or sympathy or council—he was there. And it devolved upon him to play his part; to see nothing; understand nothing; and escape as soon as he could.

Baird would have given much to be able to get his horse and disappear. But that was not possible. He was experiencing the painful embarrassment of a guest whose absence was earnestly, even tragically desired, but whose departure would cause more pain than his presence—so long as he could successfully maintain an air of unconsciousness.

He must stay, but it occurred to Baird that he could give them a few moments in which to remove their masks, in which to consult together. "I'll go wash up," he said to Edward.

Edward stood with hand on the stair-rail, erect but deadly pale. He answered steadily and courteously, "Very well, Baird—it's what I must do in a moment. If you need anything, ring. I suppose some of the servants are about."

"Thanks," Baird said, and escaped.

He washed his hands and smoothed his hair mechanically. He was generally cool when excited, but he muttered to himself, "What in hell can it be? It's serious, whatever it is." His brain had already traversed several possibilities. Had Garvin suddenly gone mad? Or committed murder?... Or had his own brain gone back on him, registered an entirely erroneous set of impressions?... Of

course it hadn't. Those people were both terrified and ashamed.

But he must go on with it. He had answered to the spur of Judith's voice. He was a poor sort if he couldn't play his part also.... Baird judged that he had given them time enough in which to consult, and not too much time in which to suspect him. He must go down.

Baird never forgot that supper. They were gathered in the dining-room when he came down, composed, courteous, charming. It was a depleted company, five of the men were absent, and Mrs. Dickenson and her daughter, but the colonel was there, and Edward, and again Baird sat by Judith. The younger people were silent; there was a hushed strained air about them, but their elders covered their silence. The beautiful old mahogany table, bared now of linen, had been made smaller to hide vacancies, bringing them together: Edward, with the sharp lines of suffering growing and deepening about his mouth, but with quick attention for everybody; Mrs. Morrison, with her stately white head even more erect than usual; the colonel, with recovered aplomb.

The colonel told stories that Baird guessed the family knew well; Mrs. Morrison reproved every one present and was really amusing, and Judith smiled brilliantly and tossed the conversational ball back and forth. She did not let it rest for a moment. A change had come over her; there was a vivid spot in either cheek and her eyes were shining—nerves strained to breaking point, Baird guessed, and, when he saw how her hands shook, he himself began to talk—of South America, of Wyoming. He dragged forgotten experiences out of obscure corners of his brain and presented them.

He talked as he had never talked before, not even when he talked "money out of a man." He was talking against time, the first moment when he could relieve that proudly secretive company of his undesired presence; talked with the full consciousness that Priscilla Copeley was looking wanly at food she could not touch; that Edward's ear, inclined as if listening to him, was bent to catch every sound from without; that Judith's restless hand was beating a tattoo on the edge of the table while she also listened and waited. Baird did not enjoy what he was doing, but he liked always to play up to a demand. Judith needed what little help he could give her.

It was over at last. Baird knew just when Judith judged that appearances had been sufficiently maintained, and the moment had arrived when the party could break up. He said good night then, but, first, he asked Priscilla Copeley, "You'll not forget our ride to-morrow?"

He wondered what her answer would be, but even in this slip of a girl the family spirit was alive. "No, indeed," she returned through colorless lips. "At four o'clock, Mr. Baird," and she succeeded in smiling.

Judith went with him to the stairs, and Baird thanked her "for one of the pleasantest and most interesting evenings I have ever spent," as he phrased it.

"And I am grateful to you," she said quietly. "You were wonderful at supper." For the moment there was all of Edward's melancholy in her anxious eyes.

So she had guessed. Baird hoped the others had not; he felt almost certain they had not. He took her hand and kissed it—there was nothing he could say.

The color deepened in Judith's face. "Sleep well—" she said softly, and turned away.

Baird had no intention of sleeping. He changed into his riding clothes and lay down fully dressed. He also was waiting and listening; he would sleep as little as any one else in that house; he had never felt less like sleeping.

There were steps and voices for a time; some of the family were taking leave. Then, gradually, the house settled into watchful quiet; now and then carefully silenced movements on the stairs, and the steady ticking of the clock in the hall. Baird had already thought of every possibility, so he was without conjectures, but sometime before daylight those who had ridden away would return. He was waiting for that.

They came during the stillest hour, just after the clock struck three. Baird heard a stir at the stables and went to the window. He could not see the stables, the kitchen wing of the house shut them off, but he could hear cautious voices and the movement of horses. Would they come in by the front or by the veranda?

They rounded the kitchen, a compact group which was in full view for a moment or two, then drew in so close to the house that the veranda roof hid them. They passed along, moving slowly, to the other wing of the house, evidently to what had been the old plantation office. Then sounds ceased.

Baird drew a short breath. He had not been able to see very clearly, but the group kept together in a fashion he knew well; they were carrying some inert burden.

And he had to stay where he was till morning!

KEPT IN THE DARK

The dawn ushered a brilliant spring day, a sky without a cloud, a light warm breeze from the south, the song of birds awakened early by the promise of nature.

Baird lay unconscious of it all, for a little before the pinky gray of morning lighted his room he had fallen asleep. Dawn had crept over him before he knew, and he lay stirless until the knock on his door aroused him into habit.

"Come in!" he called, still held by sleep.

It was the negress he had seen the night before, bearing a tray.

Baird sat up and stared at her. He was fully dressed and lying without covering, and after a rolling comprehensive glance, she stood with eyes lowered.

"What is it?" Baird asked, only half awake as yet.

"Miss Judith done send you a cup of coffee, suh, an' she says fo' you to res' till dinner if you feels like it. I tol' her I thought you was movin'—I didn't go fo' to wake you."

Baird was still dazed, for at the mention of Judith's name the events of the dark hours had rushed over him. It was difficult to connect them with this brilliant sunshine, or this collected ebony statue with the weeping, cringing creature of the night before.

Baird sprang up; he was fully awake now. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Hit's mos' ten, suh."

"Lord! Why didn't some one wake me before! I don't deserve any breakfast. The family—I hope nobody waited for me?"

"Miss Judith an' Mis' Morrison, they ain't had breakfus yet."

Baird pulled off his coat. "Tell them I'll be down right away—it won't take me ten minutes to shave.... Just bring me some hot water, will you?"

The woman served him in silence. Baird would have liked to get some hint of the state of things before he went down, but the family reserve seemed to reside in the black woman also. He saw now that, though powerfully and superbly built, she was not young; she was probably an old family servant. In the hasty minutes he required for dressing, Baird tried to adjust himself to the perfectly normal atmosphere. What had happened while he slept he could not guess. He could tell better when he went down.

Judith and Mrs. Morrison were in the drawing-room, and welcomed him exactly as he had been welcomed when he first entered Westmore. Both bore the marks of anxiety and lack of sleep. In the bright light Mrs. Morrison looked blanched and old, and Judith was also colorless and with heavy shadows under her eyes, but both were gracefully vivacious; their manner was as usual.

"It was a perfect shame to wake you!" Judith declared, when Baird apologized. "We were so certain we heard you moving."

"Don't you worry, Mr. Baird," Mrs. Morrison said. "I only just came down myself, and it was I told Hetty you were up—my old ears deceived me.... Let us go in, Judith—I'm ready fo' your beaten-biscuits."

It seemed that they were to breakfast alone, and with no account given of the absent ones, though Judith did say, "Sunday breakfast is an elastic meal at Westmore. We come down early or late, alone or in relays, as we feel inclined, and, somehow, we manage to be fed."

"I never have been certain which a man likes best—to eat or to sleep," Mrs. Morrison remarked briskly. "The fascinatin'ly natural creatures seem to like both so well—and to drink best of all."

Baird laughed. "That depends on who is ministering to us at the moment. Just now, I should much prefer to eat."

It was all so perfectly normal and natural, with the sunshine slanting across the floor and the windows open to the breeze, that Baird might almost have persuaded himself that he had dreamed—except for the consciousness that he had slept in his clothes and for the telltale pallor and lines of anxiety in Judith's face. And he was certain that he had been waked purposely; he was not wanted at the noonday meal. They intended that he should depart from Westmore in ignorance.

He was soon given a chance to declare his intentions. "I am going to ride to church this morning," Judith said. "Do you care to go, Mr. Baird?"

"Drive to church, you mean, Judith—I'm going with you," Mrs. Morrison intervened.

"Not this morning," Baird said. "I want to get back to the club before noon."

Judith did not urge him, and Baird decided that their determination to drive four miles to church when they were both still ridden by anxiety and drooping with fatigue must also be with purpose, a still further maintaining of appearances; doubtless others beside himself were to be kept in the

dark. They were heroic in their methods, these people. They were quite capable of sitting in church with heads high, knowing meantime that something ghastly lay in the disused office. His eyes had not deceived him the night before.

Baird was thinking of it, when, suddenly, heavy steps sounded on the veranda, followed by the tumbling and whining of several hounds, and a voice he knew well said sharply: "Be off, now! Get out!" Then the rear door opened and shut and a man strode through the hall, his spurs jingling as he came.

It was Garvin Westmore.

At the first sound, Judith had half risen; then she dropped back, and the next moment Garvin came in, in riding clothes, booted and spurred, clean-shaven but haggard. Baird was astounded to say the least. Had he been a nervous person, he would have been shocked. His surmises had fallen flat.

Garvin tossed aside his cap. "Still at breakfast?" he said casually. "Hello, Baird." He drew up a chair and sat down.

Baird did not know how the other two looked; he was conscious that he was staring. "Hello—" he returned blankly.

"You'll have coffee, Garvin—" Judith was saying, "and what else?"

"Anything. I'm not hungry."

He looked infinitely tired. His eyes harbored melancholy easily, as did Edward's; he looked somberly at Judith as he tossed a folded slip of paper across to her. "From Ed," he said briefly. Judith glanced at it, then set it aside.

Baird's brain was working again. So Edward had gone—where? And why?

"Is it going to be hot, Garvin?" Mrs. Morrison asked.

"It is already hot, Aunt Carlotta." His voice was too even for sarcasm.

"Aunt Carlotta and I are going to church, and Mr. Baird thinks he must go back to the club. What are you going to do?" Judith said, in the same clear way in which she had spoken to her own people the night before.

Garvin straightened a little under its warning note. "I? I am going to ride—if I can have Black Betty—the bay is about done. You and Aunt Carlotta can represent the family at church, and I'll show myself at the village. I'll ride as far as the Post-Road with you, Baird." He spoke more heartily, though his always disdainful lip curled.

Judith's anxious eyes said that he looked a fitter subject for bed than for the saddle, but she made no comment. For her sake, Baird excused himself and rose. "I'll get things into my bag, then."

XII

A VENDETTA

They went together, as far as the County Road, Judith and Mrs. Morrison driving and Baird and Garvin riding beside them. There the two men turned into the extension of the Westmore Road that skirted the Mine Banks, the shortest way to the Post-Road, leaving Judith and Mrs. Morrison to go by the more roundabout way; the disused Mine Banks Road was possible only to riders.

Judith reached from the buggy to shake hands with Baird, and there was the same sweetness in her voice as there had been when she parted from him the night before. "You must come to see us very soon, Mr. Baird. I shall expect you," and her eyes said, "Welcome you."

And Garvin's voice also had a kinder note when he parted with her, as if he had his worn nerves under better control. "I'll be back for dinner, Judy."

"Be sure you are," she returned brightly.

"Poor Judith!" Garvin said, as he and Baird rode on. "She has the world on her shoulders—or, rather, the Westmore family—and it's something of a weight, I assure you." He sighed impatiently and looked up at the looming conglomeration of sear undergrowth and trees and bald red patches which they were approaching. "Ever been up there?" he asked.

"No, but I'm going."

"Well, don't go without a guide—there are some ugly pitfalls about.... That was a steep broad hill once, dug down and muddled into what it is by the picks and shovels of English convicts. If all that's said is true, they fared worse under my great-great-grandfather's rule than the niggers did. It's not easy to make slaves of Englishmen.... For the last hundred years it's been simply a game warren. There are caves and underground passages and ore-pits full of water up there, and some soft little hollows, too, where the pines and cedars have grown up. I know every inch of it. It

always fascinated me, but there are some of our family who couldn't be driven to set foot in the place, and there's not a nigger in the county will go near it. And that's a good thing—keeps it free of pests." He laughed shortly. "Lord! I've slept off more than one drunk up there—and played with a girl there, too, on occasion, and only the moon the wiser for it." He spoke steadily, carelessly, but with an undercurrent of feeling.

Edward's exclamation still rang in Baird's ears. Garvin had not been drunk the night before; that he knew. When he and Judith went down to the terraces Garvin was dancing with Priscilla Copeley, and with an air of enjoyment.

Baird studied him closely. Garvin was riding with face lifted, and it brought his profile into relief, bold brow, haughty nose and lip, beautifully modeled chin. The lines about his eyes suggested both weariness and sadness, the curled lip measureless disgust and discontent; a thoroughly unhappy man—if he was any judge of physiognomy. And again Baird felt sorry for him; there was something radically wrong with him.

Garvin's face changed suddenly. "Look there!" he exclaimed. "By jove! Any one would say it was a bear."

He was pointing with his whip to a clambering object which was clearly outlined against one of the red patches above, a bald spot just below the cluster of evergreens that darkened the highest ledge on the Banks. There was a red crag behind them, tipping the summit, and the trees stood as if guarding it; the creature that went on all fours was apparently bent on gaining the ledge.

"It does look like a bear—it's a man, though," Baird said.

"It's Bear Brokaw.... What's he climbing up to Crest Cave for? Not for an afternoon nap, I hope. The old cuss knows there's a better way up than that—he's shinning up that slope just because he enjoys it." Garvin looked interested, amused.

"So he's the honey-tree thief."

"Poof!" Garvin said. "He served Aunt Carlotta right. There's not a stancher, closer-mouthed creature in existence than Bear. He swears by Judith and would do almost anything for me. He taught me to handle a gun—many's the night I've gone coon-catching with him."

They rode on, and Garvin's face settled into gravity. "I wonder what he's doing up there?" he said musingly. "I should have thought he'd had enough of the Banks last night," he added, and fell into silence.

It was the first reference to the night Baird had heard, but he dared not question. They were well under the Banks now and the going very rough, a road once, but no more than a trail now, leading over mounds and down into hollows, the trees hedging them closely. Baird felt tired, and they rode in silence for the next half-mile. Then they dipped into a deep cut between high banks, and Garvin aroused to speak again.

"See that?" he said, pointing to a large white stone that stood planted like a monument in the red soil of the roadside. "That's where my grandfather dropped when he was shot by some one hidden up above there. A good place for a murder and a getaway, isn't it?"

"Who did it?" Baird asked with interest.

"That's what we don't know—we never will know, I suppose. The family tried to fasten it on a Penniman, old William Penniman's father, but they had no proof at all—except that there was bad blood between them—there always had been, ever since a Penniman got part of the Westmore tract by buying the old house over there. The accusations of our family didn't help matters. I've always had my theory about it, though: old Penniman's father had nothing to do with it; those men my great-grandparents worked up there in the Banks didn't all die or leave the country—somebody's son or son's son did it." He shrugged with a look of bitter disgust. "Lord! the thing's nearly a hundred years old, and still we go on with it! There's not a Penniman will bend his head to a Westmore, or a Westmore to a Penniman. We go on with things endlessly—just our sickening, effete pride! It gets on my nerves." He looked as if it did; he looked harried.

"There's one Penniman who doesn't seem to bear a grudge," Baird remarked, "the little girl who came to your rescue yesterday morning."

"Ann?... Ann's young and light-hearted. There's plenty of time for the Penniman to develop in her," he answered carelessly, but Baird noticed that his color rose.

Garvin dropped the subject, talked of trivial things, until they reached the Post-Road. They came upon a man here, a sturdily-built, dark-featured man, clad in neat business gray and carrying a bag. He stood at the juncture of the three roads, the Westmore Road, the Back Road to the Hunt Club and the Penniman farm, and the Post-Road. His hat was tipped back like one who had walked far and was warm, and had stopped to rest and look about him. He was looking at the Mine Banks; when the two riders came up out of the cut, he looked at them, or, rather, at Garvin; he had merely glanced at Baird.

It was his steady grim stare at Garvin that arrested Baird's attention. There was no curiosity in it, it was too cold; fraught with recognition and a settled frozen antagonism. He stood his ground though Garvin's horse almost brushed him, planted firmly, like one who would instantly contest the few inches he covered. There was a quiet determined force about the man; Baird was affected

by it, even before they reached him.

Baird glanced questioningly at Garvin and saw that he was giving the man stare for stare, erect in his saddle, chin slightly lifted. But Garvin's look lacked the animosity that froze the other man's features, and just before they passed Baird saw Garvin's hand lift half-way to his cap then drop. They passed with Garvin's eyes shifted to look straight ahead, but the man's stare never wavered.

"Speak of the devil and you see him," Garvin muttered, after they had passed.

"Who is he?" Baird asked.

"Coats Penniman.... No forgiveness for the past there—why should I have any compunctions over the future." He spoke icily. The cut he had received had evidently stung.

Baird had already guessed. There was an unnamable likeness to Ann in the man's features.

They had come to the center of the Post-Road. "Well, here we part," Garvin said more lightly. "I'll see you soon, I hope."

"Come over to dinner with me to-morrow," Baird returned. "We've got to arrange about that machine."

"I meant to thank you about that," Garvin said quickly. "I haven't my usual wits about me to-day. It's good of you, Baird." There was all the Westmore charm about the man when he smiled.

"Not a bit of it—I'll see you to-morrow," and they parted, Garvin going off at a gallop down the Post-Road.

Baird took the Back Road, glancing at Coats Penniman as he did so. He had not moved; he was looking after Garvin. "I'd hate to have a man look at me like that—especially if I was in love with his daughter," Baird said to himself.

He rode slowly, for he was thinking—of the past night, of many things that were not clear to him. He came up through the pastures, then skirted the woods, as Ann had the day before. He was thinking of her, among other things, so it did not startle him greatly when he saw her a short distance ahead, standing and looking in his direction. But before he reached her she slipped back into the woods. He hurried his horse and stopped to look about him when he had gained the woods, but she had hidden herself.

Though tired, Baird was tempted to dismount and search for her; he was constitutionally opposed to anything escaping him. He did prepare to dismount, then went on, when it occurred to him why she was there: "To meet her father, of course," was Baird's conclusion. "She took me for him, at first."

XIII

INERADICABLY BRANDED

Baird was right; Ann had come to meet her father.

Saturday afternoon and evening had been filled with preparations for Coats Penniman's coming. Ann's pause for play in the barn and her adventure with Baird had merely been an interlude in the rush of work. Sue had worked late into the night, and Ann had helped her. When they went to bed, the house shone in readiness for the home-comer.

Ann had worked steadily and silently; she had had her afternoon's adventure to think over, with a commingling of anger and astonishment and a stir of feeling that made her cheeks burn. The big mannerless creature! He had taken advantage. He had held her and looked at her in imperious fashion; in a way that had made her heart bound. And she had not resented it until it was over. Ann was always truthful to herself; she had liked the hot pressure on her cheek; she could feel it yet, though now it made her angry. She was enraged with herself for having liked it, and with Baird for having touched her. He could not have a particle of respect for her or he would not have dared. Ann tossed about uncomfortably on her bed. If he came again—and she hoped earnestly that he would—he should see! All Ann's considerable will was aroused.

Then the ever-present hurt took possession of her. If she had not grown up with the longing to be petted unsatisfied, the caress of a mere stranger would not have seemed so sweet. At least, so Ann explained herself to herself, having had no experience in passion to tutor her. If only her father would love her, she would be happy. If only she knew?

It was then the plan to meet him sprang into Ann's mind and filled it. He had written that he was not to be met at the station; that he wanted to walk home. Ann decided that he was certain to come the back way. She would meet him and come proudly back with him—if he was loving to her. And if he was not?... Ann did not know what she would do. At least, her aunt and her grandfather would not be there to see.

Ann kept her purpose closely to herself during the morning, working feverishly over the tasks

Sue set her, her cheeks vivid, as were Sue's. Her grandfather was very silent. He sat with his Bible on his knee, as was his custom on Sunday morning, his thin body bent over it, his white hair hiding his face; but Ann saw him look up once as Sue passed him, moving quickly and energetically. It was a long intent look he gave her, his eyes, always vividly blue, brighter and keener than Ann ever remembered seeing them. His lips, the sunken mouth of an old and broken man, shook. He loved Sue, Ann knew that well; he often watched her at work, but with lips tight set, as if in pain; now they trembled. Coats would be bringing Sue deliverance from toil.

Ann stole off in plenty of time to the Back Road. She had waited almost an hour before Baird came upon her. She saw him when he was some distance away, but it occurred to her that he was probably Garvin Westmore, and from him she had no desire to run; she wanted to tell him that her father was coming.

When she saw who it was she hid herself. Crouched in the creek, she watched Baird's pause and close scrutiny of his surroundings. When he was about to dismount, she was frightened; when he rode on, she was a little disappointed, and yet she wanted him away. Ann did not leave her hiding place until she was certain that Baird was well on his way to the club; then she went back to her post. And when she saw a man coming across the pastures, she forgot Baird, everything; it was her father, come at last.

She watched him with the blood throbbing in her ears, a heavily-built man, not thin and sharp-featured like most of the Pennimans, yet with the Penniman look about him. She had waited eagerly enough, but with each step that brought him nearer, her terror of what might be held her back; she did not stand out where she could be seen until her father had nearly reached her.

When she came out suddenly from behind the undergrowth that screened her, they were only a few yards apart, and Coats Penniman stopped on a forward step, stood quite still. Ann saw the spasm that crossed his face, lifting his brows and widening his eyes. She thought that she had startled him; he did not know who she was.

"It's Ann, father—" she said, with a quivering smile. "I—I came to meet you—"

His face changed, settled into deep lines about his mouth, into wrinkles about his eyes, the look of her grandfather upon him—until he smiled, though it was more a twitching of the muscles in his cheeks than an actual smile.

"Ann—" He drew an audible breath. "I—wasn't expecting it—"

He came to her, for Ann stood rooted; no volition of hers could have brought her an inch nearer to that look of her grandfather, covered by that painful smile. "So you came to meet me?" He put his hands on her shoulders. "It's fourteen years since I saw you—you have grown up—child."

There was all the sorrow of the forsaken in the dazed shrinking look Ann gave him. "Yes, I've grown up," she said in tones as colorless as her face. "But I know you—you look like grandpa."

He bent and kissed her cheek, then took his hands from her shoulders, and he said what Sue had said: "And you are a Penniman, too, Ann—we're all Pennimans—we'll never outgrow that.... How are you, child?"

"I am well, suh."

"And Cousin Sue and Uncle Will?"

"They are well—they are expectin' you."

Coats Penniman took up his bag and they turned into the woods. Ann's eyes were fixed straight before her. Things looked curiously white and unreal, as they do after a shock. Her father looked at her as they went on, at her proud brow and eyes, then at her softly-rounded chin and warm mouth, reminders of her mother, and, again, the deepening lines in his face made him look old. "I'm glad you came to meet me," he said kindly.

And Ann answered to the note of kindness, just as she had always answered to the same note in Sue's voice, by an offer of service. "Can't I carry your satchel for you, father? You've walked so far."

"No, Ann, I've not come home to be waited on.... There're going to be better times at the farm, now I have come home. Until the last year I haven't had the means to make it easier for you all. For fourteen years I've prayed to make money, and then, all at once, when I'd given up hope, it came. For your sake, and for Sue's sake, I wish it had come sooner." He spoke with a deep note of feeling.

"It has been hard for Aunt Sue," Ann said tonelessly.

She felt numb and sick; she was more conscious of a feeling of illness than of anything else. The necessity of walking steadily on when she wanted simply to hide herself somewhere, was infinitely painful. Sue had said, "If Coats seems like a stranger to you, don't you feel hard to him." He did not seem like a stranger to her, any more than her grandfather did, or even her aunt did, at times. But he did not seem like her father, any more than they did. From the height of her isolation, Ann could even look at him calmly.

His dark face had lighted, now that he was looking about him. "Uncle Will has not cut down the trees—every tree is here—just as it used to be," he said with deep satisfaction. "I was afraid he'd

had to make cord-wood of them.... How well I remember it all!" he added, half eagerly, half sadly. He walked faster, until they reached the open, and then he stopped. "The house and the barn ... and the spring-house!" he said. "Not a stick or a stone changed! My, my!... And fourteen long years!... When I went, I never wanted to see it again, but it has pulled at me, just the same. It's brought me back."

He turned slowly, half circled to look about him, his eyes finally fixed on the nobly solemn line of cedars. He looked at them long and steadily; he lifted his hat and took it off. "For better or for worse' ... and so it has been—" His face was wiped of expression; his momentary excitement gone.

"He is thinking of my mother," Ann thought.

He stood a moment longer, motionless, then put on his hat, drawing the brim low over his eyes, and went on, forgetful of his surroundings, and of Ann. Perhaps it was habit that guided him, for he took the usual way, across the field and up the path between the grapevines, and Ann dropped behind; when he went into the house, she could escape.

But Sue had seen them coming. Sue who never ran, who was wont to go about wearily, ran down the kitchen stairs and her father followed, slowly, holding to the stair-rail. Sue sped across the few yards that separated them. "Coats!" she said, "oh, *Coats!*" and Coats Penniman dropped his bag and opened his arms to her.

Ann stood on the path and watched them, Sue's arms about Coats' neck, his arms holding her—and then her grandfather's welcome. The two men clasped hands, the three stood, held together in their joy, then went on slowly, her father helping her grandfather up the stairs.

Ann slipped in between the grapevines, skirted the barn enclosure, then ran like a hunted thing for the shelter of the woods; not to the hollow through which the road came, but up higher, to the group of pines that edged the woods. There was neither road nor path there; the pines were clothed and would hide her.

She stumbled as she ran, for she could not see; her sobs were blinding and strangling her. She crept beneath the sheltering branches and clung to the earth, the only mother she had ever known, beat upon the breast to which she clung, and clung the tighter.

In that hour of anguish, Ann parted with her childhood, the blessed capacity to weep one moment and laugh the next with sorrow and pain forgotten. The collie had lost his playmate, the birds a fellow-songster. Ann had not lost spirit, nor the power to endure which is a woman's heritage; but a hurt to a child is a scar carried through life, and Ann had been ineradicably branded.

XIV

THE MISFITS

The sun, well on its way to the west, reddened the bald peak above Crest Cave and shot its rays through the screen of pines on the ledge below, mottling the bed of pine-needles at the mouth of the cave. The midday sun had warmed them; they were still warm and resinous, a comfortable resting place.

Garvin Westmore lay full length on the sweet-scented bed, motionless, except when he lifted to his elbow to look out at the country below. His, or some other hand, had cut away the branches that hid the view; one could sit at the mouth of the cave and see, as through a tunnel, the slope of grain-land, the winding creek, the pastures and the Back Road; and, beyond the semicircle of woods, the roof of the Penniman house, and beyond that, open country stretching into blue distance.

Garvin was keeping watch. He quickly singled out Ann's brown cape from the browns and duns of the woods. He sat up and watched each step of her approach. He had not been at all certain that she would come; she was a resolute little thing to brave discovery in this fashion—and both ignorant and innocent ... and vastly trustful. Nevertheless, it was the eternal attraction that was bringing her—and leading him into deep waters as well. There would be all hell to pay—if he were not careful.

He sprang up, more to get away from his thoughts than to be able to see better. He had searched about the Banks and had made sure, and had watched the open country—there was no one about. And she was well away from the woods now, following the creek; its undergrowth would hide her from any one who might turn in from the Post-Road.

She did not leave the shelter of the creek until where it curved away from the Mine Banks. She was just below him now. Then she crossed the open space quickly and was lost in the trees that edged the Westmore Road. Garvin knew that she would come up behind the Crest.

They were safe from observation now, and he circled the Crest and started down the path which was more an animal trail leading through the bushes, than a path. He heard Ann's approach before he saw her, the rustle of sear leaves, and he stopped on one of the bare red patches that

the noise of his approach might not startle her. The bushes parted presently, and Ann looked out. Then she looked up and saw him, and smiled. She was lovely as she stood there, half screened, flushed and doubtful and faintly smiling.

Garvin hurried down to her. "It's all right," he said. "I've been watching.... My, but the bushes have pulled you to pieces!"

They had; her cape was off, her hair loose on her shoulders, her breath short. "It's—more grown up—than it used to be," she complained.

"And so are you.... Don't pin up your hair, Ann—it's beautiful that way: I love your hair."

She did not give him the merry glance that was her usual answer to such speeches. She gave him the cape to hold and resolutely gathered up her hair. "Now!" she said, when it was in place.

Garvin had watched her in silence. Her decision had checked him; it was unlike her usual manner. "We'll go up to the cave," he said. "You can rest there."

"I can take my cape now."

"No, I'll carry it.... You're tired, aren't you?"

"A little," she answered quietly.

She let him help her up, her hand in his, her lowered eyelids his to read. He could find nothing there, except that they were darker-tinged than usual—and her lips grave. He decided that she was frightened.

"It was a shame for me, to bring you all this way," he said, with the gentleness which he usually had at command. "I wanted so much really to talk to you, and I couldn't think of a better place."

"I wanted to come," Ann returned. "I wanted to see the Mine Banks again—"

"And to see me, too, Ann?"

"Yes." She gave him a half-questioning, half-appealing glance. "I wanted to talk to you, too." The laughter that usually danced in her eyes was not there.

Garvin was still certain that she was frightened, at her own temerity, and doubtful of him. "Well, we can talk all we want to here, dear. No one will disturb us, and you are safe with me.... See, isn't this perfect?"

They had come to the ledge. Ann looked into the umbrella-like cave with the yawning hole at the back, the burrow of some animal; then at the screen of pines. The place was shut in, warm and restful. "It's lovely," she said softly, "an' I'm not afraid of it now. I came up here once, when I was little, an' something moved in the hole, an' I was scared. I ran, and I never did come back—I imagined it was a lion.... That's why it was fun to come to the Banks—I could have such fearful imaginings—imaginings are fun." She was more like herself now, laughing softly and coquetting with the hole in the cave.

"It's nothing but a fox-hole, Ann. I used to let them have it in the winter and then trap them. When I got to coming here often, I didn't like the smell of them about, and I have made it too hot for them. I let the rabbits have it now—I don't mind their scuttling about while I lie here."

"You talk as if you lived here. It is a peaceful, far-away place to live." She was looking through the tunnel and had lost her smile.

Garvin had a sudden remembrance of some of the scenes the place had harbored, and he turned away from it, impatiently. "Let's sit under the pines, where we can look out," he suggested. He took her cape and spread it close to one of the trees. "How do you like that?"

Ann had not heard him. She was looking steadily at the roof of the Penniman house. She turned sharply, turned her back on it, sat so she could lean against the tree-trunk.

"Why do you sit that way?" Garvin asked in surprise. "Don't you want to look out?"

"No, I like this way best."

Garvin studied her closely. He had seated himself as near to her as he could, with a mental curse for the tree-trunk that allowed no excuse for the support of his arm. The flush of exertion had left Ann's face, and Garvin saw now that she was very pale and heavy-eyed, and her lips compressed. Her hands also were tightly clasped. She was not frightened, or even shy; she was wretched. It was he who was flushed and doubtful. He had not lived well, how ill only he himself knew, but this was his first tampering with innocence.

He put his hand on hers. "What's the matter, Ann?"

She was silent.

"What is it, dear?" he asked tenderly. "We're friends, aren't we? Are you sorry you came up here? What is it? Tell me?"

Ann drew one of her hands away and, taking up a pine-needle, began pricking the bit of cape that lay between them. "No, I am not sorry," she said evenly. "The only comfort I've had to-day is

thinking I was coming." She looked up at him, her eyes full of grief. "My father came home to-day."

Garvin would have taken her in his arms, but for the fear that touched him. "But he doesn't know you are here?"

"No. I didn't tell him—I couldn't tell him—anything.... Mr. Garvin, your people are fond of you—my people don't—love me." She had wrenched the thing out, despite the hurt.

Garvin breathed more freely. What a child she was! "What do you mean, dear? Have they been unkind to you—to-day?"

"They are kind to me, but they don't love me," Ann repeated, beginning to quiver. At one wrench and with tremendous effort, she had parted with reserve and the Penniman pride, and plunged on. "I don't know why they don't love me as they love each other. They have never loved me—even when I was little. My father went away an' left me because I reminded him that my being born killed my mother. An' now that he's back, I can see that he's never felt I was part of him. I understand better now—they're kind to me because they pity me. I don't want to be pitied—it's hateful to be pitied!... Your people love you, Mr. Garvin, so you can't understand—I reckon no one will understand." She had ended helplessly, not in tears, for she had wept herself into a decision that morning, and she was holding to that.

Garvin's hand had grown lax on hers and his face gloomy. She had swept away the sensuous emotion to which he had yielded while waiting for her. He had given himself up to a contemplation of possibilities as an escape from harassment. His pursuit of Ann had been just that, from the very beginning, an escape from unendurable conditions. Her, "They're kind to me because they pity me ... it's hateful to be pitied!" had brought back with a rush the thoughts that had darkened his face while he rode with Baird that morning. "Your people love you—so you can't understand." His people love him! How well he understood, indeed!

He had looked straight before him while she talked; now he looked down at her, stirred for almost the first time in his life by a sense of fellow-feeling. "Yes, I understand," he said steadily. "It takes the spirit out of you—gives you over to the very devil—to be dreaded and pitied—almost from your cradle up. I understand, Ann. It's so in some families—for one reason or another.... Some of us are born misfits; we're throwbacks—to something or some one that doesn't quite jibe with our environment. I reckon you're a bit too fine and spirited for your environment, Ann." He was looking at her brow and eyes, not the brow and eyes of a Penniman—not as he had known them.

Ann's sense of isolation caught at the note of sympathy, and she gave her decision into his keeping. "I can't bear things as they are, Mr. Garvin. I made up my mind this morning—I'm going away just as soon as I can."

She had startled him. "You, go away? Why, you're nothing but a child, Ann! Where could you go?"

Ann lifted her hands, held them out for him to see. He had noticed them before, not small hands, work-hardened, but shapely and flexible, with tapering fingers blunted a little at the tips, almost certain sign of manual labor imposed upon childhood. "Look at them!" Ann said tensely. "Would I work any harder with them for other people, than I have for my people? I'm goin'—there's the city for me to go to."

Garvin knew, far better than a stranger would, what such a decision meant to a Penniman—or a Westmore. It meant flinging away caste. They could toil unceasingly, bend their backs to the most menial labor, so long as they toiled upon their own freehold. But to become a servitor, labor with their hands for a wage!

"You can't do that, Ann," he said positively.

"I can, and I will," Ann returned with equal decision.

"If you tried such a thing, your father would bring you back—you're not of age."

She drew a short breath and considered a moment. "But I will be in the fall—they can't make me come back then, can they?"

"No—" Garvin said slowly. "They couldn't—not if you were determined."

He was thinking. A possibility had occurred to him that made him flush; brought him back to the thing to which he had given himself up of late, his desire for Ann.... The thing that was almost impossible here was possible in the city. And what a haven to escape to!... He looked at her as she distressfully pondered her future. She had never seemed more lovable or less a girl to be taken by storm; she had shown an amount of decision he had not known she possessed. He had her confidence; he would do well to keep it.

"If you are determined enough, Ann, and careful to keep what you mean to do a secret, I think you could carry it through," he supplemented. "And why shouldn't you go? Almost anything is better than life as you've had it. I'll help you to go, when you're ready for it."

"You could help me to get something to do, maybe?" she asked quickly. "I've been thinking maybe you could. That's one reason I wanted to talk to you."

"Possibly. I'd do almost anything for you, Ann, especially now I know you're not happy down

there."

Her pleasure and relief were evident; she flushed brightly. "You're very nice to me Mr. Garvin."

"We're really friends, then, Ann? You don't share the family grudge?"

"Indeed I don't! I can't see why they are so bitter."

"It's just an hereditary quarrel, that's all, and you are the first Penniman and I the first Westmore who has buried it.... Will you really bury it; dear—and show me that you have?"

"I'm showing that I have," she said earnestly.

"Shan't we kiss each other to prove that the ugly thing is gone from between us?" he asked gravely.

Ann's flush deepened, but not because of any particular self-consciousness; she neither dropped her eyes nor smiled. Ann had gone down in the depths that day and, for the time being, had parted with coquetry. The longing for affection and interest and consideration such as Garvin was offering her was her immediate need. She was desperate for want of it. And yet she hesitated. She felt certain now that Garvin was very fond of her, and to Ann's way of thinking love led to marriage. She was quite as certain that she liked him very much. She hesitated because she was a Penniman and he a Westmore; there was a class distinction between them that had held for generations.

Garvin saw her hesitation and obeyed a subtle instinct when he kept his hands from her and chose the words that would appeal to her, and the more irresistibly because of genuine feeling. "I'm not any more happy than you are, Ann—I'm wretched. My people are kind to me, too, just that, and they pity me endlessly. If ever there was a misfit, it is I. I'm sick to death of it all, and lonely enough to take the short way out.... Be nice to me, dear."

She lifted her lips to him, and his arms took her and held her, and she clung to him with a tenseness of affection. He kissed her long and passionately, but with self-control enough to realize the quality of what he received, its affection and gratitude and lack of passion. And when her lips parted from his and he buried his face on her shoulder shaken by the first effort for restraint he had ever cared to make, her hand stroked his hair, gently. "I didn't know you were unhappy, too," she said softly.

When he raised his head he was pale. "You're a child yet," he said. "You'll wake up one of these days—then you'll love me as I love you."

"I like you a great deal," Ann answered, with conviction.

He laughed shortly. "Yes, we're good friends—that's it, isn't it, Ann?"

The note of urgency and dissatisfaction made her uncomfortable. "You asked me to be friends," she said.

She moved away from his hold, and he let her go. "There's all the future," he said more quietly. "You'll love me by and by.... Ann, have you really the courage to go away from all that down there?"

"Yes."

"And the wisdom to keep our friendship to yourself?... It will be a terrible thing for both of us, if they know. I met your father this morning, on his way home, and I'd have spoken to him, if he had let me. I did speak and he cut me—he has neither forgotten nor forgiven."

"What is it they've not forgotten or forgiven?" Ann asked earnestly. "Aunt Sue wouldn't tell me."

Garvin told her what he had told Baird.

Ann flamed scarlet. "There isn't any Penniman would have done that!"

"And there's not a Westmore now who thinks it," Garvin said positively. "The thing's more than half a century old, but it's an insult your people will never forgive.... It's not going to matter to you, is it, now you know?" he added, for Ann looked so perturbed. "I never have believed it for a moment—or Edward either. I know he's terribly sorry for the quarrel, and ashamed that father let the thing rankle. It worries Ed. If it worries you, I'm sorry I told you."

"It doesn't worry me," Ann said firmly. "It doesn't make the least difference to me—in the way I feel to you and Mr. Westmore—we had nothing to do with it, an' to hate an' hate is sickening. But I know how it is with my people. I think grandfather would almost kill me if he knew that we were friends. Even Aunt Sue would be fearful to me." She drew a quick nervous breath. "It makes me want to get away more than ever."

"You shall go—I'll help you," Garvin promised. "But in the meantime I want to see you—I must. If I think of a safe way, you will meet me, won't you?"

Ann thought of the thing that had added hurt to hurt, her father's pleasure in Sue. They had been painfully kind to her at dinner, and after the meal was over he had gone off with Sue, they two to talk together.

"Yes," Ann said. "I'm not afraid. We're doing nothing wrong in liking each other."

"I'll think of a way and write to you."

She got up. "An' I must go now." Her lips quivered and set. "My father has gone with Aunt Sue—to walk around the farm—but they'll be coming back before supper."

"I am afraid you must, dear. If I brought them down on you, I should never forgive myself.... I can go with you to where I met you."

He went with her around to the back of the Crest, down the steep red-clay slope and into the shelter of the bushes. There he lifted her up and kissed her. "Ann!" he said. "Ann! I'm going to make you love me."

Ann received his kiss more shyly, turned her cheek to it. She had emerged a little from wretchedness, and the quality that invites pursuit, that draws passion and gives sparingly in return, the quality with which Ann was plentifully endowed, was coming to the surface. She escaped from his hands without answer and with eyes down.

XV

AS WITH A CHILD

Ann gained the woods in safety, so much Garvin saw from his perch, but he could not see what followed. At the point where the Back Road forked, she came face to face with Edward Westmore. He was coming from the club, riding slowly, as always.

Ann was flushed from rapid walking; she flushed more deeply when she saw him, and nodded and smiled shyly.

Edward lifted his cap, his tired face lighting. "So we meet again!" he said. "I was thinking of you—have you walked far?"

"Just across the pastures," Ann answered in embarrassment, the more so because he had checked his horse.

She had not expected him to do that, or to look so pleased when he saw her, still less to dismount and come to her which he did immediately. "You look warm, aren't you tired?" he asked.

"Yes," Ann answered, too much surprised for anything but a monosyllable. She was wide-eyed and a little startled, the child look that made her prettiest, and he studied her intently, as if absorbing her features. And yet his manner was deferential; he looked and smiled as he had the day before when he had talked with her.

"I am tired, too," he said. "I have just ridden up from the station to the club.... Won't you rest a few minutes? I wanted to talk more yesterday—I was interested in all you told me, and promised myself to take the first chance to talk again, but I hardly expected this good fortune."

Baird would have been astonished by Edward's air of animation and pleasure, more so even than Ann. "He hates quarreling and wants very much to be friends," was Ann's thought, and she was pleased. The miserable day was ending more happily; Garvin had told her that he loved her and that there was "all the future," and now his brother was showing her that he liked her. There were people in the world to whom she mattered; Garvin was interested in her, deeply interested. Ann was being carried away from her troubles; transformed into beauty and charm.

She gave Edward her drooping glance and slow smile. "I should like to talk, too."

"Shall we sit down then, for a few minutes?... Over there by the creek, don't you think? There used to be a hollow there, and a flat rock."

"Yes—it's there yet," Ann assented willingly.

It was the spot where she had hidden from Baird that morning, where the bank of the creek shelved sharply to a big rock around which the water fretted and quarreled. Clumps of chinkapin bushes intervened, effectually hiding the hollow from the road.

Edward led his horse around them and, after a swift survey that convinced him that they would be well screened, dropped the bridle. Carefully and attentively, as if she were fragile, he helped Ann down to the rock, and Ann, who had sprung down that morning as nimbly as a chamois, lent herself daintily to his guidance, instantly adapting herself to it, enjoying it. This was something quite new to her, as new as Baird's impetuosity or Garvin's restrained passion. And she took, quite as her due, the step-like ridge in the rock that seated Edward at her feet. She was neither embarrassed nor awed, partly because of Edward's well sustained ease and deference, partly because of his very evident interest in every word she uttered.

With a skill which Ann was not experienced enough to recognize, he led her to talk of the farm, then of her people, then of herself. He had been away so long, he told her. He had been everywhere—except at Westmore—much of the time in Europe; everything she told him was

news. He drew from her an accurate picture of her life as it had been from her earliest remembrance and as it was now, and that without any such passionate outburst as she had visited upon Garvin. With his knowledge of her family and his growing knowledge of her, it was easy to read between the lines. She was apart from her family; she was not happy with them. Whether she had attained to seventeen years without a romance was the one point upon which he was uncertain; even a very young girl would know how to guard that secret.

Ann could not know that she was being manipulated by a master-hand. When he looked up at her, his eyes held only pleased interest. When he looked down at the resentful, quarreling water and they were hidden from her, his expression was different.

Edward Westmore's combination of ease and impenetrable reserve, of swift intelligence and yet guarded speech, the melancholy that shadowed him, like a thin veil drawn over a smile, had baffled more astute people than Ann. It had made him a noticeable man wherever he had gone; a man of acknowledged charm and suspected subtlety. His family had known him as a spirited and yet dependable boy, the most dependable of the Westmores, until the upheaval which had sent him away from his home had revealed passions his family had not suspected. He had demanded a release from Westmore and Westmore conditions and had gained it. That he had married beyond all expectations well a woman older than himself and possessed of a fortune, and had settled into the inscrutable man he was, with the welfare of Westmore apparently his closest interest, was one of the inexplicable things about him.

Judith perhaps understood Edward better than any one else did; certainly, in their twelve years of married life, his wife had not fathomed him. If his charm had won him conquests, they had never obtruded. If he had craved youth and beauty, he had given no intimation of it. He had unwaveringly upheld both his wife's dignity and his by an unswerving courtesy; how much or how little love he had given her was a secret she had carried with her—she had left him her fortune, unconditionally.

He had led Ann up to the very present, and she told him what he already knew: "And my father came home to-day." She paused on that, because of the tragedy it had been to her, but her face was more expressive than she knew.

"I suppose he will sell the farm and take you all west with him when he goes back? That will mean a different life for you," Edward said.

The suggestion was an entirely new one to Ann; she grew wide-eyed over it. Then she shook her head decidedly. "No, he won't do that—he loves the place."

"Then he will probably send you to school in the autumn."

This also was a new idea, but after consideration she dismissed it. "No.... I didn't study very well when Aunt Sue sent me to school," she added with a touch of shame.

"You didn't?" Edward was genuinely surprised; it was not his reading of her.

"I couldn't ever learn arithmetic—I tried hard, but I couldn't. The teacher told Aunt Sue that I had no brains for study, an' she took me away from school." Ann hated to make the admission, she had been led into it before she knew, and added quickly, "But I liked history and composition—I like to read. I've read my father's books through and through."

"They don't know what good brains are in that school in the village," Edward said quietly. "My greatest pleasure is reading, too—you are fortunate to have grown up in a library."

Ann was forced to admit that it was not a library, just a cupboard in her father's room stacked with books. Edward knew that, as a boy, Coats Penniman had been an omnivorous reader and something of a student. He selected in his mind the books Coats was likely to have read, many histories, the lives of great men, and the staid fiction which he himself had enjoyed when a boy, and Ann warmed into vivid pleasure when she found that they had acquaintances in common. She talked of George Eliot's characters as one would of friends, and lovingly of Maggie Tulliver, that creation of a great woman's brain always tenderly loved by misfits such as Ann.

"She was a nobody's child," Ann said softly.

Edward noticed that the dramatic and emotional appealed profoundly to her, and the sentimental very little. He thought as he listened to her and looked at her beauty that, if the right sort of man possessed her, she would grow into a superb woman; a few years' training would make her a finished product, something more than presentable, a really fascinating woman. But the emotional in her would have to be satisfied. It was innate, patent, unmistakable—her power to arouse passion, an irresistible inclination to test the emotional, and it was quite possible that in the process she might be irremediably marred.

Edward thought of the thing he had witnessed the morning before, his brother's face bent to Ann's, and his own face darkened. He had thought of it frequently in the last twenty-four hours, and with a full realization of what her appeal to Garvin would be. He thought of the night just past, when the family skeleton had broken loose and been captured and locked away again, only after hours of dread and terror to them all.

He turned from the sickening recollection to look again at Ann. He reflected that with her type the brain is apt to be constant and the emotions less dependable, and love, actual love, rarely a

sudden thing and almost always a consecration. How much of herself she would give would depend largely on the man who captured her; to hold her he would have to appeal to her brain as well as her emotions. Edward was certain that he read her aright. He had traveled a long way before he had learned what little he knew of women; what man ever knew more than a very little of the riddle the Creator intended man should not solve.

To Ann he said, "But you haven't read many of the more modern novels, have you? And very little poetry?"

"I couldn't get them," Ann answered regretfully. "There's no library in the village." She did not add, "And I have no money to buy books," but Edward understood.

"I have any number of them—good and bad—at Westmore. I should be glad to lend you anything you would like to read."

Ann did not know what to say. She had collided again with the family quarrel. But she wanted to see Edward again. No one had ever talked to her as he had, or treated her as he did. He was quite different from Garvin, far more deferential, and yet eager to please her. She felt intensely sorry for Garvin; things seemed to be all wrong with him, just as they were with her. And she wanted him to love her; she wanted every man to love her—even Ben Brokaw. It was delightful to feel that she could interest them—as she was interesting Edward Westmore. It was wonderful that she could interest him. He was the most courtly man she had ever seen, and the most distinguished-looking. She was accustomed to tanned faces; the black and white contrasts of Edward's face pleased her. He was tall and erect and dignified. She felt a tremendous respect for him, and at the same time she felt perfectly at one with him; he was so pleasant to be with.

"I'd like very much to have the books," she said somewhat helplessly.

Edward smoothed out the difficulty without mentioning it. "I go by here so often, to the club—I could easily leave them up there, beside the bushes. If some one else found them or they got rained on, it wouldn't matter—there are plenty of others." He looked up at her, smiling quizzically. "I go to the club almost every afternoon, and ride back about this time—just when you will be curled up here in the hollow examining what I have left. I know you will do just that, because that is what all book-lovers do—an unread book is as tantalizing as ripe fruit just out of reach."

Ann thought it was a nice way of being told that he wanted to see her again, and she answered with much of his own manner. "Maybe—but never as late as this, though. See, the sun's most down, an' supper waitin' for you at Westmore, like it is for me up at the farm."

"That means that I am dismissed—that it's growing late, and that I've let you sit here without your cape around you.... Let me put it on for you—before we go up."

He wrapped it about her, his touch light yet lingering, brought it together under her chin, as one would with a child. "Have you felt cold?" he asked tenderly, as if guarding something infinitely precious.

For the second time that day affection lifted in Ann's eyes. In all her life no one had looked at her or spoken to her in just that way; even Garvin had not. "No, I have been warm," she answered softly.

Edward looked full into her eyes, the veil of melancholy that so often shadowed his face stealing over it. "Then I've done you no harm, and you have given me a great pleasure," he said. "Now run home quickly—while I get my horse back to the road."

Ann went, as he said, quickly. It had seemed to her that morning, as she had walked along the same road with her father, that she could never be comforted. But she had been—doubly comforted.

XVI

"IT WAS BORN IN HER"

"Is Ann always like this?" Coats Penniman asked Sue that evening.

They had come from supper and were sitting together on the porch. Preparing the meal had been Sue's work; Ann had insisted that the clearing away was her task, and Sue knew why she had been so determined; she did not want to join them on the porch.

"She's always quiet when father is around," Sue answered.

"And I'm a strange element—well, it's natural."

Sue knew that Coats meant to talk of Ann, and she dreaded it. They had spent almost the entire day together, going over the farm and talking of its possibilities, and Coats had scarcely mentioned Ann. But Sue knew that he was thinking of her from the occasional questions he asked and from the way in which he had studied Ann, surreptitiously, with a pitying intensity which Sue

understood well. When he spoke to Ann directly his usually deep voice softened to its kindest note, and Ann had answered dutifully, but Sue noticed that she kept her eyes turned from him.

Poor Ann! Sue sighed inaudibly. She was very sorry for the girl, but she had known just how it would be; the love Coats had seemed incapable of giving the child was not likely to be given the grown girl who reminded him even more poignantly of the bitterest days of his life.

She knew Coats so well. They had grown up together, she and her sister Marian and Coats, and his love for her sister seemed to have been born with him. He had loved Marian as a child, as a boy he had adored her, loved her with an all-engrossing passion when they were grown. He would gladly have given his life for the girl who was his wife for less than a year, and over whom he had agonized with an intensity that had almost deprived him of his reason. She had borne her child and had left him desolate. She seemed to have taken with her all his capacity for love. They were like that, the Pennimans; an affection for each other and a tremendous sense of duty, but only one love. She herself was like that. No one had ever guessed; she alone knew who it was *she* had loved all those years; loved in spite of everything, steadily loved and loved.

It was dark, and Sue could think and feel without her face betraying her. Coats' figure was a vague outline, but his presence was an intensely palpable thing. It pressed on her, enveloped her. *What* that day had been to her! After all these years, he her companion, his hand on her arm, his first thought for her, and no one to come between them—except the ghost of the past. She wanted it laid, buried too deep ever to rise again. So far he had not mentioned the past; was he going to drag the thing out now and agonize over it again?

She had not answered his remark, and he said nothing for a time, smoking in silence. Finally he said, "I wish I could make the future a little easier for her."

Sue drew a breath of relief. She was quite willing to talk of the future, even Ann's future. "I've often wondered what was best to do for her."

"Has any man ever made love to her, Sue?"

"No, no one," Sue said positively. "Who would? You know how away from people we've had to live—we haven't even had the relations here—it was the only way to do when we were so poor.... Besides, Ann's not much more than a child."

"You've always written that she was a thoughtless child. She's less of a child than you realize, Sue. And she's not thoughtless, either. She does a deal of thinking, but keeps it to herself."

Sue remembered Ann's burst of feeling which had so surprised her. "I reckon that she has grown up so gradually I haven't noticed. She has such a careless way with her most of the time. She plays with every mortal thing that comes her way, Coats—peeps at it with her eyelids down—seein' if it's goin' to give her any fun, it seems to me. It drives father mad to see her. I've often watched her, with the collie, with Ben—with every breathing thing that comes her way. An' she does lay hold on people—if there's a creature on earth Ben Brokaw loves, it's Ann. It's Ann has kept him here these last two years—she can do anything with him."

"It was born in her," Coats said evenly. It was his first reference to his wife and he turned from it, spoke more clearly. "Sue, Ann's the quintessence of attraction—I've realized it to-day. She's one of those women you might wall up and use plenty of stone and mortar to do it, and still she'd draw some man to her. It's her portion—we might as well recognize it and allow for it in the future."

"You mean she's bound to marry?"

It was not all Coats had meant, but he said, "Yes."

"But she mustn't marry here, Coats—it's what father has always said.... What chance is there here for a girl, anyway. The few boys that have stayed here are a shiftless lot, an' the Hunt Club set—they're rich, most of them, an' fast—we're just farmers to them—a girl situated like Ann is mustn't have anything to do with them."

"The club is since my time—are they about much, the men?"

"They're all over the place—as long as there's huntin'," Sue said with disgust, "an' they're always about the club, summer and winter. Father stopped their ridin' through here—he put up the gate an' notice—and he arrested Garvin Westmore, Coats."

Coats was silent, Sue guessed, because he might say too much; hatred of the Westmores lay deep in him. Sue liked the restraint he put upon himself. He had gone away a wretched silent man, and had returned a restrained yet forceful personality. He had broadened and gained weight, both mentally and physically. She had guessed from his letters that he had improved, and she had often thought, miserably, that she was not keeping pace with him. She had never had her sister's beauty or attraction, and even her prettiness was fading. And mentally?... What chance had she had, tied down to the farm?... Then bitterness slipped from her. He was here and, she hoped intensely, was going to stay. The fear that had tormented her, that he might marry out of sheer loneliness, was set at rest, and if she could feel certain that he would stay, her cup of joy would be full. All she dared hope for was that he would stay where she could care for him.

Coats spoke again, and of Ann. "I don't know just what to do for her," he said thoughtfully. "You wrote that she had no head for study. If she hasn't, sending her away to school would be a

mistake—just courting mischief.... I'm inclined to think that she'll be best off here—until she's older—then I'll try to send her west—put her with people who will look after her and see that she gets a chance to marry, for that's what it will be with her. She's bound to have her bit of life, have it and pay for it, the certainty of it is written all over her, and she'll have a better chance of happiness somewhere else than here." His voice deepened. "You see, Sue, she's not really one of us—that's the thing has been borne in on me to-day. It's an old wound opened, and it's made me feel a little sick; her mother was never meant for this place—or for me. You know how it was with her—just that craving for all the things we were not. It showed in every look and word of Marian's, unconsciously, and it shows doubly in Ann.... Why, Sue, when I looked up this morning and saw her standing there, where Marian often stood, black and white, that hair and brow of hers, and with Marian's lips smiling at me, it was exactly as if a ghost had risen up and beckoned to me! I lost hold on myself. I did the best I could, but my best was bad. I froze whatever affection the child has for me—just froze it forever." He ended helplessly, a sudden breaking away from the restraint that was habitual with him: "She's a woman grown, Sue—I didn't expect it to be that way—I never dreamed it would be like that—you never told me she looked like that—you never told me how she looked!"

"You never asked me to tell you," Sue said painfully.

Coats quieted, gained control of himself almost instantly. "I didn't mean to let myself go like that. It's the last time I'll speak of things that can't be helped. The best I can do is to watch over Ann and give her a chance."

"It's the best any of us can do, Coats," Sue's voice was still husky.

Because of the note of pain, Coats drew his chair close to hers, touched her arm. "You've always done your best, Sue. I left you to bear most of the burden, but I've come back to it. I'm going to stay, Sue—it's going to be lifted from your shoulders to mine.... And I'm glad to be back. I belong here—I'm no money-maker. I'm fitted for just this—to draw a living out of the soil and enjoy doing it.... I can't expect help from Ann—she's bound to go out into the world and live—but you'll stand by me, Sue?"

The assurance Sue longed for had been given her. "Yes, I'll stand by you!" she said deeply. "I'll stand by you always, Coats—I'm fitted for just this, too."

XVII

COMPLEXITIES

The first of May, and spring had come on the Ridge. A young green lay upon pasture and woodland, upon every spot where nature was allowed her way—except the bald patches on the Mine Banks. They still glared a sullen red, defiantly barren, when even the plowed earth glistened and was warm, impatient under man's restraining hand, eager to quicken the seed being entrusted to it, a civilized mother as intent on bearing fruit as was her uncultured sister.

Those three weeks had brought the stir of life, both restlessness and joy, to Sue, to Ann, to Judith Westmore; and, as spring quickens man as well as woman, to Edward Westmore, Garvin and Baird the consciousness of things desired and not attained which is the urge to all accomplishment.

Even Coats Penniman, busied about the farm from early morning until night, was stirred by a vague unrest which was not unhappiness nor its opposite. He worked the harder for it; he had cast his net here; he meant to gather in the harvest, a modest harvest, but one that would be sufficient for his family's needs. New horses filled the stalls that had stood empty so long, new farm implements were stored in the wagon-shed, the barn acquired a coat of paint. And the crying shame of water carried by women up three hundred yards to a kitchen without a convenience was abolished. That was Coats' first improvement: pipes were laid to the bubbling spring and a pump installed; the spring-house, unsanitary relic of a past century, would no longer harbor crocks of milk and butter ill-protected from things that crawl and germs that fatten; it housed the pump. And only the weeping willows mourned the change; they no longer stood in a swamp, for a drain carried the seeping water to the creek; they were a pleasant shelter now for any man and maid who chose to sit beneath them.

Coats Penniman had his work and Sue had hers. The old house was being transformed. Many years before, Ann, playing with a forbidden pen-knife, had cut through the half-dozen layers of paper that generations of tasteless Pennimans had laid upon the living-room walls and had come to oak paneling as beautiful as any at Westmore. Sue had not forgotten the discovery. The living-room was stripped of paper and became again what it had been in colonial days, a spacious dining-room paneled from ceiling to floor. The modern front room, the parlor, lost its dingy figured paper, was hung and curtained in white, as were the rooms above. Sue, with Ann to help her, and a sturdy negress to do the heaviest work, labored joyfully. Paint and whitewash had their way with the old house, and it emerged an elderly lady still, but with white hair smoothed and wearing a spotless cap.

Only the lonely farm-woman who toils unaided, her interests bound by four unsightly walls, a

veritable prison with a treadmill for diversion, can justly appreciate what those days of transformation were to Sue. She had longed for the two strong black hands that under her direction washed and churned and swept and cooked. But she had longed still more for a little beauty, a touch of fashion, a hint of luxury. Her day's work had always lapped over into the morrow. Now she could appear at supper with hair arranged and wearing a fresh gown. She could go from supper to sit with Coats on the porch and talk to him of her work as he talked to her of his. The delight of it!

And it was not only the house that wore new garments. Sue chose carefully and economically, but she would not have chosen tastefully had Ann not been at her right hand. Ann had an instinct for color, and an observant eye for style. She had insisted on shades of blue for Sue. "You ought to get everything blue, it goes with your eyes, an' it makes you look young and pretty," she had urged. "Have an all-blue suit, Aunt Sue, an' a blue silk drivin' coat, an' a little blue hat with white wings. An' for your house-dresses just have lawn with blue flowers in it." Sue had thought the coat an unpardonable extravagance, until she remembered that she often drove with Coats. Then she did not hesitate.

Ann was too proud to ask for anything for herself, but Sue insisted that whatever she had must be duplicated for Ann, so Ann chose for herself a summer suit of deep cream and a large cream-colored straw hat. Sue had objected to Ann's choice of a red coat. "Your suit's so dark a cream it's 'most yellow, an' your coat's a regular nigger red, Ann."

"I'm black an' white—they're my colors, Aunt Sue. I'll always have to wear rich colors to look best," Ann returned, and she was right. She did not put red roses on her hat, however. She decorated it with water-lilies; their yellow centers blended with hat and gown.

Even Sue did not suspect what pleasure Ann took in her attire, but she did notice that the girl was startlingly beautiful, even in her simple white lawn dresses sprayed with either red or yellow. It was not a glaring effect the girl had produced; she had simply intensified her usual impression of warmth, her hint of the exotic. Coats noticed it; he looked at her in an expressionless way, but Sue knew what he thought, and her father also, when he looked at Ann and then looked away. Ann's new clothes set her more apart from them than ever.

And in spite of her good sense, Sue envied Ann's compelling quality. She would never have it, but Ann thought that since her father's return Sue had grown almost beautiful. Sue's face had grown fuller and now her cheeks almost always had color. She arranged her brown hair carefully and changed her dresses frequently. And she laughed much oftener, softly and with eyes alight. Sue was glad, of course, that Coats had brought better times to them all, but even supreme relief would not account for Sue's air of subdued happiness.

Ann had puzzled over the change in Sue, until one day she saw her watching Coats Penniman while he slept. He had come in tired out and had stretched himself on the couch in the living-room. Sue and Ann were sewing when he came in and Sue had sprung up, brought him a glass of water and begged him to lie down. Then Sue had taken up her sewing again. A little later, when Ann glanced up, wondering how she could slip away without being noticed, she saw that her father was asleep and that Sue sat with hands idle. She was bent forward a little, looking at Coats in utter absorption, her lips parted, her eyes misty and yearning, her heart laid bare for Ann to read. Sue had forgotten her, forgotten everything; there were only they two in the world, she and Coats.

Ann looked long and steadily, and, in those moments of hot surprise and then of clear understanding, she laid down every claim upon her father, became definitely nobody's child. Ann's own experience in love had rapidly taught her; she knew how it was with her father and Sue; Sue loved her father, and he liked Sue better than he liked any one else.

That was what Garvin said to her in the evenings when they met under the willows by the spring: that he loved her madly, and that she only liked him. She let him kiss her when he talked like that. It made her hot and restless to be plead with and urged and caressed. She did love him—the thought of losing his love was terrible—yet she was not happy, partly because she felt that Edward would be shocked if he knew. She had discovered that the brothers did not love each other any more than she and her father loved each other. She never mentioned Edward to Garvin, or Garvin to Edward.

The night before, Garvin had said startling things: that he was going into the city to live; that Nickolas Baird was arranging a city agency for a large automobile firm, and that he would probably have charge of it. Ann had been swept by a feeling of desolation until Garvin had added, "It won't be right away, but when the time comes will you go with me?"

Ann knew that she had been silent so long that he had grown desperate. He had put his arms about her and held her as if he were afraid that she would run from him. She had said, finally, "I couldn't bear it, to have you go away."

"But I shall have to go," he had told her positively. "I can't stay at Westmore—Edward is master of Westmore now.... And you want to go away—will you go with me, Ann?"

Then she had told him the thing that had troubled her from the beginning. "A Westmore marry a Penniman? We can't do it, Garvin—ever."

And Garvin had been silent then, thinking; she had felt his hands grow burning hot. Then he said

steadily: "The city is not the Ridge, Ann. If you'll only love me completely, as I love you, what seems impossible here may be possible there. I want you, just mine to love and care for always."

Then she had told him with complete honesty. "I don't know whether I love you enough to marry you, but I can't bear to have you go away from me."

He had made his usual appeal, his own unhappiness, and Ann had almost yielded him her promise. But when she thought it all over she was not happy; she was so doubtful of her own feelings.

And she had another anxiety. Edward Westmore had given her a number of books, and she had seen him several times. Every day there had been a book for her in the chinkapin bushes. With the instinct for making herself doubly desired, she did not always stay to thank him. But sometimes she had waited in the hollow, and Edward came and sat at her feet. Then they talked. They had been less exciting but more satisfying hours than she had with Garvin. Edward told her wonderful things, interesting things. She felt like an ignorant child when she was with him, and yet she knew that he liked whatever she said, and that he loved to look at her, and that he touched her with a certain tender reverence. She thought of him as a very dear friend. It was some time before she told him how things were at the farm. Before she realized, she had told him about it, and he had said:

"Never mind, Ann, be patient. There is the future—you will leave the farm, one of these days."

He had spoken quietly enough, but Ann had seen the color come slowly into his face. Though he had turned to look at the water, she had seen and wondered. Was he beginning to care for her—as Garvin did? Such a possibility had never before occurred to her! He had seemed so much older than Garvin—old enough to be her father. It made her very uncomfortable, the first touch of self-consciousness she had had while with him. For several days after that, she had taken her book and hurried away.

Then Ben Brokaw had added to her anxiety. They talked together as always, she and Ben. Though he had said nothing, Ann knew that he understood about her father and herself. On the evening of that Sunday when she had met her father, she had found on her window-sill a box lined with pine-needles and on them several sprays of arbutus. She knew instantly that Ben had put them there, climbed to the roof to do it. His was the language of the woods: Ann knew from the pine-needles that Ben had been somewhere about when she had lain sobbing beneath the pine trees. And she had known just how to thank him; she had pinned a bit of the arbutus to her dress the next morning, and had smiled at him. "It's sweet," was all she had said. And all Ben said was "Um!"

Ben rarely mentioned Coats Penniman, but occasionally he had been satirical over the changes Coats was making. When the house became redolent of paint, he took his hammock and slept in the woods. "Paint is supposed to be a' awful good thing," he told Ann. "Even the ladies thinks it'll hide old age, but it don't deceive nobody. I never took no stock in paint—wood is one of the prettiest things on earth; why cover it up?"

On the evening when he talked with Ann in a way that made her anxious, he began by saying, "This place an' Westmo' is becomin' too fashionable. All we needs now is a' automobile. Westmo's got one—I seen Garvin scarin' chickens an' niggers all down the Post-Road this mornin', an' that young cool-head who's stayin' at the club an' makin' love to Miss Judith showin' Garvin how to do it. If the president was to travel down the Post-Road in a wheelbarrer, it wouldn't stir up half the sensation Garvin did.... I reckon Edward wanted to give Garvin something to occupy his mind. Well, he's done it—an' a fashionable way to break his neck, too."

Ann knew that Garvin was to have the automobile. He had told her that it was coming, and that, as soon as he could run it, he would take her with him to the city and back in an evening. That now he could show her the city of which she knew so little.

But she did not comment on Garvin's new possession. "You always speak of Garvin in that way, Ben, and differently of Edward Westmore—why do you?" she asked gravely.

"Edward's a gentleman an' Garvin's jes' a Westmo', second generation to his pa," Ben returned.

"I thought every Westmore was a gentleman," Ann said, quite as Judith might have spoken; there was hauteur in the reproof. Her head had lifted.

It was not too dark for Ben to see her face, and he glanced at her, a swift, intensely interested look, a deeply anxious look as well. But his answer was drawled as usual. "Accordin' to the dictionary, they are, Ann. I read up on 'gentleman' once, an' I decided that there dictionary wasted a lot of words. Why didn't it jest say, 'Gentleman: the man who does to others like he'd have them do to him.' Of co'se, if it was necessary to say more, it could jest add that there is those who grows to be gentlemen. A man can train hisself to be one. Edward has growed to be a gentleman—I found that out when he come back.... Now, if there was anything troublin' me, I'd go straight to Edward Westmo'. There ain't anythin' I'd be afraid to tell him. An' that's the advice I'd give to any one who was doubtful in their mind about anything, or who'd got into trouble—jest to talk to Edward about it.... I'm down about the woods a good bit, an' I often see Edward comin' an' goin'. We speaks. There ain't much goes on down there I don't know about; even when I'm not there, my eye's on them woods. If Edward Westmo' sat down a bit on Penniman land, I wouldn't say nothing about it—not I. I'd as soon cut my hand off as set a Penniman on a Westmo'. Coats

Penniman has growed, like I tell you some men do, Ann, but he ain't growed enough not to hate a Westmo'. That's one reason I keep my eye on them woods—I wouldn't answer for what would happen if a Westmo' angered Coats Penniman."

Ann had nothing to say to this long speech; she escaped as soon as possible to think it over. Ben had the queer cautious ways of an animal—he had told her several things, in his usual fashion. He had meant to tell her that Garvin was not as fine a man as Edward. Ann was forced to confess that she felt he was not. But Garvin was younger, and impatient and unhappy, just as she was. She loved and pitied Garvin, and nothing Ben could say would make her stop loving him.

And Ben had also meant to tell her that he knew and approved of her talking to Edward; that he stood guard over them. He wanted her to tell Edward about Garvin. She felt certain that Ben knew she cared for Garvin. Possibly he knew that they met, but she was not so certain of that.

Ann's anxiety was principally on Garvin's account. If her father discovered them it would be terrible. They ought not to meet in that way. But Garvin could not take her away now.... And even if he could, did she love him enough to go with him and face all the trouble that would follow? And yet, she would be sick with loneliness if Garvin went away and left her. But if she did not love Garvin—in the way in which he wanted her to love him—she ought to tell him so and not meet him any more. And she could not tell Edward about his brother—not after the way in which Edward had looked at her the last time she saw him—she simply couldn't.

XVIII

"YOU'RE ALL I HAVE"

Ann spent a troubled night after her talk with Ben, and she had reached no decision the next day when she went down to the woods to get her book. She did not know whether or not she would wait to see Edward. She ought not to see him. It had not occurred to her that as things were between Garvin and herself, she ought not to see Edward in this way—not until after she had suspected that Edward cared a great deal for her.

Ann did not know how much she wanted to see Edward until she discovered that there was no book left for her. She searched the bushes thoroughly; there was nothing there. Then she paused to think.... She had avoided Edward and he had decided that she did not want to see him; she had lost her friend.

Ann went slowly back to the road and stood hesitating. She did not want to go back to the house; she felt more like going up to the pines, to sit with her trouble where no one would see her.

She had flushed while she searched and found nothing, then grown pale when she felt that she had been forsaken. She brightened into beauty when she heard a horse on the Back Road. He was late in coming, that was all. She waited, her eyes fixed on the turning in the road.

It was Baird who appeared, and, riding with him, Judith Westmore. They were riding so close to each other that their horses almost touched, Judith with head bent and playing with her whip, Baird looking down at her.

Ann would have escaped if she could, but they were upon her before she had recovered from surprise, and Baird had seen her. He straightened instantly, and Ann also stiffened, moving only to give them room to pass. Baird looked at her steadily, for a questioning instant, then suddenly smiled and lifted his cap. He bowed profoundly enough when Ann smiled, though she had merely glanced at him; she was looking at Judith.

Ann's smile and bow should have been claimed by Judith, it was meant for her; but she looked at Ann, at her and through her, a blankly brilliant stare, then touched her horse. Both horses leaped at her flick of the whip, and left Ann standing beside the road.

Ann did not go to the pines and weep; it might have been better for her if she had. She went back to the house, and with head high. Hers had always been an inflammable temper, but never before had she felt the profound anger that held her now. It turned her cold, not hot. With all the family enmity forgotten, she had smiled as she would have smiled at Edward, and had been cut in a manner possible only to as finished a product as Judith. Ann's nerves were always high strung, and for the last weeks she had been under the strain of persistent denial, anxious over the danger to Garvin of their secret meetings, and too inexperienced to realize the still greater danger to herself from the sort of appeal Garvin was making to her; certain only that neither he nor she was happy. Edward's defection had been followed too closely by Judith's act. Ann shivered like one with ague.

She was very quiet at supper. The meal was a hurried one, for Sue and Coats were going to the village, and no one noticed Ann's white face. She was going to meet Garvin that night. She went as soon as it was dark, and waited for him, sitting tensely upright under the willows; usually it was Garvin who waited. She sat so still that a rabbit came in under the willows, almost to her feet, before it leaped and fled.

Garvin came presently, well hidden by the dense growth of elderberry bushes that, matted by

foxgrape vines, extended to the creek. He had chosen this spot because he could come all the way from the woods under cover. "Ann!" he said. "You here first!" On the instant his arms were about her.

Ann did not hold him off as usual. She sat quite still and let him kiss her. It was a few moments before he noticed how passive she was. "What is it? What has happened?" he asked.

"Just that I have made up my mind."

"To what?" he asked, not knowing what to expect, for he was accustomed to reluctance and withdrawal.

"That I'll go with you, Garvin—as soon as you can take me away. Then I'll marry you. I'm a Penniman, but I'm fully as good as your sister—or any Westmore lady ever was. I'm not afraid to marry you."

The blood flared in Garvin's face, but he thanked her as tenderly as any Westmore ever uttered the words. "My darling!... You do love me, then! You do love me! Thank you, dear."

Ann's hand drew his face to hers. "You're all I have," she said.

Garvin held her closely while he drew off his seal ring, engraved with the Westmore crest, and put it on her finger. "You can't wear it openly, dear; but every time you look at it it will remind you that you are promised to me."

He kissed her hands and her lips, while he gave her every assurance desire for possession ever invented. And Ann, borne into more perfect trust, gave her future more fully into his keeping.

XIX

A BARGAIN

On the way back to Westmore that night, Garvin met Baird. Baird had been riding with Judith in the afternoon and had dined at Westmore and spent the evening there. When Garvin, saying that he must go to the village, had excused himself and had hurried to Ann, he had left Baird with Edward and Judith. Very soon Edward also had gone out, and Baird and Judith had spent the evening together, as was frequent of late.

Both Garvin and Baird were riding slowly, for both were engrossed by the subject to which, next to his struggle for existence, man gives his intensest interest; Baird had just parted from Judith, Garvin from Ann.

"Hello, Garvin—just back?" Baird asked.

"Yes.... Baird, I think Will Prescott wants a machine. You know he's a sort of third cousin of ours by marriage."

Baird wondered if there was any one of their class in the southeastern states who was not, by marriage or otherwise, cousin to a Westmore. It was an effective argument he had used in persuading Edwin Carter and the others who were combining to form the automobile manufacturing company in which Baird meant to have a large interest, that Garvin would serve them well if given the city agency.

"Good!" he said. "Nail him—or any one else who comes your way. The commission'll be yours."

"How soon do you think I can get back into town and get to work?" Garvin asked. "Is the agency a sure thing?" It was the question to which he had been leading.

Baird had no intention of being hurried in the matter. He meant that Edward should give a guarantee for Garvin that would make his own position in the firm "a sure thing."

"I'll know that in a few days, Garvin. I have to see Edwin Carter again—I can tell you more then. I see no reason why the thing shouldn't go through. I'm going to make every effort to get it for you."

Garvin was forced to curb his impatience. "You're a brick, Baird."

"No—I think you're the man for the place."

They parted, each taking up thoughts that had little to do with business.

Garvin looked up at the long dim line of Westmore. Let Edward have the place if he wanted it; it was rightfully Edward's; it was Edward's money that had bought up the mortgages. He would take Ann and go. Go soon, even if he had to attach himself to Baird's firm merely as a traveling agent.

He unsaddled, stalled his horse, and let himself into the house. The lights were out; Edward and Judith must have gone to bed.

But he saw, as he came up the stairs, that Edward was still up. He was standing in his open door, evidently waiting for him. In his harassed condition, Edward was the last person he wanted to see.

"You up, Ed?" he said casually.

"Yes.... Come in here—I want to speak to you."

Garvin knew instantly that something serious had happened; Edward's manner was so deadly quiet, his voice so ominously even. The apprehension that harried them all was the first thing that settled upon Garvin. "Well, what now?" he said. "Sarah again, I suppose."

Edward closed the door, then faced him. "No.... I wish that every other irresponsible in our family was as safely guarded as poor Sarah is in the place to which I took her.... Garvin Westmore, what's this thing you've been doing? Leading astray a girl who is no more than a child—meeting her at night! How far has it gone? By heaven! if you have harmed her—I'll—" Edward broke off, grasping at the self-control that was leaving him.

Garvin's brain had leaped from thought to thought. Who had spied upon him? How much did Edward know? He could not have been near them that evening. It was not possible for any one to come near the willows and he not detect it. Garvin was capable of perfect coolness, and at unexpected moments. "What girl are you talking about?" he demanded. "I've played with more than one girl on the Ridge—so did you, I reckon, in your time."

Edward drew an uneven breath. "I mean Ann Penniman."

"Yes, I've talked to Ann—what of it?"

"Answer my question! *How far has this thing gone?*" Edward repeated with such intense passion that Garvin recoiled, surprised rather than angered. Had he not been surprised, he would instantly have flared. "I've done Ann no harm!... But what great difference should it make to you? What's Ann Penniman to you? Why the devil should you come at me in this fashion—even if I had gone the lengths! One would suppose I'd been poaching on your preserves! I'm my own master—neither you nor any other man shall question me about how or with whom I choose to amuse myself!" Garvin had flared finally.

Edward knew well what that sudden high note in Garvin's voice portended. He spoke quickly: "I apologize.... I ought to have got at the thing differently.... Sit down a moment—I want to talk of something else, first ... this matter of your getting the agency.... I've been consulting with Baird—about it.... Sit down—"

Edward had talked with a certain haste, and yet with pauses, quieting his brother while he sought for his own self-control. It was almost beyond him; he had paused, laid hold on the thing, gone on, paused again. He ended with outward calm.

And Garvin had quieted in the sudden way usual with him. Edward had motioned him to a chair, and he took it. Edward sat down opposite to him at the desk; he looked down while he talked. "It seems it depends on me whether Baird's firm will take you on or not. If I take stock in their company, they will give you the agency. I've—"

"I don't want you to sacrifice money on my account," Garvin interrupted. "I mean to go somewhere—away from here—and just as soon as I can. I'll look about for something else, that's all."

Edward continued steadily. "I shall not be doing that. I've looked into the matter—I've had my lawyer do it—for I'm no business man. He says it's a good investment, and I'm willing to go into it. I'd do almost anything to forward either your interests or Judith's. All I can do for Sarah is to see that she has every comfort it's possible to give her at a sanatorium. I made a mistake in taking her out and bringing her here, after she had been shut away from Westmore for twelve years. No wonder her poor brain went wild again and drove her to the Mine Banks. I learned my lesson. I'll never forget that night when you and the rest went after her and we waited here, all of us certain that she had done away with herself. We've Ben Brokaw to thank for having saved us that tragedy." He looked up at his brother. "You see, Garvin, the thing I'm living for now is the Westmore family. I don't want the family to go under. You have splendid blood in you—in spite of the unfortunate inheritance our father gave you. But if you don't give yourself all the help you can, you are done for. I'd give a good deal if you would take hold on life, use your will to create something of a future for yourself. I know how hard it is to do it in this environment, so I'd be glad to have you get out of it, and glad to help you do it."

"Would you advise me to marry and give Westmore an heir?" Garvin asked with bitter sarcasm.

Edward was silent.

"We can cut that possibility out of my future, then. All I want is a more normal sort of life than I've had, and I think I may get it away from here. I mean to get it—it'll save me if anything will. You happened to have been born before father started down hill—you and Judith are the fortunate ones—it's for you to give Westmore an heir." He ended more gravely than bitterly.

"All that lies in the future," Edward returned quietly. He straightened. "Garvin, I'm willing to give you your chance away from here—I'll arrange with Baird to have you go at the earliest possible moment—will you promise in return that you will give up this thing which you have assured me

was nothing but play on your part, with Ann?"

Garvin was silent for a moment; then he said, "I want to go as soon as I can. But even if I have to wait around for a while, I promise I'll not go near Ann—that bit of play is ended."

Edward studied him; their eyes met fairly. "Very well," he said. "I will see Baird to-morrow," and he rose.

Garvin got up also, but at the door he stopped. "You've questioned me, Ed—before I go I'd like to ask a question or two."

"Very well."

"Who told you I met Ann?"

"I can't answer that question."

"Did Ann tell you?"

"No—certainly not."

"Then tell me this: What's your especial interest in Ann Penniman?"

Edward's face became expressionless, but he answered clearly, "Your own judgment ought to tell you why I'm horrified at this performance of yours. If Coats Penniman knew, he would draw the same conclusion I did, and he would shoot you on sight. You know how I feel toward the Pennimans, that they have been wronged by our family. Ann deserves the love of an honest man, and it's perfectly evident to me that your intentions do not come under that head. I'll tell you quite frankly that I mean to guard Ann from you—for both your sakes. So, if, in an irrational moment, you should forget your promise to me, I warn you that you will pay dearly for it."

"Save your threats," Garvin returned coolly. "I have no intention of seeing Ann. You seem to feel strongly on the subject, more so than the matter warrants. The best thing will be for me to get away from the Ridge as soon as possible and relieve you of worry," and he went out.

Left alone, Edward paced the floor; there were vivid enough passions beneath the quiet exterior Edward Westmore presented to the world. In his agitation he spoke aloud. "I can't be candid with him, as one would be with a *man!*" he said passionately. "But if I find he has lied to me! If he has harmed her—!"

XX

MARRY? YES

When Baird parted from Garvin, he had returned to the thoughts that Garvin's business talk had interrupted; he had been thinking of marriage and of Judith.

Except on the rare occasions when he was touched by depression, Nickolas Baird had always thought of his immunity from family bonds with satisfaction. But to-night he had realized, somewhat suddenly, that he was about to give up his hitherto much-prized freedom, and that Judith Westmore would not object to his doing so.

It had come about so naturally, that intimacy of theirs. He was fully accepted now, on the Ridge; more than that, he was welcomed by Ridge society with the hospitality characteristic of southern people when assured. The night spent at Westmore, when he had borne himself well, had won for Baird the support of every Westmore, and they were a numerous clan. Colonel Dickenson had put Baird forward at the Fair Field Club and in the city. "A gentleman, suh, an' a born financier," was his introduction, "a great friend of my cousins, the Westmores." Baird had the faculty of interesting men much older than himself: business men by his pronounced level-headedness, conviviais like the colonel by his apparently inexhaustible supply of anecdotes, related simply and with a humorous zest that was captivating because in no way assumed.

And Baird had not neglected his opportunities. The establishment of an automobile factory important enough to compete with the largest in the United States was now an assured thing. Joseph Dempster, an Indiana near-millionaire, was the nucleus about which Baird had woven his web. Dempster already had an interest in a motor company, and it was Baird who had suggested to him the easy possibility of enlarging the Dempster factory so that it would be one of the biggest concerns in the States. It was he who had pointed out that Edwin Carter's steel interests made him the most eligible man to approach. Dempster had little of Baird's persuasive ability, and knew it, and he also had a high opinion of Baird's gift; the young fellow carried a middle-aged man's head on his shoulders—in matters of business. Baird had been sent east to interest Carter and had captured him.

Baird's reward was to be a high-salaried position and an interest in the company; Dempster had guaranteed him that. Baird regarded his interest in the company as the important thing. He had very little money of his own, the disastrous two years in South America had cleaned him out, so, while he spent the mornings in Carter's office going over Dempster's plans and specifications for

the new factory and took charge of the correspondence connected with it, he had been considering ways and means of pushing his own interests.

He wanted a larger interest in the company. Dempster and Carter meant to keep the controlling interest in their own hands, but they would welcome sums of which they might have the handling, additions to the company of men like Edward Westmore who would be content simply to draw dividends and interfere in no way with the management of the concern. If he could capture for them several such men as Edward Westmore, his own reward would be an increased interest in the company. Just let him once get on his feet, have some negotiable paper at his command, and he would outdistance both Dempster and Carter; he had a better business brain than either of them. Baird was not in the least modest about his own capability, and he had learned the wisdom of going slowly.

The two hunt clubs had seemed to him a good field for operations; certainly the best he could command. He would meet there just the sort of men who would be useful to him. Though unacquainted with Baird's reasons, Edwin Carter had willingly put him up at the Ridge Club, and his recommendation of the young man was genuine enough. Baird's good sense had both surprised and pleased him. The young fellow had the qualities of a winner; most young men with the attractions of a city open to them would not care to sleep where the whip-poor-wills held sway.

Things were working out well for Baird. At the Fair Field Club he had secured one man for his company, and when Edward Westmore came forward with his guarantee for Garvin he would present them both to Carter with the certainty of accrued interest in the company.

But Baird was not thinking of business when he rode away from Westmore that night. For the first time he was thinking really seriously of a woman. Until he met Judith Westmore, women had been merely incidents to him, and to-night he had been brought face to face with marriage, the thing he had not intended to consider for years to come.

He and Judith had seen each other frequently during the last weeks. They had ridden together, spent long evenings together, been bidden together to all the Ridge gatherings. And yet, throughout, Judith had maintained a certain distance, attracting him, and yet restraining him. He had struggled against her dominance, as he would always struggle to conquer anything that eluded him. Judith had hovered just beyond his reach, and he had been forced into an impassioned deference, been held to it so determinedly that his capturing instinct had been fully aroused. The eight years' difference in their ages had vanished from his consideration. Was she playing with him, or was she not? What he wanted was a more satisfying response to his love.

For Baird had decided that for the first time in his life he was in love. For the first time a woman had interested him completely, stirred all that was dearest in him, held him to deference while she showed herself supremely attractive. When he had come upon Ann that afternoon, he had been wondering what Judith would say or do if he should suddenly lift her from her horse and kiss her; tell her that he loved her? How much would he learn of the real Judith?

He had been on the very verge of some such avowal when he had looked up and seen Ann. Their little episode had long since been relegated to the background which was studded by such careless incidents; he felt no particular self-consciousness at the sight of Ann, but it did strike him as unnecessarily cruel of Judith to cut the girl. Ann was so appealingly pretty as she stood there, wide-eyed and startled, then so lovely when radiated by her eager smile. "Damn their stupid family quarrel!" had been Baird's inward comment.

The thing had chilled him, and they had ridden in silence until Judith asked brightly, "Who is that pretty girl we just passed? She gave you a brilliant smile, Mr. Baird."

Baird had been surprised into saying, "Ann Penniman—but it was you she was speaking to—she gave me only the tail of her eye," and his annoyance at Judith made him add, "I think she is the prettiest girl I've met on the Ridge."

"Ann Penniman? Why, I don't know her—I never spoke to a Penniman in my life," Judith had returned with a faintly questioning, half-amused, half-regretful note. "If she is the little girl who belongs to the farm beyond the woods there, she has grown up quickly. I'm sorry if I was really included in that smile and didn't realize it."

Judith had done her feminine best to nullify her act and at the same time convey to Baird the status of Ann Penniman. Baird had not fathomed her, or guessed the swift jealousy that had instantly struck at Ann. Ann's smile was certainly meant for Judith, but if Judith had not realized it, it was all right enough. Garvin had told him that no Penniman ever bowed to a Westmore. The odd thing was that Ann should have risked being cut. But why should he think twice about the thing—he had no interest either in their quarrels or their attempts at reconciliation.

Baird promptly forgot the incident, for, throughout the afternoon, Judith was so utterly charming to him. They had had the club to themselves; it was a little as if he were entertaining her at his own house, a new sensation to Baird—every step of his intimacy with Judith had been a new experience.

They had ridden slowly back to Westmore then, through the tender green of the woods, both the languor and the stir of spring having their way with him, his eyes saying to Judith the things his lips did not. Then Westmore had deepened, as it always did, the impression of unattainability that

Judith gave. Their walk on the terrace after dinner had softened the impression. Judith had talked about herself, and one admission she made had impressed Baird more than anything she had ever said; she was speaking of Westmore and of Edward:

"I have been mistress of Westmore for a long time, but I realize that Edward will probably marry—he is only thirty-nine.... In a way, it will be a relief to me, and yet I shall feel a little desolate."

"But you will marry," Baird had said.

"If I love a man enough, I will."

Baird did not know why he had not spoken, then and there. Why the thing had come suddenly and in the way in which it had—when his horse had been brought to the front door and Judith stood beside him as he was about to mount. He had tested the saddle, Judith was afraid that it might be loose, they stood together, their hands touching, and suddenly her nearness had pervaded him. He had caught her to him, held her for the instant of yielding, and then their lips had met.

It was a woman's kiss he had received; a woman's clinging embrace, as passionate as the pressure of his own arms—for the long moment before withdrawal. He had tried to keep her. "Judith, we love each other—" he said, but the arms that held him off were like steel.

"It's—Edward—" she whispered breathlessly. "You must let me go—" When he loosed her, she gained the portico. She had heard when he had not Edward's approach around the side of the house.

When Edward came up, Baird stood back to his horse, his grasp already on a degree of composure. He had been conscious that Edward had spoken absently, that he stood absently beside Judith while Baird told Judith that he would see her the next day. He had lifted his cap and ridden away, with only the one very clear impression, that before he saw Judith again he would settle something that was a chaotic uncertainty in his mind.

He was trying to settle it when Garvin met him, and took it up again when they parted: was he ready to marry—even for love? There were minor considerations that occurred to Baird: he had gone far, and Judith was not a woman to be played with; she would be a superb wife; she loved him and he loved her, but did he love her enough to give up his beloved freedom? to settle down to home-building?... He thought he did.

Baird shouldered the thing finally, with an all-pervading sense of responsibility; went soberly to bed with it.

XXI

A LOT OF PLANNING

Baird rose early the next morning in the same soberly responsible frame of mind, fully conscious that he was about to enter upon an entirely new phase. He had no joking word for Sam—and no shining half-dollar—he would have to be more careful of his half-dollars after this, a family man had to think of such things.

Though it was Saturday, he had to go into the city that morning, for Edward had promised that if, after considering Baird's proposition over night, he decided that he wanted to close with it, he would come to Carter's office, talk the matter over with him as well, and sign the necessary papers. Halstead, the Fair Field investor whose promise Baird had secured, was also coming. It would be a triumph for Baird, for the two were so exactly the sort of men his firm would welcome.

For the three morning hours Baird was too alertly busy to think of his matrimonial plans. Both Edward and Halstead appeared promptly, settled their business without hesitation, and, when Edward took leave of Baird at noon, Garvin's position was secure. There was already a city agency for the Dempster machines, and as soon as the present agent could be transferred to an agency elsewhere Garvin was to take his place. Carter thought that Garvin could take charge in about a month, and in the meantime he would receive commissions on any Dempsters he might be able to sell.

Baird had the satisfaction of knowing that Carter was well pleased; the extra interest in the company which he craved was certain to be his. Carter lunched him royally at his club when the morning's business was ended, and invited him for the afternoon and for Sunday to his palatial new home in Spring Valley, but Baird had other plans; he meant to go to Westmore that evening.

"An attraction on the Ridge, I suppose," Carter said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes," Baird confessed, but with the air of the man who meant to say no more.

Carter turned to business. "Dempster says the first thing for us to do is to get out a new model that's something ahead of anything on the market yet."

"We have to compete with the French machines," Baird said. "If we can evolve a model that offers the qualities of the best French traveler, we'll have accomplished something. And there's a big future for the truck, too.... I went into the Gaylord factories after I came back from South America, worked eight months there, on purpose to get ideas for a model car and truck I've had in mind ever since I first saw a motor chugging along in Chicago. It was the trial trip of the orneriest excuse for a car man ever invented. I bought my way on her second trip just to study her. Then I took up mechanical engineering, or, rather, I went on with it. Except for the two years I spent on a ranch in Wyoming, I was always knocking around machine shops; my father couldn't keep me out of them."

Carter was thinking. "You've had a course in engineering, then?" he asked.

"Four years in Chicago University. That's what took me out to South America. I saw a chance to make money there and I made it, fifty thousand in one year—the next year I dropped it, partly because I hadn't experience enough, and partly because I had the Brazilian government against me.... But I've told you that story before."

Carter had followed his line of thought to a conclusion. "How would you like to go to France for a few months, go this autumn, and go the rounds of the factories there, while Dempster is enlarging the plant, and bring us back your ideas?"

It was the thing Baird desired most. He had puzzled over some means of getting to Europe and still keeping in close touch with the company. Here was his opportunity, nevertheless his instant thought was, "If I do you'll pay me well for it—and you won't get my best ideas, either, not unless I get a lion's share of the profits." To Carter he said, "It wouldn't be a bad scheme—it would pay the company in the end, I think."

"I'll suggest it to Dempster when he comes in." Carter relaxed into chuckles then. "I've got a word to say to him about the present Dempster car, too. Spring Valley is duly impressed by the shining thing, which was my object in having it sent on, and I've gladly spent a hundred dollars or so on coats and bonnets and veils for Mrs. Carter and Christine, but, lord, Baird, every damned thing that could go wrong with an engine and four wheels has happened to that thing! I meant to run it myself and take a little quiet joy in doctoring its ills, but no, thank you! I'm done! I've advertised for a first-class chauffeur who'll take charge of it and swear to all the neighbors that the beast is an angel. It probably will sell Dempster cars, but I'll own to you that I'm sorry for the man who buys one."

"They're no good," Baird agreed, "but no make on the market is satisfactory, for that matter. We've simply got to get out a better machine." Then he laughed. "Garvin Westmore is having his trials, too, and keeping quiet about it. Every man will keep as quiet as possible about his engine troubles, keep a debit and credit sheet—debit, temper and money—credit, the envy of his neighbors and the possession of a high-priced convenience. And the credit sheet will win out every time. The craze is on and will go the lengths—until we begin to travel the air."

"I suppose you'll be advocating a flying-machine annex to the factory next," Carter said.

Baird did not say that he had given a great deal of thought to aerial navigation. He bid Carter a laughing good-by and took the first train to the Ridge.

He settled quickly into the gravity that had held him ever since he had parted from Judith.... Judith would enjoy Europe. She had never been to Europe; neither had he.... And when they returned they would have to go west to live; he would have to be near the factory. He thought, with something of a glow, that Judith would be a queen anywhere, beautiful and capable—and a passionately loving woman—her kiss had told him that.

He pondered Judith a little. She was no longer a mystery to him; just a splendid sort of woman who had plenty of will, will enough to have devoted herself to Westmore through the hard years, but, throughout, a woman desirous of love. He had wanted to discover her, and it had led to this. He couldn't ask for a better helpmate than Judith; she was a deal too fine for him, in fact; he would have to live up to Westmore ideals.... There was a lot of planning to do for the future.... It was almost four o'clock—he would fill in the time till evening, then go to Judith.

XXII

IMPRESSIONS

So Baird had decided when he alighted from the train and went down into the village for his horse which he always left at one of the village stables while he was in the city. He stopped at the little store-post-office for his mail, then rode up the Post-Road, across the railroad track and past the station. A short distance away he noticed a shining new buggy drawn close to the edge of the road, and his next glance told him that the girl in the buggy was Ann Penniman. He had not recognized her at first, in her red coat and big white hat; he had not immediately connected her with the new buggy and capable horse, either.

Baird was in a mood to be regretful for past misdemeanors; never in his life had he felt so

solemnly retrospective for so many consecutive hours. He rode directly up to Ann, undeterred by the way in which she looked through him, much as Judith had looked through her on the day before.

Baird brought his horse to a stop beside her. "How do you do?" he said gravely.

Ann's beautiful brows lifted. "I am well, thank you." Baird could not have imagined a more icy greeting.

"Will you endure my presence long enough for me to say something?" he asked with unabated gravity.

"Why—certainly—" Ann's brows were still raised.

"I want to apologize humbly, for the way in which I repaid your kindness the other day. I behaved abominably."

Ann paused an instant for a choice of words. "I reckon I was too—pleasant to a stranger—an' you behaved the way that's natural to you. I haven't thought much about it, so it doesn't matter at all."

"I guess you're right about my being an ill-mannered brute—it's about time I reformed," Baird returned with perfect sincerity. "I'm very sorry I did what I did.... You see, Miss Ann, you're very sweet and pretty, the prettiest girl I've ever seen, I think, and I clean forgot myself—was just abominably natural, as you say."

Baird would not have been Baird had he not added this codicil to his apology and signed it by the look he gave Ann, an appreciative study of the water-lily hat and the flower-like face it framed. Her red coat became her wonderfully, made her clear skin still more white, intensified the gray in her hazel eyes, deepened the black in her hair. She was a study in contrasts, and really very beautiful. And it struck Baird that she looked much more mature. There were shadows beneath her eyes, and her mouth looked firmer, like that of a girl grown rather suddenly into womanhood.

Ann increased the impression by the way in which she disposed of his speech. She shrugged slightly, shelving both his apology and his admiration with utter indifference. "I am waiting for my father—I reckon he must have missed the last train. Do you know what time it is?"

Baird looked at his watch. "The next train will be along in ten minutes."

"As soon as that? I'm glad.... I don't like to go any nearer the station, for we don't know yet whether this horse is train-broke."

Baird repeated his stock phrase. "You ought to have an automobile—it wouldn't take fright."

Ann smiled involuntarily at the thought of a Penniman's investing in an automobile, and also at Baird's business alertness; she had heard much of Baird from Garvin. "You ought to talk to father," she said. When she smiled she looked more like the mischievous child Baird had seen playing in the barn; her eyelids drooped and the corners of her mouth lifted.

"I will," Baird returned promptly. "I'll wait here and meet him, if you don't mind."

Ann decided to offer no objection. She had brought it on herself, but she felt quite capable of enduring his presence with equanimity. And if her father treated him with scant courtesy, so much the better. She settled back in the buggy, and Baird also chose a more negligent attitude. He sat sidewise and surveyed Ann.

She was certainly worth looking at as she sat there, relaxed and with eyes down, an air of self-absorption that was tantalizing. Apparently, she was quite indifferent whether there was any conversation or not.

"Have you seen Garvin Westmore driving his new machine?" he asked at random.

"No," Ann answered, without raising her eyes. She was thinking of Garvin and the night before; she had thought of little else all day.

Baird noted her manner, and launched into an account of Garvin's trial trip down the Post-Road. He exaggerated the dangers they encountered, and Ann woke to new interest, even to terror, when he assured her that it was all a man's life was worth to drive a car over some of the Ridge roads.

"An' Garvin's so reckless—about drivin'," she said, wide-eyed, and added severely, "You ought to tell him to be careful—you sold him the horrid thing."

"He'd pay more attention if you told him, don't you think?" Baird suggested tentatively.

Ann flushed deeply enough, but not so deeply as she did a moment later, when she saw Edward Westmore within a few yards of them. He was riding up from the village, and neither of them had noticed until he was almost upon them, for the soft dirt road had dulled sound. He had seen them as soon as he had crossed the railroad track; looked at them closely and observantly as he came on.

The change in Ann was instantaneous. She grew crimson and sat up abruptly, her whole aspect, for the brief moment until Edward smiled, uncertain and appealing. Then, as if she had won

pardon for some fault, the smile that vivified her was sweeter than the May sunshine. Baird thought she was the loveliest thing he had ever seen, with her lips a little apart, her eyes shining. No wonder Edward looked at her as if he were absorbing her. Baird felt a sudden envy of Edward; no girl had ever looked at him like that!... But there were not many girls who could look like Ann.

Baird also had straightened, for the look Edward had given him was somewhat coolly level; Baird felt that Edward's smile was entirely for Ann. But it was to him Edward spoke: "Just out from town, Baird?"

"Yes. I'm waiting now to talk Dempsters to Mr. Penniman—Miss Ann thinks I can sell him one." Baird did not know why he explained his presence so promptly; perhaps because Edward's manner made him uncomfortable.

"I thought I would like to see you try," Ann said with an indifference that had nothing to do with the way in which she was looking at Edward. "I'm waiting for father to come on the next train," she explained, and told Edward about the horse. "Ben Brokaw says he's afraid Billy's a runaway horse."

"You ought not to be driving him, then," Edward said with concern.

It struck Baird that Edward's entire manner was anxious and concerned. That he had looked keenly and anxiously at Ann as he had approached. He had been brief enough over their business transaction that morning, as if he had far more important matters on his mind.

"I reckon I shouldn't," Ann agreed. "I'll see how he behaves when the train comes."

"That's reckless. I wish you wouldn't do such things."

Baird was surprised at the intimacy the remark implied. Were both brothers in love with her? If one judged from appearances, Ann favored Edward... Or was she simply a born coquette? She was certainly enough to turn any man's head, and an infatuation on Garvin's part was natural, he was that sort; but Edward Westmore?

"I won't any more," Ann promised with pretty submission.

Though he looked at Ann, Edward's next speech was directed to Baird. "I was at the club about an hour ago—I went by the Back Road and left some papers for you, Baird. You can look them over and bring them to Westmore this evening—that is if you thought of coming over."

It was a reminder of Judith, though Baird knew Edward did not intend it as such; that would be too unlike him. "Yes, I am coming after dinner," Baird said gravely.

Ann knew just what Edward intended; she saw it in his eyes—that he had left a book for her—and she answered his look.

"There is the train," Edward said warningly. "Be careful, Ann." He brought his horse closer to her. "Keep your eye on the horse, Baird."

Ann sat taut, reins well held, and her eyes watchful. The train had whistled at the junction, and the next moment it roared along below them, making the usual racket as it slowed up, and it was quite plain that Ann's horse was not trustworthy. He quivered, backed and plunged and showed all the signs of fright.

"Don't touch him!" Ann said resolutely. "I can manage him." And to the horse, "You idiot, you! Sho, now, Billy—quiet, suh—quiet—"

She handled him well, and without a particle of nervousness, though for a few moments it seemed likely that the buggy would be overturned; the animal backed perilously near the edge of the road. Edward kept near enough to draw Ann from danger if that should happen, and Baird watched for the runaway that was certain to follow if the buggy overturned. They were tense moments—until the train snorted its onward way around the curve and the horse gradually quieted.

"All right, now," Baird said, "but the brute's not safe, Miss Ann—he's particularly stupid."

Ann looked at Edward, her eyes blazing. "He needed the whip! I'd have given it to him—*hard*—but I was afraid I'd frighten you." Baird thought she looked rather like Garvin with that flame in her eyes; both her cool handling of the horse and her lift into excitement surprised him; it altered his opinion of Ann Penniman somewhat.

Edward was a little gray about the lips. "Ann, promise me you will never drive that horse again."

"I'm not afraid of him!"

"Promise me," Edward repeated.

Ann drew a long breath, then smiled. "Yes, I promise. I promised before."

Edward gave her a long look, and her eyes dropped under it. He looked then at Baird, who had been silently observant. "Perhaps you'll watch over this reckless young person until Mr. Penniman comes," he said more lightly. "Having scolded, I'll depart.... Good-by, Ann." But there was nothing chiding in the parting look he gave her, Baird noticed.

There was good reason for his somewhat hasty departure, for the man who had just separated from the group on the station platform was Coats Penniman. When he started toward them, Edward had ridden on. As he approached, Coats eyed Baird quite as gravely and observantly as Edward had done. He had a stern face, heavy black brows that lowered easily over blue-gray eyes.

Baird gave him look for look, coolly, returning his nod in like fashion, and Coats transferred his attention to Ann. "Well, Ann?"

"I stopped up here on account of the horse," Ann explained. "He was ugly when the train came—if I'd been nearer, I reckon he'd have run away.... This is Mr. Baird, father—he wanted to meet you—he wants to sell you an automobile." Ann was very certain that her father would promptly dispose of Baird. He knew who Baird was, the whole Ridge knew Baird now—an enterprising young fellow who had been put forward by the Westmores.

Both to her surprise and Baird's, Coats offered his hand. "I'm glad to meet you. I've heard about you—you're a western man, aren't you?"

"Chicago.... Some one was telling me you'd lived out there—long enough to be interested in automobiles, I hope." Baird had rather a taking smile, particularly when it was whimsical.

To Ann's greater surprise, Coats said, "I have been thinking of getting one—if for no other reason than to get some decent roads about here. From what I know of your Dempsters they can be guaranteed to furnish an accident or two that would stir up our county supervisors. The roads they give us are an outrage."

Coats' face softened pleasantly under amusement, and Baird laughed. "Tell me who they are, and I'll go for them—sell each one of them a machine. That's a revenge that ought to satisfy you."

"All right—if you want to ride on with us, I'll tell you. I'm partial to automobiles anyway—even a Dempster's more satisfactory than a brute like this.... Ann, you knew he wasn't safe—why didn't you bring Jinny?"

"Jinny went lame this morning, an' the other horses were working."

Coats frowned. "There's always something wrong with them. The horse is certainly an obsolete way of getting about—I'll be glad when he becomes merely a pet."

Baird agreed with him. He liked to win a man, particularly an intelligent, unassuming man like Coats Penniman. He set himself to do so, and found that Coats, for some unexplainable reason, was willing to be friendly. They found plenty to talk about, even for the length of four miles up the Post-Road, and, when Coats chose the longer way round, by the front road, Baird kept on with them, as far as the club house. He had decided that he liked Coats Penniman, and that it was pleasant riding in this slow way through the leafy scents of May, particularly with anything as lovely to look at as Ann.

Ann had been sufficiently surprised to pay attention to the conversation for a time, to notice that Baird was not at all handsome, not like Garvin or Edward, but broad-shouldered and strong-featured. His eyes were too cold a gray, his nose too aquiline, his cheek-bones too high, and his upper lip too long. And he had entirely too much jaw. Yet, for some reason, he was attractive, at any rate while he talked; his voice was deep but not at all harsh.

So Ann decided, then looked off over the country and thought of the one overwhelming thing, the night before—and of Edward. The Post-Road was shut in by trees in some places, but there were long stretches where the country sloped away on either side, pastures vivid with spring green, alternating with reddish brown plowed fields and orchards that already showed patches of color, cherry and peach bloom. The green of the woods seemed to darken even while she watched, they were growing so rapidly into full leaf. In a few days the woods would be sprayed with white, a riot of dogwood. And the wood-honeysuckle was coming into pink bloom everywhere; and millions of violets and wild pansies. The grass in the groves was thick with forget-me-nots, and the creek hollows white and yellow and pinky-green with blood-root, adder's-tongue and Jack-in-the-pulpit.

Every other spring she had roamed the country; this spring she had forgotten the flowers. She knew where the wild pansies grew the largest and most of them had the velvety upper petals that proclaimed them pansies and not violets; and where the rare white violets were to be found. As they crossed the bridge where, some twenty feet below, the creek that skirted the Mine Banks tumbled over big rocks, Ann remembered in a vague way, as one thinks of something years past, that she used to find white violets in the soft spaces between the rocks. She thought much more vividly of how dangerous the bridge was, without any side rails, simply a planking and that none too wide; a careless turn on a dark night, and an automobile could easily be dashed to pieces below. It would be dreadful if anything happened to Garvin.

Every thought she had circled about him, and her momentous promise the night before, a thing sealed and unalterable now.... She was going away from all this, the green and the flowers, the fields and the woods. Everything would be quite different—and she was different already—not the same Ann at all.... She had been fearfully angry with Judith, and terribly hurt because of Edward, quite beside herself, and all Garvin had said to her had been so sweet, like balm laid on aching wounds—and she had given her promise, forgotten everything and everybody but Garvin and herself. She had even forgotten to tell Garvin that she was sure Ben knew that they met, and

how dangerous it was for them to go on meeting.... And now it was plain that Edward had not meant to hurt her at all ... and she would have to see him, and with a secret which she must keep from everybody.... Suppose she told Edward that she was engaged to his brother, and how it had come about?...

Her father's invitation to Baird aroused her. They had come to the club entrance and had stopped. "Come over some evening and see us," Coats said, "and don't hesitate to ride through whenever you want—the key to the gate is in a notch near the top of the right-hand post."

"Thank you," Baird returned heartily. "I'll be glad to come, and glad to take the short cut sometimes, too." He swept off his cap to them, a gleam of mischief in his eyes when he looked at Ann. Ann was flushed by her thoughts, and she colored still more deeply because of his meaningful glance.

Coats had noted Baird's look and Ann's blush. He had been thinking steadily of something quite unconnected with his conversation with Baird. He waited a little before he asked, "That's an attractive young fellow—had you met him before, Ann?"

Ann was succinct. "I let him through the gate once, just before you came home. I haven't talked with him since—till to-day."

"Who was the other man who was with you when I got off the train?"

"Edward Westmore—they both helped me with the horse," Ann answered with a calmness she did not feel. If her father questioned further, she did not know what she would do; every nerve in her was jumping, as they had been all night and all day.

But he did not. For a time they rode in an oppressive silence. Then Coats said, "I rather like Mr. Baird. He's the sort who's apt to judge men and women more by what they are than by what their great grandparents were. He comes from a part of the country that's not so hidebound by caste as this country. And he's sure to go back to it. He can come to my house whenever he likes—I approve *his* kind."

Ann said nothing.

XXIII

CHAOTIC UNCERTAINTY

When Baird started for Westmore that evening the full moon had already turned the world white.

He had dined with laughter and talk about him, for usually the club was gay on Saturday night. The hunting season was over, but some of the summer residents of the Ridge had come out to their homes and others were out from the city for the afternoon, for dinner parties at the club and a ride back through the moonlight.

Baird had left Garvin Westmore at the club and with the signs of an afternoon of indulgence upon him. Baird had discovered that liquor made Garvin cool and silent, a surface restraint that was deceptive. It was his eyes that betrayed him when he was farther gone than usual, sometimes burning and restless, again profoundly melancholy. Baird had not thought of that explanation for the man's peculiarities.

Though he had not shown it to Garvin, Baird was thoroughly annoyed. The man must often have been under the influence of liquor when he had not suspected it; he was evidently the sort that drank secretly. Baird doubted whether any one knew that Garvin drank so much; his family were probably in the dark, worried over his moodiness and anxious about him, but unsuspecting of the real cause. Baird wished that he had known this before his firm had placed the man in a responsible position. Had he known, not even his devotion to Judith and his very lively desire to forward his own interests would have led him to recommend Garvin.

Garvin had thanked him with all the Westmore grace for the position Baird had secured for him, then added restlessly, "A month! I wish I could get out of this to-morrow!"

Baird reflected, as he rode through the moonlight, that the thing was done now and couldn't be helped. It was simply up to Garvin: if he did not make good, he would be ousted, that was all. But it was too bad. The man must be mad to celebrate his good luck by a debauch, for that was evidently what it was. Baird was no teetotaler, the consumption of a certain amount of liquor seemed to be necessary for the transaction of business, but he held, with the rest of his kind, that the man who sought to drown his troubles in drink, or celebrate his joys by getting full was a fool, and that the secret debauchee was something decidedly worse.

He was going to Westmore by the Back Road and the Mine Banks, and, as he looked up at Crest Cave, he remembered what Garvin had said: "Lord! I've slept off many a drunk up there." Baird had never solved the mysteries of that queer night he had spent at Westmore—that they were some set of circumstances connected with Garvin was the only explanation he had been able to make to himself. He felt certain of it now; a man with Garvin's weakness was capable of any sort

of madness. He was glad Judith was the sane wholesome woman she was.

Baird also remembered what a man at the club had told him of Garvin's father: "The old colonel was a fine sort, hot-tempered and proud as the deuce, but a gallant sort, just the same—until the war broke him. Then came the hard times, beastly hard times for everybody, and the colonel went under—began to soak and went on soaking to the end." Edward and Judith had come before that time, but Garvin had not.

"I suppose the poor devil can't help it," Baird thought, and shrugged away his annoyance. Besides, he was going to become one of the clan; it was his duty to do all he could for Garvin.

In that soberly responsible frame of mind Baird rode up to Westmore, and the long imposing structure that for nearly two centuries had housed Judith's ancestors impressed him somberly. Perhaps it was as well, on the whole, not to have any known ancestors; it must be rather eery to recognize your great-grandfather cropping up in yourself—damned uncomfortable sometimes ... Well, Judith had certified ancestors enough to supply their family with credentials and with ghosts. Their children...

Baird's thoughts had progressed to this point and beyond when he reached Westmore. In the last twenty-four hours he had considered every possible responsibility connected with matrimony and had thought very little about the thing that turns the world golden, that transcends even the transports of passion, hallows heaven and earth. But he had not realized that. Marriage was a serious thing; it had always impressed him as an almost terrifyingly serious thing.

The door was opened to him by Hetty, the big negress. "Can I see Miss Judith?" Baird asked, preparing to step in.

"Miss Judith ain't here, Mr. Baird—she's done gone fo' a visit."

"Not here?" Baird said blankly.

"No, suh—she went this evenin' fo' over Sunday—to Fair Field. They's a party holdin' at the club—she's gone fo' hit."

Baird managed to say, casually, "Very well—just tell her, when she comes back, that I called."

"Yes, suh."

Baird rode down the Westmore Road even more slowly than he had come up. His first feeling was a hot sense of rebuff—until he began to ask himself why Judith had run away from him?... But she had not run away from him; she had not gone until that evening?... There had been the afternoon during which she might reasonably expect him to come—and the morning that might have brought her a letter from him.

It came over Baird then, with a warm flush, a shock of surprise at himself, that he had been a pretty sort of lover! He had ridden away after that kiss of love she had given him, when even a stupid man would have found an excuse for staying; he had written no impassioned note that Sam must deliver at daybreak; he had dallied through the afternoon, and had ridden composedly up to Westmore with the whole future mapped out in his mind ... Good lord!... And he was a passionate man, too—ordinarily!

Baird was so intensely surprised at himself that, for a time, he could consider nothing but his own conduct. He had never been more in earnest in his life, never more decided upon a course of action. Why, he had settled everything, even to the details of a trip abroad with Judith and the sort of house he would have money enough to run when they came back, and yet he had left undone the first and most natural things a man would do!

Baird was emotionally headlong, he knew that well, easily aroused and always hot in pursuit. What in heaven's name had been the matter with him these last twenty-four hours? His own case bewildered him more than anything he had ever come across. He set his brain to work upon himself, and finally evolved an explanation, which, as is usual when a man seeks to elucidate his own emotional shortcomings, threw the onus upon the woman: Judith's premature offering of herself had made him too sure of her. She had deliberately attracted him, and that was all right, that was what men and women were placed in the world for, to be mutually attracted and to come together. And his pursuit of her was all right, too, particularly right because it had never entered his head to trifle with her—he had respected and admired her too much for that. It was a tribute to the sort of hold she had laid upon him during those weeks of pursuit, that the instant he knew she loved him he had considered marriage and had decided upon it as completely as he had ever decided upon any important thing. The thoughts he had of Judith had been, throughout, the decentest and the honestest thoughts he had ever had.

Then he went on to own to himself that a certain eagerness had departed from him after that kiss of hers. In that one respect it had been a little like some other experiences, when he had pursued determinedly, captured rather easily, then had lost zest.... But he had wanted to marry Judith—that was the unexplainable thing.... Was it simply that, on the whole, she had been such a new experience that he had quite naturally considered marriage, which, Lord knows, was a new and strange enough thing for him to consider?

At this point, Baird asked himself point-blank, "Do you love Judith, or don't you?" And he answered himself honestly, for he felt somewhat desperately in need of honesty. "Yes, I love her,

or I wouldn't be thinking of marrying her—I've never wanted to marry any other woman I've known."

Baird considered for a longer space, and then summed up thus: "From the very first Judith appealed to the best in me—she's appealed more to the mental than the physical side of me. That's why, instead of plunging along in a fever these last twenty-four hours, I've been planning for a contented future. And if respect and admiration and the certainty that a woman will make you a splendid wife, plus a reasonable degree of passion, aren't good reasons for thinking of marriage, then I've learned nothing from watching men who have been infatuated with their wives in much the same fashion that a man is infatuated with his mistress; the result is usually ructions. I love Judith in sensible marrying fashion, but I confess I ought to feel more joyous over it."

Unless a man is permeated by the golden thing of which, as yet, Baird had little conception, he is apt to settle his own case first and the woman's last. He turned finally to a consideration of Judith. Baird was not any more conceited than the average man, but the certainty that Judith loved him about as completely as a woman could love a man was his unalterable conviction. He might live to be eighty, live to doubt most things, but of that he was certain. And it had not been a sudden thing with her; it was a culmination, a steady growing up to an involuntary offering. She desired him and wished to marry him, and not after the deliberate fashion in which he had been considering their union. Judith loved him intensely, and had sought to attract him as many honest women before her had sought to capture the men they wished to marry. She had waited through the day, then had gone because she must do something to save her pride. She knew that, if the spark was in him at all, he would follow.

He knew now just how it was with him, and he knew how it was with her. He wasn't in the least elated, yet he was pretty thoroughly committed.

What did he intend to do?

XXIV

A DEFINITION OF LOVE

Baird was still pondering his situation when, half an hour later, he let himself through the Penniman gate. The collie must have been abroad in the moonlight seeking adventure, for Baird was not disturbed by any hostile demonstrations; the Penniman barn and house might have been abandoned property, they were so silent under the moon; there was no lighted window, no stir of any kind—until he neared the front porch—then some woman dressed in white rose from a chair, evidently startled.

Even in the bright moonlight, Baird could not tell whether it was Ann Penniman or not, he was not near enough, but he was quick to reassure whoever it was: "It's Nickolas Baird; Mr. Penniman gave me permission to come through."

It was Ann's relieved voice that answered. "Oh—is it?... I thought it was some one else," and she sat down again. Ann had the porch to herself that evening, for Sue and Coats had gone to a neighbor's, and, perhaps because she had been thinking absorbedly of Garvin, she had been startled into wondering if the rider could be he.

Baird had let his horse bring him by the shortest way, for he had had about enough of his thoughts, and was tired of the saddle. When seated in his room, in business fashion, he would decide just what course to take. It occurred to him now that he would think the better for a respite. Looking at Ann would be a relief, like laying down a treatise and taking up a novel.

He had come nearer. "Sitting all alone, Miss Ann?" he asked.

"Yes.... Father and Aunt Sue have gone to make a visit."

Baird dismounted and came to her. "Just sitting and thinking? I've been riding and thinking, and I'm tired of it. May I stop for a while?"

"If you like," Ann said indifferently. "I reckon father'll come along before long—they only went to a neighbor's." Then, because her father had decreed that Baird should be treated hospitably, she added, "Won't you wait for him?"

"A few minutes." Baird seated himself on the top step, at Ann's feet. "What a night!"

"The chair'd be more comfortable," Ann suggested politely.

"I'd rather sit here, thank you.... May I have the cushion, though?"

He took it from the chair, and sat back against the pillar of the porch, his legs stretched comfortably. He could see Ann's face quite distinctly now, all except her eyes,—they were shadowed pools in a white setting; she was black and white, more marked contrasts than in daylight, though not so clearly outlined.

"I've just been to Westmore," Baird said, "and when we struck the County Road that horse of mine turned this way, instead of going on by the Mine Banks. I was thinking too hard to notice until he'd gone some distance, so I let him have his way. They're cute beasts—when they're headed for their stables they're as good as a man at calculating distance."

"Did you get him here?" Ann asked.

"Yes, I bought him off Garvin Westmore."

"Almost every horse about here would choose this way through to the Post-Road because they're used to it. One reason the Mine Banks Road is so dreadful is because everybody used to come this shorter way. I used to count the horses that came through in a day—when I was little."

"You've always lived here, then, Miss Ann?"

"Always.... I reckon I'd be lonely for it—if I went away," she added soberly.

"You wouldn't be going far away, would you?"

"Oh, no—"

There was something in her manner that recalled fleeting conjectures Baird had had since seeing her with Edward that afternoon. Judith had said, "I realize that Edward will probably marry—" It would be odd if Edward was really thinking seriously of Ann—a Penniman and all the rest of it. There'd be a stir on the Ridge, and a perfect storm in the clan. Silly, caste-bound idiots! Ann was exquisite enough for any sphere. She had been superb while she handled that horse—plenty of spirit and go. And if Edward loved her, he'd marry her, in spite of them all; Edward was a pretty fine sort.... But how about Garvin?... Some one had talked love to Ann, it showed in her face and in her voice—that was what made her seem so changed. Was it Edward or Garvin?... She certainly had drawing power, the thing that's entirely aside from physical beauty; ugly women often had it.

Baird turned from his thoughts. "This is a different sort of place from where I grew up—just about as different as you can imagine," and he slipped into reminiscences of Chicago and of his father, and, when Ann showed her interest, he endeavored to elucidate the intricacies of ward politics.

It seemed to Ann that he had grown up with plenty of wickedness about him, drinking and stealing and such things; among men who cared nothing about any one or anything, only to make money. It was a wonder that he was as nice as he was, and he must be nice, in spite of the way he had once behaved to her, or Edward and Garvin would not be so devoted to him. Ann was certain that Judith Westmore could be cruel, very beautiful and charming, but cruelly proud. Baird was evidently courting her, and she was probably not very nice to him. He certainly did not seem as light-hearted as he once did. And neither was she—she was feeling heavy-hearted enough.

Ann was always quick with sympathy. She had been poignantly reminiscent all day, and she, in her turn, told Baird a little about her own childhood, speaking so softly that her slurred syllables were music. She told him nothing intimate, yet it was a revelation of loneliness; the fields and the woods and Ben had been her companions. Baird was impressed, as Edward had been, by a child life lived apart from its family.

"You hadn't a mother, then, Ann?" Baird had responded to the change in her manner; he forgot to say, "Miss Ann."

"My mother died when I was born," Ann said with a quiver of feeling. "I reckon if I'd had her, everything would have been all different."

Ann had grown up with the longing for a father, but since the night before she had wanted her mother, wanted her intensely. That afternoon, on their return from the village, she had gone down to the woods. There had been a letter for her in the chestnut tree, an impassioned letter. Garvin wrote of the night before, of her promise to go with him. "*You are mine now, every bit of you*—there can be no going back for either of us." And he had also said, "Some one has been spying on us, Ann. I found that out last night. We can't meet as we have. I'll write to you every day, but we mustn't even be seen speaking to each other, for the present. But don't let that worry you, dear—if we are careful, there is no danger of any one's knowing how much we are to each other. And it will only be for a short time—I have the agency at last—we will go in June." Then he had painted a picture of their life together that to one more experienced than Ann might have suggested some notable omissions. Ann simply knew that the letter did not make her happy.... Then there was also a book for her in the bushes, and on the fly leaf a line: "Please wait for me tomorrow?" That had not made her happy, either.

"I suppose it would have made a difference," Baird was saying thoughtfully. "It would have made a difference to me, too—it makes a difference to any child. I wasn't much better off than you—my mother died when I was four years old."

"You can't remember then even how she looked," Ann said with profound fellow-feeling, "any more than I can remember my mother."

She had slipped from her chair, seated herself on the step beside him, and Baird could see her eyes now, wells of sympathy. So long as she lived, Ann would do such things, offer sympathy by the suggestion of a caress, just as she would always respond to the masculine call by an illusive

half-promise. Baird saw her sympathy and felt her nearness. She was an utterly sweet thing; he would have liked to touch her; not in the rough way in which he once had, just draw her close and kiss her softly. He kept his rebellious hands clasped behind his head.

"I can just remember her face—in the misty way I saw yours when you were in the chair," he said steadily. "I can't remember where or when, but I know it was my mother. She was black and white—like you." Baird did not tell her that his mother had been a Jewess; that was a thing he told no one, though he often shrugged in private over his parentage, a Jewish mother and an Irish father! A truly modern American inheritance! "And not such a bad one, either," he was in the habit of adding to himself. "It produces good brains." Just now his brain was retrospective, his feelings busied with Ann.

"I suppose a mother is just as helpful to a boy as she is to a girl," he continued, in the same reflective way. "I suppose, if I'd had my mother to talk to, I'd know women better—all the nice side of them—the mother side.... I suppose I'd know myself better.... Lord knows, I'd like some one to tell me what the lasting thing is composed of—the thing one wants to go through life with."

There was a long silence. Ann was also reflecting vaguely on the same subject, her hands clasped about her knees, her head thrown back, looking up at the stars that appeared to move restlessly, as if palely rebellious under the supremacy of the moon. A cricket beneath the steps ventured upon the stillness, and, as if emboldened by its temerity, a bird flitted by them to the clump of lilacs on the terrace and cut the silence with injunctions to "Whip-poor-will!" Far off, somewhere in the open, his mate agreed with him and reiterated his insistence. Then, just below them, in the pasture, a bobwhite called repeatedly, seeking an answer, which came presently, from the far distance, faint almost as a whispered echo.

"The night birds are making love," Baird said softly. "All nature's stirring with it. Ann, what is love, anyway? The thing we humans ought to have—the lasting thing, I mean?"

"I've been thinking, too," Ann answered musingly. "Why—I suppose it's ... I don't know just how to say it—"

"Try, Ann—you're a woman, you ought to know."

Ann pondered, eyes still lifted to the stars. "Why—I guess it's wanting somebody for all your own—so badly you feel sure you can't live without them ... an' at the same time bein' such good friends with them that you care more about makin' them happy than being happy yourself."

Baird sat up abruptly. "Say that again, will you!"

Ann was startled into confusion. She looked wonderingly at his earnestness. "I don't believe I know—just what I said."

Baird repeated her definition alertly. "That was it, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I think so."

He sat a moment in thought. "That's about right," he said finally and decidedly, "and here I've been asking myself all sorts of fool questions for twenty-four solid hours."

He got up, stood a moment looking down at her, laughing softly, amusedly, and with an air of relief. "And you're not sure just what you did say! It was a bit of wisdom that slipped out of your subconsciousness.... Ann, you're a divinely dear thing! I'm grateful to you for existing, and I'll come another evening and tell you so."

Ann had recovered somewhat from surprise. This was a little more like the impetuous young man who had displeased her because she had liked his kiss. She shook hands with him distantly. "Father'll be here then, I hope."

Baird did not stop to parley. He rode off through the cedar avenue, turned his horse over to Sam, and went directly to his room. He threw aside his cap and, sitting down at his table, wrote to Judith.

XXV

BECAUSE SHE LOVED TOO MUCH

It was Hetty who gave Baird's letter to Judith on Monday morning, as soon as Judith returned from Fair Field. "Mr. Baird come in Saturday evenin' an' he look mighty surprised when I tol' him you was gone," Hetty said, "an' yestiddy mo'nin' Sam Jackson, he come from de club fetchin' this letter.... Honey, you ain't lookin' right smart—weren't de party no 'count?"

"Yes, the party was all right," Judith answered briefly. "I'm tired, that's all."

Hetty knew better, but what the trouble was she could not guess.

Hetty had lived with the Westmores for fifty years. She was born in a Westmore cabin and was a

slave child when the war broke. On the morning when the Westmore slaves had celebrated their emancipation by departing from Westmore, Hetty had been left behind. She had clung to the family throughout the hard years, the only house-servant Westmore possessed until Edward's wife's money helped to resurrect the place. She had been mammy to all the Westmore children, had "toted" both Edward and Judith and had been sole mother to Sarah and Garvin, for Mrs. Westmore had soon faded into God's half-acre, leaving Judith to become mistress of Westmore; master of Westmore, in reality, for the colonel was no longer master of anything, least of all of himself.

Hetty had a dog's attachment to Westmore and the family, and for Judith, not merely attachment, but worship. Judith wielded the whip sometimes, her stinging, cutting tongue, and Hetty cowered under it, as on the night when she had let Sarah escape to the Mine Banks. Hetty had known that Sarah's change from gentleness to restlessness portended an out-break and was confident in the strength of her own arms, they had often restrained Sarah in the old days, but she had not had intelligence enough to circumvent cunning. Just as now, when she sensed tension in Edward, in Garvin, and in Judith, she was unable to determine the cause. As soon as Judith returned, pale and bright-eyed and with lips hard set, Hetty knew that she was in trouble of some sort. She could only wait upon her dumbly, watch her in canine fashion.

Judith did not read Baird's letter at once. She attended to her household first. When she knew she could shut herself away without fear of interruption, she opened it.

"Dear Wonder-Woman," Baird wrote.

"Though I feel that I have forfeited the joy of ever again calling you so, that you will be quite right if you decree never to see or speak to me again, I can't help thinking of you just as I always have, as the most wonderful woman I have ever known.

"You are big-natured and kind enough to forgive me for the other night? You are, aren't you? You know, don't you, that I meant no disrespect when I forgot for a moment that you are too fine, too far beyond me for me ever to touch? I've not been a very good sort, Judith—I dropped for a moment into old ways. If by my fault I have lost your friendship, I feel that I shall lose the best thing that has ever come into my life. You have kept me to decent ways—you have taught me reverence for much that I used to consider loosely. That's why you are, and always will be the Wonder-woman.

"Will you forgive me and let me try in the future to be better worthy of your friendship and your kindness? I want them both, more than I have ever wanted anything.

"Yours in sincere regret,

"NICKOLAS BAIRD."

Judith had known that it would be a withdrawal of some sort.... She sat for a long time with the letter in her lap, looking straight before her, feeling rather than thinking. Then she got up abruptly, let the pages fall, and went to the window, looking down on Westmore, at the terraces, off over the country with its promise of plentiful harvest, then up at the Westmore half-acre.... God's half-acre?... He had dealt hardly with some who lay there, and He had dealt hardly with her.

With the ache of irreparable loss torturing her, Judith went back in bitter retrospect over the years. What chance had she had? She had given her youth to Westmore; every nerve, every energy, every atom of her brain and body strained, year in and year out, to the one purpose, the conservation of the family. Her mother had slipped away and left the burden to her. Her father had weighted the burden until it was mountain-high, then had left her to carry it. Edward had flung aside family allegiance and had gone; Sarah had worse than failed her, added dread and a stigma to the burden; Garvin had remained, but more of an anxiety than a help.... Edward had come back to allegiance, tried through the last ten years to lighten her burden as much as possible, and now had lifted it to his own shoulders, but that could not bring back her youth or soften the callouses on her shoulders. They were attached to the bone, by long galling become an irremovable part of her. She was thirty-four; she had crossed the apex; she had started on the downward way.... And that letter told her so.

Cheeks white and eyes flaming, Judith stared at God's half-acre. What chance had she had? What had *He* sent her in those twenty years of struggle? She had worked faithfully, but what had *He* done to satisfy the *woman* in her—the ache for *life!* A cousin had made love to her and a nobody, a boy whose father had been overseer of slaves, had ventured to tell her that he loved her, and both romances had had their inception and their close back in the years when she was young enough to be all appeal and no brain—the sort upon which Baird would expend himself—some brainless pretty girl who would have no conception of the possibilities that lay in the man who would be mad over her.

Judith turned from the window, goaded into restless pacing by the thought. Some girl who could smile like Ann Penniman! Just allure, nothing more, but the thing that captures, nevertheless.... Baird had come to her too late; not too late if she had been like some women, experienced in the art of capture. Though cumbered by thirty-four years, she was as inexperienced as any girl, and far more ineffective because made awkward by pride and a consciousness of the overwhelming thing which had grown and grown in her until it had led her to that moment in his arms.

Judith's tightly-gripped hands twisted when she thought of that sudden offering. What woman who was not made a fool of by passion would have made that mistake!... Or what woman possessed of an iota of strategic ability would, after making one mistake, have made another, allowed her pride to carry her away when her one hope lay in the elimination of pride? Had she remained at Westmore, Baird would be hers now, and quite unconscious that he had been a dilatory lover; and she had beauty and charm enough to have kept him in ignorance. He would have married her in ignorance and been happy, as thousands of other men had married and been content, for she had a beautiful body and a clear understanding of both his possibilities and his defects. And she loved him completely.

But she had blundered stupidly, irremediably—loosened the hold she had on him by one uncontrollable act, and, by another misstep, had given his usually cool brain time to adjust itself and pen her that cruelly clever letter.... It was damnably clever; it eliminated himself, and pointed out to her the only role it would be possible for her to play.... She had lost him, and through her own fault—because she loved him too much. She wanted to scream; she had to hold herself with strong hands. If she had Sarah's taint in her, she would go mad.

It was the ache of desolation that finally brought Judith to her knees, laid her quivering across her bed, crying like a child under the lash. And it was pride and the tenacity that had held her to Westmore, a faint hope of the future, that, later on, nerved her to write her answer:

"DEAR NICKOLAS:

"Of course you are forgiven, for I have succeeded in forgiving myself. At the risk of your thinking me immodest, I'll speak plainly—the moon and the spring-time were a little too much for us the other evening, and we behaved rather foolishly. I'm some eight years older than you are, and I certainly should have known better, so I take the blame—if there is any—upon myself. Let us think of it as an incident, a bit of nature, or a bit of sweetness, or quite a reprehensible proceeding, or in any way that's proper to think of it, but certainly not as a thing that can for a moment affect our sincere liking for each other. I have enjoyed our friendship fully as much as you have, and I certainly want it to continue. If, as you say, I have helped you by stimulating that very good brain of yours, I am happy.

"Please be sure that you are always welcome at Westmore. We are all of us fond of you, and I'm as eager as can be to have you succeed. Edwin Carter was at Fair Field yesterday, and he spoke enthusiastically of you. He talked quite a long time to me about you and told me as a state secret that he was going to urge Mr. Dempster to send you to Europe in the autumn—he said they couldn't spare you till then. It will be splendid if they do that—I hope they will.

"Your affectionate friend,

"JUDITH WESTMORE."

"Don't forget Priscilla Copeley's lawn party on Wednesday. Elizabeth Dickenson and Christine Carter are coming out on the three-thirty, they told me."

The letter reached Baird that evening and he read it eagerly, then sat in thought over it for a time. It did not alter his conviction in the least, though it did call forth his sincere admiration. "She's fine—a thoroughbred! She knew just what note to strike!" Then his shrewdness added, "But I'm not forgiven—not a bit more than she forgives herself, and I'm sorry."

Baird got up and walked about then, half reflective, half restless. He had the evening on his hands; he couldn't go to Westmore until the next night—he must go then—what was he going to do for the next three moonlit hours—until he could go to bed?

He got his horse, finally, and rode through the cedar avenue; if Ann was about he would stop and talk with her.

XXVI

THE ETERNAL ATTRACTION

In the days, or rather, the evenings, that followed, Baird came and went by the cedar avenue. Though as frequent a caller at Westmore as ever, he appeared to have a penchant for the short cut, and curiously enough he seemed also to prefer the longest way back to the club from the station, around by the County Road and through the Penniman place.

With the purpose of bringing Baird often to Westmore, and at the same time bridging the awkward interval of adjustment, Judith had asked Elizabeth Dickenson and Christine Carter for a fortnight's visit at Westmore. Judith had given much thought to what must be her attitude to Baird, a perfect friendliness and the best presentation of herself always; while Baird, who possessed in full the masculine capacity to forget an affair in which he had lost interest, had given the matter no thought at all. It was a thing finished, comfortably adjusted, disposed of. He

liked Judith very much, occasionally he wondered how in the world he had ever mistaken liking for anything else, for in comparing her with Ann she appeared so unalluringly mature; he had simply been off his head for a time, that was all.

Baird was gallant to Judith without effort, and attentive to her guests, and glad, on the whole, that he rarely saw Judith alone. He went about to the Ridge gatherings with Judith and her guests, gave a dinner party at the club for them, taking care always that he should not be detained so late that he could not stop for a few minutes, at least, at the Penniman house.

He took a great deal of pains to secure that few moments with Ann, or an hour or more, if he could manage it. It would seem that Coats and Sue tacitly favored him, for simultaneously with his regular comings and goings they forsook the front porch. They had many calls to return, frequent evening drives to the village, and, when not actually off the place, they were not in evidence. Ben was always there, but he never obtruded.

Though Ann appeared to be too self-absorbed to pay any particular attention to him, Baird noticed that she looked annoyed when, not finding any one on the porch, he had the assurance to knock at the living-room entrance, forcing her to come down from her room. She always told him with frozen politeness that her father and Aunt Sue were out, and that he must keep quiet and not wake her grandfather. Baird knew that, in the evenings, Ann was always somewhere about the place, for Sue waited upon the old man during the day, and it had become Ann's duty to watch over him in the evenings. He always went to bed early now, and slept heavily; he had grown very deaf and feeble in the last few weeks.

With his usual assurance, Baird would beg Ann to come out to the porch, and often he stayed until late, using every art he knew to interest Ann. He talked on many subjects, and Ann listened; sometimes Baird was certain that she was not even listening.

He did not know what to make of her. She was utterly unlike the girl whom he had once roughly kissed; often so absent-minded that Baird vowed to himself in rage that it would be the last time he would try to talk to her. But there were the times when she aroused and was gravely thoughtful, and best of all were her occasional lapses into sweetness. Baird thought her irresistibly charming then, "divinely dear," as on the night when she had unconsciously solved his doubts for him. And she was so young; so utterly young that she made him feel vastly experienced.

Half a dozen times during the fortnight Baird decided that he would stop riding through the Penniman place, put temptation behind him, and as many times lapsed into an unsatisfactory investigation of Ann. Nobody knew what he was about; he'd like to make up his mind about Ann before the Ridge began to gossip about his devotion. He wondered, uncomfortably, what Judith would say if she knew how often he was at the Pennimans'. What would Edward think?

Judith already knew. The fortnight she had planned so carefully was not yet over when, one day, Hetty remarked: "Sam Jackson, he was tellin' me Mr. Baird is settin' up mos' every night with Ann Penniman. Sam says he don't go nor come no other way but through de Penniman place. I reckon Mr. Baird, he ain't been long enough on de Ridge to know jes' who is de right famb'lys 'roun' here."

Judith received the information in perfect silence, carried it about with her for a hotly jealous day, before she imparted it to Edward. Edward was the one person who could say an effective word to Baird.

Judith chose an opportunity when they were alone. "Hetty tells me that they are talking at the club about Mr. Baird's going so much to the Pennimans'—he seems to be taken with Ann." Judith was purposely abrupt; if Edward was startled, so much the better.

He was startled, more moved than she thought he could be; he rarely flushed, but the color grew in his face until he was crimson. "He might spend his time to worse advantage," he returned icily.

Judith's nerves were not under the best of control, for it had been a wretched two weeks, every day of which had assured her of Baird's complete withdrawal. A slight sneer crept into her even answer: "Ann is hardly the girl for Nickolas Baird to marry—for any one who considered social position to marry—is she?... Isn't it your duty to advise him a little?"

Edward changed from red to white. He rose from his chair and stood over his sister, looked at her as Judith had not seen him look since the day when he had defied her father and had left Westmore. "Ann would grace any position—I intend to help her to do so," he said, and left the room.

Judith sat in petrified silence.... So Edward loved the girl.... She had not suspected that.... A long vista opened before Judith Westmore: she was reminded that Edward owned Westmore; that he could make Ann mistress of Westmore if he chose; that his fortune was his to dispose of as he liked. She and Garvin were dependents upon him, nothing more. The shock of the thing stilled her. She was utterly helpless—she could do nothing.

By degrees, Baird also had come to the conclusion that Edward loved Ann Penniman, and that she loved him to the extent of being completely indifferent to every one else. From the way in which Baird sometimes paced his room after an evening at the Pennimans', his conclusions certainly disturbed him. Baird's powers of observation had been on the alert; he guessed that Edward saw Ann frequently. Edward came to the club almost every afternoon, dallied over a

mint-julep, then went off down the Back Road, and Baird had discovered that often it was a full hour before he rode out of the woods again.

If Garvin had been up to that sort of thing, Baird would not have granted Ann much chance of happiness; but Edward was as straight a man as he had ever known. If he was making love to Ann, it was intended seriously. He couldn't come to her house; to meet her secretly was the only thing he could do; it was what he himself would do under the same circumstances.... And Edward had the right of way; he was in the field first and, more than that, Edward was his friend. He, Baird, had no right to be hanging about trying to interest Ann. What the devil was the matter with him, anyway, that he was determined to get into such messes! Here, he had just failed Judith, and now he was urged to get in Edward's way.... It would be wild folly for him to fall in love with Ann.

For four restless nights Baird kept away from Ann. He was too upset to go anywhere. Judith's guests had gone and he could not bring himself to go to Westmore; he did not want to see either Judith or Edward. The last night of the four Baird spent in the city, and came back the next day swearing to himself that he'd not do *that* again—he'd rather sit in his room and do nothing. Then, quite suddenly, he reached a characteristic decision; it did not take him long to get into the saddle and to the Penniman house.

Coats and Sue were not there, but neither was Ann, though Baird knocked an unreasonable time at the living-room door. He walked around the house then, and was rewarded by meeting Ann, who was hurrying up the spring-house path, breathless, as from a run.

To accomplish the momentous thing that had been weighing upon her, Ann had risked leaving her grandfather alone for a short time. During the last two weeks it had made little difference to Ann whether she sat on the porch listening to Baird, or lay on her bed thinking of the thing that loomed large before her. It had grown out of her two weeks of companionship with Edward. No matter what the hurt to Garvin, she must tell him the truth.

She had written her confession that day, spent hours and much paper over the short letter, and as soon as her father and Sue were safely away she had taken it to the woods. She was back now; the thing was done; she was panting as much from nervousness as from haste.

The sight of a man looming dimly in the path startled her and she stopped. She felt ill enough to be frightened by everything; a moment before a bird had fluttered in the grapevines and her heart had stood still.

"It's only I—don't be frightened," Baird's voice said.

Ann came on without answer.

"You've been running—where have you been?" Baird questioned. He felt jealously certain that Ann had been to the woods—to see Edward, of course.

Ann did not answer his question. "Were you at the house? Was grandpa all right?" she asked anxiously.

"I think so—everything was quiet.... Why don't you wait a minute and get your breath?... I want to ask you something, anyway, Ann?"

Ann did pause. "Well?" she asked indifferently.

Baird looked at her in silence for a moment. Even in the dim light he could see that she was white and tired. If she was in love with Edward, it did not seem to make her joyful. She had never looked really happy since the day he had seen her playing in the barn. He asked his question abruptly, "Ann, are you engaged to anybody?"

Ann simply stared at him.

Baird's face had grown hot. "Are you in love with any one, Ann?... I'd rather you told me frankly.... If you are, I'll stop coming around and bothering you. If you're not, I'm going to make you like me."

There was a long silence. Then Ann said, "I'd rather you stayed away."

"You're sure of that, Ann?"

"Yes."

Baird stood in uncertainty for a moment; it was hard for him to hold to his decision. He was carrying his riding-whip, and he slashed viciously at the Bouncing-Betsies that edged the path, his teeth set.

Then he straightened. "Well—I guess there's nothing I can do—so I'll be off."

They went up to the house in silence.

THE THING

Garvin Westmore sat at the mouth of Crest Cave, his eyes fixed on the Back Road and on the stretch of woods below the Penniman house. He had sat for the greater part of the day almost motionless and steadily watching—watching every one who came and went by the Back Road, who entered or left the woods.

Beside him, emptied to the last drop, was the bottle, his comforter during the last two weeks of brooding suspense, and near it lay Ann's letter, the confession she had carried to the woods the night before. Garvin had feared the Thing in himself that stirred so frequently now, and that dropped back into quietude only when he drugged it. Therefore he had drunk persistently and deeply during the last two weeks, spent whole days when he was supposed to be in the city, lying on the carpet of pine-needles, feeling that, though he had to drug the Thing heavily, he was still himself, *unpossessed*, thinking quite clearly and coolly, as he was thinking now.

Once, when he was a boy, the Thing had suddenly come to life in him, swept him aside for mad hours that neither his family nor he had ever forgotten. Then for long years he had been as free of it as if it had never revealed itself. When he had changed from a boy to a man, it had stirred in him, and they called it "melancholia." It was the same Thing that had shut Sarah away from life.

Then had come the years when he was a man grown, and the Thing stirred only occasionally, "fits of depression" that lifted easily into excitement and dropped suddenly into perfect self-possession. He had learned then that drink lifted him out of depression, not into ungovernable excitement or into elation, but into coolness and capability. *He* knew that the Thing lay in him ready to spring into activity at any moment, but he had learned how to deceive those about him; he even half-deceived his family.

All night he had been in the grip of depression. He had not slept because of it, and that morning when ostensibly he was on his way to the city, he had come to the Mine Banks and had hidden his horse, bent upon gaining the usual relief. At noon he had gone to the woods, by way of the creek, and had secured Ann's letter. Fortified as he was, he had read it without mad excitement. It confirmed the apprehension that, during the last two weeks, had kept him in persistent depression.

He went back to Crest Cave with the queer surface restraint upon him that drink always produced, and had drained the last drop from the bottle, his mind focused upon the suspicion over which he had brooded ever since the night Edward had made him promise not to go near Ann.

Ann had written:

"DEAR GARVIN:

"If I could endure it any longer without telling you, I'd not write this; but I can't. You have asked me all along in your letters why I have written so anxiously, and I have told you that I wasn't happy because I was worried about everything, but I didn't tell you the real reason.

"Garvin, I can't do it. I don't love you enough to go with you. Almost from the time I promised I've been sorry I promised. I'm wretched because I have to tell you. I feel sick when I think of how it will hurt you, and I hate myself for not having known my heart any better. I meant everything I ever said to you. I thought I loved you, and I did want you to be happy. I still want you to be happy—I want you to have everything good that a man can have. But you want something that I've found out is not in me to give to you. That's the thing I have found out about myself, and it isn't right not to tell you.

"There isn't any more I can say, except that begging won't change my feeling to you. Please forget me. You'll be gone from here to where you'll find people you like.

"I'll always think lovingly of you—you were kind to me when I was dreadfully unhappy. You and Edward have both been kind to me. Lovingly, ANN."

Garvin had tossed the letter aside. It lay through the afternoon, its open page stirred occasionally by the light breeze. The slight rustle and the whispering of the pines were almost the only sounds, except when the birds sang. Garvin moved only when some one passed along the Back Road; then he bent forward, his eyes burning and intent beneath lifted brows. He watched Coats Penniman drive up to the woods and disappear; later on, saw Baird ride up the Back Road, evidently returning from the city. He watched him intently, made sure it was Baird, and settled back again into alert waiting.

It was late in the afternoon when another horseman, riding toward the club, came slowly up through the pastures and melted into the woods. Garvin sat, head craned and eyes narrowed, watching every step of the man's progress. When the woods had swallowed the rider, Garvin got up, circled the Crest, and went down to the Mine Banks Road. He crossed it, then crossed swiftly the open space between the road and the creek, and went down into the bed of the creek for better cover, and, with the caution of the practised hunter, made his slow way along to where it left the woods.

It had taken some time to creep along without noise. When he reached the woods, where the field

undergrowth gave way to trees and the banks of the creek were studded with rocks, he waited for a time, crouched behind a rock. He had come with the utmost caution, still, a broken twig, some slight sound, might have betrayed him. He heard nothing but the wood sounds, no voices or stir of any kind. Then he straightened, though still well sheltered by the rock, and looked about him.

There was no one there. So far as his keen eyes could discover, there was no one on the steep upward slope of the woods beyond the creek, no one on this side either; no one on the road leading to the club, or on the road that branched off to the Penniman house. A short distance away was the flat rock with the bank rising above it and the saucer-like depression in which it lay semicircled by a dense screen of chinkapin bushes. He could wait there, it was a very perfect hiding-place, but from that point he could not see the two roads. He was better placed where he was, for a growth of wood-honeysuckle surrounded his hiding-place; by parting it a little he could see very well and not be seen. Garvin waited some time before his brother returned from the club. Where the road forked, Edward stopped, looked up the Penniman Road, then dismounted and came toward the creek. He led his horse behind the chinkapin bushes, left it, and came to the top of the bank, looking down at the flat rock. Then he climbed down, seated himself, and looked down at the swirling water. He looked at it steadily, except when he turned to look up at the screen of bushes. He was waiting for some one.

Garvin also waited. A hot cord had begun to tighten about his head, forcing the blood into his eyes, yet he stood quite still; he was thinking quite clearly; he had known it would be like this.... Even when Ann came around the screen of bushes, he did not stir.

Edward sprang up and helped her down. Garvin could see their every motion, even their expression, the smile each had for the other; but they spoke very low, so low that the murmur of their voices mingled confusingly with the ceaseless gurgle of the water.... He could not creep any nearer to them and not be discovered.... But he needed no clearer confirmation than actions: when Ann stood beside him, Edward put his hands on her shoulders, looking into her eyes while she talked rapidly and distressedly. When they sat down, Edward sat at her feet. When he began to talk to her, long and low and steadily, he took her hands, both her hands, and Ann's face was bent so that Garvin could not see it. Apparently she said nothing, simply sat motionless, enthralled by what Edward was saying.

Garvin went on thinking—quite clearly. He had known he would find just this. He had seen it all enacted while he sat up there in the Mine Banks—this and more—and he had planned just what he would do. He had a good cool brain; he was clever to have decided that this was the state of things, to have foreseen it all and to have planned to the last detail. Let Edward have his hour, the—*thief!* He, Garvin, would have his hour, too!

He felt a tense elation, like one who ruled destinies. When Ann's voice lifted in a smothered cry of emotion, the sudden answer to the pause in Edward's steady speech, Garvin only parted the bushes a little more widely, watched more intently. She had slipped into Edward's arms and he was holding her, her arms about his neck, his arms clasping her. He kissed her many times, murmured over her, and then she began to weep, breathlessly, a note of joy in her tears, words and tears and caresses commingled.

"Edward is sedate!" the gibing Thing that was Garvin Westmore said. With Ann's arms about his neck and her head on his breast, he was talking her into calmness, talking, talking, interminably, the deep murmur of his voice never once raised, soothing her as one would a child. And when, at last, they stood up, his hands were on her shoulders again. But his face betrayed him; he wore a look of exaltation, and Ann's was tremulously happy. They thought themselves pledged to each other for all time, those two!

They went up out of the hollow hand in hand, and parted after a long kiss. Ann crossed the creek and ran up the opposite slope, turning often to look at Edward, who stood watching her absorbedly, a lightly-moving, radiant thing. She paused for a long moment, poised on the crest of the slope, a slender graceful form, young as the young green that framed her—then disappeared over the crest. She had gone to the cluster of pines at the edge of the woods, to sit there for a time with her happiness.

Edward watched until even her graceful head had vanished. Then he mounted and rode out by the Back Road—taking his way by the Mine Banks to Westmore.

Garvin crept down along the creek, went as he had come. He would reach the Mine Banks before his brother did.

XXVIII

THE HELL-HOLE OF THE WESTMORES

Sue Penniman had been searching frantically for Ann, through the house, on the terraces; she had even gone down the cedar avenue and then to the spring-house. She had not gone to the barn, for Coats was at the barn and Ann was certain not to be there; besides, Sue did not want to see Coats, not until she had found Ann and forced her to tell the truth.

But she could not find Ann. She came back finally to the kitchen steps and called up to the negress who was busy above, "Rachel, do you know where Ann is?"

"I seen her go down by the woods, Miss Sue."

"When?"

"About a' hour ago."

Sue paused; then she asked, "Was she dressed up, Rachel?"

"Yes'm—she got on her white dress."

"All right," Sue said, trying to keep the thickness out of her voice.

Sue put the corner of the house between her and the woman, and stood for a moment in confused thought. She was too terrified to think clearly; she could make no plan; she felt bewildered and helpless.... She would have to tell Coats—she dared not keep the thing to herself. He would have to be told in the end, anyway.... It was trouble again for Coats, desperate trouble. It was of Coats Sue was thinking, more than of Ann. She would rather have died than bring this thing on him, this long perspective of trouble for them all.

Sue went draggingly to the barn. Coats was in the wagon-shed, shifting the buggies and wagons so as to make room for a new hayrack.

He saw Sue come in, simply that she was there, in the doorway. "Time for supper?" he asked. "I didn't know it was so late." He was looking at the bare space he had made.

"Coats—"

At the husky note he turned quickly and saw her face. He reached her at a stride. "Sue!"

Sue could not find words; she looked at him haggardly.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "What's happened?"

"It's Ann, Coats."

His brows lowered and the color came in his face. "Ann?... Well?"

"I just found it out this afternoon.... She's been meeting Garvin Westmore—for a long time. They've planned to go away together." Sue could not bring herself to tell him her worst fear, not at once.

But Coats leaped to it; he grew white. "She, she's not—?"

"I don't know—Coats," she said with difficulty. "I can't find her anywhere—I wanted to ask her before I told you. Rachel says she went down to the woods about an hour ago.... I ran out of writin' paper an' went to Ann's room, to her box for some, an' I found a sheet in it with 'Dear Garvin' an' some other words of a letter that was begun. I was so frightened I broke open her trunk then, an' I found a lot of his letters. He, writes like they were engaged, but ... Coats, I'm afraid—I'm afraid she's in trouble—" She would have to say it sooner or later; it was best they should face it together.

Coats had grown quite gray, the down-drawn muscles of his face making him look old. He looked away from Sue's quivering face, beyond her to the open, staring down the vista of the past. "It had to be a Westmore, of course," he said slowly and with extraordinary evenness. "It's about time that family became extinct."

To one who did not know Coats Penniman, the words would sound cold, but Sue knew the meaning of the gray tint that had overspread his face, and the extent of the concentrated rage that edged each word with bitter sarcasm. In her terror she began to cry. "I don't know it's true, Coats—I don't know it's true, dear.... I haven't talked to Ann. We can't tell till we've asked Ann.... Coats, if harm comes to you because of this, it'll just kill me—"

Coats looked at her; took her arm. "Don't, Sue—don't cry so.... I can't do anything till I'm sure. I can't tell till I see his letters. Where are they, Sue?"

"At the house.... It'll drive you mad to read them."

"Oh, no, it won't," Coats said, through tight lips. "It may drive Edward mad, though. I shall settle my account with both of them ... when I'm ready.... Where did you say Ann had gone?"

"Rachel said she had gone down to the woods. She said Ann was dressed up—I thought maybe she had gone away with Garvin—it's what he's been askin' her to do."

"Not in broad daylight," Coats said, in the same cutting way. "His kind do their work at night.... She'll come back—and with nothing but misery before her.... If Marian had only lived, the child might have been saved—" At thought of his wife, he dropped into huskiness and restless motion. "Come to the house," he said thickly. "We can't stand here doing nothing."

Sue followed him as he strode along. "Go by the front way," she begged. "Rachel mustn't see.... And father; Coats, you mustn't tell father—it'll kill him—it'll bring on a stroke, Coats."

Coats stopped. He had regained his composure. "Keep calm," he said. "I mean to keep calm."

We've faced trouble together before, Sue—we're neither of us going to go mad."

"I'd rather have died than have this happen."

"I know you would. You're all Penniman, Sue—there're some of us mongrel, but not you."

They went in by the front porch. "Bring me the letters," Coats said, in the same quiet way.

Sue went to Ann's room and gathered them up from the bed where they lay scattered, as she had left them when she had hurried to find Ann. She brought, also, the sheet of paper that had led her to discovery, placed them all in Coats' hands.

Coats read them, Ann's few blotted sentences first. It was Ann's struggle over her letter to Garvin, a beginning put aside because it was so ill-written and blotted:

"DEAR GARVIN:

"If I could endure any longer without telling you, I'd not write this, but I can't. You have asked me all along in your letters why I have written so anxiously, and I have told you that I wasn't happy because I was worried about everything, but I didn't tell you the real reason."

Coats read it, then passed from letter to letter, his brows lowering more and more ominously, his eyes graying to steel as he noted such sentences as these: "Why do you let your mind dwell on the possibility of trouble—we are going away so soon, Ann—in less than a month we'll be together. I'm going to live to make you happy, then." And in another letter there was the underlined sentence, "*You are mine, now, every bit of you*—there can be no going back for either of us;" and in the same letter "... if we are careful, there is no danger of any one's knowing how much we are to each other. And it will only be for a short time—I have the agency at last—we will go in June." Coats understood as neither Ann nor Sue had understood the omissions in the picture of their life together with which Garvin had closed his letter. He understood perfectly what was in Garvin's mind. He knew what Garvin was, as Sue could not know. The men on the Ridge knew Garvin Westmore; he was an open secret.

When Coats put down the last letter and sat looking at the collected evidences of sensual infatuation and very evident suffering, a sort of madness that could not be given the name of love, he was without even the faint doubt that had given Sue a ray of hope. There might be girls who had either the coolness or the hardihood to pass through a siege such as this unscathed. Or the occasional girl who, though capable of arousing mad passions, remains aloof, wrapped in a self-sufficient self-respect that makes her invincible. But it was not his reading of the child who had grown up without anybody's particular care. He had said to Sue, "She's bound to have her bit of life, have it and pay for it." It had come sooner and more terribly than he had feared. Coats thought of Ann when she was a little thing, just able to walk across the floor, her steps, as always, leading her to him, and his face twisted in pain.

Sue had watched him. "Coats, you think it's so?" she asked despairingly.

"Yes," he said.

"What are you goin' to do?" she whispered.

Coats got up and gathered the letters together. "I'm going to find her first.... You go, Sue, and see if she's in sight anywhere. Then come and tell me."

He wanted those few minutes alone. He went up to his room and, from a shelf in the cupboard, took his pistol, loaded it and put it in his pocket. When Sue came back, he was again where she had left him, his hat on and binding the letters together. He put them in his pocket.

"I don't see her, Coats.... You have your hat—what are you goin' to do?" Sue could not rid herself of the terror his grim look inspired.

"I'm going to look for her—better I should talk to her where your father won't hear.... Then I'm going to Westmore."

Sue grew deadly pale. "Coats, don't you fight them! Don't, for my sake!"

Coats' lip curled. "Don't worry. I've got a word to say to Edward, and I'll guarantee he'll listen."

"If anything happens to you, I don't want to live," Sue said in despair.

Coats' face softened. He put his arm about her. "You're forgetting that we Pennimans are not cowards, Sue."

She looked at him with her heart in her eyes. "I'm just a woman when it comes to you, Coats—just a lovin' woman." In her agony of fear over him, Sue had thrown away the concealment of years; the truth stood clear, looked the man she loved straight in the eye.

It struck queerly across Coats' tense nerves, the revelation of a thing quite unexpected, but having nothing to do with the burning present. He answered to it only vaguely. "Do your part, then, Sue. Do what I tell you to do. Don't give way.... And not a word of all this to your father." He bent and kissed her, then, putting her aside, went out.

He went down to the woods, his eyes keen and searching beneath his lowered brows. He saw no

sign of Ann, either in the open or at the edge of the woods, and went straight on, looking about him, but not pausing, until he came out on the Back Road. He had not expected to find Ann in the woods. In one of his first notes to Ann, Garvin had appointed Crest Cave as an afternoon meeting-place; Coats had made a mental note of it.

He followed the Back Road until he stood clear of the woods, then looked about him. There was no sign of any one. As far as he could see, in every direction, fields and woods and brilliant evening sunshine; cattle in the pastures below, but not a human being in sight.

Coats looked at the warm teeming country, then up at the looming Mine Banks, over which hung a faint blue haze, the mist from innumerable ore-pits which the spring rains had filled to overflowing. "The hell-hole of the Westmores," he always called it in his own mind.

Then he struck off for it, directly across country, his vigorous stride carrying him along rapidly.

XXIX

"WHAT'S NOT KNOWN"

Later, when the hollows lay in shadow and only the crowns of the hills glistened in the departing sunshine, Coats Penniman came back through the woods.

Sue had gone about the house oppressed by the terror she tried to keep out of her face. She was gripped by the certainty that there was even worse trouble in store for them than merely the shame Ann had brought upon them. The thought of it made her weak-kneed and sick, yet she tried to do the usual things in the usual way. She persuaded her father to have an early supper and go to bed, and she sent Rachel to her cabin, gave her an unexpected evening off. They would have their wretchedness to themselves for one night at least. If only it did not end in tragedy! Coats' grimly purposeful look obsessed her. And in all her coming and going, from the kitchen landing, when she was down-stairs, from an upper window, while she waited for her father to go to sleep, she watched the woods.

Sue had watched Coats in terror when he went down to the woods; she watched in terror when she saw him coming back. He had gone quickly, but was coming back slowly, bent forward and walking as if each step was an effort. His coat was off, laid over one shoulder, and his free hand held it in place, so that it covered his other arm.

Sue ran down the spring-house path, and they met as he was dragging himself up to the willows. She did not need to ask if anything had happened, for Coats was ghastly pale, and, even before she reached him, she saw that he was walking so slowly because he could not walk any faster, though, from the strained look in his eyes and the effort he was making, it was plain that he wanted to hurry. They had fought and he was terribly hurt; they had tried to kill him, and suddenly rage sprang up in Sue, commingled with her fear that he was mortally wounded.

Even before she reached him, she cried, "Coats, they've hurt you—"

"I've been shot," Coats said, in a voice that was not his it was so lifeless.

He spoke with great difficulty, as if he were about to faint, yet at her horrified exclamation he frowned and looked about him. "Hush!" he said thickly. "It's just my arm—but I've bled so I'm almost done.... Get me a drink of water."

Sue obeyed him instantly and in silence. He looked grim and determined—in spite of his exhaustion; somberly excited and at the same time fearful of something, of being overcome by weakness, for one thing. Sue visioned the worst as she hurriedly filled the tin cup she took from one of the jutting logs of the spring-house. He was not fatally hurt; her greatest terror had been quieted, and the fighting blood of the Pennimans lifted in her, giving her courage. If he had killed a Westmore it was that Westmore's due. Hatred of their hereditary enemy nerved her. No matter what Coats had done in his righteous anger, she would stand by him; she would stand and fall with Coats—no matter what came. Even the sight of his blood-soaked coat did not turn her faint.

Coats was leaning against the spring-house, and she put her arm about him, holding the cup to his lips, for he kept his uninjured hand pressed to his shoulder. "Don't you worry, Coats," she said resolutely. "I'm not frightened now. Just you drink this, an' then let me help you up to the house. I've got father to bed an' I've sent Rachel home an' Ben's not about. Just you tell me—I'll stand by you no matter what it is, Coats."

Evidently he did not mean to tell her, or else his haste was too great to waste precious moments. The water had revived him somewhat. "I'm not going to the house," he said more clearly than he had spoken before. "Go up and get something soft to wrap my arm in. Bring it to the barn—I'll manage to get up there and wait for you—in the wagon-shed. Don't let anybody know what you're about—just come to the barn to me.... Has Ann come back?"

"No. Ain't you seen her, Coats?"

"No." He paused to think, intently, though his face was twitching from pain. Then he went on

hurriedly, "It's just as well—it's better she shouldn't know.... She'll come back. Put a note where she's sure to find it—just say that we've gone driving and won't be back till late, and that she's to look after her grandfather; that she's not to leave the house; that Ben will be there, so she needn't feel nervous. Say that and nothing more. Then get your hat and things and something to put around my arm and another coat for me—I want you to drive me into the city as fast as you can. I'd not take you with me, but I can't manage by myself."

"Coats! You can't go all that way with your arm like that! You've got to have a doctor!" Every word he had uttered made her the more certain that there had been a tragedy, something so terrible that he was afraid of arrest. He was afraid to tell her, and she was afraid to ask him. "You can't go like that," she reiterated helplessly. "You'll bleed to death." The thought of it made her sick.

Coats broke into sudden impatience. "I'm going to a doctor! We can't have a doctor from the Ridge! I want to get to the city as fast as I can. It's the only way. I know what I'm about—I'm trying to do what's best for us all—I've had time to think. Ann and your father mustn't know—what's not known can't be told. I'll explain while we're on our way. Go and do what I told you, then come and hitch up Billy—he's the best traveler.... Hurry, Sue—God knows what I'd do if I hadn't you to help me." His voice failed at the end; he was panting from exhaustion.

Sue obeyed without a word.

XXX

CONTENT

Twenty minutes later, when Ann came out from beneath the pines at the edge of the woods and started down through the fields to the house, she saw Sue and Coats driving away from the barn. She could not see distinctly, they were too far away, but she noticed that they were going fast. Evidently they had had supper and were going somewhere together, as they so often did.

Ann had not realized how late it was until the sun touched the horizon. She was reminded then that it was past the supper hour and that they would wonder what had become of her. She must have sat for two hours there, under the pines, simply thinking of her happiness. She had wanted to be alone with it, just as long as she could be. Once she had carried her grief and her desolation to that place; it seemed the right place to come with her joy.

Ann was glad she was going to have the evening to herself, just to sit on the porch and think. The farm and everything connected with it had faded into distance since that hour with Edward. They belonged to each other. The joy of it! During those two weeks of anxious thought over Garvin, she had realized that Edward was more to her than any one else in the world. And she knew now that he loved her as she loved him. She was solemnly, gratefully happy. He was wise and loving and wonderful; he filled the place of friend, father and lover. The ache of loneliness she had carried about with her since she was a little thing was stilled.

Ann had thought of Garvin many times that afternoon. Edward had talked about him while they sat together in the hollow. The first time she and Edward had met after she had given Garvin her promise, she had gathered up her courage and had told Edward of her engagement to his brother. Ann had felt that she must tell him. She had given Edward every detail of her acquaintance with his brother.

Edward had listened to her, never taking his eyes from her face, and when she had finished he was a little gray about the lips, as he had been while she handled the runaway horse, but all he had said was, "You don't love Garvin, Ann."

"I'm fond of him," Ann had said in deep distress.

"You don't love him—you have been spared that," Edward had repeated quietly.

"I don't love him as he loves me—I promised to marry him when I was angry and wretched," Ann had confessed.

"Yes, I understand that," Edward had said in the same steady way. "You neither love him nor will you marry him. Before long you will collect courage to write Garvin exactly how you feel. I'd rather have it that way. Then he will accommodate himself to it without going mad over it, which will be the best solution for him. And in the meantime he shall not come near you." Then he had smiled at her as he often did. "You love to be loved too well to love easily, my little Ann. But it won't always be so."

"I am so sorry for him," Ann had said.

"We are all sorry for him," Edward had answered. "By and by you will understand why."

It had been Edward's last word on the subject. In their following meetings, he had held his peace, listening intently to Ann's troubled thoughts—until that afternoon, when she had told him that she had written to Garvin, and what she had written. Then, in that steady way of his, Edward had

told her what she was to him, and heaven had opened to Ann. He had filled her heart completely.

Edward had gone back over the years and had told her about his life; about his leaving Westmore; about his marriage; about their future together. And then he had told her about Garvin, and Ann had understood why she had been drawn to Garvin and had pitied him, and yet had felt repelled. He was one of the unfortunates of the world.

Edward had not even hinted at what he knew had been Garvin's endeavor and that she had been walking on the edge of a precipice over which many would have fallen; that her elusiveness and her innocence, and, more than anything else, the quality of her affection for Garvin had probably saved her. He allowed her to think affectionately and pityingly of his brother; when he took Ann unto himself, Garvin would necessarily be part of her inheritance.

Ann was still absorbed when she came slowly down from the woods and into the house. Sue's note was lying on Ann's plate, and she read it somewhat vaguely: she was to take care of her grandfather while they were away; they would not be back until very late, but Ben would be there so she need not feel anxious.... Ann turned away from the table; she did not want anything to eat. She went up, dutifully, to see whether her grandfather needed anything, and, finding him asleep, went to her room. Then she saw her gaping trunk, Edward's books flung out on the floor ... and that Garvin's letters were not there.

At first she was terrified, for the spell of secrecy was still upon her, and the fear of harm to Edward and to Garvin. But then it came to her as a tremendous relief that Edward would know how to guard himself and how to shield Garvin. He was very wise and careful. He had said to her, "I mean to tell Garvin everything just as soon as I feel it is wise to do so. I shall write to Coats Penniman at once, but I am afraid the Penniman enmity is insurmountable. If it is, we must wait until you are of age, and that will be in October." Edward would know what to do and what to say to them; she need not be frightened.

As she sat on the porch, listening to the night sounds, Ann kept repeating to herself that she need not be frightened, and her faith in Edward's wisdom was so complete that she slipped into visions of the future. It was a dark night illumined only by the orange-red glow in the west, and it was fading rapidly. It was going to be a black night, misty with the prescience of rain.

It grew so dark that even the outlines of the nearest objects faded into the enveloping blackness, but Ann did not move; she was still dreaming with eyes wide, quite alone yet content.

XXXI

THE FAMILY NAME

It was after sundown when Judith lifted from her work over the flower-bed on the terrace and looked at the glow in the western sky. It was twilight; time for Garvin to come from the city, and Edward from his daily ride to the club; another long evening before her without the relief of active work.

Would Baird come that evening? Since her visitors had gone, there had been significant intervals between his calls, and she was quite helpless in the matter. She was filled with a passionate revolt against what she felt was woman's helplessness. If she had a man's opportunities, how long would she remain quiescent at Westmore, a slave to a routine that had begun to gall her intolerably! And any day she might be set aside.

Judith had endlessly pondered Edward's tense championship of Ann, and Baird's interest in the girl. What was going to grow out of it all? Something certainly that would make Westmore unendurable to her. After fifteen years of mental and physical toil, she was a dependent, unskilled in any direction—except as a housekeeper—the spinster adjunct to a family that would not need her. It was the fate of most women who conserved and conserved. It was her rearing that had made her what she was. If she had defied the family conventions and had gone out into the world, she could easily have made a life for herself. It was men who held the winning cards.... Judith's gardening had been a relief. She could look her thoughts while she worked; the warm earth her strong hands had prodded and pressed was a safe confidant.

She stood with hand shading her face, looking at the sunset glow, her lips shut in a straight line, her eyes smoldering. When the thud of steps on the porch above warned her that some one was coming, she turned with her usual swift decision, but first she had wiped expression from her face, a resolute downward movement of her hand from which her eyes emerged, level and questioning.

It was Ben Brokaw who was hurrying down to her, his long arms hanging and his body bent, his usual position when running and which was oddly suggestive of primordial locomotion. The smile that grew in Judith's eyes as she watched the grotesque creature changed quickly into a frown when she saw his face. He had evidently run some distance, for there was about him the steaming heat of a hard-driven animal. But his ridged and mottled face was curiously drawn and tense. He had brought up within a few feet of her, had paused and straightened.

With the instant alarm of one inured to apprehension, Judith asked, "What has happened?"

Ben could express himself only in the way natural to him. "Miss Judith, there ain't no time fo' me to come around slow to what I've got to tell, an' you ain't one to go under, you're Westmo' through an' through.... Miss Judith, the Mine Banks is claimed another Westmo'."

"Garvin?" Judith asked through suddenly blanched lips.

"Not him, tho' there's no tellin' about him. It's Edward, Miss Judith."

"Edward ... not Edward—" Judith's voice was entirely without modulation.

Ben hurried over his explanation. "I were watchin' over Ann, like Edward had told me to do—it's Edward I've been workin' for this spring, not Coats Penniman. I had found out that Garvin was meeting Ann, an' Edward had told me not to let Garvin come near Ann again. Edward knowed that Ann were safe if I watched over her. This afternoon Edward had been talkin' with Ann, down by the Back Road, an' when he went and Ann went up in the woods, I was clost to her. When she went down to the house I went to the Banks. I'd heard shootin' there, but that's always goin' on about here, I didn't think nothin' of that, but I was scart by things I seen when I got to the Banks, an' I looked about. I found him, Miss Judith, he's lyin' like one gone peaceful to sleep—the little thing what killed him done its work quick."

"You mean—he's been shot—to death—?" Judith whispered with pauses.

"Yes." Ben looked down at the flower-bed.

"By whom?" She had straightened, flung back her head.

Ben was silent.

Judith went to him, laid her steel grip on his shoulder. "You tell me!... There's only one man in the world would do that.... You know who did it—tell me this instant what you know!"

Ben looked at her, a glance that dropped away from the fire in her eyes. "It weren't the man you think. Coats Penniman's knowed nothin' of what's been goin' on. An' I don't know nothin' either—that's my answer to any who may ask, an' always will be," he said doggedly, "but there's things I'll tell you an' no one else.... Edward loved Ann, Miss Judith. He loved her very dear, an' he's seen her pretty constant. An' Garvin, he were mad over her, like it's in him to be. Edward made him keep away from Ann—there were hard feelin' between them because of it. But Edward didn't tell Garvin about Ann and hisself. 'Tain't a thing Edward would confide to Garvin—there ain't many things you or Edward ever has trusted to Garvin. I think Garvin suspicioned Edward to-day—that Edward were seein' Ann—and—" He stopped, then went on. "An' Edward come back by the Banks—" he stopped again.

Judith had drawn back as if the sight of him burned her. "You're wrong!" she said passionately. "Garvin was in the city to-day!"

Ben looked at her, pity and affection and respect struggling together in his eyes and in his voice. "He were at the Banks, Miss Judith. The traces of him was there. He had hid Black Betty, but I run acrost her, an' up to Crest Cave I foun' the letter Ann had wrote him, sayin' she wouldn't have him. An' he'd been drinkin'—I foun' the bottle. An' then, when I stood up by Crest Cave, I seen Garvin go acrost from the Mine Banks Road to the creek. It scart me the way he went—like he was hidin' hisself. I was so scart I went down to the road an' first I saw Edward's horse, an' then I foun' where he lay."

Judith's hand had covered her lips, as if to smother a shriek; over it her eyes stared at him.

"There weren't no one else at the Banks but Garvin when I was there—I'd have knowed it jest so quick as a dog, if there had been. I'd already took the letter—I run to you then.... Miss Judith, I don't need to tell you what all this'll come to. Garvin's jest gone mad, but if he comes to hisself like he does, who'll believe it? The law'll get him, Miss Judith. An' that ain't all—every bit of all your family history will be gone into. And Ann's name will be ruined. It will be the end of Westmo'. I never come up against nothin' like this befo'—I'm jest helpless!" The big creature looked both helpless and desperate.

Judith turned abruptly, faced God's half-acre, and Ben stood still with eyes on her rigid shoulders and carven profile. He knew Judith Westmore well; there was no room for grief, no limit to her capability when the family name was at stake.

It was not for long; she faced him again. "Where was he shot?" she asked stiffly.

Ben lifted a finger to his forehead.

Her mask-like face twitched, then was controlled. "Where is he—lying?" she asked, with the same difficulty over her words. "In the road?... Where some one may pass?"

"No—off the road—in the hollow—near the first ore-pit."

"In the bushes and grass?"

"Yes."

"Did you search around—him?"

"No. I saw he were gone—then I come quick."

Judith nodded. "Go to the barn and put the horses in the light wagon. There's no one there—the men have gone. Saddle another horse for yourself. I'll get some things from the house and come out to you. Go quick—I'll be quick."

"Are you goin' to the Banks?" Ben asked.

"I'll tell you when I come back. Go put the horses in," and she turned and walked rapidly to the house.

She returned to Ben's side before he had finished harnessing the horses. She was laden with blankets and a pillow, and, after she had put them into the wagon, her skilful hands helped him. She worked swiftly and accurately, her hard, short-drawn breathing alone indicative of tense emotion and desperate haste. She spoke low and decidedly.

"We'll have to face it the best way we can.... I want you to ride to the Copeleys'. Tell Cousin Copeley just that you found Edward—shot at the Banks, and that you came straight off to me—just that and nothing more.... Tell any one who asks—just that. Tell Cousin Copeley to come quick to the Banks to meet me. Then have him send one of the boys for the doctor and have him bring him to Westmore.... I'm going down through the woods to the Smiths'. I'll get Allen Smith and his son to go with me to the Banks—they're the nearest men I can reach, and they're not relations—I'd rather have them with me."

Judith said no more until they were ready. Then she put her hands on his huge shoulders. Even in the dim light he could see that her eyes were brimming. "Ben, you are our friend?" she asked very low. "You will stand by me?"

"I'd die befo' I hurt a Westmo'—or a Penniman," he said as huskily as she.

"I believe it, Ben.... Do this for me then: find Garvin and bring him to Westmore. It's the place where he'll be safest. Tell him I said so. He'll listen to you when he wouldn't to any one else. And there's no one who can find him in the night as you can. And, Ben, have him come back on Black Betty, if you can, and if you can't—" She paused and thought a moment. "If you can't, get Betty into the club stables during the night.... You're not afraid to do that for me, Ben?"

Ben's growl was sufficient answer.

Her hands dropped. "We'll go then," she said more clearly.

Ben held her back a moment. "Miss Judith, you'll not put this on a Penniman, an' you'll keep Ann's name out of it if you can?"

"No—I'll not accuse a Penniman. The dead can't speak—or suffer—let them bear the blame."

XXXII

THE DEATH-TRAP

Baird was riding slowly back from Westmore to the club. Even if he had been in the mood for rapid riding, he would not have attempted it; it was too dark a night. As it was, he was too much absorbed by his thoughts to hurry his horse. He was thinking of the group of proud people he had left standing guard over their dead. And he was thinking of Ann. Did she know?

The thing was terrible. The news had reached the club before the sunset glow had faded from the sky, brought to Sam by a Westmore negro and transmitted by him to the men who were dining at the club: Edward Westmore had taken his own life—at the Mine Banks. The men had scattered to their homes with the news, and Baird had ridden at once to Westmore.

There was nothing he could do; the family had already collected. Even Colonel Dickenson had been sent for and would reach Westmore before midnight. At Westmore Baird had learned a few details: Ben Brokaw had found the body and had run to Westmore with the news, and Judith and the two neighbors she took with her had discovered Edward's pistol, with one chamber emptied, lying in the grass not far from his hand. It was the ivory-handled, silver-chased weapon that all of them knew so well, which Edward always kept loaded and often carried.

Mr. Copeley had said to Baird: "We can't account for such an act on Edward's part. The only reason we can give to ourselves is that during the past year he has suffered from occasional attacks of heart trouble. That's the reason he wouldn't hunt and always rode so slowly. It may have preyed on his mind.... It is most kind of you to come, Mr. Baird, and we all thank you; but there is nothing you can do." Baird had remained only a few moments.

Brave people! Courteous and dignified even when in the deepest distress. During the moment Judith had given him, Baird had bent to her hand in profound admiration. She was deadly pale, but erect and clear-voiced. She was a woman in a million, was Judith Westmore!... And he had liked Edward almost better than any man he had ever known.... And Ann? Did she know yet?

Baird was thinking intently of Ann. As soon as the shock of the thing had worn off, he had

thought of Ann. Since the night before, when Ann had said, "I'd rather you stayed away," he had been as unhappy as he had thought it possible for him to be, wretched because he felt unable to get out and fight for the thing he had begun to want badly.

Baird's horse had brought him down into the hollow, to where the creek crossed the Post-Road. Beyond was the long upgrade at the summit of which he would turn off into the club road, the extension of the Pennimans' cedar avenue.... Who would tell Ann? And how much would it mean to her?

Baird's horse had come to the bridge, his hoofs had struck the planks, when he stopped abruptly, with fore-feet planted. When Baird spoke to him, he snorted and backed.

Baird knew the signs of fright, but when he peered over the animal's head he could see nothing. It was impossible to *see* anything in that density of gloom; one could only *feel*. He spoke to his horse again, but the creature refused to move. There was certainly some good reason for such reluctance; the bridge was dangerously ramshackle, and should have been condemned long ago.

Baird dismounted, led his horse to the roadside, and groped until he found a tree to which he could tie him. He went back to the bridge and, kneeling, felt his way along. He came upon it very soon; his hand left the plank and reached into space, a yawning hole wider certainly than the length of his arm, for there appeared to be nothing beyond.

He crept along then to the side of the bridge, and, presently, he made it out: beyond the broken and splintered end of timber which supported the planks on which he was, there was no bridge. It had been torn away, had collapsed. Full fifteen feet below, in the blackness, the creek tore along, fretted by the rocks. Whatever had jammed through that rotten structure had gone to certain destruction.... An automobile!

A certainty, something more than a premonition of a disaster to which he had played agent, turned Baird hot. He hung over the black gulf, trying to see, alive with dread of what he might see.... He could not see, but he could smell. It was an exhalation from below, the odor of gasoline; he was right, then.

Baird straightened, energetic, as always when action was demanded.... If only he had a lantern!... He remembered that he had matches, and struck one. The breeze, faint though it was, snuffed it out. He tried another with the same result. His next effort was a torch, a letter twisted so as to burn as long as possible.

It served his purpose, a flickering revelation of a mass of wreckage thrust against the shelving bank of the creek—until the flame crept to his fingers and he was forced to drop the charred paper. He sprang up and went back to the road, not to get help, that did not occur to him, but to get down to the thing below as soon as possible. There might be life lingering beneath that mass of wreckage.

Baird encountered a snake fence and an almost impassable mat of briars, but even in the darkness he felt sure of his direction, certain of it when he slid down into mud and water. He stood still, trying to determine just where the wrecked machine lay; to his left? His olfactory nerves helped him, and his hand soon touched a bit of the wreckage, an upflung wheel, then the rear of the car. Baird was trying to discover all he could first by feeling. He had a note-book in his pocket with which to make a brief bonfire, but he was saving that. If only he had a lantern!

It was the smell of a reeking wick that suggested a possibility. In 1905, an automobile was not equipped with electricity; its tail light was a lantern. Baird's hand had encountered it, its glass shattered, but the metal lamp intact and still warm. He lighted the wick; though inadequately equipped, he could find his way about now.

The machine lay against a rock, half-overturnd, and with nose buried in the soft earth of the bank. Baird made his way forward on its other side. Engine, wheel and seat were jammed against the rock and half-buried in the earth, but by climbing over the rock he reached the top of the pile, and could throw the light on the confused mass.

For a moment he knelt motionless above the thing he saw, weakened by a wave of physical inability; it was not the Mine Banks alone that had claimed a Westmore.... Then he made certain that the body below was without pulse or heartbeat, and that his utmost strength could not move the mass that rested on it. The end must have come as instantaneously to one brother as it had to the other.

It was of Judith, Baird was thinking as he prepared to go back. He must take the word to Westmore.... And by some means, he must prevent travelers on the Post-Road from plunging into this death-trap. He felt a little dizzy and sick.

Baird held the light up, trying to see the bank above. He kept it upheld, staring at what it revealed—a woman's crumpled body flung against the soft loamy earth, a white blot against a black background. Even before he reached her, Baird knew who she was, and the thought was quicker than his forward plunge: "It was Garvin she loved, and Edward knew it. It was that had 'preyed' on his mind."

Baird's first terror, when his hands discovered warmth in her body, was that it was deceptive—life might be gone ... or it might be passing fast, was his fear when he found that her heart was beating; it beat so faintly against his hand. He brushed the hair from her face and brought the

light close, but Ann's eyes remained closed, her lips colorless, her skin bluey-white; life was merely flickering.

Something infinitely painful rose up in Baird and choked him, a hurt greater than anything he had ever known, a profounder sense of desolation than he had had when his father lay dying. He wanted to hold her against his breast.

When he lifted her, she sighed, and the unexpected assurance of life galvanized him. He laid her down and stumbled to the creek. He brought back a little water in his cupped hands and dropped it on her face, then he rubbed her forehead with his wet hands.

It did not bring her back to consciousness, but hope had him now, coupled with a definite purpose: to get her away as soon as possible, back to her home. It would not be possible to carry her through that network of briers, but if he made his way up the creek to where there was less undergrowth he could reach the pasture. Then he could get his horse.

It was no easy matter to carry her limp body and still keep a hand free for the lantern. He made his slow way around rocks, half the time wading in water, more than once almost falling. He was nearly exhausted by combined anxiety and exertion when circumstance favored him; he came to a wide path tracked by the cattle, an easy ascent. When he reached the pasture, he laid his burden down, put the lantern where it would serve as a guide for his return.

He skirted the undergrowth along the creek without much difficulty, avoided the brier-patch, and came to the rail fence, shortly above where his horse was tied. He took down a tier of rails that he might lead him through, and his return was even more rapid than his going.

To mount his horse with Ann laid across his shoulder taxed every muscle in his body, and to hold her inert weight half-seated before him and dragging over one arm while he kept one hand free to guide his horse took both strength and skill.

Baird found the Back Road by keeping, as nearly as he could judge, parallel with the Post-Road. With his horse's head turned homeward, his task was not so difficult, for the animal strode along the familiar way, needing no guidance. In his relief, Baird kissed Ann's upturned face. "It won't be long now," he whispered. In his stress he had forgotten the hole in the bridge; forgotten Edward; forgotten Garvin; forgotten every one but Ann; forgotten even himself.

Their entrance into the woods was like passing from a darkness in which objects could be sensed into the thicker blackness of a tunnel. Baird could tell where the road led off to the club only by the turn his horse made. He forced him to back and then urged him straight ahead. Once on the Penniman Road, the animal could be trusted to keep on. That he did keep on and with the lessened speed of the horse walking away from his stable was the only guarantee Baird had that they were going in the right direction.

In time they emerged from the tunnel, into what seemed, by contrast, a normality. Baird had loathed the palpable blackness that had shrouded Ann's vague outline; he had seemed to be embracing an unreality. When they neared the barn and a horse in the enclosure whinnied, it was like hearing a friendly voice. Baird forced his horse to circle the barn, started him on the road leading to the front of the house, which the animal took gladly because again headed for the club, and checked him before the vague black mass which was the house. There was no lighted window, no sign of anxiety or of welcome.

Baird dismounted and laid Ann gently on the grass. If there was any one in that apparently heartless house to whom he could entrust her, he would ride for a doctor. He left her on the grass—better that two should move her with the care two could give—and went to the living-room door. He knocked, then pounded, then called, and was answered by total silence.

A chill touched him; was the whole world dead? Where were they all at this hour of the night? He lighted a match and, for the first time that night, looked at his watch. It was only a few minutes after ten. Baird's disbelief was so complete that he put the watch to his ear, and even when he found it ticking steadily he could not credit what it had told him. It seemed to Baird that he had spent hours under the bridge and that he had agonized half the night over Ann. But there was one comfort, if his watch was right, Ann had not been unconscious half the night. And her family were probably simply out for the evening and would be back.

He tried the door, found it unlocked, and, going in, lighted the lamp. Then he brought Ann to the couch. He could see her distinctly now, and his heart contracted as he looked at her; the limpness of her body and the waxen immobility of her face were terrifying, an inertia as complete as death. She was slipping away, and he did not know how to call her back.

As long as Baird had been fighting his way along through the night, he had been hopeful. But that vacant house!... If he went for help, Ann would die while he was gone; there was no doctor within four miles. If his ignorance struggled with that persistent unconsciousness, he might blunder fatally. He felt desperate.

FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

Baird had sat for an hour with his fingers on Ann's wrist; from twelve o'clock until the living-room clock struck one. He had made his decision. As he had expressed it to himself, "I'll stand by my job."

Once, in South America, he and a companion had worked over a man who was dying from exhaustion. They had administered stimulants and had wrapped the man in hot blankets. Baird had ransacked the living-room and the kitchen, had come upon the family supply of simple remedies, among them a bottle of spirits of camphor, and, in the cedar chest beneath the stairs, had found a feather-bed laid away for the summer. He had built a fire in the kitchen stove and had heated water.

Baird had set to work then upon Ann's cold limp body, had taken off her shoes and stockings and had chafed her icy feet with hot water and camphor. He had opened her dress and had rubbed her chest and her arms and her hands with it. Then he had wrapped her closely in the feather-bed, and, lastly, he had tried to make her swallow a little of the mixture.

Though he had worked quickly, it had taken time, a lifetime of effort and of waiting, it had seemed to Baird, before even a slight warmth had crept into her body. When his fingers discovered a throb in her wrists, Baird was uplifted; he sprang from despair to hope. When her chest began gently to lift and fall, he climbed to the height of gratitude.

For an hour he had sat almost motionless, feeling life grow beneath his fingers, watching the ghastly white in Ann's face change to a more life-like hue. It seemed to him that the life in her was trying to answer to the life in him, that each throb of his heart transmitted a little and still a little more of its bounding vitality to her, and, gradually, a curious certainty had taken possession of Baird: that through his finger-tips he was pouring his superabundant strength into Ann's limp body, while with all his force he was willing her to live.

The conviction possessed him so completely that it blotted out the disjointed thoughts that had obtruded while he had longed for other assistance than his own: his anxiety over the absence of Ann's people; the suggestion that they had traveled by the Post-Road and had fallen into the death-trap he had left unguarded; his pangs of retrospective jealousy; his hopes for the future.

He was so concentrated upon his idea that all extraneous thoughts and impressions had faded from his brain. The collie had thrust himself in through the partly-open door and had nosed Baird's absorption and Ann's muffled form, and Baird had scarcely noticed him; the murky, indeterminate night had resolved itself into a steady rain, and Baird had not been aware of it; the clock had struck a single definite note, and Baird had not heard it, for Ann had stirred at last, had moved her head and sighed.

With the same curious certainty that his strength had led her back to life, and that if he called to her now she would answer, Baird bent to her ear: "Ann—?" he said softly. He called to her several times, softly, insistently, waited, then called again. When, finally, her eyelids lifted, he was so imbued with the certainty that speech would follow that the sweep of relief did not unsteady him. She was looking at him widely, fully, but without blankness. She knew him.

He waited, giving her time. It seemed to Baird that her half-awakened thoughts crossed her eyes like slowly-moving shadows. Then her gaze turned slowly from him to the room, to the half-open door and the blackness beyond. And suddenly recollection appeared to leap up in her, twitching the muscles in her face until it set in a mask of pain. She turned strained eyes on him, and speech broke from her, a voice husky but demanding:

"Is it true, what he told me—that Edward was dying?"

Baird had not thought it would be this way. He had not considered what Ann would say when she spoke; all he had thought was that, if only she could speak, he would know whether or not she was injured, whether she was in pain. Baird's native quickness and coolness almost forsook him; he retained only presence of mind enough to grasp the fact that it was Edward she loved, and that he dared not thrust the truth upon her suddenly and abnormally active brain.

He parleyed until he could think. "Who told you that, dear?"

Her speech came quickly and thickly: "Garvin. He came for me. He said Edward's horse threw him an' he was dyin' an' wanted me."

Baird had done his thinking, and had hazarded a guess as well. "He didn't tell you the truth," he said clearly and decidedly. "He simply wanted you to come with him."

She said nothing, but she relaxed; the rigid muscles in her face softened into relief and her eyes grew cloudy and slowly closed. The spurt of abnormal animation passed.

With a new fear tugging at him, Baird watched the moisture gather on her forehead and about her lips and noted the utter laxness of her hands and the weighted heaviness of her eyelids. Was she slipping into unconsciousness again? He bent over her.

"Ann, does your back hurt?" he begged.

She breathed rather than spoke the word, "No—"

"Do you feel any pain?"

She moved her head in denial.

"You're sleepy—that's all?"

She did not answer.

If she had fainted, it was a warm breathing unconsciousness like the sleep of exhaustion. And she had said she was not in pain.... As he listened to her regular breathing Baird gradually lost his fear; nature was helping her now. He loosened the hot thing in which she was wrapped, and sat with her hand in his; if she grew feverish he would know it. There was nothing over which he could exert himself; he must simply wait; sit there till morning, if no one came.

For the first time since the struggle had begun Baird thought of himself. He was fearfully tired, sore and aching and wet; he was wet and caked with mud almost to his waist. He was experiencing the reaction. Depression settled upon him.... So it was Edward she loved. That sort of love would hold for a long time; there was no hope for him.... That she had not been crushed or broken was one of the wonders, but she was not out of danger—her spine might be injured.... A wave of anger swept Baird, arousing him a little from depression: where were her people throughout all this tragedy? Why had they left her alone in the house for Garvin to mislead? For that must have been the way of it—he had told her a half-truth in order to get her away.... Then he sank back into depression.

When the clock struck two, Baird looked up at the slowly-traveling hands; the next would be the deadest hour of the night.

XXXIV

BEN BROKAW EXPLAINS

"Does she know about Edward?" Baird asked of Ben. He had followed Ben to the barn, and that was his first anxious question.

"Yes. I tol' her. She had to be told—I couldn't keep it from her. I tol' her before Sue come."

"God! How did she take it?"

Ben's eyes lighted. "Like a Penniman—or a Westmo' would take it!"

"You had courage," Baird breathed in relief. "I didn't dare tell her."

"I knowed who I talked to," Ben returned deeply. "Ann growed up under my han'—I know the blood that's in Ann. She's got courage, Ann has—I weren't afraid."

It was Ben Brokaw, not the Penniman family, who had come in out of the darkness and the rain and had watched over Ann while Baird had gone for the doctor. Between three and four o'clock, the sleeping collie had roused and gone out, and a few minutes later Baird had heard the approach of some one. When he sprang up, it was Ben who had confronted him, dripping wet, splashed with mud, small eyes peering and amazed. He had looked at Ann, prostrate, an instant of partial comprehension, then he had looked, as redly as any enraged animal, at Baird.

Baird's explanation had been succinct, and, after a moment of grief-stricken understanding, Ben had shown even a shrewder grasp of the situation than Baird himself. Their consultation had been a hurried one, but when Baird galloped off through the rain he had been supported by the certainty that he had left both love and wisdom watching over Ann. There was a capable brain and a father's tender heart in Ben Brokaw's grotesque body—and a dog's faithfulness.

It was after sunrise when Baird had brought the doctor to the Pennimans' door, and it was Sue Penniman, haggard but collected, not Ben, who had opened to them.

"How is she?" had been Baird's instant question.

"We think she's better. She's awake an' able to talk."

Baird had held Sue's eye. "I've told the doctor Ben sent me for him. I couldn't tell him anything about the accident, only that she must have lain unconscious for a long time."

Sue met his look steadily. "We'll tell him about it," she said.

"Where is Ben?" Baird had asked.

"He just went out to the barn."

Baird had followed and had found Ben seated on a box in the wagon-shed, whittling and swaying as he worked. Any one who knew Ben well could have told Baird that Ben always whittled and swayed when thinking deeply or when perturbed; that he always carried bits of pine in his pockets, and that under his handling they usually became figure-fours. Ben had heard Baird's hasty approach, but he had not looked up until Baird was upon him with his anxious question.

Ben thought, as he watched Baird's partial relief, that the young fellow looked pretty thoroughly "done." The rain had washed most of the mud from his trousers, but he was still well smudged with it and soaking wet, his face gray-white and his eyes red-rimmed.

"You better set down while you wait fo' what the doctor has to say," he advised in a kindly growl. "Emergencies had oughter be met standin' and suspense sittin'. You've stood up pretty good against the first, reckon you can do the right thing by the second.... There's a box strong enough to hol' you, over there."

Baird brought it and sat down opposite Ben.

"You're about as wet and all in as I am," he remarked, in answer to the kindly note in Ben's voice. The big creature was just as Baird had seen him last, wet and muddy and queerly mottled about his cheeks and nose, red patches upon the nearest approach to pallor his tanned face could attain.

"A wettin' ain't nothin' to me," Ben said, "but I done somethin' the same things you done last night." Then, either to ease Baird's suspense or for some other reason, he continued: "I was tellin' you last night it was me foun' the hole in the bridge an' what was below, an' we agreed I must have come on it a little after you'd took Ann away.... You see, when I run to Westmo' to tell Judith about Edward, she says, 'Ben, Garvin ain't here. You take the word to the Copeleys first, go quick, then try to meet up with Garvin.' I done what she says. I had a hard time findin' Garvin, though. I got the first word of him at the club. Everybody were gone from there to tell everybody else what a Westmo' had done to hisself, an' the cook were the only one left. He said a while befo' he'd heard some one gettin' out Garvin's automobile from the shed—seems he'd been keepin' it there, at the club. The cook reckoned it was Garvin that some one must have tol' Garvin what had happened, an' he'd took the automobile so's to get to Westmo' in a hurry. I started down the Post-Road then, an' I come upon what had happened. My lord!" Ben paused, then went on. "Well, I dragged some rails acrost the road an' went fo' help, an' we got the las' man bearin' the name of Westmo' back to his house."

In spite of his efforts, Ben's voice had grown unsteady, and he whittled violently and in silence for a few moments, until speech escaped him: "It begun to rain on us befo' we got to Westmo', like the sky were weepin' over the sins of them that brung us into the world. That po' thing we was carryin'—'tweren't none of his fault. An' we builds jails an' madhouses fo' the like of him, an' jest goes right on fillin' them.... Garvin weren't never jest right, Mr. Baird. Them two youngest Westmo's—Sarah an' Garvin—'twere their pa should answer fo' them ... an' yet, what right hev I talkin' like that! There didn't no one teach sense to men like the ole colonel an' ole Mr. Penniman. I've jest got one big pity fo' every one of them—particular fo' them that's left."

"He nearly did for Ann—I'm not thinking of his forebears," Baird said bitterly.

Ben collected himself. "He was jest out of his mind—you can't judge him like you would a sane man.... You know, of co's', that Edward cared a lot for Ann and she fo' him, an' that Garvin were mad over her, like he would be, an' that she wouldn't have him. If you don't know, I'm telling you, an' fo' Ann's sake, it's a thing we ain't goin' to speak about to others. I'll tell you, too, what Ann tol' me when her an' me were talkin', befo' Sue come back. Ann tol' me she was sittin' in the dark on the porch an' Garvin come up sudden an' tol' her Edward were hurt an' dyin' an' askin' fo' her to come. He'd brought his automobile to the cedar road, an' that's what he must have been doin' when the cook heard him. I know his horse was at the club barn when I was there, because I seen it there. Ann says she went off quick with him, she weren't thinkin' of nobody but Edward, an' they started fo' the Post-Road. She didn't suspicion at first that Garvin weren't in his right mind, but when they began to tear down the Post-Road he spoke queer, an' jest befo' they struck the bridge she was sure he was clean mad. She was so scart she stood up, an' the next thing they was throwed. It was her standin' up saved her, I reckon. Jest what drove Garvin mad we'll never know. How much he knowed of what's happened, or jest what he intended to do, it's beyond us to tell, but that he was clean beside hisself, that's certain."

Baird had listened to Ben's explanation. It fitted in with much that he knew and with much that he had suspected, and he guessed that Ben could have told him a great deal more had he chosen to do so. Ben loved Ann, as a father loves his daughter, so much Baird had discovered during the night, and, also, that Ben was faithful to both the Pennimans and the Westmores. In his weariness and anxiety, Baird refused to think of it. What did it matter—if only Ann pulled through unshattered?

Baird was sick with fatigue, racked still by anxiety, and angered by Coats Penniman's neglect of his daughter. "Where were Ann's people all night—why did they leave Ann to fall into a trap like that?" he demanded.

Ben worked away at his stick. "That were a mystery to me, till Sue come. It was natural enough, though, how that happened. Coats, he had to go to the city, an' Sue, she drove in with him, early in the evenin'. They'd left word with Ann they'd be gone late. They knowed I'm always here in the evenin'—I ain't moved off this place a single evenin', not in weeks. They weren't worryin' about Ann's not bein' safe. But last evenin' I weren't here, an' you know why. Sue tells me they were drivin' Billy, an' you know what he is. Come time to get home, they had trouble with him. He's a devil, that horse, a good traveler, but that's all. He give Coats' shoulder a bad wrench. There weren't no trains they could get till near mornin', an' Sue she took the first train out an' walked up from the station, leavin' Coats to dispose of Billy and come out later. Sue were worried to

death over her father an' Ann, she looked like a ghost when she come in, an' ready to drop, but she come to when she seen what trouble she'd come back to.... That's Penniman fo' you, jest like Miss Judith's stiff upper lip is Westmo'. These southern ladies, Mr. Baird, whose mothers done stood fas' while their men was bein' shot to pieces in the war—their mothers' blood's in them, all right! They'll stand up to anything, they will, an' gamble on a chance cooler nor any man!" Ben spoke with a profound admiration that dignified even his language.

Baird thought of Judith and how he had bent to her hand. But he had learned a surprising thing. "You don't tell me that old Mr. Penniman was in the house all the time I was there?" he exclaimed. "Why, I pounded the door and shouted."

"Sure he was there—up to his room in the front. He's fearful deaf an' he were asleep. He never heard you. I forgot to tell you, when we were plannin' quick of how to keep from everybody's knowin' that Ann was with Garvin. All my mind was on gettin' the doctor to her an' keepin' Ann's name from bein' mixed up in what's happened, an' so was yours."

"Will Miss Penniman be able to carry it through?" Baird asked anxiously.

"She *will*! I've done talked to her."

"And Ann?"

"Ann's too sick to talk—that's her answer," Ben returned with decision. "I tol' you I'd find the right thing to say." He pointed: "You see that there hole, where fodder is thrown down to the cows? Ann fell through there—it's a consid'able fall—more'n fifteen feet an' it won't be the first case of the kind the doctor has had to do with. *I* say that *I* foun' Ann down there, onconscious, an' any that doubts my word can come to me! I ain't never judged a lie a lie if it were tol' to help a woman—it's about the only chanst a man has to make up to his ma fo' men's havin' fastened the story of Eve to her."

In spite of his anxiety, Baird smiled. He liked Ben, and for much the same reasons as he had liked Edward Westmore; Ben Brokaw was every whit as true a gentleman. Baird thought of Edward's gentleness and consideration to women. "Ben?" he asked abruptly. "Why did Edward kill himself? Ann loved him, and you say he loved her—why did he hurt her like that? There appears to be no doubt about it, for the doctor told me that the pistol was smoked and that the wound showed that it had been fired at close range. The reason Mr. Copeley gave me—that Edward had heart trouble—isn't sufficient reason to me. Why in the name of heaven did he do such a thing!"

Ben stopped his work. But he did not look at Baird; he looked out at the struggle between sun and mist. After a considerable pause, he said slowly, "It seems the cruelest thing in all this night's work, don't it?... I can't explain it.... The Ridge'll give its reasons, an' first among them, that there is knowed to be one Westmo' whose mind ain't right, an' that now the thing's showed itself in Edward.... It's all right your askin' me—I know you are considerin' Ann same as I am. You can ask me anything you like an' I'll answer to the best of my ability, but it's a thing I won't discuss with nobody else. I thought a heap of Edward—I don't want to talk about it. My biggest trouble now is Ann."

If Ben intended to divert Baird, he succeeded. Baird moved restlessly, then got up. "He's in there a long time!" he said through his teeth.

He went to the door and looked out at the misty morning. It had been a steady, deep-sinking rain, like the satisfying answer to a prayer, and now the sun was fighting the steaming moisture, trying to work its vivifying will upon the growing things; in an hour's time it would triumphantly climb the heavens.

Ben looked at Baird's drooping shoulders. The boy was almost falling from fatigue. He was certainly a "cool-head," but a boy, nevertheless; a young fellow experiencing his first big trouble, and not knowing just what to make of it. He loved Ann completely, he had shown that, a somewhat astonishing thing in one of his rough-and-ready sort, Ben thought. If the doctor brought them bad news, they were both going to suffer.

Baird straightened and turned. "He's coming," he said.

Ben rose uncertainly to his feet. "You go ask him," he returned in his deepest growl.

But Baird was already on his way. The doctor's buggy had come into view, and Ben watched Baird go. He peered intently at the group, the doctor bent forward a little and Baird standing with one hand on the dashboard, as if for support.... The buggy moved on, and, for a moment, Ben could not make out whether Baird was returning laggingly or not. Then he saw that he came with head up, and Ben stopped swaying.

Baird's tired eyes were alight. "Ben, he says there's no serious injury, just a severe shock. It was the concussion made her unconscious so long. He said she might never have come out from it, that many don't, but that she had. And he says her spine's all right." It was the fear that had harried them both, and to which neither had referred.

"Um!" said Ben. It was an expressive monosyllable.

The two looked at each other in the way usual with men when uplifted and yet held by awkwardness.

"I'm going to the club now," Baird said.

And Ben asked as prosaically, "Where's your horse?"

"I left him in the doctor's stable—I don't mind walking.... I'll come over this afternoon." And he went.

Ben stood for a time, considering, and the color that for a few moments had dulled the patches on his face gradually faded. One trouble had been lifted from his mind, but it was crowded with others. He was thinking of Judith Westmore—and intently of Coats Penniman. Sue had done her best, and he had listened without questioning, but she had not deceived his intelligence. Ann had told him that they had found Garvin's letters. Coats' sudden going and his failure to return were curious things. Was it possible that he had been mistaken? And that he had misled Judith?... If he had, he had unwittingly saved a Penniman at a pretty big price to a Westmore.

Ben was thinking anxiously of the future.

XXXV

WAITING

The middle of June brought hot days and unrefreshing nights to the Ridge, frequent rains and steaming heat, and yet Baird stayed on. He was comparatively idle now, for he had done about all he could in the Southeast for his firm. Dempster needed him in the West; any day the summons might come.

Baird could not and would not go until Ann was on the way to recovery. It was three weeks since her accident and yet he had not been allowed to see her; she had been too ill. Coats Penniman had returned to the farm the day after the Westmore tragedy, and had immediately sent for a city specialist, who had simply confirmed what the Ridge doctor had said, that there was no injury except the shock to Ann's entire nervous system. She had youth in her favor, but, at best, nervous prostration was a slow matter. Rest and freedom from worry of any sort was his prescription, the usual prescription.

Coats and Sue and Ben, and Baird also, knew why Ann was so lifeless, that she was not only ill from shock, but sick with grief as well. Sue had talked to Ann, affectionately and pityingly, and Coats had shown Ann far more paternal tenderness than he had expressed in all the seventeen years past; Ann was surrounded by kindness, but she remained lifeless, too weak to walk, too weak to talk much, even to Ben, though he was her constant companion, her nurse, in reality, for his seemed to be the only presence that did not tire her. The sight, even the sound, of her grandfather made her eyes dilate dangerously. The attentions of her family appeared to exhaust her; she could not sleep when they were with her.

Very little of the talk and excitement over the Westmore tragedy filtered to Ann. Ben told her a little about Judith's and the entire Westmore connection's quiet acceptance of an overwhelming trouble. The day following the tragedy, the city papers had given accounts of the occurrence that carefully avoided any mention of the Westmore family's inherited misfortune which was being openly discussed both in the city and on the Ridge. Colonel Dickenson had given to his friends in the city the only reason the family could assign for Edward's act, the same reason Mr. Copeley had given to Baird, and their explanation of Garvin's fate; a frantic haste to reach Westmore, and the condition of the Post-Road bridge.

For a time the Ridge had buzzed with comments: the Ridge had always known that the family misfortune would reveal itself in another Westmore, and for Garvin they had terse sentences: a reckless dissipated man, what else could you expect? A dash in an automobile on a black night and over such roads as theirs! The Ridge had always known that he would come to some such end. Ben was questioned by every one he met, and talked with apparent frankness of his connection with the tragedy. Baird had said little, but had listened intently to the Ridge gossip. When it was apparent that no one knew of Ann's connection with the Westmore brothers, he breathed more freely. Ben was keeping his secret well. Baird's own surmises he kept strictly to himself.

Coats Penniman had very little to say to any one—except Sue—there were no secrets between them. They had come together, those two; mutual distress had united them. It was known now on the Ridge that they would be married as soon as Coats' daughter was well. Coats went about the farm working hard, as usual. He had carried his arm in a sling for some days, then had discarded it. He had always been a silent man, he was more silent than usual, that was all.

Sue alone knew what weighed on his mind. His most constant thought was of Ann, and how best to help her. It seemed best to leave her to Ben. Sue knew how acutely Coats was suffering, and she clung to him with the greater devotion.

During the last of the three anxious weeks, Ann had talked more with Ben, and after that she gained a little strength. Ben wished that she would weep; her calmness was unnatural.

Ann's stoicism frightened Sue. "I'm afraid of it," she was driven to say to Coats.

The furrows in Coats' forehead deepened, but he said quietly, "Don't worry, Sue. There's plenty of good sane blood in Ann. Just wait and let time help her."

Baird also was anxiously waiting. Every day of that three weeks he had stopped at the Penniman house to inquire about Ann. Often he rode on to Westmore and spent the evening with Judith. Though urged by the whole connection, Judith had refused to leave Westmore, even for a day. She had faced God's half-acre, faced the present and the future with the same undaunted spirit with which she had faced the difficult past. She had taken up Edward's interests; she rode about Westmore like any capable overseer, and her evenings she spent seated beneath the Westmore portraits.

She was always at home to Baird, and Westmore seemed to Baird much as it had been. Save for Judith's black gown, there were few signs of mourning. Judith bore herself spiritedly, was the same fluent speaker, and charming, as always. If Baird had not noticed her expression at times, when she was off guard, he might have thought her heartless. He knew that, in her way, she was suffering as keenly as Ann. Her manner to Baird was a mixture of friendly interest and something deeper, a tacit recognition of their former relations, and as tacit a disclaimer of any expectations.

Baird was in many respects the "cool-head" Ben Brokaw thought him. So long as his own feelings were clearly defined, he felt no hesitation in going to Westmore. On the first occasion when Judith said, "You are not looking well, Nickolas," he had answered without preamble or apology, "You know, I suppose, how fond I am of Ann Penniman? She's very ill—I doubt sometimes whether she'll pull through. I'm not feeling particularly happy, Judith."

If Judith had rehearsed her answer many times, it could not have been more equably delivered: "Yes, I know you are. Ben tells me that it was a fall in the barn, and I'm sorry both for you and for her. But she's young and strong—she will get well."

"I don't know. I hope so," Baird said.

The drop in his voice had told Judith far more than his avowal, and she could not endure it in silence. "Ann was fond of my brother—of both my brothers," she said dryly.

Baird had winced; so she knew all that history, doubtless far better than he did. Then his jaw set, and he quoted her own words, "But she's young and so am I. And as I'm good at both fighting and waiting, I generally win out."

"I hope you will," Judith said, with an instant return to her usual manner. "There is no one whom I'd rather see happy."

After the first flash of anger Baird forgave her the thrust. He had been rather brutal. Still it had been a necessary brutality; unless there was a distinct understanding, he could not continue his visits. Baird judged that Judith would not again swerve from the attitude she had adopted, and he was right. He genuinely liked and admired Judith Westmore. He admired the strength of will that enabled her to go on playing the role she had chosen; she was a pretty splendid sort. And he was profoundly sorry for her; she'd had a beastly hard row to hoe, and had hoed it well. He took off his hat to her!

But Baird did not take his depression and his fears to Judith. When he was "down," he rode for miles into the country, often until late at night. He thought continuously of Ann. He was convinced that she had been a more potential factor in the Westmore tragedy than any one dreamed. Baird wondered endlessly whether Ann was not suffering as much from remorse as from grief. He had long ago decided that she was both elusive and compelling, the type that gives little and receives much, the sort of woman who drives a man to fight for all he receives. Certainly two men had struggled for her, and, Baird was convinced, had died because of her. And he himself! He had fought for her against death itself, and was still fighting.... Well, he liked to fight; he had never treasured anything that came easy.

From the beginning of time men have yielded to the women they think potential, a fascinated interest that may or may not be love. Certainly when coupled with desire it is an irresistible force. When allied to tenderness, it is the blind worship which has urged men to most of the chivalrously romantic acts in history.

Baird told himself that he had sensed the potential in Ann, on the day when he had captured a kiss. She had drawn him away from Judith and had compelled him even when he knew perfectly well that her thoughts were with one or the other of those two. She had compelled him to put up the stiffest fight he had ever made, an actual grapple with death. It might seem to others that he was infatuated with a girl of no importance whatever, but he knew better: Ann's surroundings were an accident—by right of innate superiority, she belonged to Judith's class, and Edward had realized that, too. No, he was held and compelled and overwhelmingly in love with a potential woman.

Perhaps Baird was simply laboring under the hallucination usual with lovers, which urges them to swathe the objects of their affection with an interest quite indiscernible to the sane-minded. Possibly the tragedy in which Ann was involved and the fact that she almost certainly owed her life to him had touched an imaginative strain in him. It is more likely that, like Edward, he was a shrewd judge of character and that, despite her youth and her simple rearing, Ann did possess potentiality; that eventually she might even emerge a gifted woman.

However that may be, certainly no lover came into the presence of the woman he loved with

more profound sensations than stirred Baird when at last Ben brought him to Ann. "You can come on in," Ben said. "She says she wants to thank you."

When Baird's eyes leaped to her, he lost the power of speech, for illness and grief had worked havoc: they had thinned her face until it looked small and pinched, had set immense circles about her eyes, destroyed the softness of lips and chin; her hair appeared to be the only unchanged thing about her, a black mass crowning the pillow.

Ann lifted to his clasp a hand that seemed as fragile as a bird's claw, but her voice had not changed, the old soft drawl enlivened by the well-remembered touches of coquetry and aloofness: "Ben says you saved my life—and I can't ever pay off that debt, can I? Not unless I save yours some time. I'll have to be always watching out for the chance, but all I can do now is just to say, 'Thank you—thank you very much,' an' not talk any more about it."

A light answer was quite beyond Baird. For almost the first time in his life he was pretty thoroughly tongue-tied. "I wish you weren't so ill," he said simply.

She smiled at him, a parting of colorless lips over white teeth. "Ben says young things get well quicker than old ones. He says funny things to me, an' some of them I reckon are wise things. He said yesterday, that, if a man had any heart left at all after he had done playing with it, he didn't really know nothin' about what kind of a heart it was till he was forty, an' that a woman, whether she had a heart or not, 'never knows nothin' about it at all.'"

Baird was permeated by an aching disappointment. Ann had seen what lay in his eyes, and on the instant had donned a mask and interposed a shield. She had confessed to a debt, that was all. She wanted none of him; Judith could not have conveyed the impression any more skilfully.

From somewhere within himself Baird managed to bring forth what strove to be a light sentence: "Ben's a pretty good second father to you, isn't he?"

"Yes—I reckon he is—" Then, suddenly, her mask slipped. Her eyes widened, filled to overflowing with grief and pain—then closed. The tears gathered beneath her lashes and rolled down her cheeks, until a storm of sobs caught her and shook her.

Shocked and bewildered, Baird bent over her. He was never able to remember just what he said, only that he tried to lift her up and that Ben made him put her down, then drew him out of the room.

"She ain't fit to talk!" Ben said forcibly. "Jest you go on along, an' come another time!"

Baird went out and rode for miles, until long after dark. He would have carried his wretchedness to bed with him had he not returned through the Penniman place. Ben was lounging by the gate.

"Well?" Baird asked dully.

"She's right smart better," Ben growled.

"She *is*!"

"Um."

Then Ben explained. "Women's nerves is like plants—they needs water. I've been wishin' this long time that Ann's would get rained on.... She's jest naturally cried herself to sleep."

"And you think it's done her good?" Baird asked doubtfully.

"I do.... When she asks me to fetch her the lookin'-glass, I'll rest easy."

Baird felt rather than saw the twinkle in Ben's eyes, and he laughed from sheer relief, the first time he had laughed in weeks.

He went on to the club and wrote to Dempster, asking him for a month's vacation. "You see," Baird wrote, "the girl I love and mean to marry—if I can get her—has been next door to death. There seems to be a chance for her now, and a month will mean a lot to me."

XXXVI

"IT LIES WITH ANN"

Baird was granted his holiday. He would have taken it, despite consequences, but it was better to have gained it in this way. Dempster, who was a rough but kindly sort, had written: "All right, take the month, but don't you fail me in August. Make the best of it and bring her back with you—we'll welcome her."

Baird had laid the letter down with a groan. "Bring her back with me! If he knew how hard I'm up against it!" Nevertheless, he made his daily visit to the Penniman house.

Ann was certainly improving. By the first of July she was able to sit on the porch, even to walk as far as the terraces. But not with Baird. Baird was very certain that neither Coats nor Sue nor Ben

was responsible for his not being allowed to see Ann again. He felt that all three were friendly to him and to his suit, for there was no mistaking his intention.

"He's desperately in love with her," Sue said to Coats. "I'm sorry for him when I have to tell him that Ann doesn't feel well enough to see him. It hurts me the way he looks at me."

"Yes, he's wretched," Coats agreed, "but I've nothing to say one way or the other. It lies entirely with Ann. He's a good sort and he's open-minded, but there are things may daunt even him. Ann will have to decide for herself. I know her a deal better than I did, Sue—I was all wrong in my estimate of her. She's too proud and strong-willed for any man to capture easily. I've been a poor enough father to her in the past, the best I can do now is to hold my peace."

Possibly Ben knew what disposal Ann meant to make of Baird; he knew more about Ann's thoughts than any one else did. At any rate, it was he who, on the Fourth of July, told Baird that Ann was feeling well enough to see him. He appeared at the club and delivered Ann's message:

"Ann wanted I should tell you she was able to see you," he announced.

Baird flushed crimson. "Shall I go now?" he asked hurriedly.

"Wait a bit—till the sun's gone," Ben said. "She'll be out to the porch then." He looked grave. "Mr. Baird, jest you remember that Ann's been through a deal, an' don't you overdo her." He fumbled his cap uncomfortably. "When I were young I was always in a turrible hurry—I never reckoned on time. An' I were awful decided in my mind about everything. Now I don't do no decidin' to speak of—I lets time do it."

Ben's remarks were not altogether clear to Baird, but the first part of his speech was easy to grasp. "I'll try not to tire her," he promised.

"All right," Ben said, and departed.

Baird watched him rolling off to the woods, like a bear freed from human interference. His oddly bent body suggested a craving for the woods and a thirst for running water. He had been caged for a long time; Baird guessed that it had worn upon him; he doubted whether any one but Ann could have compelled Ben to do it.

To fill in time, Baird walked to the Penniman house, loitering along beneath the cedars. He was reflecting that love did queer things to a man; it could strengthen his body into iron, make him fight like mad, or turn him as weak as a baby and as humble as a slave; weak in the knees and sick about the heart.... But, if only for a moment, he could hold Ann in his arms ... and she should cling to him.... He stopped, shaken from head to foot at the thought of possible response.

The thing swept him and shook him.... Then he walked on. He was a fool; he was forgetting. The best he could hope for was a little kindness. She meant to be kind, or she wouldn't have sent for him.

It was not twilight yet, the sunset was too brilliant, and fear of not finding Ann on the porch made him come slowly up the road. When he saw her white dress, he strode along. He was grateful to the glow, for he could see her face. It was not so thin as when he had last seen her, and her eyes were less shadowed; a little of the old-time softness had returned to her lips and chin. But she was still wan and thin and fragile enough to remind him of Ben's warning. So help him! he'd behave more sensibly than on the last occasion! He could even force himself to be banal.

"It's good of you to see me," he said when he reached her. "Are you really feeling well enough to talk?"

She smiled up at him, and her smile made her look more like the Ann he remembered. "I can stand up, but I won't," she said with a touch of her old-time gaiety. "My feet feel queer an' far away when I do."

"Stand up! I should think not!... May I sit here on the step, where I sat the first time we ever really talked together? That was about a hundred years ago, I think." Baird ventured this reference to the past.

Ann answered gravely. "A little less than two months ago—I was thinking of it to-day."

Baird chose to consider the speech propitious, and he ventured further. "I remember you gave me a definition of love, and then couldn't remember just what you'd said.... I've always remembered that definition of yours."

"I don't remember now what it was I said. I know, though, that I'm not wise about such things." She spoke with a quiver of feeling, and looked beyond him, at the sunset.

Baird did not dare to say one of the things that crowded to his lips. He decided to say, "Wisdom never proceeds from a vacant head, and what you said was a bit of wisdom. I haven't forgotten a word of it."

Ann moved restlessly. She made no reply, but Baird saw the color tinge her cheeks. He had purposely chosen the top step of the porch, for then he could look up into her face, and, surreptitiously, he could hold a bit of her dress. There was comfort in the contact. He felt queerly nervous, for it was so evident that he was not talking to the same girl who had thought aloud while she stared up at the stars. There was a disconcerting air of maturity about Ann.

Somewhere above them a locust started its song and Ann withdrew her eyes from the distance and looked down at Baird's steady upward gaze. "Do you hear that?" she asked.

Her look, veiled and troubled and at the same time observant of the changes the last weeks had wrought upon him, had no more connection with her question than Baird's eager gaze had with his answer. He had grown thinner, his cheek-bones more prominent and his jaw less heavy; he looked more nervously and less brutally forceful.

"That fellow's retiring late—they've been winding their watches under my window all afternoon." He replied, while his blue-gray eyes, alight and questioning, searched her face: "I went for a walk this morning, beyond the creek, to where they're cutting grain, and the grasshoppers were everywhere, grinding their legs as if getting ready for a busy summer. You know the big flat rock, down by the creek, in the woods near the Back Road? I found a tree-toad in the chinkapin bushes there, and two little red and yellow turtles in the creek. I brought them all home with me and played with them a while.... You see, I've been driven to nature for comfort—while I've been waiting for a sight of you."

Ann had grown dead white; her eyes had shifted to her lap, to her tightly clasped hands. "Locusts and grasshoppers coming so early mean—a dry summer—" she said with difficulty. Then more clearly, "I wanted you to come as soon as I was able—because I had to ask you something—" She stopped.

"Well?" Baird breathed.

She met his vivid look, shrank a little under it, but did not look away. "Mr. Baird, I know why you are staying here—an' I'm sorry. It's no use—I'll only hurt you more and more. You must go away."

Baird sat motionless, his eyes blank.

Ann went on more softly. "You've saved my life—you've done much more than that, an' the only kindness I can do you is just to tell you to go. If I let you go on caring for me, I'd be doing you a wicked wrong."

Baird flung back his head; color and life and the urge to fight had come back to him. "Suppose you let me decide what's best for me! How can you judge of the future? Am I hateful or repellent to you?... I don't believe it. You like me, and in the end you'll love me."

"I can't ever love you," Ann said firmly.

He took her hands. "Ann, give me a little time, dear? Just a fighting chance?... That's all I ask."

"No. I've been responsible for trouble enough—I can't do it."

"Why can't you? What possible harm can it do for you simply to be kind to me? Give me a chance?"

She was silent, trembling and breathing quickly.

Baird bent and kissed her hands, put his cheek against them. "Ann, I love you—I never dreamed that I could love any one as I love you. You've gone deep down in me and nestled against things I didn't know were there. I'll be patient—if only you'll give me a word of hope."

"I can't—I can't give you hope when there isn't any!" Ann said with sudden sharpness. "If you asked me for anything else in the world I'd give it to you, but you want a thing I can't give!"

Baird dragged himself up and stood with his back to her. "You hurt me—" he said through his teeth.

"I'd have to hurt you—like this—every time you came," Ann said with a drop into huskiness. "That's why I'm beggin' you to go an' stop thinking about me. I've got to go on livin' whether I want to or not, an' I couldn't bear it."

Baird turned around. "I'll go," he said. "I'll go to-morrow.... But I'm coming back, Ann.... I'll keep on coming to the end of time. I put my life into you that night—you're part of me. It isn't a debt you owe me, it's just that I belong to you and you to me!" He spoke with passionate conviction.

Ann said nothing; she sat with eyes closed.

Then he said thickly, "I've made you ill—is there any one here to look after you?"

"Yes—Aunt Sue—"

He bent down, took her face between his hands and kissed her lips. "I'm going now. I had to say that last—it's true."

"July, August and September—an endless number of Julys, Augusts and Septembers as futile as these last three months have been. That's my future, I suppose—if I go on with it," Baird said to himself. He had just come up through the Mine Banks Road, had crossed the County Road, and had turned into the long winding approach to Westmore.

Baird drew rein and looked back at the looming Mine Banks. Autumn had wielded a full brush, splashing the country with October colors, reds, warm-browns, yellows, rioting in gaudy pre-senile triumph over the resigned duns of field and pasture and the stately indifference of the never-changing cedars and pines. The bald iron-reddened forehead of the Banks, forever ferocious over man's vandalism, glared as angrily upon autumn's saturnalia as it had upon spring's tender eagerness. The venturesome tendrils of wild-grape and Virginia creeper, tolerated by the evergreens, had not dared to wind themselves about the Banks' burning forehead, and, now, unlike the more courteous evergreens, it supported none of all this brilliant decay. Not even the sumac, inconsequent reveler, had planted its crimson torch upon the Banks' bald head; only the impalpable blue haze, like the courageous wind and the rain, the sun and the snow, ventured to touch it.

Baird's eyes traveled from the Mine Banks to the pastures, then to the brilliant semicircle of woodland that curtained the Penniman house. "If I go on with it," he repeated. He turned and faced Westmore; spoke to his horse and they moved on.

Nickolas Baird, who loved to fight and to conquer, owned himself beaten. He had kept his promise to Ann: he had gone west to Dempster and had worked indefatigably throughout July, August and September, and, now, in October, they were sending him to France.

Throughout the first two months, he had written frequently to Ann, long letters sometimes, a pretty complete self-expression. She had not answered; it had been a little like writing to the dead. Early in the summer, when terribly anxious over Ann's health, he had written to Coats Penniman, and had received a courteous but reserved reply: "Sue and I wish you well," Coats had written. "We have always thought highly of you. All I can say regarding Ann is that she is steadily improving in health. Yes, she has received your letters, for I have heard her speak of them. Cold comfort this had been to Baird."

Early in August it had occurred to Baird to write Ben. The epistle he had received in return had won Baird's lasting gratitude. There was a big soul in Ben Brokaw, tenderness and loyalty and sincerity. Baird had had some conception of the patient effort Ben had expended upon that letter; he could vision the huge creature compelling himself to chair and table, the dictionary on his knee, his hairy paw cramped by a pen. Ben had told him some of the things he was yearning to know: quite unimportant things Ann said or did, sustenance, nevertheless, to a lover as starved as Baird was. Among other things, Ben wrote:

"She's not herself yet, but she's prettier nor ever, though, more growed up and stately."

Baird had not asked why Ann would not even acknowledge his letters, and Ben had not referred in any way to what lay between Ann and Baird, yet his entire letter had breathed understanding and sympathy. It had emboldened Baird to ask, "Ben, you know Ann better than any one else—tell me, is there no hope at all for me?"

Ben's answer had been cryptic:

"About your hopes—I ain't no wise judge of women, but I've noticed that some of them is just naturally born giving hearted, and some has to grow up to it. The kind that has to grow to it generally loves most to be loved. They seem to grow up to loving by being loved, that is, if they're loved the right way."

Baird had been thrown upon his own resources, as he had been when he had struggled for Ann's life. He had succeeded then in infusing her with his vitality, why could he not infuse love into her now? Those letters of Baird's to Ann were vividly honest self-expressions; the best in him went hand in hand with acute physical craving.

Then, in September, he had received a staggering blow. Ben wrote:

"Something has happened you'll want to know about. Edward Westmore's will has been made known and it's sure that he's left Ann a considerable sum of money. Westmore and one-fourth of his money he left to Judith, and the other three-fourths to be divided equal between Garvin and Sarah and Ann, Sarah's to be held in trust. In case either Garvin or Sarah should die, their portion was to be divided equal between Judith and Ann, so Ann gets half of Garvin's money right now, as well as her own. Edward's will states distinct that he is giving a Penniman this money because of wrongs done the Penniman family by the Westmore family in the past.

"There's great talk on the Ridge about it, and there's those who says that Judith sure will try to break the will on the ground that Edward couldn't have been of sound mind—that the way he did for hisself showed that, and that the will were made just before he died. But I know that Ann will get her money. It's a big thing for Ann, and I thought you'd want to know about it."

Ben had also told Baird that, a few days before, Coats and Sue had been married. "Seems like a

little happiness has come to the Penniman family at last," Ben wrote.

Nickolas Baird was a thoroughgoing modern with a high appreciation of the value of money. He came of a money-winning and money-worshipping race. However, he was sturdy in his ambitions, for he had never considered marrying money, and had no particular desire to have it given to him. It was making money that fascinated him.

Ben's news had cut the ground from beneath Baird, for Ann Penniman, penniless and tied to the farm, had been a possibility; Ann, independent and with the world of men from which to choose, was another matter. Baird had been unable to write to Ann after that. He was handicapped by as complete a depression as had overtaken him after he had won her back to life. He had been straining to get a hearing; suddenly it seemed futile to attempt anything at all; she was beyond him.

But he wrote to Ben: "Thank you for telling me of Ann's good fortune. I suppose I ought to be glad, but I'm not. I feel more as if I'd had a blow on the head. I can't write to Ann or do anything—she's passed beyond my reach. I've nothing to offer her now—to save my neck, I couldn't clean up more than about twenty thousand—that and my salary. When I make my pile, I suppose I'll have courage to try again—if somebody doesn't get ahead of me, or if in the meantime I don't fall for some woman whose love is big enough for both of us."

Baird was in exactly this frame of mind as he rode up to Westmore under the October sunshine. He had fallen hard, down upon the worldly earth; upon old and familiar thoughts, trite aspirations and desires, cast there by the vision of Ann buttressed by money. The sweet thing that had permeated him had grown sick when frowned upon by cold cash. There was an ugly vacant ache in him.

"Why not?" he asked himself, as he looked at Westmore, its stuccoed length mottled by splashes of red and yellow, clinging vines and low-hung branches. Judith had never failed him. All that long summer her letters had come regularly, warmed by interest, asking nothing of him, simply giving, giving—all she felt she would be allowed to give. He had not told her that he was going to Europe. He had not even told her that he was coming out to the Ridge, for he had decided to keep away from Ann.

Then, suddenly, he had changed his mind. He would go to New York by the southern route; give himself the comfort of seeing Judith. But he would not see Ann.

XXXVIII

THE REVELATION

It seemed very natural to be welcomed by Hetty and shown into the drawing-room. "Miss Judith, she'll be surprised!" Hetty exclaimed. "Lord, Mr. Baird, you done growed thin!"

"I've had too happy a summer to grow fat, Hetty."

"Why, you ain't got married, is you?" Hetty asked seriously.

"Far from it, Hetty—you run along and tell Miss Judith I'm here. I'm in a hurry, for I have to get back to town this evening."

Baird looked about the beautiful old room. How well he knew it! It was Judith's rightful setting; he was glad she possessed the place. The fact that she was a rich woman did not trouble him at all; if he loved her greatly, he supposed it would.

Judith came presently, her light quick step in the hall, then her actual presence, welcome in every movement, her cheeks warm and eyes very bright. She was still in black, but Baird thought he had never seen her look more youthful. Or was it simply because he felt so many years older than when he last saw her?

"You here, Nickolas?" she said.

Baird took the hands she held out to him, clasped them firmly. "Yes—to say good-by for a time—I'm sailing for France day after to-morrow. I've snatched a few minutes this afternoon because I wanted to see you."

There were swift thoughts surging through Judith's brain, but her answer was spontaneous enough: "That was good of you!"

"Yes, kind to myself," Baird said lightly. "I felt urged to come."

Judith's smiling eyes had taken instant note of his appearance, and her keen perception was busied over him. He lacked buoyancy, lacked it utterly; every trace of boyishness was gone. He had aged, hardened. He had the air of a man who looks coolly and joylessly upon his future.

Judith had learned nothing from Baird's letters. He had left the Ridge very suddenly; something

had gone wrong. Probably Coats had intervened, or, possibly, when she had discovered herself an heiress, Ann had failed him. Judith had the jealous woman's bitter estimate of the girl who had brought both her brothers under her sway, and had entangled Baird also. The intensity of detestation she felt for Ann sometimes sickened Judith. That Ann had won part of Edward's fortune had ground Judith's detestation to a dagger's point.

Under her brilliant exterior Judith was quivering. She had longed for the sight and touch of this man and, but for Ann, she might have recaptured him. Yet she had refrained from dealing the girl a blow. For months Judith's soul had been crisscrossed by passions and burdened by secrets. And Judith was in revolt. In revolt against conventions, against her rearing, against herself; against everything. She was typical of many women of her period; the restless craving woman of 1905 was at heart a revolutionary, and ten years of revolt have molded her into the feminist of to-day.

Judith had been resolutely considering her future. What did life, lived as she was living it, offer her? Unproductive, undeveloping middle-years and a solitary old age. She felt that she had paid her last debt to Westmore, and that the future lay before her, to be lived in different fashion—if she had the courage to make the break. She had decided to make it.

And in her visioning of the future Nickolas Baird was a prominent figure. He was an ambitious man, vastly capable, and destined for big things, and she could help him. He would not marry Ann; she felt certain that she could prevent it; it was her duty to prevent it. He would recover from his infatuation, for he was not the sort of man who would be held very long by an infatuation.

Judith had been on the point of writing to Baird her momentous decisions, and in coming to her he had given her an unexpected opportunity. The smile did not leave her lips. "I have made all the arrangements, Nickolas—I intended to write to you about it before I left—that I am going to Paris, too—in a few days."

"*You* leave Westmore!" Baird was too much surprised to express pleasure.

"Yes, I am leaving Westmore—and I doubt whether I shall ever return to it." Her color had risen; though she smiled, a little of the bitterness she felt edged her words.

"I imagine it must be desolate for you here—but you, out of this setting—I can't conceive of it exactly." Then it occurred to Baird what this move of hers would mean to them both; a continued intimacy, certainly. The vague motives that had brought him to her prompted the quick addition: "We'll meet in Paris then, Judith—we'll see it together."

Though undefined, there was a suggestion both in his words and his manner that affected Judith curiously, urging her to a sudden defiant candor. What had her restrained, conventional life won for her? Nothing more than expressions of gallant admiration; never the vital gripping thing. "My setting!" she said scornfully. "A woman reared as I have been has no more freedom of will than a walled-in prisoner! She's a perfect slave, bound to the past and handed over hand-tied into the future. From now on, I'm going to live. I am going to know countries, and nations, and women and men—more as a man knows them. I'm going to think as I please and live as I please. Not even the past is going to dictate my future!" She had flung out her resolve, body tense and head high.

Baird studied her; she had both surprised and amused him. Though not widely experienced, he had met this sort of revolt degenerated into mere free-living. Baird considered himself broad-minded, but he had not passed beyond the conception that a woman's assertion of free thought and action invariably meant that she was considering—as he would have expressed it to himself—"going on the loose."

But Judith Westmore, with her monumental pride and her immense self-respect and her narrowly conventional rearing, talking of becoming a free-lance! She didn't know what she was talking about; she could no more do it than she could fly. She would see Paris—the world and its peoples, for that matter—and "*men*," as conventionally as her class and kind always saw them. She was simply worn into exasperation by Westmore troubles—and her love for him. The thing was laughable—and a little sad.

It was Baird's very genuine admiration and liking for Judith that was responsible for this conclusion. To almost any other attractive woman who had tempted his present uncertain mood, he would have answered, and meaningly, "Well, why not?" But to Judith he said kindly and amusedly, "I don't wonder you want to throw all this off and get out into breathing space. It'll do you good to get a change. I don't believe you'll paint Paris a vivid red, though, Judith, even if I tried to help you do it."

It was evident that he had not taken her seriously, and Judith decided that it was as well that he had not done so; she had said much more than she had intended to say. The future was before them, and he would discover soon enough that she was in deadly earnest. He would find a changed woman when they met in Paris.

She regained her usual bright manner. "I'm glad you're not too shocked to continue our acquaintance. I hope you'll come to see me in Paris, and then you can tell me what you think of my new way of life."

Baird smiled. "Of course I'll come."

She was very beautiful as she stood there, head high and with the color of defiance still warming her cheeks. The ugly ache in Baird reminded him that, at a few words from him, her structure of independence would crumble. She would marry him to-morrow if he asked her, and give him an immense devotion. His flush deepened into a dull red.

Judith wondered of what he was thinking so absorbedly. Of Ann? Mentally, she had passed on to the other decision she had reached. "Nickolas, you knew, of course, that Edward remembered Ann Penniman very generously in his will?" she asked.

Baird started and stiffened. "Yes, so I understand."

"Do you still care about her?... I wouldn't ask unless I had a good reason."

Baird had not realized that anything could hurt so keenly as this questioning. His thoughts of a moment ago had vanished at the first mention of Ann's name. "Yes, I love her just the same."

"But things haven't gone very smoothly, I am afraid, Nickolas?"

"No—they haven't.... I love Ann—she doesn't love me."

"I doubt whether she is capable of loving anybody, very much," Judith said quietly. "I hear that she is going to take her little fortune and leave the Ridge—educate herself; first of all, for she is ambitious.... You mean to see her before you go, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Baird did not know why he said it; he had meant to go without seeing Ann. But, from the depths of him, the "Yes" came, resonant with determination.

Judith grew dead white, for what she meant to say next was of tragically serious import. And it was not jealousy alone that actuated her. She spoke very slowly and clearly. "I'm sorry to hurt you, Nickolas—I'm certain you don't know—but if you really mean to persist, if you intend to try to persuade Ann to marry you, you ought to know. She may risk not telling you, she may not tell any man whom she wants to marry, and let him in for disgrace in the future, for any amount of undreamed-of trouble.... Ann is not Coats Penniman's daughter, Nickolas.... Edward, my brother, was Ann's father."

Judith was looking directly into Baird's eyes, and she saw how curiously they widened and grayed. She watched the blood drain from his face. In spite of the passions warring in her, Judith's love for Baird was a very complete thing. She suffered as she watched him. She felt that she had hurt him terribly.

Baird moved at last, looked down at the floor. "I can't realize it—at once—all it means—" he muttered.

Judith continued. "You see, Nickolas, Edward was only a boy, he was only twenty-one, and he was madly in love with Marian Penniman—and she with him. She was a very pretty girl, with Ann's same dangerous allure about her. You know the family quarrel? They met secretly—my father knew nothing about it, neither did Mr. Penniman—until it was too late. Edward was a nice boy, he loved Marian and he wanted to marry her. There was fearful trouble. Mr. Penniman and my father quarreled violently. My father swore that no Westmore should marry a Penniman, and Mr. Penniman was as determined that no daughter of his should owe anything to a Westmore. Edward would have run away with her if he could, but Mr. Penniman guarded his house with a shotgun, and between them all they married Marian to her cousin, Coats Penniman, just to save her good name. Coats loved her—he honestly wanted to help her, so it was a marriage only in name. It was a wretched business. It killed Marian, I believe, and it almost killed Edward." Judith's voice quivered with deep feeling. "Poor Edward!... And, in the end, he's sacrificed for his family's sins—"

Baird had heard Judith's explanation, his senses mechanically grasped what she said, while he pondered the thing which was of such tremendous import to him. When Judith had finished, he was still pale, but collected enough.

He looked very steadily at Judith when he asked his questions. "Did Garvin know Ann's relationship to him?"

"No. Mr. Penniman, Coats and Sue, and Edward and myself—we were the only ones who knew.... And Ben Brokaw knew. I think Ben guessed rather than knew—way back in the beginning. And from the beginning he's been like a father to Ann, I mean in feeling—much more so than Coats."

"And Ann didn't know?"

"Not till Edward told her. Ben says Edward told her, for the first time, on the afternoon of his death.... I don't know just what Edward had in mind for her—certainly to take her away from the farm, and perhaps to adopt her. I know he would never have made the truth known—he would guard the Westmore name too carefully for that."

There was coldness in Judith's assertion, a discounting of Ann. Judith Westmore had the southern aristocrat's pitiless contempt for the illegitimate. It was the heritage of the negro, the curse of the South, but why think about it? Nothing would have compelled her to countenance Ann.

Baird understood, but he made no comment. He prepared to go, and smiled when he took Judith's

hand. "Thank you for telling me—you have done me a kindness. It's settled that we next meet in Paris, and happily, I hope.... By the way, I must have your address."

Judith gave it to him. She wished that she could keep him long enough to smooth away the last few painful moments. It had certainly been a shock to him, but it would be salutary. He was very cool-headed; he would think it over, and from all angles; and he would not go to Ann.

When Baird had circled the lawn and had reached the road below, he looked back. Judith still stood where he had left her, on the steps of the portico. She waved to him, and he lifted his hat. Then his eyes traveled over Westmore. It was a beautiful old place.... And the proudly arched brows of Edward Stratton Westmore, first Westmore of Westmore, had been transmitted unto Ann!

When he turned to open country, Baird's face was set and resolute.

XXXIX

"WILL YOU GO WITH ME?"

Baird walked slowly down the cedar avenue, for he was waiting. Then he chose a spot beneath the trees, where the branches hung so low that they shut out the country, and sat down. By leaning forward he could look up and down the avenue, otherwise he was shut away from the world, canopied by a leafy tent. And the evening was closing in early.

Sue had told Baird that Ann would return from the village by way of the avenue. As he waited, Baird remembered the first time he had ridden up between the cedars, light-heartedly determined to discover Ann. That had been a boy's quest. He was still seeking to discover Ann, a man now, anxious and tensely determined.

It seemed a very long time before he saw her at the end of the avenue, driving slowly, her cape about her shoulders, but with hood thrown back. He saw the black and white contrasts of face and hair first, before her features grew distinct. She was leaning back, with reins lax and eyes lowered. Even when he came out into the road, she did not look up; he had time in which to see what the last three months had done to her, that they had brought back much of the old roundness and softness to chin and lips, and fulness and warmth to her throat. The beautiful arch and sweep of her brows, her Westmore inheritance, was even more pronounced. Ben was right, she had grown more arrestingly beautiful.

Baird let the horse pass him, he was abreast of the buggy when she looked up and saw him. Her convulsive jerk of the reins stopped the horse, and Baird came to her, looking directly into her eyes.

"Ann Westmore," he said.

She sat motionless for a full moment, then she answered, very low, "You know, then."

"And you thought that would matter to me?"

"Yes."

The color swept into his face. "So that's why you sent me away, and would have none of me all summer!" He drew back. "Will you come with me now, where I can talk to you, or will you drive on with your Westmore and Penniman pride and leave me to travel alone?"

Ann looked down at the reins, then up, straight up the avenue, a long enough moment to vision the future. Her thoughts, whatever they were, drew the color of surprise from her face. Then she looked at Baird, lips parted a little and eyes blank, like one frightened by what she had seen.

"Will you come?" Baird repeated.

"Yes." She dropped the reins and moved vaguely, as if to get out on the other side, but Baird reached in and lifted her, held her up, as he had once before, long enough to look steadily into her troubled eyes.

Then he set her down. "Come this way—I'll take my answer, whatever it's to be, here—not in the middle of the road."

He guided her to the spot he had chosen. "We'll fight it out here," he said in the same controlled way, though his eyes were alight.

Ann complied in silence, not confusedly, absently rather, as if too completely engrossed by her thoughts either to speak or to object. She sat with hands lax and eyes vague.

Baird studied her, trying to determine just how to begin: by telling her the truth about himself first of all, he decided, though he longed to set that aside until he had captured the one all-important thing.

He began abruptly. "Judith told me about your father and mother, the whole history, and I hoped

that was the reason you had sent me away—that you thought it would matter to me.... I can match you history for history: my father and mother found each other much as yours did, in spite of their different religions, which was quite as insurmountable a difficulty as Edward and your mother faced. My mother was a Jewess and my father an Irish Catholic. They lived together two years, and then, because I had come, they went before a justice of the peace and gave me my father's name. To their way of thinking they weren't a bit more married than they had ever been. Love had married them and they had clung to each other in spite of everything. I've often thought, when I've seen the children a loveless marriage has brought into the world, that I've had the best of it—that those children must be wanting in some way. I never fully realized how much the mere legality of a marriage means to people like your people until I listened to Judith this afternoon.... So, you see, Ann, it doesn't matter to me. It matters a good deal more to me that you've suffered because of the narrow prejudices of your people. You told the collie, when you hugged and kissed him, in the barn, that first day I talked to you, that he and Ben were the only ones that loved you. You have gone hungry and thirsty—that's been the trouble with you."

Ann's vagueness had slipped from her; she was quivering from head to foot. "I know it!" she said. "I'm always wanting to be loved an' trying to make people love me, and it's led to fearful trouble. It drove Garvin mad and it took my father—away—from me—" Her voice failed her.

Baird put his arm about her, bent and kissed her hands. "Don't think about all that, Ann. You love me—I *know* you do—there's nothing between us now."

But she held him off. "Yes, there is!... Let me tell you: I let Garvin love me—I thought for a time that I loved him. But it was just that I wanted so badly for somebody to love me, an' I know now that the way I felt to him was like I would have felt if I had known he was my father's brother—just that I was fond of him an' sorry for him. I had to tell him so and—" She broke off with a shudder, then went on with head hung. "I've felt differently to you.... Back at the time you kissed me—I loved it. When you used to come an' talk to me, even then I liked you—sitting close by me—even while I was worrying over Garvin an' not knowing what to do, an' at the same time caring more for Edward than for any one else in the world, just *feeling* that he was my father, an' not knowin' why I loved him so much. That night you met me on the spring house path and asked me if I was engaged to anybody, I told you I'd rather you stayed away, because I was angry at myself for feelin' to you the way I did. I felt *hateful* caring for three men at the same time, like I was doing. Then when I read your letters this summer—"

Baird was not to be denied any longer. He pulled her hands from his shoulders, drew her forcibly into his arms, and lifting her bowed head, found her lips.

He kissed away resistance, her efforts to speak, plead and demanded until he won response, arms that circled his neck and clasped him, and then her long and passionate kiss. Even when her arms slid from his neck and her head dropped back against his shoulder, he held her imprisoned. He put back her fallen hair and kissed her brow and her cheek and her throat, until the chill of something striven for and still unpossessed touched him.

He looked down at her. "What is it?" he asked. "You love me—why aren't you happy?"

Her eyes were brimming with tears. "I do love you—but—"

She tried to free herself, and he let her go, for he was sobered by the pallor that had replaced the hot flush in her cheeks. "What's the difficulty, Ann—tell me!" he demanded. "It's not going to make any difference, whatever it is—but tell me."

"It's something I can't tell, but it may bring disgrace on me an' that will be disgrace on you—if I let you marry me."

"It's nothing you have done—I know that!" Baird said quickly. "What other people have done doesn't matter to me.... You mean the true inwardness of all that tragedy last spring?... Why, Ann, I've always known that half that story hadn't been told."

"I was the cause of it all.... Any day it may come out who I am and worse things than that for you to bear. That was the reason I made you go away an' wouldn't answer your letters."

"Westmore and Penniman pride—there it is again!" Baird said. "I don't want your secret, dear. I think there's not much you could tell me that I haven't already guessed—in spite of Ben." He circled her with his arms. "Do you think that anything could drive me away from you now—after that kiss of yours?... Tell me again that you love me! Tell me!"

Her answer was a drooping glance and her slow smile, which Baird stole from her lips. "Ann, you're here in my arms and I'm holding you close, but I've a queer feeling that I'm clasping something that may slip away any moment—it makes me want to hold you tighter. It won't be like that by and by—when you're all mine?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I'll always be wanting to be loved an' not thinkin' so much about whether I'm lovin' or not.... I know it was like heaven when Edward told me he was my father and how much he loved me. I'd been wanting to be loved like that—all my life—"

Baird pondered her answer for a moment.... She had not pretended; she had told the truth about herself; the woman in her answered to the man in him, but there was, deep in her, a capacity for loving that he had not yet touched. It was guarded by hesitancy, elusiveness, and, not selfishness exactly, nor timidity, but an indefinable inaccessibility that was simply Ann. Judith was more

forceful and less complex.... Perhaps if Ann had striven over him as he had striven over her, the thing he wanted to grasp would be his. Edward had come nearer to the indefinable thing than he had.... And yet, it was her inaccessible quality that had drawn him, and that made him hold her the tighter now.

Baird remembered something Ben had written: "... I ain't no wise judge of women, but I've noticed that some of them is just naturally giving-hearted, and some has to grow up to it. The kind that has to grow up to it generally loves most to be loved. They seems to grow up to loving by being loved, that is, if they're loved the right way." Ben had defined Ann very accurately.... But how was he to discover the right way of loving her? Certainly not until he possessed her.

Baird looked down at Ann. "Probably it's your nature not to give much, and I love to struggle for all I get. You're all quivering nerves, a mixture of snow and sunshine, and I've no nerves to speak of—I'm all fight. I think we're suited to each other." He spoke decidedly. "Ann, they're sending me to Europe; I'm going day after to-morrow—will you go with me? Will you marry me to-morrow, and come away from all this?"

She was silent for a long time. "I'd rather wait—till you come back," she said finally.

It was the answer he expected. She was very true to herself, and he liked it. "I'll be gone for a good many months," he said quietly. "What will you do while I'm gone—stay here?"

"I—they want me to go to school.... I can't stay here. My father wanted me to be educated—I'm so ignorant. He told me he meant to make a wonderful woman of me. That I would grow to be a more charmin' an' wonderful woman than Judith.... But those things he thought because he loved me so much." She spoke bleakly.

"You'll be a deal more wonderful than Judith, because you have a quality she doesn't possess," Baird said. "Do you want to go to school, Ann?"

There was actual terror in her reply. "No. They'd all be strangers—there's nobody would care anything about me."

There it was, her one great need, the thing upon which he must build. Baird kissed her breath away. "You sweet reluctant thing! Do you think I'd go away without you!" His voice suddenly deepened. "Ann, you want to be loved and I want to love. I've been *hungry* for you, literally starved. I *want* you—you can't understand how much I want you. You'll travel, and you can study, and I'll be satisfied just to study you.... Come with me, Ann!"

"An' you don't mind taking me and trouble both together—for there may be big trouble?"

"I've told you—I'll take anything, so you come with it."

The dusk had gathered rapidly; close as they were to each other, their faces had grown indistinct. Ann's answer was groping hands lifted to him, a pressure of slim fingers on his neck. But when he tried to kiss her she bent her head, smothering his caresses with her hair. "I must say 'yes' my own way," she objected.

"Well—say it your way," Baird whispered, husky from emotion.

She lifted her face and brushed his cheek with her lashes. "A butterfly's kiss," she said with soft gaiety.

"You've pretty ways—dangerous ways—" Baird said chokingly. "I'll love you too much—that'll be the trouble." He strove for control. "Ann—do you remember what you said to the stars, the night I didn't know my own heart—when you told me what love was?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Repeat it, won't you—I want to hear you say it."

Ann's slurred syllables again made music of it: "Love is wantin' somebody for all your own—so badly you feel sure you can't live without them ... an' at the same time bein' such good friends with them that you care more about makin' them happy than being happy yourself."

"There's a bit of the Golden Rule in that," Baird said. "That's what makes it difficult. Do you think we can live up to it, Ann?"

Ann answered him to the best of her ability.... Years later she answered the same question with a better understanding.

CONCLUSION

Is it permissible to steal a fragment from later history in order to elucidate what has gone before? It is a responsibility the fictional historian must sometimes take.

Judith and Ann and Baird are of the present. Life has woven them into subsequent history, drawing from a skein as tangled as was the skein of thirteen years ago. The fragment I pilfer is the conclusion of a letter from Judith to Ann, penned in our day, and part of another story:

"I have written you a few facts, Ann. I have one more thing to tell you, something that reaches back beyond these years of mutual antagonism.... The day after Nickolas Baird married you, Coats Penniman came to see me, and told me the following: that Sue had found certain letters of Garvin's to you which gave him the erroneous impression that Garvin had wronged you. Then he went, hot from reading them, to the Mine Banks, thinking he would find you with Garvin. That he met Garvin at the first ore-pit and accused him, and that Garvin denied it. That he gave Garvin the lie and they drew their pistols, that they fired, and that Garvin wounded him in the shoulder, disabling his pistol arm. That Garvin had leveled to fire again, when, suddenly, Edward appeared and tried to hold Garvin back, and that Garvin's pistol went off. Coats thought the shot had gone wild until he saw Edward drop. He said that Garvin laughed wildly then and ran back into the Banks.

"Coats said that Edward had passed instantly. He realized then some of the complications that were certain to follow, and that he went directly home, and that Sue drove him into the city, where he had his wound dressed.

"Coats said that he had had no intention of shirking his responsibility, that he had simply waited for events to shape themselves, and that what followed made any action on his part unnecessary, but that he had determined to come to me with his confession as soon as he felt that your future was assured. He told me to proceed against him if I thought fit, that he would face any charge I made. I thought I had paid my last debt to Westmore, but I was mistaken; I told Coats to take his secret back with him and keep it.

"And I have kept it until to-day. Now I turn it over to you, together with my confession: for the sake of my family's good name, I did the thing that saved you from disgrace; I saved one brother at, what seemed to me, a lesser expense to the other.

"Take what I have told you and add it to your already full experience of lives inextricably tangled because of you. Wherever you have cast your net, you have brought in a heavy haul.... JUDITH."

And from Ann's reply also a fragment:

"... and what you have told me is not new to me. Coats told me long ago, while I still lay ill. Coats told me, and dear old Ben told me all he knew—I made them tell me, for I knew that my father had never forsaken me—*of his own free will*.

"And, Judith, I also know just why you have written all this to me. Throughout these years it has been a Westmore pitted against a nobody's child. But I feel no bitterness, only an immense interest, for out of it all has grown a wonderful thing.... ANN."

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOBODY'S CHILD ***

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