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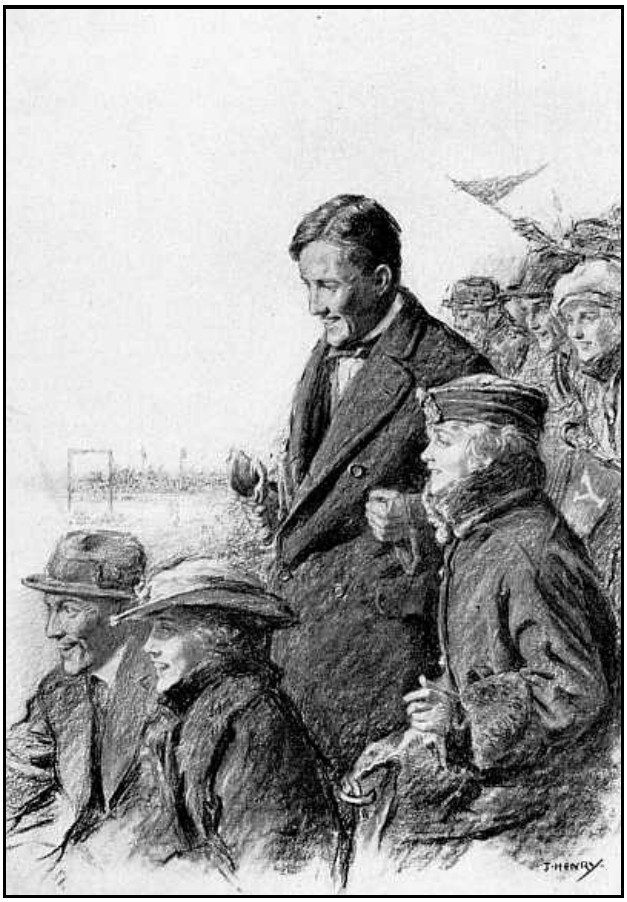
THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME



"'JAMES DID IT! JAMES HAS MADE A TOUCHDOWN'"
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THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME

BY

WAYLAND WELLS WILLIAMS

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
J. HENRY

"*And thus the whirligig of Time brings in his revenges.*"—Twelfth Night.

NEW YORK

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THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME

[1]

PART I

CHAPTER I

UNWRITTEN PAPERS

Two o'clock struck by the tall clock on the stairs, and young Harry Wimbourne, lying wide awake in his darkened bedroom, reflected that he had never heard that clock strike two before, except in the afternoon. To his ears the two strokes had a curious and unfamiliar sound; he waited expectantly for more to follow, but none did, and the tones of the second stroke died slowly away in a rather uncanny fashion through the silent house. For the house was silent now; the strange and terrifying series of sounds, issuing from the direction of his mother's room, that had first awakened him, had ceased some time ago. There had been much scurrying to and fro, much opening and shutting of doors, mingled not infrequently with the sound of voices; voices subdued and yet strained, talking so low and so hurriedly that no complete sentences could be caught, though Harry was occasionally able to distinguish the tones of his father, or the nurse, or the doctor. Once he detected the phrase "hot water"; and even that seemed to give a slight tinge of familiarity and sanity to the other noises. But then had come those other sounds that froze the very blood in his veins, and made him lie stiff and stark in his bed, perspiring in every pore, in an agony of ignorance and terror. It was all so inexplicable; his mother—! A strange voice would not have affected him so.

But all that had stopped after a while, and everything had quieted down to the stillness that had prevailed for an hour or more when the clock struck two. The stillness was in its way even more wearing than the noises had been, for it gave one the impression that more was to follow. "Wait, wait, wait," it seemed to Harry to say; "the worst is not nearly over yet; more will happen before the night is out; Wait, wait!" and the slow tick of the clock on the stairs, faintly heard through the closed door, took up the burden "Wait! Wait!" And Harry waited. The passage of time seemed to him both cruelly slow and cruelly fast; each minute dragged along like an hour, and yet when the hour struck it seemed to him to have passed off in the space of a minute.

[2]

Sleep was impossible. For the fiftieth time he turned over in his bed, trying to find a position that would prove so comfortable as to ensure drowsiness; yet as he did so he felt convinced that he could not sleep until something definite, something final, even if unpleasant, should end the suspense of the silence. He looked across the short space of darkness that separated his bed from that of his elder brother James, and envied him his power of sleeping through anything. But a

short sudden change in the dim outline of the other bed told him that his brother was not asleep. Harry felt the other's gaze trying to pierce the darkness, even as his own. He half turned, with a sharp and nervous motion, to show that he was awake, and for some minutes both boys lay silently gazing toward each other, each wondering how much the other had heard.

At length James broke the silence. "It's come," he said.

"Yes, it has," answered Harry. "How long have you been awake?" he added, feeling he must ascertain how much James knew before committing himself any further.

"Oh, hours," said James.

"Since before—"

"Yes."

So James had heard all, thought Harry. It was just like him to be awake all that time and never give a sign. It scarcely occurred to him that James might be as shy as himself in reference to the events of the night.

It must not for a moment be supposed that either of these boys was ignorant of the nature of what was taking place in their mother's room. Harry was ten at the time, and James was within hinting distance of his twelfth birthday. So that when their father, a few days before, had solemnly informed them that they might expect the arrival of a little brother or sister before long, and that they must be most careful not to disturb their mother in any way, etc., etc., no childish [3] superstition picturing the newcomer flying through the window or floating down a stream on a cabbage leaf or, more prosaically, being introduced in the doctor's black bag, ever entered their heads. When the trained nurse appeared, a day or two later, they did not need to be told why she was there. They accepted the situation, tried to make as little noise as possible, and struck up a great friendship with Miss Garver, who at first had ample leisure to regale them with tales of her hospital experiences; among which, she was sorry to observe, accounts of advanced cases of delirium tremens were easily the favorites.

For a long time the two boys lay awake without exchanging any more conversation worth mentioning. They heard the clock strike three, and after that they may have slept. At any rate, the first thing they were aware of was the door of their room being opened by a softly rustling figure which they at once recognized as that of the trained nurse. She crossed the room and methodically lit the gas; then she turned and stood at the foot of Harry's bed, resting her hands lightly on the footboard. Both the boys noticed immediately how white her face was and how grave its expression.

"Are you both awake, boys?" she asked.

They both said they were, and Miss Garver, after pausing a moment, as if to choose her words, said:

"Then get up and put on something, and come into your mother's room with me."

Without a word they rose and stumbled into their dressing gowns and slippers. When they were ready Miss Garver led the way to the door, and there turned toward them, with her hand on the knob.

"Your mother is very ill, boys. We are afraid—this may be the last time you will see her."

Dazed and silent they followed her into the hall.

The bedroom into which they then went was a large room at the front of the house, high of ceiling, generous of window space, and furnished for the most part with old mahogany furniture. It was a beautiful old room when the sun was pouring in through the great windows, and it was quite as beautiful, in a solemn sort of way, now, when it was dimly illuminated by one low-burning gas jet and one or two shaded candles. A low fire was burning in the grate, and its dying [4] flames fitfully shone on soft-colored chintz coverings and glowing mahogany surfaces, giving to the room an air of drowsy and delicious peace. And in the middle of it all, on a great mahogany four-poster bed, curtained, after the fashion of a hundred years ago, Edith Wimbourne lay dying. She, poor lady, white and unconscious on her great bed, cared as little for the setting of the scene in which she was playing the chief part as dying people generally do; but we, who look on the scene with detached and appreciative eyes, may perhaps venture the opinion that, if a choice of deaths be vouchsafed us, we would as lief as not die in a four-poster bed, surrounded by those we love best, and with a flickering fire casting changing and fantastic shadows on the familiar walls and ceiling.

Beside the dying lady on the bed, there were three other people in the bedroom when Miss Garver led Harry and James into it. The doctor, whom they both knew and liked well, sat at the head of the bed. In a large armchair near the fire sat the boys' father, and somewhere in the background hovered another trained nurse, sprung out of nowhere. The presence of these figures seemed, in some intangible way, to make death an actual fact, instead of a mere possibility; if they had not been there, the boys might merely have been going to pay their mother a visit when she was ill. Now they both realized, with horribly sinking hearts, that they were going to see her for the last time.

The doctor looked up inquiringly as Miss Garver brought the two boys into the room and led them

over toward the bed. The father did not even turn his head as they came in. They stood by the bedside and gazed in silence at the pale sleeping face on the pillow. A faint odor of chloroform hung about the bed. The doctor stood up and leaned over to listen to the action of the dying woman's heart. After he had finished he drew back a little from the bedside.

"You may kiss her, if you like," he said softly.

The boys leaned down in turn and silently touched the calm lips. It was almost more than Harry could stand.

"Oh, must this be the last time?" he heard himself shrieking. But no one paid any attention to him, and he suddenly realized that he had not spoken the words aloud. He looked at James' face, [5] calm though drawn, and the sight reassured him. He wondered if James was suffering as much as himself, and thought he probably was. He wondered if his face showed as little as James'.

The doctor and Miss Garver were whispering together.

"Shall I take them away now?" she asked.

"Not yet," was the answer; "there is just a chance that—"

He did not finish, but Miss Garver must have understood, for she nodded and quietly drew the boys away. They walked off toward the fireplace, and their father, without moving his head, stretched out a hand in their direction. Silently they sat down by him, one on each arm of his chair, and he slipped an arm about the waist of each.

So they started on the last period of waiting for what they all knew must come; what they prayed might come soon and at the same time longed to postpone as long as possible. The doctor had resumed his seat at the bedside, and now kept his fingers almost constantly on the patient's wrist. The two nurses sat down a little way off, to be ready in case—The emergency was not formulated. These three people were all present for professional reasons, so we may assume that most of their meditations were of a professional nature. But even so, they felt beneath their professional calm the mingled sadness and sweetness and solemnity that accompanies the sight of death, be it never so familiar. And we may easily guess the feelings of the two boys as they awaited the departure of the person they loved most on earth; nothing but the feeling of suspense kept them from giving away completely. The person in the room whom the scene might have been expected to affect most was, in point of fact, the one who felt it least, and that was the shortly to be bereaved husband, Hilary Wimbourne.

"Poor Edith," he mused, "poor Edith. What a wife she has been to me, to be sure! I was fond of her, too. Not as fond as I might have been, of course ... Still, when I think that I shall never again see her face behind the coffee things at the breakfast table it gives me a pang, a distinct pang ... By the bye, I don't suppose she remembered, before all this came on, to send that Sheffield urn to [6] be replated ... But it's all so beautiful—the fire, the draped bed, the waiting figures, the whole atmosphere! Just what she would have chosen to die in; all peace and naturalness. Everything seems to say 'Good-by, Edith; congratulations, Edith; well out of it all,' only much more beautifully. There is a dirge—how does it go?—

> Oh, no more, no more; too late
> Sighs are spent; the burning tapers
> Of a life as chaste as fate,
> Pure as are unwritten papers,
> Are burnt out—

"That comes somewhere near it; 'a life as chaste as fate'—not a bad description of Edith ... 'Pure as are unwritten papers'—who but an Elizabethan would have dared to cast that line just like that? Let's see; Ford, was it, or Shirley?... If only some one were singing that now, behind the scenes, out by the bathroom door, say, everything would be quite perfect. 'Unwritten papers'—ah, well, people have no business to be as pure as Edith was—and live. But what is to become of my home without her? What will become of the boys? Good Heavens, what am I going to do with the boys? Good little souls—how quiet they are! It all hits them a great deal harder than it does me, I know. It won't be so bad when they're old enough to go off to school, but till then ... I must ask Cecilia's advice; she'll have some ideas, and by the way, I wonder if Cecilia thought to see about that Sheraton sideboard for me?"

And so on, and so on. Hilary Wimbourne's meditations never went very far without rounding up at a Sheraton sideboard or an old Sheffield urn or a nice bit of Chienlung or a new idea for a pleached alley. Let us not judge him. He was that sort of person.

These reflections, and the complete outward silence in which they took place, were at last interrupted by a slight stirring of the sick woman on the bed. For the last time in her mortal life—and for very nearly the first, for the matter of that—Edith Wimbourne was to assume the center of her family stage. Her husband and sons heard her sigh and stir slightly as she lay, and then the doctor and Miss Garver appeared to be busy over her for a few moments. Probably they made shift to force a stimulant between her teeth, for in a moment or two she opened her eyes to the [7] extent of seeing what was about her. Almost the first sight that greeted them was that of her two sons sitting on the arms of their father's chair, and as she saw them she smiled faintly.

The nurse glanced inquiringly toward the doctor, who nodded, and she went over and touched

Harry lightly on the shoulder.

"Come over and speak to your mother," she whispered, and Harry walked to her side. Very gently he took the hand that lay motionless on the bed and held it in his. He could not have uttered a word for the life of him.

Either the reviving action of the stimulant or the feeling of the warm blood pulsing through his young hand, or perhaps both, lent a little strength to the dying woman. She smiled again, and ever so slight a flush appeared on her wasted cheeks. "Harry, dear Harry," she whispered gently, and the boy leaned down to catch the words. "I am going to leave you, dear, and I am sorry. I know I should be very proud of you, if I could live ... Be a good boy, Harry, and don't forget your mother."

She closed her eyes again, exhausted with the effort of speaking. Dazed and motionless Harry remained where he stood until the nurse led him gently away to make room for James.

James stood for some moments as his brother had done, with his hand clasped in that of his mother. Presently she opened her eyes once more, and gazed gravely for a moment or two at the face of her first-born, as though gathering her little remaining strength for what she had to say to him.

"Listen, dear," she said at last, and James bent down. "I'm going to die, James. Try not to be too sorry about it. It is all for the best ... Dearest, there is something I want you to do for me; you know how I have always trusted you, and depended on you—well, perhaps you don't know, but I have ... James, I want you to look out for Harry. He needs it now, and he will need it a great deal more later. You will see what I mean, as you grow up. He is not made like you; he will need some one to look after him. Can you promise me that you will do this?"

"Yes," whispered James.

His mother sighed gently, as though with relief. "Now kiss me, dear," she said, and then, almost [8]
inaudibly, "It is good to leave some one I can trust." Then she closed her eyes, for the last time.

James never repeated those words of his mother to any human being, as long as he lived, not even to Harry. It would be too much to say that they were never absent from his thoughts, for in truth he thought but seldom of them, after the first few days. But in some compelling though intangible way he realized, as he stood there by his mother's death-bed, that he had accepted a trust from which nothing but death would release him.

The doctor returned to the side of the dying woman. Swiftly and quietly Miss Garver placed a hand on the shoulder of each of the two boys and led them from the room. Edith Wimbourne slept, and her sleep slowly passed into death.

The man in the chair never moved.

CHAPTER II [9]

AUNTS

Till Miss Garver had seen Harry and James tucked away in their beds again and had put out the light and left their room, both the boys maintained the same outward composure that they had shown throughout the experiences of the night. But once left alone in the quiet of their darkened bedroom, no further ordeal ahead of them to inspire restraint—for they knew perfectly well by this time that their mother must be dead—they gave way entirely to their natural grief and spent what they both remembered afterward as the wretchedest night of their lives.

It was scarcely better when Miss Garver woke them in the morning, though sleep had so completely erased all recollection of the night before that Harry, lazily sitting up and rubbing his eyes, asked what time it was in the most natural voice in the world.

"About ten o'clock," was the reply.

"Ten o'clock! Why, we're an hour late for school already."

"You are not going to school to-day," answered Miss Garver, gently, and she hated to say it, knowing that the remark would immediately set them remembering. When she turned toward them again she saw that it had, indeed.

"Listen," she told them, as gently as she could, "I want you both to get dressed now as quickly as possible and then go down and eat your breakfast. After that I am going to take you both down town. There is a good deal to be done. So hurry up."

"Why are you going to take us down town?" asked James.

"To get some clothes."

"But I don't understand," he began again, and then he did. He started dressing, mechanically, and had half completed his toilet before he noticed his brother, who was kneeling despairingly by his bed, with his face buried in the pillow.

"Come on, Harry," he said gently; "I'm nearly ready."

"No," moaned Harry. [10]

"Yes. It's got to be done, you know."

"Oh, go away and leave me alone."

James bent his head down close to that of his brother. "You feel better when you're doing something," he said softly.

Harry, at length persuaded, arose and began to dress, and before long he began to feel that James was right. Doing something did not remove the pain, or even ease it, but it made you notice it less. It was even better during breakfast. Both the boys ate steadily and fairly copiously, though their enjoyment, if there was any, of what was customarily their pleasantest meal, was wholly subconscious. There was honey on the table, and Harry, without realizing what he was doing, helped himself to it for a second time. He mechanically pushed the pot back toward James, who also partook. Almost simultaneously their teeth closed on honey and muffin, and at the same time their eyes met. For two or three seconds they gazed shamefacedly at each other, and then stopped eating. Harry left the table and stood in front of the window, looking out over the wide lawn.

"Oh, Mother, Mother," he cried within himself; "to think I should be eating honey and muffin, now, so soon, and enjoying it! Oh, forgive me, forgive me!"

When the first shock of self-contempt had passed off, the boys wandered into the library, in search of their father. They discovered him, seated at his desk as they had expected, but it was with a sharp shock of surprise that they perceived that he was interviewing the cook. Both were more or less disgusted at the discovery, but they felt nevertheless, in a vague but reassuring way, that this partly justified the honey episode.

The interview closed almost as soon as they entered, and their father called them over to him.

"You have both been very good," he said, taking a hand of each of them; "this has all been very hard for you, I know." He paused, and then, seeing signs of tears on their faces, he went on somewhat hurriedly: "You must go down town with Miss Garver now; she has very kindly offered to get you what you will need for the funeral. Aunt Cecilia will take you to New York after that, I expect, and will fit you out more fully. The funeral will be to-morrow at three o'clock, and you will be on hand for that. I don't know whether any one told you; the baby died—the one that was born [11] last night. It was a little girl; she only lived a few minutes. She will be buried with your mother. There will be a lot of people coming up to-day and to-morrow for the funeral; Uncle James and Aunt Cecilia and various others, and as there is a good deal to arrange you must try to be a help and not a hindrance, and make yourselves useful if you can. Now run along with Miss Garver and —oh, one more thing. I should advise you not to ask to see your mother again. You can, of course, if you want to, but I rather think you will not be sorry if you don't. You see, you probably have a good many years in which you will have to live on her memory, and I think it will be better if your last recollection of her is as she was when she was alive, not when she was dead ... and if you want to drive down to the station after lunch to meet Uncle James and Aunt Cecilia on the two-fifty, you can. You'd better do that; it's a good thing to give yourself plenty of occupation. That's all—good-by."

Then they went off in search of black clothes, and somewhat to their surprise they noticed that Miss Garver had returned to her companionable self of the preceding days; it was almost as if their mother had not died, except that she was gravely cheerful now, instead of cheerfully cheerful, as before.

Before long the boys noticed that almost every one they had to do with adopted the attitude taken by Miss Garver. Lunch, to be sure, was a rather terrible meal, for then they were alone with their father, and he, though he refrained from further allusion to the loss that hung over them all, was silent and preoccupied. But Uncle James and Aunt Cecilia, when met at the station by their nephews, spoke and acted much as usual, and neither of them noticed that Aunt Cecilia's gentle eyes filled with tears as she kissed them. They had always loved Aunt Cecilia best of all their aunts, though she was not their real aunt, being the wife of their father's younger brother. Of their Uncle James the boys were both a little afraid, and never felt they understood him. He was much like their father, both in behavior and appearance—though he was clean-shaven and their father wore a beard and mustache—but he was much more unapproachable. He had an uncomfortable way of suddenly joining in a conversation with an apparently irrelevant remark, at [12] which everybody would generally remain silent for a moment and then laugh, while he sat with grave and unchanged countenance. The boys had once spoken to their father of their uncle's apparent lack of sympathy; Harry had complained that Uncle James never seemed to "have any feelings." "Well," replied their father, "he is a better lawyer than I am," and the boys never saw any sense in that reply till they remembered it years afterward, and even then they never could

decide whether it was meant as an explanation or a corollary.

Later in the afternoon Aunt Selina arrived. There was always something magnificent and aloof about Aunt Selina; she had the air of having been transplanted out of a glorious past into a frivolous and inferior present, and being far too well-bred to comment on its inferiority, however keenly she was aware of it. She was the half-sister of Hilary Wimbourne, and much older than he, being the child of a first marriage of his father. Harry and James were on the front steps to greet her as she drove up in state. Her very manner of stepping out of the carriage and ascending the steps where she gravely bent and kissed each of her nephews with the same greeting—"How do you do, my dear James," "How do you do, my dear Harry,"—was not so much a tribute to the gravity of this particular occasion as a typical instance of Aunt Selina's way of doing things. Though only of average height, she generally gave the impression of being tall by the erect way in which she habitually carried her head, and by the straightness and spareness of her whole figure. Her skirts always nobly swept the floor beside and behind her, in a day when other women's skirts hung limply about their ankles. Both Harry and James looked upon her with an awe which was only slightly modified by affection.

But both boys' views of Aunt Selina underwent expansion within the next twenty-four hours, and they were to learn the interesting lesson that a warm and impulsive heart may be hidden within a forbidding exterior. Aunt Selina entered the home of the Wimbournes with her customary quiet ceremony, and gravely greeted such of her relatives as were present, after which every one else in the room instinctively "stood around," waiting for her to make the first move. Kind and gentle [13]
Aunt Cecilia, who was a daughter of one of New York's oldest and proudest and richest families, was no one in particular while Aunt Selina was in the room. Miss Wimbourne immediately proceeded to her bedroom, to repair the ravages of travel, and when she came down again she found the drawing-room deserted except for James, who was standing in front of a window and gazing out into the twilight. She went over and stood by him, also looking over the darkening lawn.

"I am very glad to get this chance to see you, James," she said presently, in her subdued, measured tones, "even though the occasion for my being here is such a sad one. It is not often I get a chance to see any of my nephews and nieces."

James mumbled an inarticulate monosyllable or two in reply, without turning his head. Aunt Selina had interrupted what was a bad half-hour for James. She turned and looked at him, and the look of dumb suffering on his face struck into the very roots of her heart. She stooped suddenly and put her arms about him, kissing his cheek with a warmth that was entirely new to James.

"I know how it feels," she whispered; "I've been through it all, not once, but again and again, and I know just how bad it is. Dear boy, how I wish I could bear it for you."

She sat down on a little settee that stood in front of the window, still holding one of James' hands in hers, and the boy, after the first shock of astonishment had passed, sank down on his knees in front of her and buried his head in her lap. So he remained for some minutes, sobbing almost contentedly; it was sweet to find consolation in this unexpected quarter.

Presently he raised his miserable eyes to hers. "It's Harry, too—partly—" he said, and could go no further.

"Yes, I know that too," said his aunt. "You mean that you have to bear up on Harry's account—"

"Yes!"

"Because you are older and stronger than he, and you know he would suffer more if you let him see how much you suffer. So you go about with the pain burning your very heart out, because all the time something in his face makes it impossible for you to breathe a word more of it than you can help. And so every one gets the idea you are more hard-hearted than he," she went on [14]
passionately, letting her voice sink to a whisper, "and are not capable of as much feeling as he. But you don't care what people think; you don't know or care about anything except oh! if you only might go somewhere and shriek it all out to somebody, anybody! And after a lifetime of that sort of thing self-repression becomes second nature to you, so that you can't say a thing you think or feel, and you become the sort of living mummy that I am, with your soul dead and embalmed years ago, while your body, your worthless, useless body, goes on living and living. You have begun it early, my poor James!"

She stopped, quite as much astounded at her own outburst as James. The boy no longer cried, for astonishment had driven away his tears, but stared thoughtfully out of the window. He had not caught the full meaning of all that his aunt had said, but he knew that he was receiving a most important confidence from the most unexpected possible quarter, which was exactly in tune with his own mood. The good lady herself was for a few moments literally too bewildered to utter a word.

"Good Heavens!" ran her astonished thoughts, "do you know what you have done, Selina Wimbourne? You have made more of a fool of yourself in the last five minutes than you have done in all the years since you were a girl! God grant it may do him no harm."

To James she said aloud, as soon as she could control her voice:

"I am a foolish and indiscreet old woman, James—"

"No, you're not," interrupts the boy with sudden spirit.

"Well, I've said a great deal more than I ought, at any rate. I don't want you to get any false impression from what I have told you. I want to explain to you that all the suffering I have undergone from—in the way I have told you—has not hurt me, but has rather benefited me. You see, there are two kinds of human suffering. One is forced upon you from the outside. You can't prevent that kind, you just have to go through with it. It never is as bad as you think it is going to be, I find. The other kind you make for yourself, by doing the wrong thing when you know you ought to be doing the right thing. That is the really bad kind of suffering, and you can always prevent it by doing the thing you know is right." [15]

"You mean," said James thoughtfully, "that it would have been even worse for you if you had squealed, when you knew—when you knew you ought not to!"

"Exactly. It's simply a question of the lesser of two evils. Doing the pleasant but wrong thing hurts more in the end than doing the disagreeable but right thing."

"I see. But suppose you can't tell which is the right thing and which the wrong one?"

"Ah, there you've put your finger on a real difficulty. You just have to think it all over and decide as best you can, and then, if it turns out wrong, you're not so much to blame. Then, your suffering is of the kind that you can't help. No one can do any better than what he thinks is right at the time.... Now get up, dear, I hear people coming."

"Well, thank you, Aunt Selina. What you have told me helps, an awful lot. Really!"

"I am glad, my dear," replied Miss Wimbourne, and when people entered the room a second or two later no one suspected the sudden bond of sympathy that had sprung up between the specimens of crabbed age and youth they found there.

"Cecilia, what's going to become of those two boys?" inquired Miss Wimbourne later in the evening, finding herself for the moment alone with her sister-in-law.

"I've been asking myself that question pretty steadily for the last twelve hours," answered Mrs. James. "I wish *I* could take them," she added, impulsively.

"Hardly, I suppose." If any of the remarks made in this conversation seem abrupt or inconsequent, it must be remembered that these two ladies understood each other pretty thoroughly without having to polish off or even finish their sentences, or even to make them consecutive.

"Unfortunately," went on Mrs. James, after a brief pause, "the whole thing depends entirely upon Hilary."

"The very last person—"

"Exactly. Yet what can one do?"

"It seems quite clear to me," said Aunt Selina, choosing her words carefully and slowly, "that Hilary will inevitably choose the one course which is most to be avoided. Hilary will want them to go on living here alone with him; preserve the *status quo* as far as possible. What do you think?" [16]

"I am almost sure of it. But...."

"But if any of us have the slightest feeling for those boys ... Until they are both safely away at school, at any rate, and he won't send them away for a year or two yet, at any rate."

"Harry not for three, I should say.... That is, *I* shouldn't."

Silence for a moment, then Aunt Selina:

"Well, can you think of any one that could be got to come here?"

Mrs. James fluttered for a moment, as though preparing for a delicate and difficult advance.

"I wonder," she said, "that is, the thought struck me to-day—if you—if *you* could ever—"

"Hilary and I," observed Aunt Selina in calm, clear impersonal tones that once for all disposed of the suggestion; "Hilary and I Do Not Get On. That way, I mean. At a distance—"

The sentence was completed by a gesture that somehow managed to convey an impression of understanding and amity at a distance. Mrs. James' subdued "Oh!" of comprehension, or rather of resignation, bid fair for a while to close the interview. But presently Aunt Selina, with the air of one accepting a sword offered with hilt toward her, asked, or rather observed, as though it was not a question at all, but a statement:

"What do you think of Agatha Fraile?"

"Well," replied Mrs. James with something of a burnt-child air; "I like her. Though I hardly know her, of course. I should say she would be willing, too. Though of course one can't tell.... They are not well off, I believe.... She is very good, no doubt...."

"Hm," said Aunt Selina serenely, aware that there was a conversational ditch to be taken, and determined to make her interlocutrix give her a lead. This Aunt Cecilia bravely did with:

"You mean—how much does she know about—?"

"About Hilary, yes."

"I rather think, myself, she must have found out through Edith.... I don't see how she could have failed to know. Do you?"

"I can't say, I'm sure. Edith had rather curious ideas, though she was one of the best women that ever lived. However, that is not the main point for consideration now. What I want to know is, can you think of anything better?" [17]

"N-no," replied Mrs. James slowly. "I even think it would be the best possible arrangement, if—Oh dear, to think it should come to this—those poor boys!"

"Yes, I know," said Aunt Selina, briskly. "Now, that being decided, some one has got to put it to Hilary. Hilary will do nothing alone. She comes to-morrow morning, does she not? I think it should be settled, one way or the other, before she goes. Now who is to approach Hilary?"

"I don't know," faltered Mrs. James, rather bewildered by the other's swiftness of reasoning.

"Well, I do. James is the only human being I know who has, or ever had, any influence on Hilary. Now one of us has got to talk to James, and I rather think, Cecilia, that I could do it more successfully than you. For the first time, that is.... Of course, afterward, you...."

"Yes, of course," murmurs Mrs. James.

"Very well, then; I will see James the first thing in the morning. I don't say it will come to anything, but there is a great deal to be gone through before she is even approached. We must do *something*. Living here alone, with their father...."

"Out of the question, of course." The conversation having, as it were, completed one lap of its course and arrived again at its starting point, might have perambulated gently along till bedtime, had it not been abruptly interrupted by the entrance of James, junior, come to say good-night.

A few days after the funeral, after they had gone to bed of an evening, Harry through the darkness apostrophized his brother thus:

"I tell you, James, Aunt Selina is all right; did you know it?"

"Oh," was the reply, "she gave you five dollars, too, did she?"

"Yes, but that's not what I mean. She's given me five dollars plenty of times before this."

"Well, what do you mean, then?"

"Well, she found me in the garden one morning.... Tuesday, I guess—" Tuesday had been the day of the funeral—"and I had been crying a good deal, and I suppose she knew it. At any rate, she took me by the hand and talked to me for a while...." [18]

"What did she say to you?" This question was not prompted by vulgar curiosity; James knew that his brother wished to be pumped.

"Oh, she didn't *say* much. She was just awfully nice, that's all.... She told me—well, she said, for one thing, that I cried too much. Only she didn't say it like that. She said that going about and crying wasn't much of a way of showing you were sorry. She said that if—well, if you really *missed* a person, the least you could do was not to go about making a pest of yourself, even if you couldn't really do anything to help."

"Oh."

"She said that the last thing that would please Mama herself was to think that all she had taught me came to no more than ... well, than crying. Then she said.... I don't think I'll tell you that, though."

"Well, don't, if you don't want to."

"She told me that, in a way, she realized I must feel it—about Mama—more than any one else, because I had been more with her lately than any one else—more dependent on her, she said, ..."

"Yes, I see."

"And that while it was harder on me, it put a greater responsibility on me, because, you see—oh, I can't explain it all! But she was about right, I guess."

"She told me something of the same kind ... not exactly like that, I mean, but—well, the same sort of thing. It helped, too. It's funny, to think of her understanding better than any one else—Aunt Selina!"

"Yes, isn't it? Well, you really never can tell about people." With which mature reflection Harry turned over and went to sleep. But his brother lay awake for some time thinking over what he had just heard, and as he thought, his respect for his aunt grew. Not only could she sound the

depths of his own woe and give him comfort for it, but she could light on the one thing that would be likely to help Harry in his own peculiar need, and show it to him with ready and fearless tact. And what she had told Harry was practically the very opposite of what she had told him.

"I wish I could be like Aunt Selina," he thought.

CHAPTER III

[19]

NOT COLONIAL; GEORGIAN

Harry and James lived in the city of New Haven in a big house surrounded by spacious grounds. The house itself was an old and stately one; the local papers, when they had occasion to mention it, usually referred to it as the Wimbourne "mansion." The boys' dislike of this word dated from an early age, when their father informed them that it was a loathsome expression, which people who "really knew" never used under any circumstances. He himself, if he had had occasion to describe it, would have spoken of it as a "place."

The house was built in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It was put up by Hilary Wimbourne's great-grandfather James, first of the name, the founder of the family fortunes. He came to New Haven as a penniless apprentice to a carriage-maker after the conclusion of the Revolutionary wars left him without other occupation, and within ten years after his arrival he became one of the two or three most prominent lawyers in the place. His understanding of his early trade he turned to good account by investing a large portion of his earnings as a lawyer in the carriage factory in which he originally served, and which with the benefit of his money and business acumen, became the most profitable of its kind in the town. He bought a farm in what were then the extreme outskirts of the city and built the spacious, foursquare, comfortable-looking house in which the Wimbournes with whom we have to deal still lived, nearly one hundred years later.

The house stood in a commanding position above an up-town avenue. It was painted white with green trimmings, and had a front portico of tall Doric columns reaching up to the top of the house. People habitually referred to its style of architecture as "Colonial." "Post-Colonial," or "late American Georgian" would have come much nearer the mark, but these distinctions are as naught to the great and glorious body of New England's inhabitants, to whom everything with [20] pillars is and always will be "Colonial." The house was in truth a fine example of its style, and had been surprisingly little spoiled by the generations of Wimbournes that had lived and died in it, but the unity of its general effect was marred by the addition of two wings reaching out from its sides, erected by Hilary Wimbourne's father in the fifties and showing all the peculiarities of that glorious but architecturally weak period. Friends of the family often expressed sympathy and sorrow at the anachronism the house was thus made to offer, but Hilary soon became somewhat impatient of these. In fact, he never listened to an expression of regret on the subject without breathing a silent prayer of thanksgiving that the wings had been built when they were, and not ten or twenty or thirty years later, when architectural indiscretion ran to extremes only vaguely hinted at in the forties and fifties.

"Besides," he would explain to those who showed interest in the matter, "those wings are not always going to look as badly as they do now. Our eyes will always look on them as unpleasantly different from the old house, but the eyes of a hundred years hence will see in them nothing more than a quaint and agreeable variety. After all, the two styles are but two different aspects of neo-classicism, one a little more remote from its original model than the other. History has proved what I say; think how the sensitive must have shuddered in the fifteenth century when they saw a lot of Perpendicular Gothic slammed down by the side of pure Early English! It must have looked like the very devil to them." Only very few people heard this theory carried back to its logical conclusion, however. Hilary would see and recognize the drowning expression that came over their faces, and as soon as he knew that he was beyond their depth he stopped, for he made it a rule never to talk above people's heads. Consequently he seldom got beyond the "neo-classicism" point.

As far as the interior was concerned, the atmosphere of the old days had been almost perfectly preserved. Every wall-paper, every decoration had, by some lucky succession of chances, been as nearly as possible duplicated when it became necessary to replace or restore, and the hand of the seventies and eighties left almost no trace of its equally ruthless destructive and constructive powers. So that at the time of which we write the house was furnished almost completely in the [21] style of the late Georgian period, for what his ancestors omitted to leave him the faultless taste of Hilary supplied.

The house faced westward and toward the principal street of the neighborhood; the ground fell gently away from it on all sides, but most steeply toward the west. Carriage drives led up to the house from the two corners formed by the main thoroughfare and the two intersecting streets

which bounded the property. A tar footpath followed the curve of each driveway, so that between the street and the front door of the house there stretched an unbroken expanse of green lawn. In their early youth Harry and James both wondered why no footpath ran directly up the middle of the front lawn, as was the case with most of the other front lawns of their acquaintance, and they considered it monstrously inconvenient that they were obliged to "go way round by the corners" when they wished to reach the house from without. At length, however, the brilliant thought occurred to them that as they always approached the house either from the north or the south, and never from the unbroken block to the west, they could not well have used a central walk if they had had it.

Such was the setting in which the early lives of these two boys took place, and, taking one thing with another, their lot could probably not have been bettered. The first ten years of their lives had the divine monotony of perfect happiness and harmony, in which no more momentous events than the measles, a change of school, or summer trips to the coast of Maine or, more rarely, to Europe, ever occurred. They were brought up, from their earliest years, under the direct but never too obtrusive eye of their mother, and as we have already heard Aunt Selina describe her as "one of the best women that ever lived," we should be guilty of something akin to painting the rose if we ventured on any further encomiums of her character on our own account. Their relation with their father was hardly less ideal, though they saw much less of him and were, at bottom, less deeply attached to him than to their mother. Hilary was fond of his boys, and was capable of entering into their youthful moods with a sort of intimate aloofness that the boys found very winning. Not infrequently he would suddenly swoop down on them in their happy but [22]
humdrum occupations and carry them off to a baseball game or perhaps to New York for the day to spend a few hours of bliss in the Aquarium or the Zoo, in less time than it frequently took their mother to decide what overcoats they should wear to school. This dashing *insouciance* secretly captivated their mother as much as it did them, and though by this time she had given up showing the delight it caused her, she was never more pleased than when Hilary would so take them off.

Hilary also read to them occasionally, and his reading was another source of secret admiration to their mother. He never read them anything but what his wife would have described, and rightly, too, as "far beyond them"; such things as Spenser, Shakespeare, Sheridan, or Milton, even; and he always read with such a mock-serious air as Sir Henry Irving used in the scene where Charles I recites poetry to his children. His wife on such occasions, though perfectly content with her rôle of Henrietta Maria, would reflect that if *she* tried to read such things to them they would be fidgeting and walking about the room and longing for her to stop, instead of sitting spellbound, as they did when he read, on the arms of his chair and breathlessly following each word of the text.

With another parent and with other children such reading would have proved utterly sterile, but from it the boys managed to absorb a good deal of pleasure and the germs of literary appreciation as well, and the words of many a great passage in many a great author became dear to them long before they were able to grasp their full meaning. Results of their literary sessions would crop out in the family intercourse in sundry curious ways. One instance may serve to illustrate this. The family were sitting about together one day after lunch; Edith Wimbourne had a pile of household mending before her.

"I declare," she said, "these tablecloths have simply rotted away from lying in that dark closet; they would have lasted much better if they had been used a little."

"She let concealment," said Hilary from behind a magazine, "like a worm i' the bud, feed—what did concealment feed on, James?"

"Feed on her damask—"

"Tablecloth!" shouts Harry, brilliantly but indiscreetly.

"Oh, shut up," retorts his brother, peevishly, as who would not, at having the words snatched [23]
from his mouth? "You needn't be so smart, I was going to say that anyway."

"The heck you were!"

"Yes, I was."

"You were not! You were going to say 'cheek'; I saw you start to say it."

"Oh, shut up! Can't any one be bright but you?"

"That's all right; you were going to say it. Wasn't he, Father?" asks Harry, with the air of one appealing to the supreme authority.

"What?" Hilary had long since returned to his magazine.

"Say 'cheek.' Wasn't he going to?"

"Who?"

"James, of course."

"I trust not. It seems to me that it is one of the slang words your mother has requested you not to use."

"Wha—what is?"

"Cheek." Not much of a joke, certainly, but Hilary, looking with impenetrable gravity over his glasses at his son, when he really knows perfectly well what Harry is talking about, is funny. At any rate Harry stops to laugh, and the quarrel is a failure. Edith could have stopped the quarrel by simply enjoining peace, but she could not have done it without resort to parental authority.

One day James, ordinarily phlegmatic and self-controlled, ran through the house in a great state of dishevelment and distress in search of his mother, holding aloft a bloody finger and weeping hot tears of woe.

"Where's Mama?" he inquired breathlessly, ending up in the library and finding his father alone there.

"Out, I think. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing.... A kid licked me.... I wanted something for this finger."

"Well, go upstairs and get that large brown bottle on my wash-stand, and we'll see what we can do about it." Hilary, taking a page out of his own boyhood, guessed that no mere cut finger could have reduced James to such an abject pass. He suspected that his son, who, unlike Harry, was almost morbidly sensitive to appearances and almost never gave way to demonstrations of grief, had augmented the disgrace of being thrashed by allowing himself to be reduced to a state of [24]
tears in the presence of his fellows. Some such occurrence only could account for this precipitate rout. One or two further inquiries confirmed this conjecture, and he then prepared to apply, if possible, a balm to his son's mental wound as well as the physical one.

"There," said he, giving a final pull to an unprofessional-looking bandage, composed of an entirely un-antiseptic handkerchief, "that will stay till your mother comes in. Now go and get me that green book on the third shelf and I'll read to you for a while, if you want."

The green book happened to be no less notable a work than "Paradise Lost," and Hilary, turning to the last pages of the twelfth book, read of the expulsion of our sinning forbears from Eden. He read Milton rather well, almost as well, in fact, as he secretly thought he did, and James, though incapable at first of listening attentively or understanding much of anything, was gradually soothed by the solemn music of the lines; by the time his father reached the closing passage he was listening with wide open ears.

> They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
> Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate
> With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.
> Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
> They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.

Hilary kept the book open on his knee for a moment after he had finished, and he noticed with interest that James leaned forward with aroused attention to read over the passage again. "Some natural tears—wiped them soon—the world was all before them—" the words sank in on James' mind as his father knew they would, and suggested the thought that the world need not be irrevocably lost through one indiscretion.

Let no one gain from these somewhat extended accounts of Hilary's dealings with his sons an impression to the effect that the boys found a more sympathetic friend in their father than in their mother. As a matter of fact, the exact contrary was true. Like all perfect art, Hilary's [25]
successful passages with them bore no trace of the means by which they were brought about, and consequently they did not feel that their father's attitude toward them was inspired by anything like the warm and undisguised affection which pervaded their mother's. Nor, indeed, was it.

James, even in these early days, showed signs of having inherited a fair share of his father's inborn tact in his dealings with his brother. The fraternal relation is always an interesting one to observe, because of its extreme elasticity, combining, as it does, apparently unlimited possibilities for love, hate and indifference. Who ever saw two pairs of brothers that seemed to regard each other with exactly the same feelings? Harry and James certainly did not hate each other, but on the other hand they did not love each other with that passionate devotion that is supposed to characterize the ideal brothers of fancy. Nor could they truthfully be called wholly indifferent to each other; their mutual attitude lay somewhere between indifference and the Castor-and-Pollux-like devotion that the older and less attractive of their relatives constantly tried to instil in their youthful bosoms. They were never bored by each other. James always felt for Harry's superior quickness in all intellectual matters an admiration which he would have died sooner than give full expression to, and Harry, though he frequently scouted his brother's opinions in all matters, had a profound respect for James' clearness and maturity of judgment. But what, more than anything else, kept them on good terms with each other and always, at the last moment, prevented serious ructions, was a way that James had at times of viewing their relation in a detached and impersonal light, and acting accordingly. On such occasions he appeared to be two people; first, the James that was Harry's brother and contemporary, less than

two years older than he and subject to the same desires and weakness, and, secondly, the James who stood as judge over their differences and distributed justice to them both with a fair and impartial hand.

For instance, there was the episode of the neckties. A distant relative, a cousin of their mother's, who does not really come into the story at all, took occasion of expressing her approval of their existence by sending them two neckties, one purple and one green, with the direction that they should decide between them which was to have which. James, by the right of primogeniture that [26] prevails among most families of children, was given the first choice, and picked out the purple one. Harry quietly took the other, but though there was no open dissatisfaction expressed, it soon became evident to James that his brother was tremendously disappointed. During the rest of the day, as he went about his business and pleasure, vague but disturbing recollections flitted through James' mind of Harry's being particularly anxious to possess a purple tie, of having been half promised one, indeed, by the very relative from whom these blessings came; circumstances which, from the wording of the letter which accompanied the gift, obviously constituted no legal claim on the tie, but were nevertheless enough to appeal to James' sense of moral, or "ultimate" justice.

The next morning James, according to custom, approaching the completion of his dressing some time before Harry, remarked in a casual tone:

"Oh, you can have that purple tie, if you want. I'd just as lief take the green one."

Harry, who had taken the attitude of being willing to suffer to the point of death before making a complaint in the matter, would not allow this. In the brief conversational intervals that the spirited wielding of a sponge, and subsequently of a towel, allowed, he disclaimed any predilection for ties of any particular color, or of any particular kind of tie, or for any particular color in general. Clothes were a matter of complete indifference for him; he had never been able to understand why people spent their time in raving inanely over this or that particular manner of robing themselves. As for colors, he could scarcely bother to tell one from the other; the prism presented to him a field in which it was impossible to make any choice. If, however, in his weaker moments, he had ever felt a passing fancy for one color over and above another, that color was undoubtedly green. And so on, and so forth. James made no further observation on the subject, but when he reached the necktie stage in his dressing, he quietly put on the green tie, and Harry, like the Roman senators of old, subsequently flashed in the purple.

James preferred the purple tie, but he let Harry have it because Harry felt more keenly on the subject than he. "If"—so ran the substance of his reasoning—"if I give way in this matter, about [27] which I do not particularly care, one way or the other, there will be a better chance of my getting what I want some other time, when the issue is a really vital one. By sacrificing a penny now, I gain a pound in the future." Such clearness of sight was beyond James' years, and, but for the real sense of justice that accompanied it might have made him an opportunist. James would never in the last resort, have used his reasoning powers to cheat Harry, who, though his brother, was, when all was said and done, his best friend.

CHAPTER IV [28]

PUPPY DOGS, AND A PSYCHOLOGICAL FACT

The story of the life of any person begins with the moment of his birth and ends with the last breath that leaves his body. The complete account of the inward and outward experiences that go to make up any one individual life would, if properly told, be the most fascinating story in the world, for there never lived a person who did not carry about within himself the materials for a great and complete novel. Such stories have never yet been written, and probably never will be, partly because they would be too long and partly because the thing would be so confoundedly hard to do. So as to make it interesting, that is. We have chosen to begin this account of the lives, or rather, a section of the lives, of Harry and James at the death of their mother because that was their first great outward experience. It influenced their inward lives even more fundamentally. It lifted their thoughts, their whole outlook on life, from what, for want of a better expression, might be called the level of youthful development and sent them branching and soaring into new and strange regions.

One of the most important outward changes that Edith Wimbourne's death caused in the life of her household was the substitution, as far as such a thing could be, of her younger sister, Agatha Fraile, in her place. Such was, in a word, the ultimate fruit of the conversation between Aunt Selina and Aunt Cecilia that occurred a chapter or two ago. James Wimbourne was approached and convinced, and in his turn approached and convinced his brother Hilary, who, in his turn, came back to his half-sister Selina and persuaded her to approach and convince that lady in question on his behalf. Aunt Selina was perfectly willing to do this, though she had not counted

on it.

"Miss Fraile," she said, on the first occasion for speech that presented itself; "my brother Hilary has asked me to put a proposition to you on his behalf. What would you say to coming here and living with him as his housekeeper and having an eye on those two boys, until—well, say till it is time for them to go off to a boarding-school?" [29]

This direct manner of approach was perhaps the one best calculated to win Miss Fraile, who after a very little parley, assented to the proposition. She was a very young and fragile-looking woman, having but lately passed her thirtieth birthday, but she was in reality quite as able to take care of herself as the next person, if not, indeed, a great deal more so. She was the very antithesis, as the boys presently discovered, of Aunt Selina, being all smiles and cordiality on the outside and about as hard as tempered steel when you got a little below the surface, in spite of her smiles, and in spite, moreover, of her really unusual and perfectly sincere piety.

"I think," went on Aunt Selina rather magnificently, after the main point had been gained, "that in the matter of the stipend there will be no difficulty at all. You will find my brother entirely liberal in such matters." Here she named a sum, Miss Fraile instantly decided that it would not do, and proceeded after her own fashion to the work of raising her opponent's bid.

"How very good of him," she murmured, letting her eyes fall to the carpet. "All of our family have unfortunately been obliged to devote so much thought and attention to money matters since our dear father's death left us so badly off. Let me see.... I suppose my duties here would take up very nearly all my time, would they not?"

"I do not know.... I daresay...."

"Exactly; one has to look so far ahead in all these matters, does one not? I mean, that looking after this great house and those two dear boys and Hilary himself would not leave me much time for anything like music lessons, would it? Perhaps you did not know that I gave music lessons at home?... Money is such a bother—! I suppose I should scarcely have time to practise here myself, with one thing and another—household affairs do pile up so, do they not?—without thinking of lessons or anything of that sort; yet I daresay I should somehow be able to ... to make it up, that is, if—" [30]

"How much more would you need?" asked Aunt Selina bluntly.

Miss Fraile named a sum half as large again as the one previously mentioned, but Aunt Selina, stifling a gasp, clinched the matter there.

After the funeral Miss Fraile returned to her home in semi-rural Pennsylvania "to collect my traps" as she brightly put it, and a week or so later came back to New Haven and settled down in her new position. The boys on the whole liked their Aunt Agatha, though even their exuberant boyish natures occasionally found her cheerfulness a little oppressive, and she certainly did very well for them and for their father. She ordered the meals, saw to the housework, arranged the flowers, dusted the bric-à-brac with her own hands, did most of the mending and presided at the head of the table at meals, fairly radiating peace and cheer.

Hilary was a little appalled, to be sure, when she would burst on him on his returning to the house of an evening with a pair of warmed slippers in her hand and a musical little peal of laughter on her lips, but he did not have to see much of her, and besides, he so thoroughly approved of her.

"It is like living with Mary and Martha rolled into one," he told his brother a month or two after her arrival; "with a little of Job and the archangel Gabriel thrown in, flavored with a spice of St. Elizabeth of Hungary—that bread woman, you know—and just a dash of St. Francis of Assisi. She has covered the lawn knee-deep with bread crumbs for the sparrows, and when she is not busy with her church work, which she almost always is, she goes about kissing strange children on the head and asking them if they say their prayers regularly. They all seem to like her, too; that's the funny part of it. The boys are entirely happy with her, and she is splendid for them. In short, I am entertaining an angel, though not unawares—oh, no, certainly not unawares."

The two boys were thrown on each other's society much more constantly than formerly, especially as, during the first weeks, at any rate, they had small heart for the games of their schoolmates. James especially, during these days of retirement, observed his brother with a newly-awakened interest, and in the light, of course, of his mother's last words to him. He had always thought of Harry as more irresponsible and light-headed than himself, but it had never occurred to him that he could give him any help against his impulsiveness beyond the customary fraternal criticism and banter. Now he began to see that his position of elder brother, combined with his superior balance and poise of character, gave him a considerable influence over Harry, and he began to feel at times an actual sense of responsibility very different from the attitude of tolerant and half-amused superiority with which he had previously regarded Harry's vagaries. At such times he would drop his ridicule or blame, whichever it happened to be, and would become silent and embarrassed, feeling that he should be helping Harry instead of merely laying stress on his shortcomings, and yet not having the first idea of how to go to work about it. [31]

One day they were returning to the house after a walk through a somewhat slummy and hoodlum-infested neighborhood and came upon a group of boys tormenting a small, dirty, yellow mongrel puppy after the humorous manner of their kind. They were not actually cruel to the dog,

but they were certainly not giving it a good time, and Harry's tender heart was stirred to its core. Without a word or a second thought he rushed into the middle of the gang, extracted the puppy and ran off with it to a place of safety. The thing was done in the modern rather than in the romantic style; he did not strike out at boys twice as big as himself—there were none there, in the first place, and in any case he had no desire for a fight—nor did he indulge in a lengthy tirade against cruelty to animals; he simply grabbed the dog and ran. The "micks" followed him at first, but he could run faster than they and none of them cared much about a puppy, one way or the other.

James, meanwhile, had run off a different way, and when presently he came upon his brother again he was walking leisurely along clasping the puppy in a close embrace.

"You certainly are a young fool," said James, half amused and half irritated; "what did you want to get mixed up in a street row like that for? Darned lucky you didn't get your head smashed." [32]

Harry thought it needless to reply to this, as the facts spoke for themselves, and merely walked on, hugging and kissing his prize.

Then suddenly the situation dawned on James in its new light, and he walked on, silent as Harry himself and far more perplexed. Harry's fundamental motive was a good one, no doubt, but he realized what disproportionate trouble the reckless following up of Harry's good motives might bring him into. This time he had luckily escaped scot free, but the next time he would very likely get mixed up in a street fight, and would be lucky if he were able to walk home. And all about so little—the dog was not really suffering; being a slum dog it had probably thrived on teasing and mistreatment since before its eyes were open. And the worst part of the situation was that he was so helpless in making Harry see the thing in its true light.

At any rate, he reflected, his first attitude was of no avail. Calling Harry a fool, he knew, would not convince him of his foolishness; it would more likely have the effect of making him think he was more right than ever. As he walked silently on, beside his brother, Harry's shortcomings seemed to dwindle and his own to increase.

"Let's have a look at the beast," he said presently in an altered tone, stopping and taking the puppy from Harry's arms. "He's not such a bad puppy, after all. Wonder how old he is." He sat down on a nearby curbstone and balancing the puppy on his knee apostrophized him further: "Well, it was poor pupsy-wupsy; did the naughty boys throw stones at it? That was a dirty shame, it was!"

James put the puppy down in the gutter and encouraged playfulness. For a few minutes the two boys watched its somewhat reluctant antics; then James asked:

"What are you going to do with it, anyway?"

"Take it home, I suppose."

"What'll you do with it there? Keep him in the house?"

"No. That is, I suppose Father wouldn't hear of it."

"I suppose not A puppy...! There are three dogs in the house anyway."

"What about the stable, then?"

"I don't know. There's Thomas." Thomas was the coachman, who made no secret of his dislike for dogs "under the horses' hoofs." [33]

"Yes," said Harry, "and Spark, too. Spark would try to bite him, I'm afraid."

"What are you going to do with him, then?"

"I don't know; what shall we?"

"It's for you to say—he's your dog."

"Do you think," said Harry, lowering his voice and gazing furtively around, "do you think it would be all right just to leave him here?"

James laughed, inwardly. Then a bright idea struck him. Grasping the puppy in one hand he walked across the street to a small and dirty front yard in which a small and dirty child of four or five was sitting playing.

"Hullo, kid," said James breezily, "do you want a puppy dog? Here you are, then. He's a very valuable dog, so be careful of him. Mind you don't pull his tail now, or he'll bite."

James walked off well pleased with the turn of events, which left Harry relieved and satisfied and the dog honorably disposed of. As for Harry, he was profoundly grateful. He would have liked to give some expression to his gratitude, but the words would not come, and he walked on for some time without speaking. But he was determined to give some sign of what he felt.

"Thank you, James," he said at length in a low voice, and blushed to the roots of his hair.

"What? Oh, that's all right." James' surprise was no affectation; the matter had really passed from his mind. But he gave to Harry's words the full meaning that the speaker placed in them. They

made him feel suddenly ashamed of himself; what had Harry done that was wrong? What had he done but what was right and praiseworthy, when you came to look at it? Should he not be ashamed himself of not having run in and rescued the dog before Harry?

And yet, most of the things that Harry did worked out wrong, somehow, even when they were prompted by the best of motives.

"Poor Harry," thought James, "he's always getting into scrapes, and yet I suppose, if everything were known, people would see that he was twice as good as I am, at bottom. I would never have thought of saving that dog; Harry thinks out such funny things to do.... I can generally do the right thing, if it's put directly up to me, but Harry goes out and searches for the right thing to do; I guess that's what it amounts to. Only, I wish he didn't have to search in such strange places." [34]

As James settled down into his position of mentor to his brother he found out a curious thing; he was fonder of Harry than formerly. The old sense of unconscious, taking-it-for-granted companionship gradually became infused with positive affection which, for the reason that it found little if any outward expression in the daily round of work and play, escaped the notice of everybody except James himself.

"Do you think that doing something for a person would ever make you fonder of that person?" he once asked of his father when they were alone together. "I mean—I should think, that is, that it would work out the other way, so that the person you did the thing for would be fonder of you."

"It's a well known psychological fact," replied his father; "I've often noticed it. If you merely stop a person in the street and ask him the way, or what time it is, you can see his expression change from one of indifference, or even dislike, to interest and cordiality. And if you ever feel that a man, an acquaintance, doesn't like you, ask him to do you some slight service, and he'll admire you intensely from that moment on. And conversely, if you want to make a man your enemy, the best way of going about it is to do something for him.—Why, what made you think of it?"

"Thomas," replied James promptly, being prepared for the question. "He was cross as two sticks the other day when we wanted to build forts in the haymow, but after I asked him to help me put the chain on my bicycle," etc., etc. But James was disturbed by his father's development of the theory. What if his "helping out" Harry should have the effect of making him hate him, James, the very effect of all others he desired to avoid? He resolved to keep his new-found feeling to himself, and give his brother's resentment no foothold; but he could not entirely live it down, for all that. Unconsciously he found fault less with him, unconsciously he would take his part in squabbles with the servants or with his father; and as he noticed no change in Harry's conduct toward him he congratulated himself on his powers of concealment. [35]

But he need have had no worries on the score of Harry's resenting his protection. To Harry, James had always appeared to partake somewhat of the nature of a divinity; if not Apollo or Jupiter, out and out, he was at least Hercules, say, or Theseus. And though, in the very nature of things in general and the fraternal relation in particular, he was obliged outwardly to deny James' superiority in everything and more especially the right to boss younger brothers, he was acutely, almost pathetically, sensitive to James' demeanor toward him and was entirely ready to respond to any increase in good feeling, if James would lead the way.

James, with all his insight and quickness of perception, failed to count upon the fact that Harry would be as slow in making a parade of his feelings as he himself, and was a little surprised that Harry made so slight a demonstration of sorrow when, about a year after their mother's death, James was sent off to school. Harry, indeed, sought to cover his secret conviction that he would really miss his brother very much by repeated harpings upon the blessings that James' presence had ever kept from him, and now, the obstacle being removed, would shower copiously on his deserving, but hitherto officially unrecognized, head. Now he would get the first go at all dishes at table, now he would always sit on the box beside Thomas and drive, now people would see whether he could not be on time for breakfast without his brother's assistance, and so forth. James smiled tolerantly at all such talk; he knew that it did not amount to much, though even he failed to realize quite how little.

When the fatal morning came the brothers parted with complete cordiality and every outward expression of mutual contempt.

"Be very careful about putting on your clothes in the morning, kid," said James as the train that was to take him off rolled into the station. "You put on your undershirt first, remember, then your shirt and coat. Don't go putting your undershirt over your coat; people might laugh."

"All right, you dear thoughtful boy, I'll try to remember, but I shall be pretty busy hoping that those other kids'll lick the tar out of you, for the first time in your innocent life. You're a good boy at heart, James; all you need is to have the nonsense knocked out of you!" [36]

James' first letter to his brother from school, written some ten days after his departure, is still extant, and may be quoted in full as a document in the story.

St. Barnabas' School.

October 5.

Dear Harry:

> I meant to have written you before, but I have been so busy that there was no time. This certainly is a fine place, and I like it a lot already. There are 21 new boys this term, which is fewer than usual, but they say we are an unusually good crowd. We say so, at any rate! There was a big rough-house in our corridor Saturday night. A lot of the old boys came down and turned the new fellows after lights were out, and also made them run the gauntlet down the hall, standing at the sides and swatting them with belts and things as they went by. That was much worse than the turning, which did not amount to much. I got turned five times, and Brush, the fellow that rooms with me, six times. That was not much. There was one chap that got turned 22 times that one night. That was Hawley. They call him 'Stink' Hawley already, because he is so dirty looking. They say he has not washed his face since he came. Gosh, I wonder what you will be called when you get here!"

"What a filthy lie!" shrieked Harry when he reached this, making up in vehemence what he lacked in coherence. His alleged aversion to the wash-basin was a standing joke in the family, and any reference to it invariably brought a rise.

"Gracious, dear," murmured Aunt Agatha, and smiled.

"Let's hear," said his father, suspending judgment. (The scene took place at the breakfast table.) Harry read the letter aloud up to the point in question, and was relieved to observe an exculpatory smile on his father's lips when he stopped.

"I admit there is an implication in that last remark," said Hilary, "that might prove irritating. However, that's no excuse for making a menagerie of yourself. What else does James say?" Harry read on:

[37]

> There always is a big rough-house the first two or three Saturday nights every year, and after that they keep pretty quiet. They say the masters let them do what they like, almost, those first nights, because they behave better afterwards and it keeps the new boys from being too fresh. That's what I'll be doing to you, you see, next year!
>
> I have been playing football every day, and am trying for the fourth team. Do you remember Roswell Banks, that boy we saw up at Northeast? He is going to make the first team this year, probably. They say he tackles better than any one else here. Kid Leffingwell also plays a peach of a game, but he won't make the first this year. He is too light, but he has got lots of nerve.
>
> I must stop now, so good-night.
>
> Your affectionate brother,
>
> JAMES.

The present writer has no quarrel with any one who is unable to detect in this letter symptoms of any particularly keen brotherly affection. It is his private opinion, however, that such exist there. He thinks, *imprimis*, that James, strange as it may appear, laid himself out to be more agreeable in that letter than he would if he had written it, say, a year previously. It is longer and fuller than James' letters usually were. And—though this may be drawing the point too fine—he thinks that the exclamation point after "that's what I'll be doing to you next year" would not have been put in under the old régime. An exclamation point does so much toward toning down and softening a disagreeable remark! And for the manner of signature, of course James might have signed himself like that to Harry at any time of his life. Yet the writer, even at the risk of being called super-sensitive, will not ignore the fact that most of James' letters to his brother previous to this date are signed, more casually, "Yours affect'ly," or "Ever yours," or simply "Good-by,—James," and though he realizes that at best the point is not an all-important one, he feels he can do no better than give the reader all the information he has at his command, be it never so trifling, and let him draw conclusions for himself.

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[38]

CHAPTER V

BABES IN THE WOOD

One Saturday morning about a year after James went away to school Harry bounded downstairs for breakfast to find his father just leaving the dining room.

"Hello, Father," he said, jumping up and kissing him as usual. "You don't stay in the office this afternoon, do you, Father? Why don't you take Bugs and me to the game? Or you can take us for a ride in the car, if you like; we'll meet you downtown for lunch, so as to save time." (Bugs was for the moment Harry's *fidus Achates*; a sort of vice-James.)

"You will not, I fear," returned Hilary briefly. "I'm going out of town for the day."

"What, not in the car?"

"In the car."

"*All* day?"

"All day. Leaving now, as soon as ever the car comes round, and not getting back till late—perhaps not to-night."

"Dash," remarked Harry. "I wish you'd go by train; Graves told me he'd give me a lesson in running the machine the next free Saturday."

"Sorry. Next week, perhaps."

"Where are you going, anyway, Father?"

"My business."

"Going to take Graves?"

"No."

"What, all alone? You'll be lonely. Why don't you take Aunt Agatha?"

"No, I shan't be lonely and I'm not going to take Aunt Agatha. I'll tell you what I am going to do, however; I'm going to send you away to school, and that next term. You have a pretty glib tongue in your head, Harry my boy, and I think perhaps young gentlemen of your own age will be even better able to appreciate it than I am."

But Harry was far too elated by the news to pay much heed to the rebuke. He became inarticulate with delight, and his father went calmly on with his preparations for departure. [39]

"Yes, I'll have a talk with Hodgman about the exams.... There's the car, at last—I must run. Where did I put those water rights, anyway? Oh.... Yes, I think you'll probably have to do extra work in algebra this term.... Take care of yourself; we'll have a spree next week if I can arrange it," and so forth, enough to cover sorting a morning's mail, progress into the front hall, donning a hat and overcoat—no, the dark one, and where are the gray gloves, dash it?—and a triumphal exit in a motor car. Harry watched the retreating vehicle with mingled regret and admiration. Hilary made a striking and debonair picture as he whirled along in his scarlet chariot—they ran a great deal to bright red paint in those early days, if you'll remember—and people would run to catch a glimpse of him as he dashed by and talk about it at length at the next meal. But it occurred to Harry that he would complete the picture very nicely, sitting there at his father's side. He wished fervently that he could ever make his father remember that Saturday was Saturday.

This parting conversation was redeemed from the oblivion of trivial things and inscribed indelibly on Harry's memory by the fact that it was the last he ever had with his father.

The day passed like any other day and at its close the household went to bed as usual, boding no ill. Toward midnight the telephone rang and Aunt Agatha arose and answered it. The voice at the other end introduced itself as Police Headquarters and inquired, as an afterthought, if this was Mr. Wimbourne's house. Yet, it was. Headquarters then expressed a desire to know if any of the family was there and, without waiting for a reply, asked with perceptible animation if this was one of the girls speaking? Aunt Agatha answered, in a tone which in another person would have been called frigid, that this was Miss Fraile.

Headquarters appeared duly impressed; at least he seemed to have difficulty in finding words in which to continue. Aunt Agatha's crisp inquiry of what was it, please? at last moved him to admit there had been an accident. Yes, to Mr. Wimbourne. The automobile did it; ran into a telegraph pole down near Port Chester. Pretty bad smash-up; couldn't say just how bad.... Was Mr. [40] Wimbourne badly hurt? Well, yes, pretty badly; the machine—Was Mr. Wimbourne killed? Well, yes, he was, if you put it that way. His body would arrive sometime next morning....

This was the sort of occasion on which Aunt Agatha shone as a perfect model of efficiency. She spent an hour or more telegraphing and telephoning, prayed extensively, returned to her bed and slept soundly till seven. Then she arose and gave directions to the servants. It was breakfast time before she remembered that she had yet to tell Harry.

Then, as he appeared so cheerfully and ignorantly at the breakfast table, Aunt Agatha's heart failed her. Her presence of mind also left her; she blurted out a few words to the effect that his father had had a bad accident, wished she had let him eat his breakfast in ignorance, hoped despairingly that he would guess the truth from her perturbation. But even this was denied her; he asked a great many questions and refused to eat till she made him, but gave no sign of suspecting anything beyond what she told him.

She saw that the suspense of waiting for his father's return would tell on him more than the worst certainty, but still she could not bring herself to break the truth to him. When at last she nerved herself to do it, it was too late.

"Come here and sit down by me, Harry," she said gently, but Harry, who was standing at one of the front windows, listlessly replied:

"Wait, there's something coming up the street."

"Just a minute, dear, I want to talk to you," said Aunt Agatha, going over and trying to push him gently away from the window. But Harry's attention was caught and he refused to move.

"I thought it might be Father. Do you think it's Father, Aunt Agatha? It moves so slowly I can't see.... Yes, it's turning in at the gate. What sort of a thing is it, anyway?..."

The next moment his own eyes answered the question, and with a little cry he toppled backward into her arms.

James' reception of the news was characteristically different. His behavior was generally referred to by the family as "wonderful." He certainly was very calm throughout. He was informed of his father's death on the Sunday morning by the headmaster of his school, to whom Aunt Agatha had telegraphed the night before. [41]

"I suppose I'd better go home," was his first comment.

"I suppose you had," replied the schoolmaster, and he was rather at a loss for what to say next. He had certainly expected more of a demonstration than this. "Somebody had better go with you. Whom would you like to have go?"

James hesitated and blushed. "Do you suppose Marston would come?" he said at last, in a low voice. Marston, a long-legged sixth former, was James' idol at present; to ask him to do something for one was like calling the very gods down from Olympus.

"I am sure he would," said the headmaster, who understood, perfectly. "I will send for him now and ask him."

So Marston accompanied James on his dreary homeward journey, though his presence was not in the least necessary, and James sat covertly gazing at him in mute adoration all the way. His thoughts were actually less on his father's death during this journey than on the wonderful, incredible fact that anything like a mere family death could throw him into intimate intercourse with Marston for a whole day.

But of course he gave no sign of this, and Marston, like a real god, seemed entirely unconscious of the immensity of the blessing he was conferring. He spent the night at the Wimbournes', behaving himself in his really rather trying position with the greatest ease and seemliness, and even submitted with a becoming grace to the kiss which Aunt Cecilia impulsively placed on his brow when she bade him farewell next morning.

"You're a dear good boy," she said softly, as she did it; "thank you, again and again, for what you've done."

James, who was a witness to this episode, nearly sank through the floor with shame. That a relative of his should kiss—actually, *kiss* Marston—! He felt like throwing himself on the ground and imploring Marston's pardon, dedicating himself to his service for life as an expiation.

Yet Marston only blushed and laughed a little and said he had done nothing, and bade good-by to James with unimpaired cordiality.

Aunt Cecilia had been the first of the relatives to arrive on the spot after Hilary's death, and she remained commander-in-chief of the relief forces throughout. But her command was not a complete or unquestioned one. Among the relatives that assembled at the Wimbourne house on that Sunday and Monday for Hilary's funeral was one with whom the story has hitherto had no dealings, but who was a very important force in the family, for all that. This was Lady Fletcher, Hilary's younger sister, by all odds the handsomest and most naturally gifted of her generation. She was the wife of an English army officer, Sir Giles Fletcher, who, having won his major-generalship and a K.C.B. by distinguished service with Kitchener in the Soudan, and being physically incapacitated by that campaign for further service in the tropics, was now, with the able assistance of his wife, devoting his declining years to politics. Lady Fletcher, by the discreet exercise of her social qualities, had succeeded in making herself in the five years since her husband had entered Parliament, one of the most important political hostesses in London. At the time of Hilary's death she was paying one of her flying autumn visits to the country of her birth, in which her headquarters was always her brother James' house in New York. [42]

She and James had gone up to New Haven on the Sunday afternoon in a leisurely fashion several hours in the wake of Aunt Cecilia, who had rushed off, without so much as packing a bag, the moment she received Miss Fraile's telegram that morning. Miriam—that was her Christian name—always felt that she and her brother James understood one another better than any other members of the family, and it was her private opinion that they between them possessed more of the rare gift of common sense than all the other Wimbournes put together, with their wives and husbands thrown in. During the short two-hour journey from New York to New Haven neither she nor her brother appeared so overcome by sorrow over their recent loss that they were not able to discuss the newly created situation pretty satisfactorily, or, to "be practical" as Lady Fletcher was fond of putting it.

"You aren't going to smoke, James?" she asked, as her brother, shortly after the train had started, exhibited preparatory signs of a restlessness which she knew would culminate in an apologetic exit to the smoking car. "Please don't; I can't, on the train, and the thought of your doing it would

make me miserable." She stopped for a moment, reflecting that there was perhaps that in the air which ought to make her miserable anyway; then went on, with a significantly lowered voice. "Beside, I want to talk to you; we may not get another chance...."

"Well?" said James at length.

"Don't be irritating, James; you know what I mean, perfectly. Can't you turn your chair around a little nearer? I don't want to shout.... Tell me, first, who are to be the guardians? Now don't say you don't know, because you do."

"I do, as a matter of fact. You and I, jointly. That's the one thing I do know, for sure."

"I felt sure it would be that, somehow.... Why me, I wonder? and if me at all, why you? However, it might have been worse, of course."

"Yes, I think he was right, on the whole." So perfect was the unspoken understanding between these two that, if a third person had interrupted at this moment and asked, point blank, what they were talking about, both would have replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Selina," though her name had not passed their lips.

"Well, what's to be done?" Lady Fletcher exhibited, to James' trained eye, preliminary symptoms of a "practical" seizure.

"Can't tell anything for certain, till we see the will. I shall see Raynham in the morning."

"Yes, but haven't you any idea ..."

"Oh, none! You were not a witness, were you?... if that's any comfort to you."

"Thanks, I have no expectations." This was uttered in Lady Fletcher's best snubbing tone, impossible to describe. "Please be practical, James. What is going to become of those two boys?"

"Well, there are several possibilities. First, there's their aunt...."

"Oh, the Fraile woman? I've never met her. Isn't she ... well, a trifle...."

"Oh, quite. She's a leading candidate for the position of first American saint. But there'd be no point in keeping on with her, with James away at school and Harry ready to go."

"Oh, really? I didn't realize."

"No," continued James, raising his eyes to his sister's and smiling slightly, "what it will come to will be that I shall have six children instead of four. Or rather, seven instead of five." [44]

"Oh, really?" This in a changed tone from the lady.

"Yes, hasn't she told you? April."

"No." The practical mood seemed to have undergone a setback; there was something new in that monosyllable, irritation, a twinge of pain, perhaps. An outside observer might have thought this was due to Miriam's having been left out of her sister-in-law's confidence, but James knew better. He felt sorry for his sister; he knew that her childlessness was the one blight on her career.

"I don't see why you should do it, James." This after a long interval of silent thought on the part of Miriam, and passive observation of the rushing autumn landscape on the part of James. "I don't see why, when I'm equally responsible. It isn't a question of money, so much—I suppose that will be left all right?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. Though I don't know just how."

"It's more than that; it's the responsibility, the bother. There's no use in saying that one more, or two more, don't matter, for they do; and there's no use in saying that they would both be away at school, for, though that would make a difference, of course, you never can tell what is going to turn up. No matter what did happen, it would always fall on you—and Cecilia."

"That's all very true, perhaps, but—"

"And remember this; it's not as if you didn't have four—five already, and I none."

"What *are* you driving at, Miriam?"

"Don't you see? I want to take one, or both of them, myself."

"Whee-ew." This was not, strictly speaking, an observation, but rather a sort of vocalized whistle, the larynx helping out the lips. "You do rush things so, Miriam! Aside from the consideration of whether it would be advisable or not, do you realize what opposition there'd be?"

"Why? What, I mean, that could not be properly overcome? You are one guardian, I the other; I take one boy, you the other. What is there strange about such a course? Or I could take both together."

"I should be against James leaving the country, myself. He is safely started in his school; doing well there; striking his *milieu*. Why disturb him?" [45]

"Well, Harry, then. What sort of a child is he, James? I haven't seen either of them for three

years, but as I remember it, I liked James best. Rather the manly type, isn't he? Not but what the other seemed a nice enough child...."

"Harry? Oh, he'll have the brains of his generation, without doubt. Yes, I'm not surprised at your liking James best. There are plenty of people who find Harry the more attractive, however. He's got winning ways. But—are you serious about this, Miriam?"

"Serious? Certainly!"

"Well, what's the point? Do we want to make an Englishman out of the boy? And do you want to separate them? Wouldn't that smack a little of—well, of Babes in the Wood? Cruel uncles and things, you know?"

"I don't think so. We wouldn't want to do that, of course. It wouldn't be for always, anyway. But even if he went to an English public school, which I should prefer to an American one, particularly for that type ... they would always have vacations. You are here, and I am there, and we would keep running across pretty frequently. Besides," here Lady Fletcher again changed her tone, and generally gave the impression of preparing to start another maneuver; "besides, there's another element in it—Giles. He's devoted to children. He would come as near being a father to the boy, if he liked him, as any one could. And—do you realize what that might mean for him—for Harry?" Miriam stopped, significantly, and looked her brother straight in the eye for a moment. "The Rumbold property is very large, and Giles will certainly come into it before long...."

"I see," said James, slowly nodding his head; "I see. Though I wouldn't sacrifice anything definite to that chance. Beside, what about the Carson family?"

"Oh, yes, I'm not saying there's any certainty; it's just one of the things to be counted on.... Leaving Harry out of consideration for the moment, it would be a wonderful thing for Giles. I can't think of anything Giles would rather have; it would be like giving him a son. And if you knew how wild English people of a certain class and type are about children—! Giles has never got on well with the Carson children, for some reason."

"That's all very fine, Miriam, but we mustn't leave Harry out of consideration, since it's him we're [46]
the guardians of, and not Giles—at least, I am.... I'm inclined to think there is something in what you say, though I should be definitely against making an Englishman of him—you understand that?" Lady Fletcher nodded, and her brother continued: "It would certainly have an admirably broadening influence, if all went right. And I'm not sure but what you're right about English public schools. Even for American boys. But—" here he smiled quizzically at his sister—"did you ever hear of a person called Selina Wimbourne?"

Lady Fletcher laughed. "You've hit it this time, I fancy! Honestly, James—" the practical mood was now in complete abeyance—"though I've knocked around a good deal with swells and terrifying people and all that, I have never been so cowed by the mere presence of any individual as I have been by my sister Selina. Did it ever occur to you, James, that Selina runs this family—well, as the engineer runs this train?"

"Something very like it—yes."

"At any rate, I have a premonition in the present instance that as Selina jumps the tree will fall ... fancy Selina jumping out of a tree! It will have to be most carefully put to her—if it is put."

"If it is put—exactly. We must see how things lie before doing anything.—What, already?" This to a negro porter, who was exhibiting willingness to be of service. "We must look alive—the next stop's New Haven. Mind you don't say anything too soon, now; easy does it."

"Yes, of course.—No, Bridgeport, isn't it?—What, don't we, any more?... But you are on my side, in the main, aren't you?"

"Conditionally, yes—that is, if all parties seem agreeable. The one thing I won't stand for is—well, Babes in the Wood business."

"James, what do you think of my taking Harry off to England with me?" said Aunt Miriam to her elder nephew a day or two later.

"I think it would be fine," was his reply, and then after a pause: "For how long, though?"

This was going nearer to the heart of the matter than the lady cared to penetrate, so she merely answered:

"Oh, one can't tell; a few months; perhaps more, if he wants to stay." Seeing that he swallowed [47]
this without apparent effort, she went on: "What should you say to his going to school in England, when he is able, for a time?"

James' expression underwent no change, but he only answered stiffly, "I think he had better come to St. Barnabas, when he is able," and his aunt let the matter drop there.

It was in Aunt Cecilia, and not Aunt Selina, that Lady Fletcher found the most formidable opposition. Miss Wimbourne, indeed, quite took to the idea when her half-sister, very carefully and with not a little concealed trepidation, suggested it to her. She took it, as Miriam more vividly put it to her brother, "like milk."

"That is not a bad plan, Miriam, not a bad plan at all," she said in the quiet voice that could be so

firm when it wanted. "I can see why there are good reasons why neither of the boys should live in New Haven. For the present, you know. James will be at school, and will spend his vacations with James' family, and Harry will be with you until he is ready to do the same. I do not see but what it is a very good arrangement. I am perfectly willing to do my part in taking care of them, but I am not nearly so useful in that way as either you or James."

But not so with Mrs. James. Her husband first spoke to her of the scheme before breakfast on the Monday morning, and she took immediate and articulate exception to it. The plan was forced, dangerous, artificial, cruel, unnecessary, short-sighted; in fact, it wouldn't do at all. There was no telling what Miriam would do with him, once he was over there, and no telling when she would let him come back to what had been, what ought to be, and what, if she (Mrs. James) had any say in the matter, was going to be his Home. It would make her extremely unhappy to think of that child spending his vacations—or his whole time for that matter—with any one but his uncle and natural guardian ("Miriam is his guardian, too," James attempted to say, but no attention was paid to him), his aunt and his young cousins. As for all that business about Giles Fletcher, it was Perfect Nonsense. Before she would give an instant's consideration to such—to such an absurdity, she (Mrs. James) would give the boy every scrap of money she had, or was ever going to have, outright, and would end the matter then and there. (This would have been a really [48] appalling threat, if it was meant seriously, for Cecilia was due to inherit millions.) As for sending him to an English public school, she thought it would be the cruelest, most unfeeling, most ridiculous thing possible, seeing Harry was what he was. If it had been James, now—!

But the gods fought on Miriam's side. Cecilia went into the library during the latter part of the morning and discovered young James alone there. She found him uncommunicative and solemn, which, in the nature of things, was only to be expected; and he took her completely by surprise by asking after a few moments, in the most ordinary tone:

"Who is Marcelline Lefèbre, Aunt Cecilia?"

Mrs. James stifled a gasp, and waited before replying till she was sure of her voice.

"Why? How did you ever hear of her?" she said.

"Oh, in this. There's a lot more about it to-day. She was badly hurt, wasn't she?"

Mrs. James looked up and saw the newspaper lying open on the desk in front of which James was sitting.

"Oh, yes.... An actress, I think."

"Yes," said James, "it says that here." The words and tone clearly implied that James expected her to tell him something he did not know already, but she parried.

"Had you ever heard of her before?"

"No, never. That's just the funny part of it. Why should we never have heard of a person Father knew well enough to take out to ride? Did you ever know her?"

"No; merely heard of her. Oh, it's not to be wondered at; he had lots of acquaintances, of course." This was definite enough to indicate that she had told him all she intended to, and both were silent for a while. But presently a new thought occurred to her and she began again:

"Tell me, James, does Harry know anything about Mme. Lefèbre?"

"Not that I know of; not unless he heard of her ... before."

"Well, I think it would be a good plan if you didn't mention her name to him, or talk about her in his presence."

"All right. Why, though—particularly?"

"Never mind about that. At least," she caught herself up, realizing, perhaps, that this was [49] treating him too much *en enfant*; "at least, I think it would be just as well for him not to know anything about her. It might worry him. Particularly in his present state. There is no reason why he should see the papers, or hear anything."

"I see," said James, quietly, staring out of the window. He saw far too well, poor boy, was Aunt Cecilia's thought.

But the conversation started her off on a new line of thought in regard to Harry. Harry was so different from James; if he once smelled a rat he would go nosing about till he found him, even if he undermined the foundations of his own happiness in so doing. And Harry was the kind that smelled rats.... Inevitably her thoughts wandered around to Lady Fletcher's scheme, and beheld it in a new light. There was a certain amount of common sense in the plan, so viewed; there would certainly be fewer rats in London than anywhere in this country. And after all, what was the danger in his going to England? Miriam would not eat him, neither would Giles; Miriam must really be fond of him if she wanted to take him—Miriam would hardly do anything against her own inclination, she reflected, a little bitterly.

She presented her changed front to her husband that evening, and the upshot of it all was that Harry was to go to England. The whole family adjourned to New York after the funeral, and steamship plans and sailings were in the air. James went with them; it was decided that he was

not to return to school till Harry sailed with his aunt.

Harry himself took most kindly to the scheme; seemed, indeed, to prefer it to St. Barnabas. He flaunted his superior fortune in the face of his brother, making comparisons between the British Isles and St. Barnabas, greatly to the detriment of the latter.

"Oh, yes, I'll write to you," he said airily during one of these conversations; "that is, if I can find a minute to do it in. Of course I shall be pretty busy, with pantomimes, and theaters, and parties, and—and the Zoo, and all that."

"Fudge," said James calmly; "you'll be homesick as a cat before you've been there a week."

"Then when I get tired of that I may go to school—if I feel like it. Aunt Miriam says she knows of one that would just do. Not Eton or Rugby, or anything like that; a school for younger boys. This one is in a beautiful big house, Aunt Miriam says, with lots of grounds and things about. Park, [50] you know, like Windsor. And deer in it. And the house was built in the reign of Charles the First."

"Bet you don't even know when that was. What's the use in having that kind of place for a school, anyway?"

"St. Barnabas," replied Harry with hauteur, "was built in the reign of Queen Victoria."

"Queen nothing! Gosh, if you talk rot like this now, what'll you be when you've been over there a while?"

"Then I may go to Eton, or one of those places, later." This was merely to bring a rise; Harry had no idea of completing his education anywhere but at St. Barnabas'.

"Yes, a fine time you'd have there! A fine time you'd have with those kids. Lords, Dukes, and things. Gosh, wouldn't you be sick of them, and oh, but they'd be sick of you!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Harry; "good fellows, lords. Some of them, that is. I might be made one myself, in time, who knows?"

"Yes, you might, mightn't you?" James was laughing now. "Nothing more likely, I should think. Lord Harry, Earl Harry!"

Harry replied in kind, and hostilities ensued.

This was all more or less as it should be, and the mutual attitude was maintained up to the actual moment of sailing—after it, indeed, for when Harry last saw his brother he was standing on the very end of the dock and shouting "Give my love to the earls!" and similar pleasantries to the small head that protruded itself out of the great black moving wall above him; above him now, and now not so much above, but some distance off, and presently not a great black wall at all, but the side of a perfectly articulate ship, way out in the river.

Uncle James and his wife, also their eldest child, Ruth, a girl of nine or thereabouts, all came down to the dock with James to see the travelers off, and as they arrived hours and hours, as Miriam put it, before there was any question of sailing, there was a good deal of standing about in saloons and on decks and talking about nothing in particular, pending the moment when gongs would be rung and people begin to talk jocularly about getting left and having to climb down with the pilot. They all went down to see the staterooms, which adjoined each other and were pronounced satisfactory. Aunt Cecilia said she was glad Harry could have his window open at [51] night without a draught blowing on him, and Aunt Miriam remarked that it was nice to have the ship all to one's self, practically, which was so different from Coming Over, and Uncle James added that when he crossed on the *Persia* in '69 as a mere kid, there were only fifteen people in the first cabin and none of them ever appeared in the dining room after the first day except himself and the captain. After this, conversation rather lagged and there was a general adjournment to the deck. A few passengers, accompanied by their stay-at-home friends and relations, wandered about the halls and stairways, saying that autumn voyages were not always so bad and that you never could tell about the ocean, at any season; which amounted to admitting that they probably would be seasick, though they hoped not. Our friends, the Wimbournes, had little to say on even this all-absorbing topic, for Harry, who had crossed once before, had proved himself a qualmless sailor, and Aunt Miriam had crossed so often that she had got all over that sort of thing, years ago.

Uncle James was presently despatched to see what mischief those boys were getting that child into, and the two ladies wandered into the main lounge and sat down.

"Anything more different than the appearance of a steamship saloon while the ship is in dock from what it looks like when she is careering round at sea can hardly be imagined," murmured Lady Fletcher, pleasantly, with no intention of being comprehended or replied to. Mrs. James' polite and conscientious rejoinder of "What was that, Miriam?"—she had not, of course, been listening—piqued the other lady ever so slightly. It was not real annoyance, merely the rather tired feeling that comes over one when a companion sounds a note out of one's own mood.

"Oh, nothing; merely what a difference it makes, being out on the open sea."

"Yes, doesn't it?... Harry will—"

"Harry will what?"

"Nothing." Mrs. James blushed a little. She was going to say, "Harry will have to be looked out for, or he will go climbing over places where he shouldn't and fall overboard," or something to that effect, but she decided not to, fearing that her sister-in-law would think her fussy. Lady [52] Fletcher accepted the omission, and went on to talk of the next thing that came into her mind, which was Business. There were some Lackawanna shares, it appeared, part of Harry's property, the dividends on which James was going to pay regularly to the London banker for defraying Harry's expenses, and James might have forgotten to do something, or else not to do something, in connection with these. Lady Fletcher wandered on to American railroad stock, making several remarks which, in the absence of brothers, with their satirical smiles, remained unchallenged. Poor Aunt Cecilia, who could neither keep on nor off her sister-in-law's line of thought, unluckily broke in on the Union Pacific with the malapropos remark:

"Miriam, Harry has got to be made to wear woolen stockings in the winter, no matter what he says ..."

Lady Fletcher was amused. "I declare, Cecilia," she said, "you think I am no more capable of taking care of that boy than of ruling a state!"

But Mrs. James did not smile in reply; the remark came too near to describing her actual state of mind.

"Well, Miriam, with four children of one's own, one may be expected to learn a thing or two; it isn't all as easy as it seems. Beside, I am fond of the boy; I suppose I may be excused for that ..."

"I can certainly excuse it; I am fond of him myself." Lady Fletcher was trying to conceal her irritation. Perhaps the suavity of her tone was a little overdone; at any rate, it only served to make Mrs. James' face a little rosier and her voice a little harder as she replied:

"I suppose you think, Miriam, that because I have four children of my own to fuss over, I might be expected to let the others alone, and I daresay you're right; but all that I know is, my heart isn't made that way. I have noticed you during these last weeks, and I am sure that you have felt as I say. But if you think that because I have four of my own to love, and therefore have less to give to those two motherless boys, you are mistaken. The more you have to love, the more you love each one of them, separately—not the less, as you might know if you had children of your own ..."

She stopped, unable to say any more. Her words were much more cruel than she intended them to be; that is, they fell much more cruelly than she meant them to on Lady Fletcher's ears. She [53] had no idea, of course, of the deep though vain yearning for offspring of her own that filled her sister-in-law's bosom; Miriam could not possibly have expressed this, the deepest and most tragic thing in her life, to Cecilia. She was made that way. The more poignantly she felt what she had missed, the more determinedly she concealed every trace of her feeling from the outside world.

So it was now. Every ounce of feeling in her flared for a moment into hate; the hate of the childless woman for the mother. The flame fell after a second or two, of course, and she was able to reply, unsmilingly and coldly:

"I think that Harry will be as well treated by me as you could wish, Cecilia."

Mother love, nothing else, was responsible for all the hardness and bitterness in her tone. But Mrs. James knew nothing of this; she only felt the hardness and bitterness and judged the speaker accordingly.

That was all. The quarrel, if such it could be called, died down as quickly as it had flared up, for it was impossible for these two well-bred ladies to fall out and fight like fishwives. Lady Fletcher's last remark made further discussion of the subject, or any other subject, for the time being, impossible, and after a minute the two rose by tacit consent and went out to find the others.

By the time they found them they were both as calm and self-possessed as usual. When, after a little more standing around, the gongs were rung and the time for farewell actually arrived, Lady Fletcher kissed her nephew and niece with neither more nor less than her usual cordiality, and Mrs. James was exactly as affectionate in her farewells to Harry as might have been expected. The two ladies also embraced each other with no sign of ill-feeling. Lady Fletcher's good-humor was unabated in quantity, if just a little strained in quality.

"Now comes the most amusing part of sailing," she said, "which is, watching other people cry. Don't tell me people don't love to cry better than anything else in the world; if not, why do they come down here? You might think that every one of them was being torn away from his home and country for life!"

"The time when I always want to cry most," contributed Uncle James, "is on landing. Everything [54] is so disagreeable then, after the ease and comfort of the voyage."

That was the general tone of the parting. Even Aunt Cecilia smiled appreciatively and gave no sign of underlying emotion. But as she watched the great steamer glide slowly out of her slip her thoughts ran in such channels as these:

"Miriam is a brilliant woman; she has made a great lady of herself, and is going to be a still greater one. She has money, position, wit, beauty and youth. The greatest people come gladly to her house; small people scheme and plot to get invitations there. Yet what is it all worth, when the greatest blessing of all, the blessing of children, is denied her? And the terrible part of it is,

she is so utterly unconscious of what she has missed; her whole heart is eaten up with those worldly and unsatisfactory things. Poor Miriam, I pity her as it is, but how I could pity her if it were all a little different!"

And the thoughts of Lady Fletcher, as she stood on the deck and watched the shores slip away from her, were somewhat as follows:

"I always thought Cecilia was one of the best of women, until this hour. I don't mind her being a great heiress, I don't mind her never being able to forget that she was a Van Lorn, I don't mind her subconscious attitude of having married beneath her when she married James—whose ancestors were governing colonies when hers were keeping a grocery store on lower Manhattan Island—! But when it comes to her boasting about having children, and flaunting them in my face because I haven't got any, I think I am about justified in saying that she shows a mean and ignoble nature. I have seen all I want to of Cecilia, for some time to come!"

CHAPTER VI

[55]

ARCADIA AND YANKEEDOM

We have given a more or less detailed account of the misunderstanding just described because of the fact that the mental relation it inaugurated was responsible, more than any one other thing, for the separation of Harry and James Wimbourne for a period of nearly seven years.

No one, not even Lady Fletcher herself, had any idea that this would come to pass at the time Harry left the country. One thing led on to another; Harry was put in a preparatory school for two or three terms soon after his arrival in England; he was so happy there and the climate and the school life agreed with him so well that it seemed the most natural thing, a year or so later, to send him up to Harrow with some of his youthful contemporaries, with whom he had formed some close friendships. This was done, be it understood, in accordance with Harry's own wish. There was an atmosphere, a quality, a historical feeling about the English schools that after a short time exerted a strong influence on Harry's adolescent imagination, and made St. Barnabas seem flat and unprofitable in comparison. It would not have been so with many boys, but it was with Harry.

Of course James was a strong magnet in the other direction, but not quite strong enough to pull him against all the forces contending on the English side. There was a distinct heart-interest there; within a year after Harry's arrival in the country, the majority of his friends were English boys. How many vice-Jameses were needed to offset the pull of one James we don't know, but we do know that there were enough. James at first objected strenuously to the change in plans, but Harry countered the objection with the proposal that James should leave St. Barnabas and go up to Harrow with his brother. This was considered on the American side as such an inexplicable attitude that further argument was abandoned and the matter of Harry's schooling given up as a bad job.

[56]

The one valid objection to Harrow was that if Harry was to become an American citizen, the place to educate him was in America. Sir Giles saw this, and gave the objection its full value.

"If I were to consult my own inclination alone," he said to Harry when they were talking the matter over, "I should undoubtedly want to make an Englishman out of you. I think you would make a pretty good Englishman, Harry. You could go to Oxford, and then make your career here. Parliament, you know, or the diplomatic. But there seems to be some feeling against such a course. They want you to be an American. They seem to think that your having been born and bred an American makes some difference. Fancy!"

"Fancy!" echoed Harry, as capable as any one of falling in with the spirit of what Lady Fletcher called Sir Giles' "arising-out-of-that-reply" manner.

"And I won't say they are wholly wrong. The question is, can we make a good American of you over here in England? By the time you have gone through Harrow, won't you be an Englishman of the most confirmed type? Won't you disappoint everybody and slip from there into Oxford, as it were, automatically?"

"I am of the opinion," replied Harry judicially, "that the honorable member's fears on that score are ungrounded. You see, Uncle G.," he went on, dropping his parliamentary manner, "I shall go back to America to go to college, anyway. I couldn't possibly go anywhere except to Yale. We've gone to Yale, you see, for three generations already."

"I thought, when you came over here, that you couldn't possibly go to school anywhere except at St. Barnabas. It seems to me I remember something of that kind."

"This is quite different," said Harry firmly, "quite different. I was brought up in Yale, practically. I'm sure I could never be happy anywhere but there. Besides, I don't want to become an Englishman. That's all rot."

"Well," said his uncle, "if that's the case, we'll risk it. And—" he unconsciously quoted his wife on a former occasion—"there are always the vacations."

But that is just where the honorable member proved himself mistaken. The vacations weren't there, after all. And that was where the mutual misunderstanding between the two ladies came in. [57]

We don't mean to say that this was wholly responsible for the uninterrupted separation. Other things came into it; coincidence, mere fortuitous circumstances. Plans were made, on both sides of the Atlantic, but they were always interrupted, for some reason or another. James and Cecilia would write cheerfully about coming over next summer and bringing young James and one or two of their own children with them. That would be from about October to January. Then, along in the winter, it would appear that their plans for the summer were not settled, after all. Ruth was not well enough to travel this year, or James could not leave his work and Cecilia could not leave him. Or, on the other hand, Aunt Miriam would talk breezily at times of taking Giles over and showing him the country—Giles had never been to America except to marry his wife—and taking Harry too, of course; or she would casually suggest running over with him for a fortnight at Christmas. But Harry's summer vacation was so short, only eight weeks, and there were Visits to be made in September; the kind of visits that implied enormous shooting parties and full particulars in the *Morning Post*. And when Christmas drew near either Giles or Miriam would develop a bad bronchial cough and have to be packed off to Sicily. It is odd how things like that will crop up when two women are fully determined to have nothing to do with each other.

And the boys themselves, could they not go over alone and stay with their relations, at least as soon as they were old enough to make the voyage unaccompanied? James wanted to do something of that kind very much at times; wanted to far more than Harry, who thought that he would have enough of America later on and was meanwhile anxious to get as much out of the continent of Europe as possible. One reason why James never did anything of the sort was that he was afraid; actually a little afraid to go over, unsupported, and find out what they had made of Harry. James' thoughts were apt to run in fixed channels; after he had been a year or two at St. Barnabas, the idea that there was another school in the country, fit for Harry to attend, or in any other country, never entered his head. Harry's decision in favor of Harrow, and particularly Harry's lighthearted suggestion that he should come over and go to Harrow with him, filled his soul with consternation. He, James, leave St. Barnabas for Harrow!... [58]

And to the receptive mind the mere fact that Aunt Cecilia was at this time his closest friend and confidante will explain much. She never made derogatory remarks to him about his Aunt Miriam, nor did she reveal to him, any more than to any one else, the antagonism of feeling that existed between them; but in some subtle, unfelt way she imparted her own attitude to him, which was, in a word, Keep Away. She herself would have said, if any one asked her point blank, that she had Given Harry Up. She never approved of his staying over to be educated; she would have had him back, away from Miriam and Europe (Aunt Cecilia wasted no love on that Continent) inside two months, if she could have had her own way. But her opinion was worth nothing; she was not the boy's guardian!

There was a time, two or three years after his arrival in England, when Harry was consumed by a desire to see his brother again, if only for a few weeks. He told his Uncle Giles about it—he soon fell into the habit of confiding in him sooner than in his aunt—and Uncle Giles sympathized readily with his wish, and promised to run over to America with him the next summer. But when, a few days before the date of their sailing, Harry came home from school, his uncle met him in the library with a grave face and told him that he had been called upon to stand for his party in a by-election early in September, and could not possibly leave the country before that. Afterward there would be no time.

"It is quite a compliment to me," explained Sir Giles; "they want me to go in for them at West Bolton because it is a doubtful and important borough, and they think I can win it over to the Conservatives if any one can. Whereas Blackmoor is sure, no matter who runs. It pleases me in a way, of course, but I hate it for breaking up our trip."

"Oh, dear, I did want to see James," said Harry, leaning his elbows on the mantelpiece, and burying his face in his hands to hide his tears of disappointment.

"Poor boy, it is hard on you," said Sir Giles, and impulsively drew Harry to him and clasped him against his broad bosom. "Do you remember the man in the play, that always voted at his party's call and never thought of thinking for himself at all? That's me, and it makes me feel foolish at times, I can tell you. But if you want so much to see James, why can't he be brought over here?"

"I don't know," said Harry, "I wish he would come, but I'm sure he won't. I don't know what's the matter, but I'm certain that if I am to see him, it will have to be I that makes the journey. I've felt that for some time." [59]

"Well, what about your going over alone? I could see you off at Liverpool, and they would meet you at New York."

But that would not do, either. Harry had counted so much on having his uncle with him and

showing him all the interesting things in America that his uncle's defalcation took all the zest out of the trip for him. So he remained in England and helped Sir Giles win the by-election, which interested him very much.

Lady Fletcher was right when she prophesied that Sir Giles would become fond of Harry. He was just such a boy as Sir Giles would have given his Parliamentary career, his K. C. B., and his whole fortune to have for his own son. The two got on famously together. Sir Giles liked to have Harry with him during all his vacations, and visits during summer holidays—visits, that is, on which Harry could not be included—were almost completely given up, as far as Sir Giles was concerned. They spent blissful days with each other on the golf links, or fishing in a Scotch stream, or exploring the filthiest and most fascinating corners of some Continental town, while Aunt Miriam, gently satirical, though secretly delighted, went her own smart and fashionable way, joining them at intervals.

No one was prouder or more pleased than Harry when—a year or two after he came into the Rumbold property, curiously enough—Sir Giles was given a G. C. B. and a baronetcy by his grateful party; or when, in the Conservative landslide that followed the Boer War, he rose to real live ministerial rank, and had to go through a second election by his borough and became a "Right Honorable." The fly in the ointment was that he saw less of his uncle than formerly. The Fletchers moved from their smart but restricted quarters in Mayfair to an enormous place in Belgrave Square, "so as to be near the House," as Aunt Miriam plausibly but rather unconvincingly put it, and Sir Giles seemed to be always either at the House or the Colonial office —have we said that he became Secretary for the Colonies? However, Harry was treated as though he were a son of the house, and was given *carte blanche* in the matter of asking school friends to stay with him when he came home. This permission also applied to Rumbold Abbey, the [60] estate in Herefordshire that formed the chief part of the aforementioned property. There was no abbey, but there was a late Stuart house of huge proportions; also parks and woods and streams that offered unlimited opportunities for the destruction of innocent fauna, of which Harry and a number of his contemporary Harrovians soon learned to take advantage.

On the whole, Harry led an extremely joyous and entertaining life during the days of his exile. At school he fared no less well than at home; he was never a leader among his fellows, but he was good enough at sports to win their respect and attractive enough in his personality to make many friends. The natural flexibility of his temperament enabled him to fit in fairly easily with the hard-and-fast ways of English school life. He accepted all its conventions and convictions, and never realized, as long as he remained in England, that they were in any way different from those of the schools of his own country. He soon got to dress and to talk like an Englishman, though he never went to extremes in what he loved to irritate his schoolfellows by calling the "English accent." While not exactly handsome, he became, as he reached man's estate, extremely agreeable to look upon. He had a clear pink complexion and dark hair, always a striking and pleasing combination, and he was tall and slim and moved with the stiff gracefulness that is the special characteristic of the British male aristocracy. In general, people liked him, and he liked other people.

His vacations, as has been said, were usually spent with Sir Giles either in the British Isles or on the Continent, but there was one Easter holiday—the second he spent in England—when he was, to quote a phrase of Aunt Miriam's, thrown on the parish. The Fletchers were booked to spend the holiday in a Mediterranean cruise on the yacht of a nautical duke, who was so nautical and so much of a duke that to be asked to cruise with him was not merely an Engagement; it was an Experience. In any case, there could be no question of taking Harry, and Lady Fletcher was in perplexity about what to do with him till Sir Giles suggested, "Why don't we send him to Mildred?" So to Mildred Harry went, and spent an important, if not a wildly exciting, month.

Mildred was Sir Giles' only sister, Lady Archibald Carson. She lived in a little house in the Surrey hills, and though the land that went with it was restricted, it was fertile and its mistress went in [61] as heavily as her means would allow for herbaceous borders and rock gardens and Japanese effects. Her two children, both girls, lived there with her. Her husband, Lord Archibald, was also, in a sense, living with her, but the verdant domesticity of the Surrey hills had no charm for him and he spent practically all of his time in London and other busy haunts of men, or even more busy haunts of women. He was a younger son of a long line of marquises who for their combination of breeding and profligacy probably had no match in the British peerage. Within five years of his marriage he had with the greatest casualness in the world run through his own patrimony and all he could lay his hands on of his wife's. Having bullied and wheedled all that he could out of her he now consistently let her alone and depended for his income on what he could bully and wheedle out of his brother, the eleventh marquis, who was known as a greater rake than Lord Archibald merely because he had greater facilities for rakishness at his command.

Lady Archibald was a tall, light-haired, pale-eyed woman with a tired face and a gentle manner. She had no interests in life beyond her children and her garden, but she had a kind heart and welcomed Harry cordially on his arrival at the little house in Surrey. He had seen her once before at the Fletchers' in London, but he had never seen her children. It was, therefore, with a rather keen sense of curiosity that he walked through the house into the garden, where he was told that Beatrice and Jane were to be found. He saw them across the croquet lawn immediately, and he underwent a mild shock of disappointment on seeing, as he could, at a glance, that they were just as long of limb, just as straight of hair and just as angular in build as most English girls of their age.

The elder girl rose from her seat and sauntered slowly across the lawn, followed by her sister.

She stared coolly at Harry as she walked toward him, but said nothing, even when she was quite near. He met her gaze with perfect self-possession, and suddenly realized that she was waiting to see if he would make the first move. He instantly determined not to do so, it being her place, after all, to speak first; so he stood still and stared calmly back at her for a few seconds, till finally the girl, with a sudden fleeting smile, held out her hand and greeted him. [62]

"You're Harry Wimbourne, aren't you?" she said, cordially enough. "This is my sister Jane. We are very glad to see you; we've heard such a lot about you. Come over here and tell us about America."

In that meeting, in her rather rude little aggression and Harry's reception of it, was started a friendship. She deliberately tested Harry and found that he came up to the mark. He did not fidget, he did not blush, he did not stammer; he simply returned her stare, waiting for her to find her manners. Nothing he could have done would have pleased her better; she decided she would like him, then and there.

Harry on his side found her conversation, even in the first hour of their acquaintance, stimulating and agreeable, and like nothing that he had experienced before in any young girl of thirteen, English or American.

"You needn't be afraid that we shall ask foolish questions about America," Beatrice went on. "We know the Indians don't run wild in the streets of New York, and all that sort of thing. We even know what part of the country New Haven is in; we looked it up on the map. It's quite near New York, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Harry, "you're quite right; it is. But how do you pronounce the name of the state it is in? Can you tell me that?"

"Connecticut," replied the girl, readily enough; but she sounded the second *c*, after the manner of most English people. Harry explained her mistake to her, and she took the correction smiling, quite without pique or resentment.

"Now go on and tell us something about the country. Something really important, you know; something we don't know already."

"Well," said Harry, "there seems to be more room there; that's about the most important difference. Except in the largest cities, and there there seems to be less, and that's why they make the buildings so high. And nearly all the houses, except in the middle of the towns, are made of wood."

He went on at some length, the two girls listening attentively.

At last Beatrice interrupted with the question:

"Which do you think you like best, on the whole, England or America?" [63]

"Oh, America of course; but only because it's my own country. I can imagine liking England best, if one happened to be born here. Some things are nicer here, and some are nicer there."

"What do you like best in England?"

"Well, the old things. Cathedrals and castles. Also afternoon tea, which we don't bother about much over there. And the gardens."

"And what do you like best about America?"

"Trolley cars, and soda water fountains, and such things. And the climate. And the way people act. There's so much less—less formality over there; less bothering about little things, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know exactly. Silly little things, that don't matter one way or the other. I know I should like that about America."

"I think you would like America, anyway," said Harry, looking judicially at his interlocutrix. "You seem to be a free and easy sort of person."

"Well, I wouldn't like trolley cars," interrupted Jane with firmness, "They go too fast. I don't like to go fast. It musses my hair, and the dust gets into my eyes."

"Shut up, silly," said her sister; "you've never ridden in one."

"No, but I know what it is to go fast, and I don't like it. I don't think I should care much for America."

"Well," said Harry, laughing, "we won't make you go there. Or if you do go there, we won't make you ride on the trolley cars. You can ride in hacks all the time; they go slow enough for any one."

Beatrice's first impression of Harry underwent no disillusionment as the days went on. She seemed to find in him a companion after her own heart. He had plenty of ideas of his own, and he was entirely willing to act on hers; he never affected to despise them as a girl's notions, nor did he ever object to her sharing in his amusements because of her misfortune of sex. They climbed trees and crawled through the underbrush on their stomachs together with as much zest and *abandon* as if there were no such things as frocks and stockings in the world. Harry had never known this kind of companionship with a girl before, and was delighted with her.

"Oh, dash, there goes my garter," she exclaimed one day as they were walking through a country lane together. She had got rather to make a point of such matters, to over-emphasize their possible embarrassment, simply in order to see how beautifully he acted. [64]

"Well, tie it up or something," said he, sauntering on a few steps.

Beatrice did what was necessary and ran on and caught up with him.

"I never could see why a garter shouldn't be as freely talked about as any other article of clothing," said she. "All that sort of modesty is such rot; people have legs, and legs have to have stockings to cover them, and stockings have to have garters to keep them up. And women have legs, just as much as men; there's not a doubt of that. Perhaps that's news to you, though?"

"No, I knew that."

"You really, honestly aren't shocked at what I'm saying?" asked the girl, scanning his face intently.

"Not in the least; why should I be? You're not telling me anything shocking."

Beatrice drew a long breath of pure enjoyment.

"It *is* a comfort to meet a person like you once in a while," she said. "Tell me, are women such fools about their legs in America as they are here?"

"Yes, quite," said Harry fervently; "if not actually worse. That's one thing that we don't seem to have learned any better about. It always makes me tired."

The two saw each other, infrequently but fairly regularly, throughout Harry's stay in England. They never corresponded, both admitting that they were bad letter writers, but when they met they were always able to pick up their friendship exactly where they had left it.

When Sir Giles came into the Rumbold property there was naturally a corresponding change in the circumstances of Lady Archibald and her daughters. Every penny of the property, which came to Sir Giles through the death of a maternal uncle, was entailed and inalienable from his possession; but he was able to alleviate her condition by giving her a large yearly allowance out of his income; and it was pointed out that such an arrangement would have the advantage of keeping the money safe from her husband. Lady Archibald took a small house in South Street and [65] spent the winter and spring months there, and in the due course of time Beatrice was brought out into society.

Her undoubted beauty, which was of the dark and haughty type, and her excellent dancing were enough to make her a social success. This was a tremendous comfort to her mother, who was never obliged to worry about her at dances or scheme for invitations at desirable houses, and could confine her maternal anxiety to merely hoping that Beatrice would make a better match than she herself had. But Beatrice hated the whole proceeding, heartily and unaffectedly.

"The dancing men all bore me," she once said to Harry; "and I bore all the others. Almost all men are dull; at any rate, they appear at their dullest and worst in society, and the few interesting ones don't want to be bored by a chit like me, and I can't say that I blame them. As for the women—when they get into London society they cease to be women at all; they become fiends incarnate."

"I hope that success is not embittering your youthful heart," said Harry, smiling.

"Not success, but just being in what they are pleased to call society; that will make me bitter if I have much more of it. I don't know why it is; people are nice naturally—most of them, that is. Of course some people are born brutes, like—well, like my father; but most of them are nice at bottom. But somehow London makes beasts of them all. If I am ever Prime Minister—"

"Which, after all, is improbable."

"Well, if I am, the first thing I shall do will be simply to abolish London. We shall have just the same population, but it will be all rural. We shall all live in Arcadian simplicity, and while we may not be perfect, at least we shan't all be the scheming, selfish, merciless brutes that London makes of us."

"And pending the passage of that bill you want to live in Arcadian simplicity alone. I see. I quite like the idea myself. I should love to found Arcadia with you somewhere in rural England, when I have time. Where shall we have it? I should say Devonshire, shouldn't you? Clotted cream, you know, and country lanes. It will be like Marie Antoinette's hamlet at Versailles, only not nearly so silly. We will pay other people to milk the cows and make the butter, and do all the dirty work, [66] and just sit around ourselves and be perfectly charming. No one will be admitted without passing a rigid examination in character, and that will be the only necessary qualification. Arcadia, Limited, we'll call it; it sounds like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, doesn't it?"

"Whom shall we have in it? Uncle Giles—he could pass all right, couldn't he?"

"Oh, Heavens, yes, *Magna cum*. And Aunt Miriam—perhaps. She would need some cramming before she went up. What about your mother?"

"I'm afraid Mama could never get in," answered Beatrice, smiling rather sadly. "I've talked to her

before about such things and she never answers, but just looks at me with that sad tolerant smile of hers that seems to say 'Arcadian simplicity is all very well, but you'll find the best way to get it is through a husband with ten thousand a year or so.' And the dreadful part of it is that she's right, to a certain extent."

Although in matter of years Beatrice was a few weeks Harry's junior, she was at this time twice as old as he, for all practical purposes. She was an honored guest at Lady Fletcher's big dinners —almost the only ones that did not bore her to death—into which Harry would be smuggled at the last minute to fill up a vacant place, or else calmly omitted from altogether. Nevertheless, he was her greatest comfort all through her first season; nothing but his jovial optimism, which saw the worst but found it no more than amusing, kept the iron from entering into her soul. Such an occasional conversation as the above-quoted would put sanity into her world and fortify her for days against the commonplaces of dancing men and the jealous looks of less attractive maidens. And how she would pine for him during the intervals! How she would long for the arrival of the next vacation or mid-term exeat that would bring him up to town! There was a freshness, a wholesomeness about his way of looking at things that was soothing to her as a breath of country air.

It is not surprising, then, that Beatrice began to dread the nearing date of Harry's departure for America and college more than any one else, even Sir Giles himself, to whom Harry had become by this time almost as dear as a son. Poor Uncle Giles, though he wanted Harry to stay in the [67] country more than any other earthly thing, made it a point of honor never to dissuade the boy from his original project of returning to his own country when he was ready to go to college and becoming an American again. Beatrice, however, was bound by no such restriction and complained bitterly of his desertion.

"What is the point of your going back to some silly American college?" she would ask. "It isn't as if you didn't have the best universities in the world right here, under your very nose. Why aren't Oxford and Cambridge good enough for you, I should like to know? They were good enough for Milton and Thackeray and Isaac Newton and a few other more or less prominent people."

"Very true," replied Harry with perfect good-humor. "The only thing is, those people didn't happen to be Yankees. I am, you know. It's been a habit in our family for two hundred years or more, and it doesn't do to break up old family traditions. Must be a Yankee, whatever happens."

"But that doesn't mean that you have to go to a Yankee college, necessarily," argued Beatrice. "You won't learn nearly as much there as you would at Oxford. You are as far along in your studies now as the second year men at Yale; I heard Uncle Giles say so himself."

"Yes, I know, that's very true. I can't argue about it; you've got all the arguments on your side. I just know that there's only one possible place on earth where I can go to college, and that is Yale. Better not talk about it any more, if it makes you peevish."

"Well, we won't. I'll tell you one thing, though; we have got to start a correspondence. You can spare a few ideas from your Yankees, I hope. I shall simply die on the wooden pavements if I can't at least hear from you occasionally."

"Certainly; I should like nothing better. I'll even go so far as to be the first to write, if you like, and that's a perfectly tremendous concession, as I'm the worst letter writer that ever lived."

So there the matter was left. Harry left Harrow for good at Easter, and spent one last golden month in London, seeing Beatrice almost every day and being an unalloyed joy and comfort to his uncle and aunt. In May he took a short trip through Spain with Sir Giles; it was a country neither [68] of them had visited before, and they had planned a trip there for years. Uncle Giles worked double time for a fortnight in order to be able to leave with a clear conscience, but he found the reward well worth the labor.

They parted at Madrid, the plan being for Harry to sail for New York from Gibraltar, arriving in time to take his final examinations in New Haven in June.

There were tears in Sir Giles' kind blue eyes as he bade Harry good-by, and Harry saw them and knew why they were there. Suddenly he felt his own fill.

"I don't want to go very much, Uncle Giles," he said in a low voice. "Now that it comes to the point, I don't like it much. You've all been so wonderful to me.... It's not a question of what I want to do, though. It's just what's got to be done."

"Yes," said his uncle; "I know. You're quite right about it. It's the only thing to do. But perhaps you won't mind my saying I'm glad, in a way, that you find it hard?"

"Thank you; that helps, too. There's more that comes into it, though; more than what we have talked over together so often.... I mean—"

"James?"

"Yes," said Harry, "that's it."

They clasped hands again and went their separate ways; Sir Giles to the train that was to take him north to Paris and home, and Harry to the train that was to take him south to Gibraltar and home.

CHAPTER VII

[69]

OMNE IGNOTUM

"Bless us, how the boy has grown!" cried Aunt Cecilia, and kissed him all over again.

"You'll find your aunt very much changed, I expect," said Uncle James, clasping his hand and smiling, quite in his old style.

"Not a particle, thank Heaven," said Harry, understanding perfectly; "nor you either. Nor the U. S. Customs service, either. Can't I just make them a present of all my luggage and run along? Except that I have some Toledo work and stuff for you and Aunt C."

"Hush, don't say that out loud; they'll charge you extra duty for it," replied Uncle James.

"Oh, was there e'er a Yankee breast which did not feel the moral beauty of making worldly interest subordinate to sense of duty?" misquoted Harry. "Bother the duty. Tell me how you all are. How are Ruth and Oswald and Lucy and Jack and Timothy and the baby? All about eight feet high, I suppose? And James, where is he?"

"James is in New Haven," said Aunt Cecilia; "he has an examination early to-morrow morning and could not get away till after that. He'll be here to-morrow in time for lunch."

It was all very easy and cordial. Harry was in high spirits over returning to his native land, and was genuinely pleased that both his uncle and aunt should take the trouble to come down to the dock to meet his steamer. They, on their side, were most agreeably impressed by him; agreeably disappointed with him, we almost said. It was a relief, as well as a pleasure, to find him, so unchanged and unaffected at heart, though he looked and talked like an Englishman. Mrs. James sat on a packing case and watched him with unadulterated pleasure as he tended to the examination of his luggage. The art of his Bond Street tailor served to accentuate rather than hide the slim, sinewy, businesslike beauty of his limbs, brought into play as he bent down to lift a trunk tray or tug at a strap. Though all that was nothing, of course, to the joy of the discovery [70] that he was unspoiled in character.

"It's turned out all right," she thought and smiled to herself. "I don't know whether it's chiefly to his credit or theirs, but it has come out all right, anyway. I wish the boat had not arrived in the evening, so that I could have brought the children to see him, the first thing. They'll have plenty of time, though; and how they'll love him! And how pleased James will be!"

She meant young James, who was now putting the finishing touches on his sophomore year at Yale. James was never very far from her mind when her thoughts ran to her own children—which was most of the time. She always thought of him now more as her own eldest child than as her husband's nephew.

And Harry's thoughts, beneath all his chatter to his uncle and aunt and his transactions with the Customs officials, were also on James. All the way across the Atlantic, on the long dull voyage from Gibraltar—there are not many passengers traveling westward in June—they continually ran on that one subject—James, James, James. What would he be like now? would he be the old James, or changed, somehow—strangely, disappointingly, unacceptably? Harry hoped not; hoped it with his whole heart, in which there was nothing but humility and affection when he thought of what his brother had been to him in the old days. He was so little able to speak what he felt about James that he was embarrassed and over-silent about him. That was why he was so debonair with the Customs officials; that was why he asked after each of his young cousins by name before he mentioned his brother.

"Every single article of clothing I own was bought abroad," he was telling the Customs inspector; "so you can just go ahead and do your worst—That suit cost eight guineas—yes, I know it's too much; I told them so at the time, but they wouldn't listen.... No, that thing with the feathers is not a woman's hat; it's a Tyrolean hat, that the men climb mountains in. I'm going to give it to my Uncle James—that man there sitting on the woman's trunk that she wants to get into—to wear to his office, which is on the thirty-fifth floor.... Yes, I have worn it myself, but don't tell him.... That gold cigarette case is for my brother, who smokes when he's not playing football, and it cost six [71] pound fifteen, which is dirt cheap, I say. I'd keep it myself, except that it's so cheap that I can't afford not to give it away...."

And James, what was he feeling, if he was feeling anything, in regard to his brother at this time, and why have we said nothing about him during these seven years? The truth is, his life had been chiefly distinguished by the blessed uneventfulness that comes of outward happiness and a good understanding with the world. If you can draw a mental picture for yourself of a boy of perfect physique and untarnished mind, gradually attaining the physical and mental development of manhood in comradeship with a hundred or more others in a like position, dedicating the use of each gift as it came to him not to his own aggrandizement but to the glory of God and the service of other men, recognizing his superiority in certain fields with the same humility with which he beheld his inferiority in others, equally willing to give help where he was strong and take help where he was weak, and possessed by the fundamental conviction that other people were just as

good as he if not a little bit better, you may get some idea of James during the years of his brother's absence. He was not brilliant, he was not handsome, but there was a splendid normality about him, both in appearance and in character, that inspired confidence and affection among his teachers, his relatives, and friends of his own age.

"He has a good mind and body, and there is no nonsense about him," was the substance of the opinion of the first-named group. "He is a good boy and a nice boy, and I'm glad he is one of the family," said the second. "He is captain of the football team," said the third group, and to one who knows anything about American boarding schools this last will tell everything.

If any one is inclined to blame James for his allowing the Atlantic Ocean to separate him and brother so completely for those seven years it may interest him to know that James was quite of the same opinion. As he sat in the train that took him from New Haven to New York on the morning after Harry's landing, he wondered how the long separation could have come about. On the whole, after a careful review of the business, he was inclined to blame himself; not over-severely, but definitely, nevertheless. He had been timid, indifferent and, above all, lazy. Looking back over his attitude of the last seven years, he was inclined to be scornful and a little amused. [72] What had he to fear about Harry? Weren't Uncle Giles and Aunt Miriam good people, who could be trusted to bring him up right? What was there to fear, even, in his becoming an Englishman? And anyway, even if he had feared the worst, ought he not to have taken the trouble to go over and see with his own eyes? It had probably turned out all right, for Harry had returned at last with every intention of living in America for the rest of his life; but if he had been spoiled or altered for the worse in any way, he, James, must take his share of the blame for it. There could be no doubt of that.

The root of the matter was, we suspect, that James had been somewhat lacking in initiative. Thoroughly normal people customarily are; it is at once their strength and their weakness. A splendid normality, such as we have described James as enjoying, is a serviceable thing in life, but it is apt to degenerate, if not sufficiently stimulated by misfortune and opposition, into commonplaceness and sterile conservatism. But let us do James justice; he at least saw his fault and blamed himself for it.

He was devoured with curiosity to see what Harry was like; almost as much so as Harry in regard to him. James had plenty of friends, but only one brother, when all was said and done. As the train rushed nearer the consummation of his curiosity, he felt the old feeling of timidity and suspicion sweep over him; but that, as he shook it off, only increased his curiosity; gave it edge. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*; every one knows that, even if he never heard of Virgil, and it is especially true of such natures as James'. Each little wave of fear and suspicion that swept over him made him a little more restless and unhappy, though he smiled at himself for feeling so. It was a relief when the train pulled into the Grand Central Station and he could grip his bag and start on the short walk to the house of his uncle, which was situated in the refined and expensive confines of Murray Hill.

Any one who knows anything about the world will be able to guess pretty closely the nature of the brothers' meeting. Harry was sitting in the front room upstairs when his cousin Ruth, who was at the window, announced: "Here he comes, Harry." In a perfect frenzy of pleasure, embarrassment, affection and curiosity, the boy made a dash for the stairs and greeted his [73] brother at the front door with the demonstrative words:

"Hello, James!"

To which James, who for the last few minutes had been obliged to restrain himself from throwing his bag into the gutter and breaking into a run, replied:

"Well, Harry, how's the boy?"

Then they walked upstairs together and began talking rather fast about the voyage, examinations, Aunt Miriam, Spain, the Yale baseball team,—anything but what was in their hearts.

"Well, you came back without being made an earl, after all, it seems," said James a little later at lunch.

"No, but I came back a sub-freshman, which is the next best thing. There's no telling what I might have been if I'd stayed, though. Everybody was so frightfully keen on my staying over there and going to Oxford, especially Beatrice—Beatrice Carson, you know; I've written you about her? She would have made me an earl in a minute, if she could, to make me stay. None of it did any good, though. I would be a Yankee."

"How do you think you'll like being a Yankee again?" asked James. "You certainly don't look much like one at present."

"No? That'll come, I dare say. My heart's in the right place. Though that doesn't prevent the Americans from seeming strange, at first. Did you notice that woman in the chemist's shop this morning, Aunt C.? She was chewing gum all the time she waited on you, and she never said 'Thank you' or 'Ma'am' once."

"They all are that way," said Aunt Cecilia with a gentle sigh. "I don't expect anything else."

"Oh, the bloated aristocrat!" said James. "It is an earl, after all. Only don't blame the poor girl for

not calling you 'My lord.' She couldn't be expected to know; they don't have many of them over here."

"I don't mean that she was rude," said Harry; "she didn't give that impression, somehow. It was just the way she did things; a sort of casualness. The Americans are a funny people!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned James; "hear the prominent foreigner talk. What do you think of America, my lord? How do you like New York? What do you think of our climate? To think that that's the thing I used to spank when he was naughty!" [74]

"That's all very well," retorted Harry, with warmth; "wait till you get out of this blessed country for a while yourself, and see how other people act, and then perhaps you'll see that there are differences. You may even be able to see that they are not all in our favor. And as for smacking—spanking, if you feel inclined to renew that quaint old custom now, I'm ready for you. Any time you want!"

"Oh, very well," growled James; "after lunch."

"Yes, and in Central Park, please," observed Uncle James; "not in the house; I can't afford it. You are right, though, Harry, about the Americans being a funny people. If you enter the legal profession, or if you go into public life, you'll be more and more struck by the fact as time goes on. But there's one thing to remember; it doesn't do to tell them so. They can't bear to hear it. We have proof of that immediately before us; you announce your opinion here, *coram familia*, as it were, and what is the result? Contempt and loathing on the part of the great American public, represented by James, and a duel to follow—in Central Park, remember; in Central Park."

"I wonder if that milk of magnesia has come yet," murmured Aunt Cecilia, who had not gone beyond the beginning of the conversation; and further hostilities—friendly ones, even—were forgotten in the general laugh that followed.

Of course James, who conformed to the American type of college boy as closely as any one could and retain his individuality, was greatly struck during the first few days by his brother's Anglicisms, which showed themselves at that time rather in his appearance and speech than in his point of view. For example, James was indulging one day in a lengthy plaint against the hardness of one of his instructors, as the result of which he would probably, to use his own expression, "drop an hour"; that is, lose an hour's work for the year and be put back one-sixtieth of his work for his degree. Harry listened attentively enough to the narrative, but his sole comment when James finished was the single word "Tiresome." The word was ill chosen for James' peace of mind. If such expressions were the result of English training he could not but think the less of English training. [75]

The summer passed off pleasantly enough, the boys living with their uncle and aunt at Bar Harbor. Harry saw much less of James than he had expected, for he was away much of the time, visiting classmates and school friends whom Harry did not know. He was obliged, too, to return to Yale soon after the first of September for football practise. Harry spent most of his time playing fairly happily about with his young cousins and other people of his own age. The most interesting feature of the summer to him was a visit to Aunt Selina at her summer place in Vermont. This was the ancestral, ante-Revolution farm of the Wimbournes, much rebuilt and enlarged and presented to Miss Wimbourne for her life on the death of her late father. Here Aunt Selina was wont to gather during the summer months a heterogeneous crowd of friends, and it was a source of wonder and admiration to the other members of the family that she was able to attract such a large number of what she referred to as "amusing people." With these Harry was quite at ease, his English training having accustomed him to associating with older and cleverer people than himself, and it gave Aunt Selina quite a thrill of pleasure to see a boy of eighteen partaking in the staid amusements of his elders and meeting them on their own ground, and to think that the boy was her own nephew. She became at length so much taken with him that a bright idea occurred to her.

"Harry," said she one day; "what do you think of my going to live in New Haven?"

"I think it's a fine idea," said Harry. "But where?"

"Why, in the old house, of course. That is, if you and James, or your guardians, are willing to rent it to me. It has stood empty ever since you left it, and I presume there is no immediate prospect of your occupying it yourselves for some time."

"As half owner of the establishment," said Harry courteously, "I offer you the full use of it for as long a time as you wish, free of charge."

"That's sweet of you, but it's not business. I should insist on paying rent."

"Well, Aunt Selina, you're used to having your own way, so I presume you will. But what makes you want to come and live in New Haven, all of a sudden? I thought you could never bear the place."

"I had a great many friends there in the old days, and should like to see something of them again. Besides, it will be nice to be in the same town with you and James." [76]

Like most people, she put the real reason last. If Harry failed to realize from its position that it was the real reason, he learned it unmistakably enough from what followed. The conversation

wandered to a discussion of changes in the town since Aunt Selina had lived there. She supposed that everybody had dinner at night there now, though she remembered the time when it was impossible to reconcile servants to the custom. She herself would have it late, except on Sundays. Sunday never did seem like Sunday to her without dinner in the middle of the day and supper in the evening.

"Well," said Harry, "I hope you'll ask James and me to a Sunday dinner occasionally."

"Good gracious, yes! Every Sunday, and supper too. That will be a regular custom; and I want you both to feel at liberty to come up for a meal at any time. Any time, without even telephoning beforehand. And bring your friends; there will always be enough to eat. How stupid of me to forget that. Of course I want you, as often as you'll come."

"We accept," said Harry, "unconditionally. We shall be glad enough to have a decent meal once in a while, after the food we shall get in college. James says he even gets tired of the training table, which is a great admission, for he loves everything connected with football. Even when we were kids, I remember, he used to love to drink barley water with his meals; nasty stuff—they used to make me drink it in England."

Harry rattled on purposely about the first thing that came into his head, for he noticed his aunt seemed slightly embarrassed. She was going to New Haven to take care of James and himself, and naturally she did not care to divulge the real reason to him. Well, she was a dear old thing, certainly; he remembered how she had acted on his mother's death. He was suddenly sorry that he had seen nothing of her for the last seven years, and sorry that he had written her so irregularly during his absence. It was pleasant to think that he would have a chance to make up for it in the future.

CHAPTER VIII

[77]

LIVY AND VICTOR HUGO

On a certain Wednesday evening late in September Harry stood on a certain street-corner in the city of New Haven. Surging about him were a thousand or so youths of his own age or a little older, most of them engaged in making noises expressive of the pleasures of reunion. It was a merry and turbulent scene. Tall, important-looking seniors, wearing white sweaters with large blue Y's on their chests, moved through the crowd with a worried air, apparently trying to organize something that had no idea whatever of being organized. They were ineffectual, but oh, so splendid! Harry, who had almost no friends of his own there to talk to, watched them with undisguised admiration. He reflected that James would be one of their number a year hence, and wondered if by any chance he himself would be one three years from now.

Just as he dismissed the probability as negligible, a sort of order became felt among those who stood immediately about him. Men stopped talking and appeared to be listening to something which Harry could not hear. Then they all began shouting a strange, unmeaning succession of syllables in concert; Harry recognized this as a cheer and lustily joined in with it. At the end came a number; repeated three times; a number which no one present had ever before heard bellowed forth from three or four hundred brazen young throats; a number that had a strange and unfamiliar sound, even to those who shouted it, and caused the upperclassmen to break into a derisive jeer.

A new class had officially started its career, and Harry was part of it. No one flushed more hotly than he at the jeer of the upperclassmen; no one jeered back with greater spirit when the sophomores cheered for their own class. No one took part more joyfully in the long and varied program of events that filled out the rest of the evening. The parade through the streets of the town was to him a joyous bacchanal, and the wrestling matches on the Campus a splendid orgy. [78] After these were over even more enjoyable things happened, for James, with two or three fellow-juniors—magnificent, Olympian beings!—took him in tow and escorted him safe and unmolested through the turbulent region of York Street, where freshmen, who had nothing save honor to fight for, were pressed into organized hostility against sophomores, who didn't even have that.

"Well, what did you think of it all?" asked James later.

"Oh, ripping," said Harry, "I never thought it would be anything like this. We never really saw anything of the real life of the college when we lived in town here, did we?"

"Not much. It all seems pretty strange to you now, I suppose, but you'll soon get onto the ropes and feel at home. What sort of a schedule did you get?"

"Oh, fairly rotten. They all seem to be eight-thirties. Here, you can see," producing a paper.

"That's not so bad," pronounced James, approvingly. "Nothing on Wednesday or Saturday afternoons, so that you can get to ball games and things, and nothing any afternoon till five, so that you'll have plenty of time for track work."

"Oh, yes, track work; I'd forgotten that."

"Well, you don't want to forget it; you want to go right out and hire a locker and get to work, to-morrow, if possible. If track's the best thing for you to go out for, that is, and I guess it is, all right. You're too light for football, and you don't know anything about baseball, and you haven't got a crew build."

"What is a crew build?" asked Harry.

"Well, if you put it that way, I don't know that I can tell you. It's a mysterious thing; I've been trying to find out myself for several years. I don't see why I haven't got a fairly good crew build myself, but they always tell me I haven't, when I suggest going out for it. However, you haven't got one, that's easy. So you'll just have to stick to track."

"Yes," said Harry soberly, "I suppose I shall."

Harry was what is commonly known as a good mixer, and made acquaintances among his classmates rapidly enough to suit even the nice taste of James. In general, however, they remained acquaintances and never became friends. It was not that they were not nice, most of them; "ripping fellows, all of them," Harry described them to his brother. They were, in fact, too [79] nice; those who lived near him were all of the best preparatory school type, the kind that invariably leads the class during freshman year. Harry found them conventional, quite as much so as the English type, though in a different way. Intercourse with them failed to give him stimulus; he found himself always more or less talking down to them, and intellectual stimulus was what Harry needed above all things among his friends.

There were exceptions, however. The most brilliant was that of Jack Trotwood, probably the last man with whom Harry might have been expected to strike up a friendship. Harry first saw him in a Latin class, one of the first of the term. Trotwood sat in the same row as Harry, two or three seats away from him—the acquaintance was not even of the type that alphabetical propinquity is responsible for. On the day in question he dropped a fountain pen, and spent some moments in burrowing ineffectually under seats in search of it. The fugitive chattel at length turned up directly under Harry's chair, and as he leaned over to restore it to its owner he noticed something about his face that appealed to him at once. He never could tell what it was; the flush that bending over had brought to it, the embarrassment, the dismay at having made a fuss in public, the smile, containing just the right mixture of cordiality and formality, yet undeniably sweet withal, with which he thanked him; perhaps it was any or all of these things. At any rate after class, on his way back toward York Street, Harry found himself hurrying to catch up with Trotwood, who was walking a few paces ahead of him. Trotwood turned as he came up, and smiled again.

"That was sort of a stinking lesson, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Harry, "wasn't it, though?"

"I should say! Boned for two hours on it last night before I could make anything out of it. Gee, but this Livy's dull, isn't he?"

"Yes, awfully dull. Do you use a trot?"

"No, I haven't yet, but I'm going to, after last night. I can't put so much time on one lesson. Do you?"

"Well, yes. That is, I shall. Do you like Latin?"

"Lord, no, not when it's like this stuff. I only took it because it comes easier to me than most other things. Do you like it?" [80]

"Not much. Not much good at it, either.... Well, I live here—"

"Oh, do you? so do I. Where are you?"

"Fourth floor, back. Come up, some time."

"Thanks, I will. So long."

"So long."

So started a friendship, one of the sincerest and firmest that either ever enjoyed. And yet, as Harry pointed out afterward, it was founded on insincerity and falsehood. Harry's whole part in this first conversation was no more than a tissue of lies. He was extremely fond of Latin, and was so good at it that his entire preparation for his recitations consisted in looking up a few unfamiliar words beforehand; he could always fit the sentences together when he was called upon to construe. It had never occurred to him to use a translation. He was rather fond of Livy, whose flowing and complicated style appealed to him. He gave a false answer to every question merely for the pleasure of agreeing with Trotwood, whom he liked already without knowing why.

The two got into the habit of doing their Latin lesson together regularly, three times a week.

Trotwood did not buy a trot, after all; he found Harry quite as good.

"My, but you're a shark," he said in undisguised admiration one evening, as Harry brought order and clarity into a difficult passage. "You certainly didn't learn to do that in this country. You're English, anyway, aren't you?"

"Lord, no; Yankee. Born in New Haven. I have lived over there for some years, though."

"Go to school there?"

"Yes; Harrow."

"Gosh." Trotwood stared at him for a few moments in dazed silence. He stood on the brink of a world that he knew no more of than Balboa did of the Pacific. "What sort of a place is it?"

"Oh, wonderful."

"You played cricket, I suppose, and—and those things?"

"Rugby football, yes," said Harry, smiling.

"And you liked it, didn't you?"

"Oh, rather! Only—"

"Only what?"

"Oh, nothing. I did like it. It's a wonderful place." [81]

"Only it's different from what you're doing now?" said Trotwood, with a burst of insight. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"I see; I see," said Trotwood, and then he kept still. There was something so comforting, so sympathetic and understanding about his silence that Harry was inspired to confide in him.

"The truth is, I'm beginning to doubt whether I ought to have gone to an English school. I'm not sure but what it would have been better for me to go to school and college in the same country, whatever it was. You see, after spending five or six years in learning to value certain things, it's rather a wrench to come here and find the values all distorted."

"I see," said Trotwood again. He wasn't sure that he did see at all, but he felt that unquestioning sympathy was his cue.

"It's not merely the different kinds of games," went on Harry; "it's not that they make so much more of athletics, or rather of the public side of athletics, than they do over there, though that comes into it a lot. It's what people do and think about and talk about and—and are, in short. Last year, I remember, the men I went with, the sixth formers, used to read the papers a lot and follow the debates in Parliament and talk about such things a lot, even among themselves. Some of them used to write Greek and Latin verse just for fun—wonderfully good, too, some of it. And here—well, how many men in our class, how many men in the whole college do you suppose could write ten lines of Greek or Latin verse without making a mess of it?"

"Not too many, I'm afraid."

"Then there's debating. We used to have pretty good house debates ourselves at school. I used to look forward to them, I remember, from month to month, as one of the most interesting things that happened. But of course they were nothing to a thing like the Oxford Union. You've heard of that, I suppose? Lord, I wish some of these people here could see one of those meetings! It would be an eye-opener."

"But we have debating here," said Trotwood, doubtfully.

"Yes, but what kind of debating? A few grinds getting up and talking about the Interstate Commerce Commission, or some rotten, technical, dry subject, because they think it will give them good practise in public speaking. Everybody hates it like poison, and they're right, too, for it's all dull, dead; started on the wrong idea. The best men in the class won't go out for it. I wouldn't myself, now that I know what it's like; but I thought of doing it in the summer, and spoke to my brother about it. He didn't say anything against it, because he didn't dare; people are always writing to the *News* and saying what a fine thing debating is. But he let me see pretty clearly that he didn't think much of debating and didn't want me to go out for it, because it didn't get you anywhere in college; *simply wasn't done*. He'd rather see me take a third place in one track meet and never do another thing in college than to be the captain of the debating team." [82]

"Did he tell you that?"

"Lord, no; he wouldn't dare. No one would; technically, debating is supposed to be a fine thing. But it doesn't get you anywhere near a senior society, so there's an end to it.... But perhaps I'd better not get started on that."

"No, I should think not! Heavens, a junior fraternity is about the height of my ambition!"

Harry smiled at his friend and went on: "You see it's this way, Trotty; you are a sensible person,

and look at them in the right way. You play about with your mandolin clubs and various other little things because you like them, like a good dutiful boy. When the time comes, you'll be very glad to take a senior society, if it's offered you. If it isn't, you won't care."

"But I will, though. I don't believe I have much chance, but I know I shall be disappointed if I don't make one, just the same."

"For about twenty-four hours, yes. Don't interrupt me, Trotty; this isn't flattery, it's argument. You are a sensible person, as I have said; and don't let such considerations worry you. There are lots of other sensible persons in the class, too. Josh Traill, for one, and Manxome, and John Fisher and Shep McGee; they're all sensible people, and don't worry or think much about senior societies, though I suppose they all have a good chance to make one eventually, if any one has. But that isn't true of all the class. There is a large and important section of it that now, in the first [83] term of freshman year, is thinking and talking nothing except about who will go to a junior fraternity next year, or a senior society two years hence. It's the one subject of conversation that seriously competes with professional baseball and college football, which is all you hear otherwise."

"Oh, no, Harry, you're hard on us. There's automobiles. And guns. And theaters. But why should you mind if a lot of geesers do talk about societies?"

"Well, it makes me sick, that's all. And when I say sick, I use the word in its British, or most vivid sense. It makes me sick, after England and after Harrow, to see a lot of what ought to be the best fellows in the class spending their waking hours in wondering about such rubbishy things.—Do you happen to be aware of an ornament of our class called Junius Neville LeGrand?"

"Golden locks and blue eyes? Yes, I know him. Acts rather well, they say."

"Yes; he's the kind I mean. At any rate, I seem to be in his good graces just at present. All sweetness and light; can't be too particular about telling me how good I am at French, and that sort of thing. In fact, he went so far to-day as to suggest that we might go over the French lesson together, and he's coming here presently to do it."

"But what's the matter with poor Junius? I thought he was as decent as such a painfully good-looking person could be."

"I'm not denying he's attractive. But if you'll stay for the French lesson I think I can show you what I'm talking about."

"But I don't take French."

"No, dear boy; you won't have to know French to see what I'm going to show you. Your rôle will consist of lying on the window-seat and being occupied with day before yesterday's *News*. Now listen; I have an idea that the beautiful Junius has recently made the discovery that I am the brother of James Wimbourne, of the junior class, pillar of the Yale football team and more than likely to go Bones, or anything he wants, next May. Hence this access of cordiality to poor little me, the obscure Freshman. I'm going to find out that, first."

"But there's no need of finding out that," said Trotwood naïvely. "I told him so myself, the other day." [84]

"A week ago Tuesday, to be exact," said Harry reflectively. "I remember he slobbered all over me at the French class Wednesday, though he didn't have anything to say to me on Monday. Wasn't that about it?"

"Yes," admitted Trotwood.

"Well, it proves what I was saying, but I'm sorry you did it, for it spoils my little game with the beautiful Junius. The French lesson will be a dull one, I fear. I rather think I shall have to end by being rude to Junius, to keep him. from making an infernal little pest of himself."

But the French lesson was not as dull as Harry feared, for the ingratiating Junius played into Harry's hands and incidentally proved himself not so good an actor off the stage as on. His behavior for the first ten or fifteen minutes was all that could be desired; he sat in Harry's Morris chair and waved a cigarette and put his host and Trotwood at their ease with the grace and charm of a George IV. At length he and Harry settled down to their "Notre Dame de Paris," and for a while all went well. Then of a sudden Junius became strangely silent and preoccupied.

"'Then they made him sit down on—' oh, Lord, what's a *brancard bariolé*?" said Harry. "You look up *brancard*, Junius, and I'll look up the other.... Oh, yes; speckled. No; motley—that's probably nearer; it depends on what *brancard* means. What does it mean, anyway? Come on, Junius, do you mean to say you haven't found it yet? What's the matter?"

"I was looking up *asseoir*," said Junius, who had been staring straight in front of him.

"Sit, of course; you knew that. I translated that, anyway. I'll look up *brancard*." Harry's glance, as he turned again to his dictionary, fell upon a letter lying on his desk, waiting to be mailed. It was addressed in Harry's own legible hand to

Lieut.-Gen. Sir Giles Fletcher, M. P. etc.,
204 Belgrave Square,
London, S. W.,

England.

It immediately occurred to him that this was the probable cause of his classmate's preoccupation, and the joy of the chase burned anew in his breast. [85]

"What *are* you staring at, Junius?" he asked a minute later, with, well simulated unconsciousness.

"Nothing," replied Junius, returning to his book and blushing. That was bad already, as Harry pointed out later; it would have been so easy, for a person who really knew, to pass it off with some such remark as "I was overcome by the address on that letter. My, but what swells you do correspond with," etc. But the unfortunate Junius could not even be consistent to the rôle of affected ignorance that he had assumed.

"I see you know Sir Giles Fletcher," he said after a while. "I saw that envelope on the table; I couldn't help seeing the address. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Harry; "my uncle."

"Oh. Well, I heard a good deal about him last summer from some relations of his ... connections, anyway; the Marquis of Moville ... and his family. We had a shooting-lodge in Scotland, and he had a moor near ours. He came over and shot with us once, and said ours was the best moor in Perthshire. His brother came too; Lord Archibald Carson. He's the one that's connected with your uncle, isn't he?"

"Yes. Married his sister."

"The Marquis is rather a decent fellow," continued Junius languidly. "Do you know him?"

"No," said Harry calmly; "no decent person does. Nor Lord Archibald, either. They're the worst pair of rounders in England. My uncle doesn't even speak to them in the street."

"Oh." Junius' face was a study, but Harry was sitting so that he could not see it, and had to be contented with Trotwood's subsequent account of it. There was silence for a few moments, during which Harry waited with perfect certainty for Junius' next remark.

"Well, of course we didn't know them *well*, at all. They just came and shot with us once. That's nothing, in Scotland."

Victor Hugo was resumed after this and the translation finished without further incident. The beautiful Junius, however, needed no urging to "stick around" afterward, and sat for an hour or more smoking cigarettes and chatting pleasantly about his acquaintance, carefully culled from the New York social register and the British peerage. [86]

"Well, Trotty," said Harry after the incubus had departed, dropping a perfect shower of invitations to New York, Newport, Palm Beach, the Adirondacks and the Scottish moors; "what about it? Is the beautiful Junius, friend of dukes and scion of Crusaders, an obnoxious, unhealthy little vermin, or isn't he?"

"I suppose he is. My, but he was fun, though! But he's going to make the Dramatic Association after Christmas, for all that."

"Oh, yes. He'll make whatever he sets out to make, straight through. Nobody here will ever see through him. He doesn't often give himself away as he did to-night, of course. He talks up to each person on what he thinks they'll like; to Josh Traill, for instance, he'll talk about football, and to an æsthetic type, like Morton Miniver, on Japanese prints and Maeterlinck's plays; and to you on the Glee and Mandolin Clubs.... He has already, hasn't he? Don't attempt to deny it; your blush betrays you! That's the way his type gets on here; talk to the right people, and don't talk to any one else, and in addition do a little acting or whatever you can, and it'll go hard if you don't make a senior society before you're through.... He's clever, too; he'll make it, all right. You see, he only gave himself away to me because he talked on a subject where breeding counts, as well as knowledge.... It was rash of him to try the duke and duchess stuff; he'd much better have stuck to track, or something safe."

"See here, Harry," said Trotwood, rising to go, "I grant you that Junius has given himself away and that he's a repulsive little beast, and all the rest of it, but don't you think that you are taking the incident just a little too seriously? It's an obnoxious type, all right, but it's a common one. There are bound to be a few Juniuses in every bunch of three or four hundred fellows wherever you take them; Oxford, or anywhere else. Why bother about them? Let them blather on; they won't hurt you, as long as you know them for what they are. And if Junius, or one of his kind, gets too aggressive and unpleasant, all you have to do is reach out your foot and stamp on him. But don't let him worry you!"

"How wise, how uplifting, how Browningesque!" breathed Harry in satirical admiration. Trotty winced slightly and made for the door. "Don't be a fool," Harry added, running after his retreating friend and grabbing him. "You're dead right about all that, of course, as you always are when you take the trouble to use your bean. There's just one thing, though, when all is said and done, that irritates me. Junius at Yale ends by making his senior society, in spite of all. Junius at Oxford doesn't! Do you know why? Because there aren't any senior societies there!" [87]

CHAPTER IX

[88]

A LONG CHEER FOR WIMBOURNE

Harry did eventually bestir himself to the extent of hiring a locker in the track house and going out and "exercising," as he called it, three or four afternoons a week. He enjoyed it, but he obviously did not take it very seriously. He was neither good enough nor enthusiastic enough to attract the attention of the coach and captain, and it was something of a surprise to all concerned when he took a first place in the low hurdles in the fall meet and became entitled to wear his class numerals.

"Fine work," said the captain, a small and insignificant-looking senior, who could pole vault to incredible heights without apparent effort. "Macgrath tells me you haven't come within two seconds of your time to-day in practise."

"No," said Harry; "I've been working more at the jumps."

"Well, you'd better stick to the hurdles from now on. We're weakest there. You practise and train regularly this year and next year you'll probably be the best man on the hurdles we have. Except Popham, of course. But we never can depend on Popham for a meet; he's always on pro, or something."

That evening after dinner Harry strolled into Trotwood's room.

"Say, you're the hell of a fine hurdler, you are," growled the latter, from the depths of a Morris chair. Harry was somewhat taken aback till his friend suddenly clutched at his hand and began swinging it up and down like a pump handle. Then he realized that objurgation was merely Trotwood's gentle method of expressing pleasure and affection. Delight shone in his face; not delight in his triumph but in the thought that it meant something to Trotwood and that he understood Trotwood's peculiar way of showing it.

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"That's all right, Trotty dear," he said. "Never mind about giving me back my hand; I shall have no further use for it."

"I suppose you think you're quite a man now, don't you?" continued Trotwood in the same vein. "Just because you won a damned race against people that can't run anyway."

"Sweet as the evening dew upon the fields of Enna fall thy words, O sage," said Harry. "You're really quite a wonderful person at bottom, aren't you, Trotty? How did you know that the last thing I'd want was to be slathered over with congratulations by you? Good Lord, you ought to have heard Junius LeGrand on the subject!"

"Never mind about LeGrand. Speaking seriously, it's a great thing for you, Harry. I don't suppose you realize that, bar that unspeakable rounder Popham, you're the coming man in the hurdles from now on? Why, you've got your Y absolutely cinched for next year, with him going on the way he does!"

"So it seems," said Harry dryly. "I seem to have heard the name of Popham before. Suppose we talk about something else.... Look, Trotty; will you room with me next year?"

"Yes," answered Trotwood, blushing deeply, and continued, after a pause: "I've wanted to arrange that for some time, but I thought you'd better be the one to mention the subject first."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; I thought if I asked you, you'd accept out of plain good nature, for fear of throwing me down, and I didn't want that."

"Well, as it happened, I was determined to let the first advances come from you, for very much the same reason. Until just now, when I was so afraid you'd room with some one else that I couldn't wait another minute. I've lost all sense of maidenliness, you see."

"Maidenliness be hanged. You don't have to be maidenly when you've won your numerals at track."

That was on a Saturday. James had been out of town with the football team and did not return till late that evening. The next day he and Harry walked out to their old home together for their regular Sunday dinner with Aunt Selina. On the way they discussed at length the fine points of the game of the day before, in which James had played right half with great distinction. Presently he inquired:

[90]

"By the way, how about the fall meet yesterday? How did you come out?"

"Oh, fairly well. I only entered in the low hurdles, but I came out all right."

"All right?"

"Yes—first."

"What? Do you mean to say that you got first place in the hurdles?"

"Substantially that, yes."

"Good Lord. I hadn't heard a thing. Went straight to bed when I got home last night and only got up this morning in time for Chapel. Why, it's the best ever, Harry! You get your numerals. You must be about the first man in your class to do that. What was your time?"

"Pretty rotten. Twenty-five two."

"Not so bad. Gee, but that's fine for you, child!"

"I'm glad you're pleased, James."

"It isn't merely the getting of your numerals in the fall meet, either. It means that you'll be one of the main gazabes in the track world from now on, if you work. There's no one here that can make better time than you in the hurdles, bar Popham, who makes such a fool of himself they can't use him, mostly."

"Oh, damn," said Harry softly and slowly.

"What's the matter? Forgotten something?"

"No. I can't forget something, that's the trouble."

"Well, what *is* biting you?"

"Only that if I hear the name of Popham much more, I believe I shall go mad on the spot."

"Oh, don't take it so hard as that. Most likely you'll be able to beat him out anyway, if you make progress, and he's likely to drink himself out of college anyway before—"

"Shut up, James, for Heaven's sake!" There was real anger in Harry's tone, and James turned and looked at him with surprise. "You're as bad as every one else—worse! Don't *you* know me better than to suppose that all my chances of happiness in college, in this world, in the next, depend on Popham's drinking himself to death? Do you think it's pleasant for me to know that every one considers my—my success, I suppose you'd call it, dependent on whether that rounder stays off probation or not? You make me sick, James." [91]

James remained silent a moment. "No offense meant," he said gently. "I'm sure I'm sorry if—"

"Oh, rot!" Harry disclaimed offense by slipping his hand through his brother's arm. "Only you don't seem to *see*, James. That's what bothers me."

"Well, no; I'm afraid I don't. It will be a great thing for you if you get your Y next year. Do you think it's low of me to wish that Popham, who is no good anyway, should get out of your way?"

"No; the wish is kindly meant, of course.... But this idea that my whole worldly happiness is tied up with Popham takes the pleasure out of it all, somehow. I don't give a continental whether I get my Y or not, now."

"Oh, come on. Don't be morbid."

"No. I've a good mind not to go out for track any more."

James made no answer to this, and the two walked on in silence till they had reached the house. As they walked up the front steps James said:

"You must tell Aunt Selina all about this. She'll be awfully glad to hear about it."

"Including Popham," said Harry in a low voice. James made no reply to this, for it scarcely called for a reply, but his lips were ever so slightly compressed as he walked through the front door.

During the idle months that followed Harry used his spare time for efforts in another and wholly different direction—a literary one. He became what is known in the parlance of the college as a "*Lit.* heeler"; that is, he contributed regularly to the *Yale Literary Magazine*. For the most part his contributions were accepted, and in the course of a few months his literary reputation in his class equaled his athletic fame. His verses, written chiefly in the Calverly vein, were equally sought for by both the *Lit.* and the *Record*, the humorous publication, and his prose, which generally took the form of short stories with a great deal of very pithy, rapid-fire dialogue in them, was looked upon favorably even by the reverend dons whose duty it was to review the undergraduates' monthly offerings to the muses.

"Has a cinder track been laid to the top of Parnassus?" wrote one who rather prided himself on his quaint and whimsical fancy. "Do poets hurdle and sprint where once they painfully climbed? Do the joyous Nine now stand at the top holding a measuring tape and wet sponges, instead of [92] laurel wreaths, as of old? Assuredly we shall have to answer in the affirmative after reading the story 'Quest and Question' which appeared in the last issue of the *Lit.*, for not only is the writer of this, the best and brightest offering of the month, a mere freshman, but a freshman who, it seems, has distinguished himself so far for physical rather than mental agility. The 'question' about Mr. Wimbourne appears, indeed, to be whether the fleetness of his metrical feet can equal that of his material ones," etc.

All this amused Harry, who, it is to be feared, sometimes laughed at rather than with his

reviewers; and it gave him something to think about outside of his studies and his classmates, both of which palled upon him heavily at times. But he was irritated from time to time by the way in which even literary recreation was looked upon, by the undergraduate body. A casual and kindly remark of a classmate, "Hullo, I see you're ahead in the *Lit.* competition," would often throw him into a state of restless depression from which only the soothing presence of Trotwood could reclaim him.

"Isn't it awful, Trotty," he once complained; "Euterpe (she's the lyric muse, you know), has deserted me. I haven't been able to write a line for a month. Of course the loss to the world of letters is almost irreparable, but that's not the worst of it. You see, if I can't write, I shan't do well in the *Lit.* competition, and if I don't do well I shan't make the chairmanship, and if I don't make the chairmanship in the competition, I shan't make a senior society, and wouldn't that be terrible, Trotty?"

"Cheer up, old cow; you probably won't make one anyway," suggested Trotty reassuringly, and Harry laughed.

The football game with Harvard was played in New Haven that year, and Harry took Aunt Selina to it. Aunt Selina had never seen James play, and was anxious to go on that account, though she had not been to a game for many years, and even the last one she had seen was baseball.

"You must explain the fine points of the game to me, my dear," she told him as they drove grandly out to the field in her victoria. "You see, I have not been to a game since the seventies, and I [93] daresay the rules have changed somewhat since then. I used to take a great interest in it, but I've forgotten all about it, now."

They were obliged to abandon the victoria at some distance from the stands, rather to Aunt Selina's consternation, for she had secretly supposed that they would watch the play from the carriage, as of old. She was consequently somewhat bewildered when, after fifteen or twenty minutes of such shoving and shouldering as she had never experienced, she found herself in a vast amphitheater which forty thousand people were trying to convert into pandemonium, with very fair success. As they wormed their way along the sidelines toward their seats, a deafening roar suddenly burst from the stands on the other side of the field, which caused Aunt Selina to clutch her nephew's arm in affright.

"Harry, what *is* it?" she asked. "*What* are they making that frightful noise about?"

"That's the Harvard cheer," replied Harry calmly. "You'll hear the Yale people answering with theirs in just a minute."

The Yale people did answer, but it would be too much to say that Aunt Selina heard. She was vaguely conscious of going up some steps and being propelled past a line of people to what Harry told her were their seats, though she could see nothing but a narrow bit of board. Nevertheless she sat down, and tried to accustom her ears and eyes to chaos; just such a chaos, she thought, as Satan fell into, only larger and noisier.

"Here we are," Harry was saying cheerfully, "just in time, too. The teams will be coming on in a minute or two. What splendid seats James has got us, bang on the forty yard line. Why, we're practically in the cheering section! Do you know the Yale cheer, Aunt Selina? You must cheer too, you know; it's expected of you.... Here comes the Yale team...."

Aunt Selina lost the rest, as chaos broke forth with redoubled vigor. She saw a group of blue-sweatered figures run diagonally across the field, and thought the game had begun.

"Which is James?" she asked feverishly, feeling chaos work its way into her own bosom. "Do you think he'll win, Harry? Oh, I do hope he'll win!" [94]

When the team lined up for its short preliminary practise Harry pointed James out to her in his place at right halfback.

"I see," she said, gazing intently through her field glasses, "he's one of those three little ones at the back. Does that mean that he'll be the one to kick the ball? I'd rather he kicked it than be in the middle of all that tearing about. Poor boy, how pale he looks!"

"He won't look pale long," said Harry grimly.

Aunt Selina by this time felt every drop of sporting blood in her course through her veins. "Which is the pitcher, Harry?" she inquired knowingly, and was not in the least abashed when her nephew informed her that there was no pitcher in football.

"Well, well," said she indulgently, "isn't there really? Things do change so; I can't pretend to keep up with them. I remember there used to be a pitcher in my time, and Loring Ainsworth used to be it."

Just then the teams set to in deadly earnest, and conversation died. In bewildered silence Aunt Selina watched the twenty-two players as they ran madly and inexplicably up and down the field, pursued by the fiendish yells of the spectators, and wondered if in truth, she were dead and this —well, purgatory.

She made no attempt to understand anything that was going on down on the field, or even to watch it. She turned her attention to Harry; he seemed to be the most familiar and explicable object in sight, though she wondered why he should leap to his feet from time to time shouting such nonsense as "Block it, you ass!" or "Nail him, Sammy, nail him!" or "First down! Yay-y-y!" Presently she became aware of a growing intensity in the excitement. The players seemed to be moving gradually down toward one end of the field, and short periods of breathless silence in the audience punctuated the shouts. She heard cries of "Touchdown! Touchdown!" emanate from all directions, but they meant nothing to her. The players moved further and further away, till they were all huddled into one little corner of the field. Every time they tumbled over together in that awful human scrap-heap she shut her eyes, and did not open them again till she was sure it was all right. Finally, after one of those painful moments, there was a relapse of chaos, fifty times more severe than any of the previous attacks. Women, as well as men, shrieked like maniacs, and [95] threw things into the air. Trumpets bellowed and rattles rattled; somewhere in the background was a sound of a brass band, of an organized cheer. Hats and straw mats flew through the air in swarms.

"What is it?" shrieked Aunt Selina. "Who won? Who won?"

"It's a touchdown!" Harry shouted in her ear. "For Yale! It counts five!" (It did, then.) "And James did it! James has made a touchdown!" And in a moment Aunt Selina had the unusual pleasure of hearing her own name shouted in concert by ten or fifteen thousand people at the top of their voices.

"—rah rah rah Wimbourne! Wimbourne! Wimbourne!" shouted the crowd, at the end of the long Yale cheer, and they went on shouting it, nine times; then another long cheer, and nine more Wimbournes, and so on.

It was a great moment. Is it to be wondered that Aunt Selina, who did not know a touchdown from a nose-guard, shrieked with the others and wept like a baby? Is it strange that Harry, to whom the event meant more than to any other person among the forty thousand, should have forgotten himself in the expression of his natural joy; should have forgotten where and what and who he was, everything but the one absorbing fact that James had made a touchdown? We think not, and we have reason to believe that every man jack out of the forty thousand would have agreed with us. One did, we know. She thought it was the most natural thing in the world, though it did set her coughing and disarranged her hat and veil beyond all hope of recovery without the assistance of a mirror, not to mention a comb and hairbrush. And Harry needn't apologize any more, for she wouldn't hear of it; and the way she had behaved herself, in the first excruciating moment, was a Perfect Disgrace. So they were quits on that matter, and might she introduce Mr. Carruthers? Mr. Wimbourne. Was Harry surprised that she knew who he was? Well, she would explain, and also tell him who she was herself, if she could ever get the hair out of her mouth and eyes.

For it must be explained that Harry, in his transports of exultation, had behaved in a very unseemly manner toward his next-door neighbor on the right hand. Aunt Selina, who sat on his [96] left, had sunk, exhausted with joy and excitement, to her seat as soon as she was told that James had made a touchdown, and Harry, whose feelings were of a nature that demanded immediate physical expression, had unconsciously relieved them on the person of his other neighbor, who still remained standing; never noticing who or what she was, even that she happened to be a young and attractive woman. Harry never could remember what he had done in those hectic seconds that immediately preceded his awareness of her existence; according to her own subsequent account he had slapped her violently several times on the back, put his arm around her, shaken her by the scruff of her neck and shouted inarticulate and impossible things in her ear.

The interval of hair-recovery was tactfully designed to give Harry a moment's grace in which to recall, if possible, his neighbor's identity; she was perfectly able to tell who she was with the hair in her mouth and eyes, proof of which was that she had been talking in that condition for the past few minutes. Harry was grateful for the intermission.

"Why of course I know you!" he exclaimed, as soon as the dying away of the last nine Wimbournes made conversation feasible. "It was stupid of me not to remember before. Do you remember; dancing school?.... It must have been ten years ago, though; and you *have* changed!"

"Yes, I suppose I have changed—thank Heaven!" The exclamation given with a smile through a now unimpeachably neat veil, seemed in some subtle, curious way to vindicate Harry, to emphasize his innocence in failing to recognize her. "I know what I looked like then, all long black legs and stringy yellow hair—"

"Not stringy," said Harry, recognizing his cue; "silky. I remember the long black—the stockings, too. And lots of white fluffy stuff in between; lace, and all that.... And we used to dance a good deal together, because we were the two youngest there, and you were so nice about it, too, when you wanted to dance with the older boys. But how did you know me? Haven't I changed, too?"

"Oh, yes; but not so much. Boys don't. Beside, I knew your aunt by sight...."

"I'm sorry, I forgot," said Harry. "Aunt Selina, do you know Miss Elliston? And Mr. Carruthers, my [97] aunt."

"Madge Elliston," corrected the girl, smiling, "you know my mother, I think, Miss Wimbourne."

"Indeed I do, my dear; I am delighted to meet her daughter," said Aunt Selina, who had had time to recover her customary *grande dame* air, "I knew her when she was Margaret Seymour; we used to be great friends."

And so forth, through the brief but blessed respite that follows a touchdown. There is no need to quote the conversation in full, for it degenerated immediately into the polite and commonplace. If we could give you a picture of Madge Elliston during it, if we could do justice to the sweetness and deference of her manner toward Aunt Selina, her occasional smile, and the easy way she managed to bring both Harry and Mr. Carruthers into the conversation, that would be a different thing.

The next kick-off brought it to an end, and all parties concerned turned their attention once more to the field. Harry attempted to explain some of the rudiments of the game to Aunt Selina, who confessed that her recollections of the rules of the seventies were not of material assistance to her enjoyment. And so passed the first half.

"Do you know, I believe I know exactly what you're thinking of?" was the next thing Harry heard from his right. It was between the halves; Miss Elliston was in an intermission of Mr. Carruthers, and Harry was listening in silence to "Fair Harvard," which was being rendered across the field.

"Do you?" he replied. "Well, I'll tell you if you're right."

"You were thinking of 'Forty Years On.'"

The smile died from Harry's face, and he paused a moment before replying, almost gruffly:

"Yes, I was, as a matter of fact. How did you guess it?"

"Oh, I know all about you, you see." She stopped, and her silence seemed to Harry to mean "I'm sorry if I've hurt you; but I wish you'd go on and talk to me, and not be absurd." So he threw off his pique and went on:

"I don't know how you know about my going to Harrow, nor how you know anything about 'Forty Years On,' and I don't care much; but I put it to you, as man to man, isn't it a song that's worth thinking about?" [98]

"It is! There never was such a song."

"Not even 'Fair Harvard'?"

"No."

"Not even 'Bright College Years,' to which you will shortly be treated?"

"Not even that." They exchanged smiles, and Harry continued, with pleasure in his voice:

"Well, it is a relief to hear some one say that, in a place where 'For God, for country, and for Yale' is considered the greatest line in the whole range of English poetry. But of course I'm a heretic."

"You like being a heretic?" The question took him by surprise; it was out of keeping, both in substance and in the way it was asked, with Miss Elliston's behavior up to this point. He gathered his wits and replied:

"Oh, yes; who doesn't? Is there any satisfaction like that of knowing that every one else is wrong and you alone are right?"

"I suppose not! That's the main danger of heresy, don't you think? Subjective, not objective. Being burned at the stake doesn't matter, much; it's good for one rather than otherwise. But thinking differently from other people merely for the pleasure of being different, and above them —there's danger in that, isn't there?"

"Then there is no such thing as honest heresy?"

"That was not what I said." This remark, spoken gently and with a quizzical little smile, had none of the sharpness that cold type seems to give it. Adopting something of her manner, Harry pursued:

"But I am not an honest heretic?"

"I didn't say that, either." Again the smile, which seemed to be directed as much toward herself as toward him, softened the words. "And aren't you rather trespassing on female methods of argument?"

"I don't understand."

"Applying abstract remarks to one's own case; that's what women are conventionally supposed to do. But don't let's get metaphysical. What I want to say is that, though I think 'Forty Years On' is incomparably finer, as a song, than 'Bright College Years,' I wouldn't have it changed if I could. The 'For God, for country, and for Yale' part, I mean; and 'the earth is green or white with snow,'—a woefully under-appreciated line.... There is something priceless, to me, in the thought [99] of a great crowd of men, young and old, getting up and bellowing things like that together, never doubting but that it's the greatest poetry ever written. That's worth a great deal more, to me, than good poetry.... They're all such dears, too; the absurdity never hurts them a bit!"

"By George," said Harry slowly, "you're right. I never thought of that before. It is rather a priceless thought."

"Yes, isn't it? It's the full seriousness of it that makes it so good. 'For God, for country, and for Yale'—it's no anti-climax to them; it's the way they really feel. It's absurd, it's ridiculous. But I love it, for some reason."

"That's it. You make me see it all differently.... You mean, I suppose, that if we could start from the beginning with a clean slate, we would choose 'Forty Years On,' or something like it, every time. But now that we've got the other, and they sing it like that, it seems just as good, in its way ... so that we wouldn't like to change it...."

He wanted to add something like "What an extraordinary young person you must be, to talk of such things to me, a stranger, under such conventional circumstances," but a simultaneous recurrence of Mr. Carruthers and the game prevented him. It is doubtful if he would have dared, anyway.

He spoke no more to her that day, except to say good-by and ask if he might call. Nor did he think much more of her. We would not give a false impression on this point; he was really much more interested in the game than in Miss Elliston, and after the second half was fairly started scarcely gave her another thought. But in the moment that intervened between the end of their conversation and the absorbing scurry of the kick-off it did occur to him that Madge Elliston had grown up into an unusual girl, a girl whom he would like to know better. Their short conversation had been as different from the ordinary run of football game civilities between young men and maidens as champagne from water. Harry liked girls well enough, and got on well with them, but in general they bored him. He had never met one, except Beatrice Carson, with whom he was able to conduct anything approaching an intellectual give-and-take, and even Beatrice was no more than an able follower in his lead. Madge Elliston was a bird of a very different feather; she [100] had undeniably led him during every moment of their conversation. It was a new sensation; he wondered if it would always be like that, in future conversations.

But football was uppermost in his mind for the remainder of that day, at least. He was proud and pleased beyond all expression about James, and longed to grasp his hand in congratulation. But he had to go all the way home with Aunt Selina after the game was over, and when at last he reached Berkeley Oval he met James hurrying away somewhere and could give him only the briefest and vaguest expressions of pleasure. On returning to York Street he learned that the team was to have a banquet that evening, in the course of which they would elect their captain for the next year. It occurred to him that it would be nice if James were elected, and it gave him pleasure to hear Trotwood and others say that his chance was as good as any one's.

He stayed up to hear the result of the election, which when it came was disappointing. James had missed the honor, less, apparently, because he was not good enough, than because some one else was considered even better. Harry was sorry, though he lost no sleep over it. When he saw James next morning, he spoke first of what was uppermost in his heart.

"James," he said impulsively, seizing his brother's hand and hanging on to it as he spoke; "I want to say a whole lot more about yesterday. I don't mind saying you're the greatest thing that ever came down the pike, and I'm proud to own you!" and more in the same vein, which James received with smiling protests and remarks of a self-depreciatory nature. But when Harry ended up "And I'm sorry as heck about the captaincy," his manner changed.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. His face became grave, his whole attitude seemed to add: "And we won't talk any more about that, please; it's a sore subject."

Harry's easy flow of talk stopped short, and a new feeling filled his mind. "Good Heavens, James cares, actually cares about the confounded thing," he thought, and dropped his brother's hand.

CHAPTER X [101]

RUMBLINGS

"Please, sir, could you give me any dope for the *News* about your coming back to coach the football team?" asked a timid voice from the doorway.

"No, heeler, no; I've already said I wouldn't give anything about that till I made up my mind, and I haven't yet." Thus James, more petulantly than was his wont, from his chair below the green-shaded lamp. The heeler, obviously a freshman, blinked disappointedly through the half-gloom for a few seconds and then moved to go.

"Wait a bit," said James, his good-humor restored; "I'm sorry, heeler. But when I tell you that

you're the thirteenth person that has come in at that door since seven o'clock, and that I've got a hundred pages of economics to read for to-morrow, perhaps you'll understand why I'm a little snappy about being interrupted."

"That's all right," murmured the heeler vaguely. He was used to being snapped at by prominent seniors, but he was not used to being apologized to by them, and was not sure how he liked it.

"I tell you what I'll do, though," went on James. "I'll give you a locker notice that ought to have been put in long ago. Here." He reached for the heeler's notebook and wrote in it: "All senior members of the football squad are requested to remove their clothes from their lockers as the space will be wanted for spring practice." "There, that'll put you fifty words to the good, anyway," he said brightly, and the heeler went his way in peace.

James had conducted himself most creditably during his college course, and in the course of a few months would graduate if not exactly in a blaze of glory, at least in a very comfortable radiance. His standard of values had been a simple but satisfactory one; first, Football; second, Curriculum; third, Other Things. Any number of the steadier and worthier portion of the college world make this their creed, and find it works out extremely well. In the case of James, at least, [102] such a standard gave a sane and well-balanced view of life. He took football with the most deathly seriousness, it is true, but only in its season, and its season, owing to the rigors of the New England climate, lasts hardly more than two months out of the twelve. During that time James practically hibernated when not actually on the football field, lived mainly on boiled rice and barley water, indulged in no amusements or vices, went about thoughtful and preoccupied, scarcely spoke even to his most intimate friends, studied only just enough to keep his stand above the danger mark and slept, as Harry rather vividly put it, "anywhere from thirty to forty hours out of the twenty-four." Out of the football season he was cheerful, cordial, loved the society of his fellows, smoked, drank in moderation, went to the theater, played cards, ate every kind of food he could lay his hands on and studied with a very faithful and intelligent interest. His classmates admired him during the football season, and loved him the rest of the year. Generally speaking, he conformed closely to his type; but his type was one of the best the college evolved.

After the *News* heeler left him on the evening in question he read economics uninterruptedly for about half an hour; then he took a cigarette from his case and lit it. The case was the gold one that Harry had brought him from Europe. He thought of Harry as he lay back in his chair after lighting the cigarette, and it is not too much to say that the thought of him impaired the pleasure of the first few puffs. Harry was, indeed, the chief, the only cloud on the horizon. It was too bad; he had begun so well. No one could have desired a more brilliant freshman year for him, what with his track work and his literary success and the excellent stand he maintained in his studies. And yet now, at about the middle of his sophomore year, he seemed to be going in any direction but that of fulfilling the promise of his first year. James could see for himself, and he had heard things.... Perhaps, after all, though, it was merely that he had begun too well; that his promise was fulfilled before it was fairly given. Many men graduated from college high in the esteem of their classmates without having distinguished themselves as much as Harry had in one year. Perhaps he was really going on exactly as well as before, only people were just beginning to find [103] out that he was only an American boy of nineteen, not Apollo and Hermes rolled into one. That was what James hoped; but it occurred to him that if such had been the case the idea would have come to him as a certainty, not as a hope.

Harry himself sauntered into the room before the cigarette was smoked out. Well, his outward appearance had not suffered, at any rate, was James' first thought. The slimness of his figure was unimpaired; his features retained their clear-cut lines of youth and innocence; his complexion shone with the glow of health, nothing else.

"Give me a cigarette, and hurry up about it, too," were his first words. "I've just been under a severe mental strain.... It will probably be the last one for many moons, too, if I start in training to-morrow, like a good little boy."

"Oh, of course; you've been to the call for track candidates," replied his brother, handing over the desired commodities. "Well, was it a good meeting?"

"Inspiring. Don't you see what a glow of enthusiasm I'm in? First Dimmock got up and opened his mouth. 'Fellows,' he said, 'I'm darned glad to see you all here to-night, but I wish there were more of you. I see fewer men out than usual, and we need more than ever this year, and I'll tell you why. We want to do better in the intercollegiates. We think we are strong enough for the dual meets, but we want to make a better show in the intercollegiates. But we've got plenty of good material here, and with that we ought to get together and work hard and show lots of the old Yale spirit, for we'll need it all in the intercollegiates.'

"Well, Dimmock is a good soul, if he has got a face like a boiled cod, and we cheered and clapped and patted him on the back. Then Macgrath took the floor. He said he thought we were going to have a good year, for there was plenty of material in sight, though he was sorry to see so few there to-night. He hoped we weren't forgetting what the Yale spirit was, because we particularly wanted to do well in the intercollegiates. He spoke of the new cinder track and the lengthening of the two-twenty yard straight-away, and ended with a hope that we would all get together and do Yale credit in the intercollegiates.

"Then McCullen, who as perhaps you know, is manager, got up. As he is a particular friend of [104] yours I won't try to give an exact account of what he said. His main points, however, were the

fewness of the candidates present, the probable wealth of good material in hand, the new cinder track and the desirability of doing well in the intercollegiates. Lastly, a man called Hodgman, or Hodgson, or something, who was captain back in the eighties somewhere, was introduced. He spoke first of the new cinder track and straight-away, from which he lightly and gracefully went on to congratulating the team on having so much good material this year—though he saw fewer there to-night than he had expected. He closed with a touching peroration in which he intimated that the track team had in general come off well in regard to Harvard and Princeton, and what was wanted now was a little better showing against the other universities in the intercollegiates.... Oh, it was a glorious meeting!"

James fully appreciated the humor of this narrative, as the sympathetic twinkle in his eye betrayed, but he merely observed after Harry had finished:

"Well, that's true; they ought to do better in the intercollegiates. There's a good deal of feeling about it among the graduates, too, I believe."

"Oh, it's *true* enough." Harry, who felt the heat of the room, opened the window and lay down at full length on the window-seat, directly in the draught. "I'd take the word of those four noble, strapping, true-hearted men for it any day in the year. Only—only—oh, heck! Why should I have to sit up and listen to those boobs spend an hour in telling me that one thing? And what the devil do I care about it anyway, if it's the truest thing that ever happened?"

"Well, I care about it, though I'm no good at track and not a member of the team," commented James.

"Perhaps if you were on it you wouldn't care quite so much.—Well, I'll train and I'll practise regularly, not because I want Yale to win the intercollegiates, but because I think it's good for me. It is good for the figure, and I'd rather have my muscles hard than soft."

"Well, it comes to the same thing, if you keep to it, and don't go gassing to the track people about your reasons."

"I shall go gassing to every human being I've a mind to.—And I'll tell you one thing there's going to be trouble about, if they try to use coercion, or the Yale spirit gag. That's about the Easter [105] vacation; there's some talk of making the track people stay here and train. I have other plans for Easter."

"What are they?—For Heaven's sake, shut that window! What a fool you are, lying in a draught like that, with the track season beginning."

"James, you are every bit as bad as any of them, at heart," said Harry, shutting the window. "You wouldn't give a continental if I caught pneumonia and died in frightful agony, except for its cutting the university of a possible place in the intercollegiates.—Why, I'm going down to the Trotwoods' place in North Carolina. Trotty's going to have a large and brilliant house-party. Beatrice is going; he met her in New York not long ago and took a great shine to her." For Beatrice, in the company of Aunt Miriam, was paying a visit to the country of her dreams.

"What?" said James, pricking up his ears. "Beatrice going? Why hasn't Trotty asked me?"

"Didn't dare, I suppose," said Harry indifferently. "I'll make him, though, if you like. That's the way the King's visits are arranged; he says he'd like to visit some distinguished subject, and a third party tells the distinguished subject, who asks the King, who accepts. It's complicated, but it gets there in the end."

James did not seem particularly interested in points of etiquette in royal households.

"What do you make out of this business of the Carsons?" he asked.

"What business?"

"Hadn't you heard? Aunt C. told me about it when I was there last Sunday. Beatrice's mother has made up her mind to sue for a divorce, and Beatrice has quarreled with her about it."

"Good Lord! No, I hadn't heard a thing. I knew what the father was, of course.... Has anything in particular happened?"

"Apparently, yes. Aunt C. can tell you more exactly than I. Beatrice has confided the whole thing to her—they're thick as thieves already; she gets on better with her than with Aunt Miriam, even. It seems that the husband, Lord Archibald, is on to the fact that his wife has had a good deal of [106] money to spend lately; Uncle Giles having given her a lot since he got that—"

"Yes, I know. Go on."

"Well, that's about the whole thing. He's been bullying her, making her give it up to him ... and one thing and another, till she got desperate, and decided to try for a complete divorce. There's plenty of ground, even for English law ... but Beatrice's idea is that there's no need. Of course, it will mean a lot of scandal. She says that if she had been there to deal with him there would have been no talk about it, and that, at worst, a separation would have been all that was necessary."

"Poor Lady Archie! She has had a tough time; I shall be glad to see her well out of it. A divorce—! Well, she has more sense than I gave her credit for."

"It seems to me that Beatrice is quite right," said James, a trifle stiffly. "I should have thought that a divorce was the thing most to be avoided. It's not like an American divorce.... I understand her point very well."

Harry did not reply to this; he simply growled—made a curious sound in the bottom of his throat. It amounted to a polite way of saying "Nonsense!" Apparently James accepted the implied rebuke, for he said no more on the subject. His brother also was silent for some time and gazed thoughtfully out on the lights of the Campus. "I've got troubles of my own, James," he said presently. "Have you heard anything about last night yet?"

"Last night? No; what?"

"Well, you've heard of Junius LeGrand, in our class?"

"The actress? Yes."

"Well, he's become rather a power in the class; not only he is making straight for the Dramat. presidency, but he's more or less the center of a certain clique; the social register, monogrammed cigarettes, champagne-every-night and abroad-every-summer type; the worst of it, that is. Well, I had a dreadful scene with him last night. I got a thrill and called him names, and he didn't like it."

"What happened?"

"There was a whole bunch of us sitting round at Mory's, and I was talking partly in French, as I usually do when—when mildly excited, and referred to him as a 'petite ordure.' Of course that isn't a pretty thing to call a person, even in French, and I probably shouldn't have said it if I [107] hadn't been drinking. I meant it all, though, and was willing to stand by it, so when he got mad I called him other and worse things, in English. He wasn't tight, but he was pretty furious by that time, and there'd have been a free fight if people hadn't held us apart."

"That's pretty poor, Harry," said James gravely, after a moment's consideration. "I don't mean your hating LeGrand—though you needn't have actually come to quarreling with him. But your being tight and he not puts you in the wrong right off.—What's all this about your drinking, anyway?"

"I don't, so you could notice it.... That was the first time I ever got carried beyond myself, except about once—or twice. I'm not fond of the stuff; I only drink when I want to be cheered up."

"That's bad, too; it's much worse to drink when you're in bad spirits than when you're in good," said James, with a wisdom beyond his experience.

"After I've drunk, the good spirits are in me," retorted Harry, with rather savage humor.

"It's no joking matter. Harry, will you cut it out entirely, if I ask you to?"

"You'll have to do some tall asking, I'm afraid.—I don't like you much when you preach, James. I came here for sympathy, not sermons."

"You won't get me to sympathize with your making a beast of yourself."

"James, you know perfectly well you were tight as a tick at the football banquet in Boston last fall."

"I'm no paragon, I admit."

"You say that as if you thought you were, and expected me to say so. No, you're right—you're not. There!"

James' humor suddenly changed. His grave face relaxed into a smile, he rose from his chair and wandered to the end of the room and back to the window-seat.

"All right, we'll leave it at that; I'm not." He stood for a moment hands in pockets, smiling down at his brother. "It's nice to find one point we can agree on, anyway.... I won't bother you. After all, I suppose there's not much danger."

"No ... I don't think I should ever really get to like the stuff." But Harry did not smile and fall in with his brother's mood; he had too much on his mind still. "I haven't told you the most [108] disagreeable part of it," he went on. "Something happened to-day that made me sorry I had made a fool of myself. Shep McGee came to me to-day and said that he'd heard about our little *coup de théâtre*, and that he was sorry, but being one of Junius' particular friends he couldn't be friendly with me any more unless I apologized. I was sorry, because I've always liked Shep and got on very well with him."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, of course I was pretty peeved, and I messed it up still further. I told him I was glad he'd spoken, because henceforth my acquaintance would not be recruited conspicuously from Junius' special friends. I said that, strange as it might seem, I felt myself able to hand him, Shep, over to Junius' complete possession without a tear. I added that I thought he would find it safer in the future to choose his friends exclusively from the cause of Christ, and suggested that he might try to convert Junius to the same august organization...."

Some explanation may be necessary to show why this remark outraged James' feelings to the extent it did. The organization to which Harry referred was Dwight Hall, the college home of the Y. M. C. A., Bible study classes, city and foreign mission work, in all of which branches of religious and semi-religious activity many of the worthiest undergraduates interest themselves. James particularly admired the organization and those who worked in it; he would have gone in for some department of its work himself had he possessed the qualities of a religious leader. Most of his best friends were Dwight Hall workers; the senior society to which he belonged was notorious for taking many of them into its fold yearly—so much so, indeed, that it has become a popular myth that an underground passage exists between Dwight Hall and the society hall.

Consequently, Harry's contemptuous epithet, together with the tone in which he uttered it was quite enough to shock and pain James very much. But what put him out even more was the thought that Harry had said this to Shep McGee. The latter was one of the most respected men in Harry's class, and James had happened to take a particular fancy to him. He rather wondered at McGee's making a friend of such a person as LeGrand, but he did not stop to think about that now. [109]

"Harry," said he in a sharp, dry voice, "I think that's the rottenest remark I ever heard you or any one else make—if you used that expression to McGee."

"I did."

"I never thought you were capable of saying such a rotten thing, and I don't mind your knowing what I think of it. Are you going to apologize to McGee?"

"No."

"Well, I shall. If I can't apologize on your behalf, at least I can apologize for being your brother! What the devil do you mean by saying such a thing, in cold blood, to such a man? If you don't believe in the work yourself, can't you let other people believe in it? What do you believe in, anyway? Do you call yourself a Christian? Do you call yourself a gentleman? Do you flatter yourself that McGee isn't a hundred times a better man than you are?"

"Rumblings from the underground passage." This remark, given with a cold, hard little smile, in which there was no geniality, no humor, even of a mistaken nature, amounted to a direct insult. Any reference made to a Yale man about his senior society by an outsider, be it a brother or any one else, is looked upon as a breach of etiquette—was at that time, at any rate. Harry's remark was worse than that; it was a rather cowardly thrust, for he was insulting a thing that James, by reason of the secrecy to which he was bound, could not defend.

James did not reply; he simply grabbed up a hat and flung himself out of the room. Harry listened to his footsteps retreating down the stairs with a sinking heart; all his anger, all his resentment ebbed with them, and by the time they had died away there was nothing left but hopeless, repentant wretchedness. In the last twenty-four hours he had made a public disgrace of himself, he had fallen out with one of his best friends, and he had wounded the feelings of the last person on earth he wanted to hurt. And all because of his asinine convictions, because he thought his ideals were a little higher than other men's, his honesty a little more impeccable than theirs.

He got up and left the room, cursing himself for a fool, cursing the fate that had brought him to this pass, cursing Dwight Hall, the senior societies, the university that harbored them, the school, the country that had put ideas into his head. But chiefest of all he cursed Junius LeGrand.... [110]

But that did not do any good.

The next morning he wrote and posted a note of apology to James:—

> Dear James—I am sorry about last night—really, I am. I will try not to make such an ass of myself again.
>
> "Harry."

The same evening he received an answer, also through the mail. It was simply a post-card bearing the words:

All right. James.

Its curt, businesslike goodwill and the promptness of its arrival comforted him somewhat. He wisely determined to keep away from his brother for the present and let time exert what healing effect it could. When they did meet again, after some ten days' interval, no reference was made to the episode. James was cordial, very cordial. Far, far too cordial....

"Trotty," said Harry mournfully that evening; "I don't think you'd better room with me again next year. You can't afford to, Trotty. I'm a pariah, an outcast. Half the decent people in the class don't speak to me any more. You simply can't afford to know me. It'll ruin your chances."

"I wish you'd shut up," said Trotwood. "I'm trying to study."

"I mean it, Trotty. Don't pretend you don't hear, or understand. I'm giving you warning."

"Rot," said Trotty, beginning to blush. "Damned, infernal rot."

Harry sighed. "You're a good soul, Trotty. But it's true. You'll be known as the only man in the class that speaks to me, if you keep it up."

"Will you shut up, you infernal idiot?"

"No. I tell you, I'm going straight to the devil."

Trotty rose from his chair and went to where Harry stood. He gently pushed him back to the wall, and pinning him to it looked him straight in the eyes. Harry was surprised to see that his face was set and serious.

"Now," said Trotwood, "I'm going to talk about this business this once, and if you ever mention [111] the subject again I'll break your damned head open. I'm going to room with you next year. I'm going to room with you the year after that, if you'll have me. If we ever split up, it'll have to be because you're tired of me—not afraid I'm tired of you, but actually tired of me. You're not going to the devil. If you do, I don't give a damn. What does friendship mean, anyway? Answer me that, damn you!—damn you!—damn you—" His voice failed, but his eyes still spoke.

"All right, Trotty, we won't say any more about it, if you feel like that." Harry smiled as he spoke the words, but he felt more like crying.

CHAPTER XI [112]

AUNT SELINA'S BEAUX YEUX

As Harry had anticipated, an issue arose between himself and the powers in the track world concerning the Easter vacation. The edict went forth that members of the 'varsity squad were to remain in New Haven, in strict training, through the holidays, and it was assumed that he was to be of their number. None of the powers asked him what he was going to do, and he did not think it worth while to inform them of his plans.

One day, about a week before the vacation began, he did mention the subject casually to Judy Dimmock, the captain, as they walked in from practice together. Dimmock's consternation, as Harry said afterward, was pitiful to see.

"But do you think you can get Macgrath's permission?" he asked, stupefied.

"Why in the world should I bother about asking Macgrath's permission?" answered Harry. "Of course he wouldn't give it to me."

"Do you mean to say that you're going without it?"

"Of course I'm going without it."

Dimmock was bewildered rather than irritated, though Harry's course of action defied his authority quite as much as the coach's. "You'll have to be dropped from the squad, then, I'm afraid."

"So I supposed."

"Harry, do you mean to say this work means no more to you than that?" stammered Dimmock, all his convictions seething in his brain. "Haven't you got any more respect for your college and traditions than that? Don't you see what good discipline it is to buckle down to work and keep at it, whether you like it or not?"

Harry waited a moment before replying, wondering how he could silence Dimmock without angering him.

"That would all sound very well, if it were the dean and not the track captain that said it," he ventured. [113]

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Harry." There was such a complete absence of anger in the other's tone that Harry felt a momentary outburst of sympathy for this honest, good-tempered creature.

"I'm sorry, Judy," he said. "The fact is, you take track deadly seriously, and I don't. That's all there is to it. So we're bound to disagree."

So Harry went to the North Carolina mountains and shot quail and rode horseback and played bridge and carried on generally with James and Beatrice and Trotty and eight or ten others of his age. When he returned to New Haven he went out to the track field and jumped and ran about as before, but nobody paid any attention to him. Nor was he asked to rejoin the training table.

"It'll do him good to let his heels cool for a while," observed Dimmock to Macgrath.

"That's all very well, but you'd better not let them cool too long, if you want to get a place in the hurdles with Harvard," granted the coach.

"I was afraid all along we'd have to take him on again," said the other. "He gets better and better on the track all the time, and queerer and queerer every other way. I don't trust him."

"He's a second Popham," said Macgrath.

About a week before the Harvard meet Dimmock approached the second Popham and with very commendable absence of anything like false pride asked him if he would please put himself under Macgrath's orders for the next few days and run in the meet. Harry graciously consented. He hurdled abominably badly for a week, showing neither form nor speed; then he hurdled against Harvard and beat their best men by a safe margin. He won a first place, and his Y.

But that did not make him any more popular in the track world.

Later in the spring Beatrice came on for a visit, anxious to see the university that Harry had preferred to Oxford. She and Lady Fletcher stayed with Aunt Selina; presently Aunt Miriam went on and left Beatrice alone there. She and Aunt Selina struck up one of those unaccountable intimacies that occasionally arise between people of widely different ages.

"I do like your relations," she once told Harry; "I like your country and your university and your [114] friends well enough, but I like your people even better. I like your Uncle James, though I'm scared to death of him, and Aunt Cecilia of course is a dear; but I like Aunt Selina best. I never saw such a person! I didn't know you had her type in America. She makes Aunt Miriam look like a vulgar, blatant little upstart!"

"I know," said Harry, laughing. "Did you tell Aunt Miriam that?"

"Something to that effect, yes. She laughed, and said that she had always felt that way in her presence, too.—There's more about Aunt Selina than that, though; there's something wonderfully human about her, at bottom. I have an idea she could get nearer to me, if she wanted to, than almost any one else, just because her true self is so rare and remote."

Both Harry and James saw a good deal of Beatrice during her visit. Harry was supposed to be in training again, and it was his interesting custom to dine discreetly at the training table at six o'clock and then dash out to his aunt's and eat another and much more sumptuous meal at seven. James was scandalized when he heard of this proceeding, but he carefully refrained from saying anything to Harry about it; he merely smiled non-committally when Harry, with a desire of drawing him out, rather flauntingly referred to it.

"A few weeks ago he would have cursed me out," he thought; "lectured me up and down about it. Now he won't say anything because he's afraid it would bring on another scrap." The thought made him feel lonely and miserable.

James was greatly taken with Beatrice; that was quite clear from the first. He was attracted by her beauty, and still more by her apparent indifference to it. He found her more frank and sensible than American girls, whose débutante conventionalities and mannerisms bored and irritated him. He could not conceive of Beatrice "guying" or "kidding him along" on slight acquaintance, as most of his American friends did, or of Beatrice openly dazzling him with her beauty, or using her prerogative of sex by making him "stand around" before other people.

One evening after dinner Beatrice, accompanied by both the brothers, was walking down one drive and up the other, as the family were in the habit of doing on warm spring evenings. [115]

"Are you both prepared to hear something funny?" she asked.

"Fire away," they answered, and she continued:

"Well, I'm probably going to come back here next winter and live with Aunt Selina!"

Harry gave a long whistle.

"This from you! Are you actually going to turn Yankee, too?"

"I'm going to give the Yankees a chance, at any rate! You see, there are reasons why life for me wouldn't be particularly pleasant at home next year.... I'm going back with Aunt Miriam after Commencement, as we had planned, to try to patch it up with Mama, and then, if all parties are agreeable, as I'm pretty sure they will be, I shall come back in the autumn. The idea is for me to keep house for Aunt Selina and be her companion generally. I shall receive a stipend for my valuable services, so that I shall have the comfortable feeling of earning something. Aunt Miriam thinks it's a fine plan. What do you think about it?"

"I think it's simply top-hole, to use the expression of your native land. But won't you find New Haven a trifle dull, after London, and all that?"

"I rather think I shall, but in a different way. I shall be quite busy, and I thought I'd go to some lectures and things in the university and learn something.—Why don't you say something, James?"

"I think it's a wonderful idea." James had been thinking so hard he had forgotten to speak. Did he

perhaps regret his lately-made decision not to come back and coach the football team, but to take advantage of a business opening in the Middle West? At any rate, he was startled to observe what a leap his heart gave when Beatrice said she was coming back. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he was really going to care for this girl, with her dark brown eyes and her aloof, aristocratic, unchallenging ways?...

But he was undeniably glad she was coming back, and found occasion to tell her so more fully another time, when they were alone.

"I'm particularly glad," he added, "on Harry's account. He needs some one to keep an eye on him; [116] do you think you can do it?"

"I've done that for some years," said Beatrice, smiling. "I've been more of a brother to him than you have, really. Why on earth did you never come over and see him all that time, James?"

"Heaven knows.... I was lazy; I got in a rut. I wish I had, now."

"Why, nothing's going wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, damnably!—I beg your pardon. When he first came back he did certain things that used to get on my nerves, and I, like a fool, let it go on that way, thinking that he was all wrong and I was all right. It's only lately that I've come to see better ... and now, when he particularly needs some steadying influence, I can't give it to him. You see, he gets on other people's nerves, too; he and his ideas—"

"Ideas?"

"Yes; fool notions he got about the way things are done in England—"

"Isn't that a trifle hard?"

"Oh, the ideas may be all right, but not the way he applies them.... At any rate, they, or something else, are playing the deuce with his college course. He's getting in Dutch, all around—"

"In Dutch," murmured Beatrice. "Oh, I do like that!" But James did not notice the interruption.

"And while I see all this going on I have to stand aside and let it go on, because when I say anything it doesn't do any good, but only irritates him and makes him worse."

"I see. Well, I'm always willing to do what I can for Harry, but I'm afraid I haven't any real influence over him, either."

"Oh, yes, you have. He has the greatest respect for you."

"Not nearly as much as you think." Her usually calm expression was clouded; she seemed disturbed about something. Why did James feel a momentary sinking of the heart when he noticed the seriousness of her face and manner? It was nothing, though; gone again in a second. Beatrice continued, in a more optimistic tone:

"But I honestly don't think, James, that there's much to worry about. I don't mean that he mayn't get into scrapes, but I don't think that there's anything seriously wrong.... I have always had the [117] greatest faith in him—not only in his intellect, but in his character. So has Uncle G.; he expects great things of him, says he has just that combination of intellect and balance that results in statues in public places."

"The genius in the family is all confined to him; I'm glad you realize that!" James could not help being a little rasped by her harping on the good qualities of his brother, nor could he help showing it a little. He immediately felt rather ashamed of himself, however, for Beatrice replied, in a gently startled tone:

"Why, James, how bitter! You don't expect me to fling bouquets at your very face, surely! I throw them at you when I'm talking to Harry!"

"You must throw a good lot of them, then, for you see him alone often enough," was the somewhat gruff reply. Beatrice must have considered it rather a foolish remark, for she paid no attention to it.

Harry's attitude toward her decision, as expressed in his next *tête-à-tête* with her, was rather different from that of his brother.

"Beatrice," said he, "of course I'm pleased as Punch about your coming here next year, both on my own account and on Aunt Selina's, and all that sort of thing; but I hope you won't think it rude of me if I ask why on earth you're doing it. Of course, I know there are family unpleasantnesses, and that you aren't particularly interested in London balls, but that doesn't explain to me why, when you really do occupy an enviable position over there, get asked everywhere worth going, in season and out, and all that, you should choose to be the paid companion of an old woman in a small New England town. And I don't believe it's Aunt Selina's *beaux yeux*!"

"No!" said Beatrice, laughing; "I don't believe it's quite all that, either!"

"What will people think about it over there?" went on Harry. "What'll your mother say?"

"I'm afraid Mama will be perfectly delighted, even if she doesn't say so," replied Beatrice, serious

again. "The truth is, Harry, poor Mama and I don't gee very well, somehow.... Jane is a great comfort to her—a perfect daughter—she came out this year, you know."

"Is she as much of a social success as you?" asked Harry with that frankness that was characteristic of their relation. [118]

"Much more so—in a way. She uses her gifts to much more effect."

"She's not nearly as good-looking as you," persisted Harry.

It was a remark thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of their comradeship, the kind of remark, expressive of a plain truth, nothing more, that they prided themselves on making and taking between themselves without the least affectation or self-consciousness. Yet Beatrice simply could not keep pleasure from sounding in her voice as she replied:

"Well, no; I suppose not. It's the only thing in which I have the better of her, though. I'm very—"

She began her reply in the old spirit, but could not keep it up. She had started to say, "I'm very glad you think that," then stopped herself, then wished she had gone on. It would have been perfectly consistent with their old "man-to-man" attitude, if she could have said it in the right way!

Harry noticed her halting, and looked up at her quickly. He saw that she was blushing. "Good Heavens!" he thought; "I hope Beatrice doesn't think I'm paying her compliments!" The incident was slight, but it brought a new and disturbing element into their relation. Indeed, in that one little moment they ceased to remain boy and girl in their attitude toward one another, and became man and woman. They met often enough on the old terms of frankness and intimacy, but sex interest and suspicion always lurked in the background, ready to burst out and break up things at any moment.

The spring wore on; Commencement arrived; James was graduated. Aunt Miriam, the James Wimbournes and numerous youthful James Wimbournes came to stay with Aunt Selina and see him graduate. Beatrice was also there and Harry was of course on hand. He took little part in the graduation festivities and amused himself chiefly by showing his two eldest male cousins, Oswald and Jack, the sights of the university and incidentally making them look forward with a healthy dread to the day when as freshmen first they would come to Yale.

"This is the swimming-pool," he would tell them; "it doesn't look very big now, does it? Perhaps not! But it *seems* pretty big, I can tell you, when the sophomores dump you in there, in the pitch dark, and tell you it's half a mile to shore and you've got to swim! And you have to scramble out as best you can. *They* won't help you!" [119]

"They don't do that to *every* freshman, though, do they?" hopefully inquired Oswald, a nice, plump, yellow-haired, wide-eyed youth of fourteen or so, the image of his mother.

"Yes, Muffins, indeed they do, every one, whether they can swim or not," replied Harry seriously. (Oswald was called Muffins because he was considered by his playmates to look like one. This reason usually did not satisfy older people, but after all, they did not know him as well as those of his own age, and had no kick coming, at all.)

"I say, Harry, it's awfully decent of you to tell us all these things beforehand, so that we shall be warned when the time comes!" This from Jack, who was twelve and dark and looked like his father.

"Harold Wimbourne, what on earth have you been telling those children about Yale College?" was Aunt Cecilia's indignant comment on his powers of fiction. "Neither of them slept a wink last night, for thinking about what the sophomores would do to them; and Jack asked me quite seriously if he thought his father would mind much if he went to Harvard instead, because he didn't think he could ever swim well enough to live through his freshman year! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Harry laughed unfeelingly, and refused to abate one jot of the horrors of hazing. He even wished it were all true, that these innocent and happy boys might have to go through with it all, that some one would ever be miserable in college beside himself. He scarcely spoke to James during the last few days, though James remained cordial and cheery enough toward him. But he was unnaturally cordial and forbearing, and that drove Harry into despair, especially as there was copious reason why James, under normal conditions, should be neither cordial nor forbearing. Harry had, a fortnight or so before Commencement, just after training was broken up, taken part in one of those engagements with the forces of law and order with which undergraduates are wont to relieve the monotony of their humdrum existence. First there had been strong drink, and plenty of it, after which came a period of vague but delightful irresponsibility, culminating in much broken glass, a clash with policemen and two or three arrests. [120]

Harry had escaped this latter ignominy, but as his name enjoyed equal publicity with those of the more unfortunate revelers, it did him little good. Nothing could possibly be less to the liking of such a person as James, as Harry realized perfectly at the time. He participated in the affair neither because he liked strong drink nor because he disliked policemen, but chiefly with a sort of desperate desire to force James' hand, to make his brother take him severely to task and end their mutual coolness in one rousing scene of recrimination and forgiveness.

But no such thing happened; James did not make the slightest reference to the business! Harry also remained silent on the subject, at first because of his amazement, then out of obstinacy, and finally because he was genuinely hurt. If James preferred that they should be strangers to each other, strangers they should be. Meanwhile James remained silent, of course, not because he did not take enough interest in his brother, but because he took too much. He refrained from mentioning the row because he was afraid that a discussion of it would merely bring on another quarrel, which he wished of all things to avoid.

So the two brothers bade good-by to each other for the summer in misunderstanding and mistrust, though their outward behavior was cordial and brotherly enough. James, who was starting almost immediately for the West, smiled as he shook the hand of his brother, who was going abroad for the holidays and said, "Well, so long; look out for yourself and don't take any wooden money." Harry, also smiling, replied in the same vein; but the smile died on his lips and the words turned to gall in his mouth as he thought what a bitter travesty this was of former partings, when their gaiety was either natural or intended to hide the sorrow of parting, and not, as now, wholly forced and affected to conceal the relief that each could not but feel in being far from the other.

CHAPTER XII

[121]

AN ACT OF GOD

It was five o'clock in the afternoon and five degrees above zero. It was also very windy, which made it seem colder to everybody except the thermometer; and as the thermometer alone exhibited signs of being able to stand a temperature of twenty or thirty or even forty degrees colder without suffering disagreeable consequences, that seemed rather unfair. For the wind, which was blowing not in hysterical gusts but in the calm, relentless, all-day-and-all-night, forty-to sixty-mile gale that you only get west of the Great Lakes, *did* make it colder; there was no doubt about that. Else why did every one keep out of it as much as possible; walk on the protected side of the street, seek shelter in doorways while waiting for trolley cars, and so forth? Of course the wind made you colder; so much colder that when you were sheltered from it, if only for a moment, you felt comparatively warm, though it was still five degrees above zero. Unless, that is, you happened to be standing over one of those grated openings in the sidewalk that belched forth their welcome though inexplicable gusts of warm air into the outer world; if you could get a place over one of those—gee, but you were the lucky guy!

That was the way you phrased it, at any rate, if you happened to be twelve years old and a newsboy with an income of—well, say thirty dollars a year, if that sounds sufficiently insufficient to provide anything approaching decent clothes, decent food and a decent place to live. If not, make it as little as you like. The point is that the annual income of a certain ten-year-old newsboy, by name of Stodger McClintock, was preeminently, magnificently insufficient to provide any of those commodities. As a consequence of which, Stodger was cold. As another consequence of which Stodger, the gay, the debonair, the unemotional, the anything but tearfully inclined, was very nearly in tears. People do actually suffer from the cold occasionally, even in this effete and over-protected age, and Stodger was suffering. The volcanic opening was all very well, but he [122] could not stay there long. And the prospects for the night were bad, and bad even for supper....

There were tears in James' eyes also as he hurried along from work, but they were entirely due to the wind. As soon as he perceived Stodger, however, who dashed out at him with the customary "Here's yer paper, mister!" at an unexpected place in the side street instead of at the corner as per custom, he realized that his (Stodger's) tears were not entirely due to the wind.

"Well, Stodger! What are you doing down here?" he cried cheerfully.

"Trine t' git woim." Stodger's diction at best was imperfect and it was now further impeded by a certain nasal fluency, the joint result of the cold and contemplation of domestic imperfections. But James understood, perfectly well.

"Well, Stodger, it is cold, I'll have to grant you that!" he rejoined, and instituted fumbling operations into the pocket where he kept his loose silver. "Give me a *Star* and a *Sun* and a *Mercury*, too, will you? This is no time for economy; the announcement of the all-American football team is out to-night. Give me one of every paper you have!"

Pecuniary transaction ensued, parallel with conversation.

"And how do *you* like this weather, Stodger?"

"Me? Oh, *I* don't mind."

"Don't you? Well, I do, I'm afraid. This is just a little too cold for my pleasure. But then I'm not a

husk, like you."

"Well—" there was concession in Stodger's voice—"it's loike this. Some guys minds it, 'n' then they don't like t' unbutton their coats 'n' fork out a penny fer a paper. 'N' that makes bum bizniss. See?" Print is miserably inadequate to give an idea of Stodger's consonants.

"I see. Stodger, did you ever hear of an act of God?"

"Huh?"

"Well, never mind. A cold snap like this is an act of God. Some natural cataclysm, something that can't be prevented or even foreseen. Well, sir, opposed as I am to indiscriminate giving, I'm going to break a rule this time. All bets are off when an act of God comes along. Here's half a dollar. [123] Can you get something to eat and keep yourself warm over night with that?"

"Sure I kin." Stodger grinned broadly for a second or two; then his face clouded. "Aw, naw. Not off you. I couldn't take that off you." He meant that only fools gave away money, and he did not want to put James in that category.

"Why not?" James' smile, his unruffled good-humor, had their effect. Surely a god that smiled and looked like that could not be quite a fool, even if he gave away money. "Now stop your guff; take the cash and cut along. So long!... That was my trolley, dash it; you and your confounded scruples have made me miss my car, Stodger!... Well, let's take a look at the all-American football team. Stoddard of Harvard, Brown of the Army, Steele of Michigan...." He ran his eye down the list till interrupted by a sharp exclamation from his friend.

"Gee, but he's a bum choice!"

"Who?"

"Steele."

"Steele? Oh, I'm not so sure. He's death on running back punts...."

"Aw, he *is* not! I tell yer, he couldn't hang onto a punt if 'twas handed to him on flypaper by a dago in a dress suit, let alone run with it! My ole gran'mudder c'n run better'n him, any day!" Domestic troubles being for the nonce in abeyance Stodger was in a mood to let his tongue run free on a favorite topic.

"Well, we'll have to put your grandmother in at all-America left half next year." Stodger knew as well as anybody when he was being laughed at, and held his peace. "I didn't know you were such a football fan, Stodger."

"Aw, yes. I'm some fan." This without enthusiasm, in the bored tone in which one agrees to the statement of a self-evident fact.

"Well, I wonder. Stodger, do you think you could recognize any all-America player if you saw him on the street, in ordinary togs?"

"Sure I could."

"How many years back?"

"T'ree years ... oh, more; four, five years, mebbe!"

"Well, I'm afraid you lose, Stodger!"

"Aw, gwawn! Try me an' see!" [124]

"You've lost already, I tell you. You've been talking to an all-America player for the last ten minutes and never knew it!"

"Aw, wotcha trine t' hand me! Run along 'n' tell it to the cop on the corner! Tell it to me gran'mudder, if you like; *she*'ll believe yer! You can't slip one like that on *me*, I tell yer!" Stodger's contempt was magnificent, but he rather marred the effect of it by adding suspiciously "Wotcheer?" which amounted to a confession that he might be wrong, after all.

"Two years ago. Take a good look now, Stodger; see if you can't recognize me." James turned so that the sunset glow fell more strongly on his face. Stodger looked with all his eyes, but remained unconvinced.

"Line, er back?" he inquired.

"Back."

"I gotcha now! Wimboine! Wimboine! Right half! Yale!" But experience had taught him that such dreams usually fade, and he went on, disappointed: "Aw, naw. Can't slip *that* on me. You're not that Wimboine. You look a little bit like him, but you're not *that* Wimboine. Brudder, p'raps. *You're* no football player."

"Why not?"

"Too thin. *You* c'd never tear through the line th' way *that* feller did."

"Oh, rot; we'll end this, here and now." James fumbled at length beneath his fur coat and

produced the end of a watch-chain on which dangled a little gold football with his name, that of his college and the date of his achievement on it. Stodger, convinced, simply stared. It was as though Jupiter had stepped right down from Olympus. James, with a smile at his consternation, resumed his paper for the last minute or two before his car arrived.

"Say, mister! Mister Wimboine! You got my tail twisted that time, all right! I'm a goat, I'm a simp, I'm a boob! You got my number! Call me wotch like!"

"All right, Stodger, I will." James spoke and smiled through his reading. He had almost ceased to think of Stodger, who was more entertaining when incredulous, and was reading merely to kill time till his car arrived. Stodger's tongue was still wagging:—

"Say, dey was a guy useter live down Chicago called Schmidt—Slugger Schmidt, that was a cracker jack—middle-weight—ever hear of him? I knew him, oncet ... he had a little practise bout wid Riley th' other night—you know, Hurrican Riley?—and laid him out in t'ree roun's.... Say, mister, there goes yer car! That's the Poik Street car went!" [125]

"What? Oh, did it? Never mind; I'm going to walk." James was off; off almost before the words were out of his mouth, and Stodger, struck by the sudden curtness of his tone was afraid he had outraged the feelings of the god. Mister Wimboine had clearly been deeply displeased about something, and Stodger was sure it must have been something more than the all-America football team.

Of course Stodger was not really responsible for James' displeasure and his sudden determination to walk the three miles that lay between him and his club and dinner, any more than was the composition of the all-America football team. It was something much more serious; something that made bodily exercise imperative lest cerebration around and around one little particular point should make him dizzy. For it was a very small thing that cerebration was busy on, even if it did represent a great deal to James; only a tiny paragraph at the bottom of the first page of one of the evening papers. The single headline had first caught his eye:—"Rates Heartache at $40,000," and then with unbelieving eyes he read on: "New Haven, Conn., Dec. 8. Myrtle Mowbray, a manicure living in this city, has filed a suit of breach of promise of marriage for $40,000 in the Superior Court here against Harold Wimbourne, a student in Yale University. Mr. Wimbourne is a member of an old and prominent New Haven family. He is a senior in the academic department."

A sort of mental and emotional nausea overcame James as the meaning of those lines sank into his brain. The vulgar, degrading cynicism of the headline! Breach of promise, scandal, newspaper publicity—that was the sort of thing that happened to other people, not to one's self. Such things simply did not occur in families one knew, much less in families by the name of Wimbourne. James had always thought of that name as apart, aloof from such things, exempt from all undesirable publicity. His family pride was none the less strong for being so unconscious, so dormant; now that it was outraged it flamed forth in a scorching blaze. [126]

So loathing gave way to anger, and anger lasted a full mile and a half. It would have lasted longer if it had been concentrated on one person or thing, instead of directed against several persons, several things, several sets of circumstances, the order of things in general. For James was not angry at Harry alone; even he realized that before the mile and a half were up. He was angry at him at first, but that soon passed off somewhat; his anger seemed even to be seeking other objects, unconsciously—the Mowbray woman, Uncle James, himself, Yale University, the whole nature of man.

But cerebration had a chance to get in a good deal of its fell work during those three miles. As he swung open the front door of the club and passed into the main lobby, with its teeming confusion of electric lights and bellboys, he was conscious of nothing but a quiet, deep, corroding disgust that seemed to be as old as all time. It seemed as if he had known of this disgrace for years; had almost had time to outlive it, in fact. His first impulse was to go into the bar and annex himself to one of the cheerful groups that would be congregating there at this hour, and turn his mind to something else. But almost immediately he remembered that practically every one there would also have read the evening paper, and he shuddered at the thought of their pitying glances.

Automatically following his daily custom he cheeked his coat and hat at the cloak room and collected his mail from his post-box. Then he went straight to the one room in the club where he thought he was likely to be alone; a small reading-room usually popular in the afternoon but deserted by early evening. He found it empty, as he had expected. With a sigh of relief he turned out all the electric lights and threw himself on a couch in front of the open wood fire—a graceful though unnecessary compliment on the part of the club management to meteorological conditions.

But unluckily his glance fell on the unopened letters he still held in his hand, and immediately his trouble was on him again. One of them he recognized as coming from his Uncle James and the other, bearing the post-mark of New Haven, was from Beatrice. With a slight groan of combined resignation and disgust he tore open his uncle's letter and read it by the flickering light of the fire. [127]

> Dear James:
> Your young brother has made more of a mess of it than we hoped would be the case. The Mowbray woman has brought suit for $40,000, and is likely to get it, or a good part

of it, according to Raynham, whom I saw about the business yesterday. She has letters and a spoken promise in the presence of witnesses. We have nothing except the knowledge that Harry was drunk when he wrote the letters and drunk when he spoke the words, which is not much comfort. Still, Raynham thinks she can be made to settle out of court, especially if we take our time. We have got to show her first that the world will not come to an end because a Wimbourne has been mixed up with a woman—which it won't. It will be a matter, Raynham thinks, of $15,000 at least; probably more.

"What is going to become of the boy? Have you any influence over him? If not, who has? It is about time somebody exerted some on him, other than bad. He has much to fight against.

Your aunt sends her love. Your affect. uncle,

JAMES WIMBOURNE.

In spite of his fatigue and his disgust, James smiled as he finished the letter. It was so characteristic of Uncle James; the most conventional sentences, the ones that seemed to mean least, really meant the most. "Your aunt sends her love"; only a person who knew Uncle James could appreciate the consciously suppressed humor of that phrase. As if Aunt Cecilia were not in such a vortex of conflicting emotions over the affair that such a conventional message would not be as far from her as Bagdad! "He has much to fight against"; Harry had much to fight against; Uncle James knew what, and he knew that James also knew. Connotative meanings like these more than atoned for the unflinching frankness of certain other phrases.

On the whole, James felt better for having read the letter, and opened Beatrice's with a lighter heart.

Dear James; (he read)

Jack Trotwood has just been here and told me that that unspeakable woman is actually going to sue Harry for breach of promise. I tried to get him to tell more, but he said [128] that that was all he had been able to get out of Harry. It's too awful! You can imagine what a time I've been through, seeing him at least once a week and not being able to say a word about the whole business. I've had to depend on Jack Trotwood for all my information, and naturally he hasn't wanted to say much. Do you mean to say Harry hasn't written you all this term? I cannot understand it at all.

Aunt Selina seems quite cut up about it, and wishes you were here. 'Tell James to come,' she said when I told her I would write you. I must confess, though, that I don't see what good you could do—now. Of course, terrible as this suit is, it does relieve things in one way, at least. Once we're quite sure it's merely money she's after, it doesn't seem quite so bad. I even think it is better now than it was early in the autumn, when we thought he was actually fond of her.

There is no other news to give you; as you can imagine, we have not been thinking of much else. Poor Harry, how sorry I am for him! How much I wish I could help him, and how little I can do!

As ever yours,

BEATRICE.

This letter was less comforting than the other. Beatrice's words seemed to James to carry a veiled reproach with them; to implicate him much more closely in Harry's disgrace than he had as yet thought of implicating himself. "I don't see what good you could do—now;" "better now than it was in the early autumn—" such sentences could not but have their sting for the sensitive mind, and James was sensitive when Harry was concerned, and even more so when Beatrice was.

Had he been negligent in regard to Harry? Oh, yes, he was perfectly willing to admit that he had, now that he came to think it over, though he would rather have had anybody other than Beatrice point out the fact to him—and that, doubtless, was because a comment from Beatrice would have twice the force of the same comment uttered by any one else. He had never really put himself out for Harry in any way, since the days when England seemed too far for him to venture to discover what the years were making of him. In the critical period of his senior and Harry's sophomore [129] year he had shown himself entirely incapable of giving the friendship and sympathy and guidance that were needed. Jack Trotwood, and not he himself, had been Harry's best friend, in every sense of the phrase, for three years and more. And after graduation, he had come to Minneapolis.

Then this degrading affair with the manicure. James had heard of that first through Beatrice, for Harry's letters, which had arrived at regular, though rather long, intervals, had ceased abruptly in September, at the beginning of the college year. That had been almost a relief to James. Harry's letters had been calculated to widen rather than bridge the gulf between them. They had been amusing and always cleverly written. A letter written on the previous Tap Day, dated conspicuously "Thursday, May 18, 7 P.M." (two hours after Harry had failed to receive an election to any senior society) had been a perfect masterpiece of omission. It ran pleasantly along on the weather, the outward appearance of the university, sundry little incidents of no importance or interest, the economic condition of the country—everything except Tap Day, himself, anything that would interest James. This letter had irritated James beyond all expression, yet at the same

time he admired it for what it was worth, and hated himself for admiring it.

And so, as he was obliged to learn from other sources of Harry's missing a senior society, so he was dependent on others for all his information *in re* Myrtle Mowbray. In October Beatrice had written him that Harry had been seen much in the society of the woman, who conducted her business in connection with a barber shop situated conveniently for the patronage of the student body. Jack Trotwood had also written, somewhat timidly, to the same effect, evidently much perplexed about where his truest duty to Harry lay. Apparently there had been motor parties to neighboring country inns, more or less conspicuous carryings-on in restaurants about town, and so forth. Such tidings became more and more acute for a month, and then ceased. There was reason for hoping that the nonsense was all over. Then the thunderbolt of to-day. [130]

James had not really been much worried, before to-day. He had caught a glimpse of "the Mowbray woman," as he always thought of her, one day in the previous June, while in New Haven for Commencement. He had been strolling along Chapel Street with a group of classmates, and one of them called his attention to a female form emerging from a shop door, giving in a discreet undertone a brief explanation of her celebrity, ending with a vivid word of commendation—"Some fluff." James looked, and saw a pretty face. It had been but a fraction of a second, and the face was turned away from him; but it was enough to leave quite a lasting impression on his mind—an impression that had not been without its effect on his reception of the news of Harry's infatuation. A pretty face! Well, when all was said and done, Harry had not been the first man of his acquaintance to become enamored of a pretty face—and get over it. He did not approve of the alleged infatuation; the thought of it gave him considerable uneasiness. But, helped out by the impression, his optimistic temperament had battled with the uneasiness and in the end overcome it; prevented it, certainly, from growing into anything like anxiety, anything that would necessitate drastic and disturbing measures, such as pulling up stakes, for instance, and hurrying New Haven-ward.... Oh, how loathsomely lazy and indifferent he had been, now that he looked back on it all!

A pretty face! The memory of it was still sharply out-lined on the back of James' brain and drove introspection and self-recrimination into momentary abeyance. A clear, slightly olive complexion, rising to a faint pink on the cheeks—artificial? Not as he remembered it; there was no suggestion of the chorus-girl—sharply-drawn eyebrows and dark hair. Above, a hat of some sort; below, a suit, preferably of dark blue serge. The impression had been recurrent in James' mind during these past months; not soon after it was received, in the summer; since then. There was something irritating and tantalizing about this circumstance; it was as though the impression had been strengthened by a second view. Where had he seen that face again, if at all? Yes, he had seen it, somewhere; he was almost certain of it. He was absolutely certain of it; he could remember everything—except the time and place. Which after all were important adjuncts to definite recollection—! No, he would not laugh himself out of it; he was sure. He would remember [131] all about it some time when he least expected it.

He left it at that, and listlessly lay at full length watching the fire and allowing his thoughts to wander from the all-absorbing topic and its octopus-like ramifications. The fire was fascinating to watch; he loved open fires and wished they would have one in this room every evening. It would be almost like a home to come back to, after work. It was particularly pleasant to watch, like this, in an otherwise dark room, as it cast its intermittent flare on the walls and furniture. It brought out the rich warm tones in the brown leather of the chairs and the oak of the wainscot, and picked out small particles of gilt here and there in the ceiling decoration, and set them twinkling back in a cheerful, drowsy way. From the dim outside world beyond the open door came occasional sounds of club life; the distant clatter of crockery, the swish of a passing elevator, a voice finding fault with a club servant. James listened to them at first, in a half-amused, idle sort of way; then gradually they faded from his consciousness and he was aware of nothing but the fire and its flickering yellow light.

He watched the fire intently, absorbedly, with the lazy concentration with which a tired brain often fastens itself on some physical object, as though to crowd out other thoughts clamoring for admittance. The fire was beginning to burn low now, with flames that never rose more than a few inches above the logs. Every few moments a small quantity of half-burnt wood dropped off and fell to the glowing bed of coals beneath, and the flames broke out afresh in the place it fell from. James watched this process with a growing sense of expectancy; he seemed to be always waiting, waiting for the next fall; yet when the next fall came he was still waiting.... Was it only the fall of the coals that he was waiting for? It must be something else, something that had nothing to do with the fire at all; something much more important; something that he longed not to have come, yet, and at the same time wished were over.... He seemed now not to be lying at full length, but sitting on the broad arm of a chair. The fire-light's glow fell no longer on leather and oak, but on old flowered chintz and mahogany.... Now he was sitting no longer; he was bending over— [132] bending low over something white; turning his ear so as to catch certain words that some one was uttering in a whisper; words that were indelibly burnt on his brain; words that were as inseparable from his being as life....

Then in an instant the room, the fire, everything vanished; and in their place, filling his whole consciousness—that face! He knew it perfectly now, exactly when, where, all about it; no room for mistake or doubt any more! He started upright on the couch; his whole world seemed suddenly illumined by a blinding flash of light. In another instant he was aware that somebody had turned on the electric light, and of a face staring quizzically into his. He heard a voice.

"Hello, you all alone in here, Wimbourne? You must be fond of the dark!—What are you looking so all-fired pleased about, I wonder?"

"Oh—Laffan! How are you?... Nothing much; I just thought of something, that's all."

"Congratulations on your thoughts. I'm looking for some one to dine with; I suppose you've eaten? It's late—"

"Whew—nearly eight! No, I've not eaten; shall we go up together?"

They started to leave the room, but James stopped abruptly in the doorway, suddenly practical, master of himself, of the whole situation.

"I say, Laffan, you're a lawyer, aren't you?"

"I attempt to be."

"Well, I want to consult you, professionally, if you'll let me. Consider me a client! Now, what I want to know is this; suppose a—"

"Oh, rot, man—not on an empty stomach! Come along upstairs; you can tell me all about it while you eat!"

CHAPTER XIII

[133]

SARDOU

About a week later James went to the head of his firm, the classmate's father who had offered him his position, and asked for a few days' leave of absence.

"Why didn't you go to Smith?" said his employer, naming the head of the department in which James was working.

"I didn't think he'd let me off without your leave, sir."

"Hm.... You must go, must you?"

"I'm afraid I must. Indeed, I'm bound to say, sir, that I shall go, leave or no leave."

"Hm. Well, you can go; but if you take more than half a week it'll have to come off your annual vacation."

"Thank you, sir, I shan't need more than that," said James and the interview was closed. No word was spoken of the reason for James' departure. Jonathan McClellan, founder and owner of the McClellan Automobile Company, knew a thing or two beside how to run an automobile business. He also read the papers.

That was on a Thursday. In the course of the evening James conducted an interview with his friend Laffan and at midnight or thereabouts he took train for Chicago. He proceeded next day to New York, and thence, on Saturday, to New Haven, arriving there early in the afternoon.

He went straight from the station to the law offices of Messrs. Raynham and Rummidge and remained there upwards of half an hour. Every sign of satisfaction was visible on his face as he emerged, but Raynham, who escorted him to the outer door, seemed not nearly so well pleased.

"I wish you'd change your mind, even now, and leave it to us," he said, just loud enough for the stenographer in the outer office not to hear.

"Plain enough sailing, now," replied James, smiling encouragingly. "I don't think you need to worry."

"Well, if you get into trouble, don't lose your head or your temper, or try to bluff. Just say you'll leave the rest to your lawyers, and get out!" [134]

James proceeded up Chapel Street in excellent spirits. A light snow was falling, melting on the pavements but covering the grassy expanse of the Green with a soft white blanket, and bringing each gaunt black branch of the elm trees into strong relief. James walked on the Green side of the street, so as to avoid the greetings of possible acquaintances, and kept his eyes on the broad square. He noticed that some elm trees had been clipped and others felled since he had last been in town; he was sorry to see them go and wished the authorities could find some way of preserving them better....

He walked unhesitatingly into the shop and, disregarding the obsequious gestures of the line of barbers, went straight to the very end, where he knew he would find her, with her glass-topped

table and her instruments and her disgusting little basin.... She was there, but a broad black back obtruded itself in front of her.

"One moment," she said, looking up and smiling.

James retreated a few steps to a row of chairs placed there for the use of the expectant. He sat down, and cursed himself for a fool. What business had he here? Why hadn't he left it all to Raynham, like a sensible person? He knew he would mess it all now, in spite of everything; he remembered stories of commanders who had been ousted out of impregnable positions by the mere confident attitude of their opponents. It was her appearance, her manner, her faultless smile, that unnerved him. It was, as he mentally phrased it to himself, because she looked "so damned refined." Never had he dreamed it would be as bad as this.

The black back shuffled inchoately out of his vision; his moment had come. He walked forward.

"You are Miss Mowbray, are you not?" he asked, speaking slowly and steadying his voice with difficulty.

"Yes?"

"My name is Wimbourne. I think you know my brother.... I would like to talk to you, if I might. When will you be at liberty?"

"Why shouldn't we talk right here?" she said cheerfully. "If you'll sit down there.... You had better let me tend to your nails—they need it."

"Very well." James sat down. He felt his courage returning; her self-possession stimulated him. [135] Not one shadow of a change of expression had passed over her face when he told her he was Harry's brother; her manner remained the perfection of professional cordiality. Well, if she could show nerve, he could, too.

She filled her bowl with warm water and arranged her instruments with perfect composure. When she was ready James surrendered his right hand.

"Miss Mowbray," he began at length, "as I understand the matter, you are suing my brother for breach of promise. Is that right?"

"It is."

"Well, I'm sorry. It's a bad business. Bad for you as well as for him, because you can't possibly win. Now, Miss Mowbray, I will be frank with you. You are not going to get that forty thousand dollars—your suit will not even get into court. I know that, but I don't want to have to go into the reasons why. I don't want scenes, I hate them; I want to make this interview as easy and as short as possible, so I will open it with an offer. I will give you five hundred dollars if you will agree to withdraw your suit and clear out of town, within a week. Do you accept?"

"I do not." Her smile was more than cordial now, there was pity in it. "Why do you suppose I took the trouble to sue for forty thousand dollars, if I would be content with five hundred, Mr. Wimbourne?"

"Oh, must we go into arguments? Why can't you simply take my word for it that your suit is impossible, and close with me? Five hundred dollars—think what it means! It would pay all your costs and leave you enough to start in with somewhere else."

"The sum is just eighty times too small."

"You won't, then? Think it over a little! I'll leave the offer open for five minutes; you needn't answer definitely till then."

James was thoroughly sure of himself and at ease now; he smiled to himself with a certain grim pleasure at his little touch of melodrama, reminiscent of—what? Sardou? A common trick, of course, but never without its effect. He ceased thinking about it, and watched the clock. Presently he was aware that his companion, always busy with her scraping and cleaning and rubbing, was speaking in a low, calm voice. [136]

"No, Mr. Wimbourne, I am not quite the fool you take me for, I'm afraid. You may not know it, but your brother has treated me very badly. He deserves to be punished. A man cannot make a fool of a woman, as he has of me, and get off scot free. There is such a thing as law and justice for those that are abused, and I have been abused. I should be very silly now if I did not go on and take all that is coming to me. I shall only be taking my right, Mr. Wimbourne; remember that. Fun is all very well if it is innocent fun; but when it hurts other people it has to be paid for."

"The five minutes are up," said James; "but I will willingly extend the time if there is any chance of your reconsidering. What do you think?"

No answer. James watched her calm face, with its pleasing and well-chiseled features, enlivened now by only the merest suggestion of a smile that was not really there, but still seemed latent, ready for instant use if called upon. About the mouth hung a shade of impatience, of obstinacy; anything else? No, assuredly no, search as he would. She was extraordinary!

"Oh, dear," he said with a gentle sigh, "you will go in for all the unpleasantness, I'm afraid.... Miss Mowbray, you have no right to sue my brother for breach of promise. You have been acting under

false pretenses to him from the first. You were married to a man called Edward Jennings, in the city of Minneapolis, on the 3rd of last September."

"You have proofs, no doubt?" The tone was sharp and defiant, the smile scornful and satirical, but she did blench—no doubt of it. James' heart leaped within him.

"Oh, yes—lots, right here in my breast pocket. Tiresome things, but lawyers love them. If you will release my right hand for a moment—" He chose to smile ingratiatingly at her, and it gave him a little thrill of revenge to observe how obviously forced her answering smile was. She was not proof against her own weapons. But his triumph faded almost immediately, and pity took its place. Poor thing, what a ridiculous game she had been playing! How could it possibly succeed? Could she not have known that some one who knew of her marriage would be sure to turn up at the wrong moment and spoil the whole affair? She looked so small, so defenseless, so crumpled as she sat there, waiting for him to produce his proofs; surely she was never made for this sort of [137] a career! Then her smiles of a little while ago came back to him, and he reflected that perhaps she was, after all.

"First, here is a little history of your career. You were born in Minneapolis, June 16, 188-. At the age of sixteen you went to New York City, where you entered the theatrical profession. For some years you were on the vaudeville stage, playing occasionally in New York, but mostly on the road. Your stage name was Rosa Montagu. You left the profession about three years ago, and have been engaged in this place as manicure for a little less than two years. You resumed the name of Myrtle Mowbray, which as far as I can make out is your own, on leaving the stage, but you were married, last September, under your stage name. Here is a copy of your marriage lines, sworn to by the Minneapolis License Bureau. Here is a photograph of you as Rosa Montagu...." "Suppose you let me finish manicuring your hands, Mr. Wimbourne." James replaced the papers in his pocket and his hand on the glass-topped table, and professional duties were resumed. They continued in silence for some time; neither party really had much to say now. It occurred to James that even now she might be trying to take him in by her indifference, to "bluff" him; but a careful study of her face dispelled the idea. He admired her nerve now no less than before.

"Are you satisfied, Miss Mowbray?" he asked at length.

"No. I'm beaten, though." James liked the reply immensely; liked, also, the manner in which it was given—hardly betraying anything more than good-humored disgust.

"When can I see you again to-day or to-morrow?" he asked again after a short pause. "There will be papers to sign, and that sort of thing."

"Is it possible that Mr. Raynham sent you out without a written statement for me to sign in your pocket?" she rejoined, looking fearlessly up at him.

"No—that is—yes, he did." Of course he had not, but James was already planning a little *coup* of his own not included in Mr. Raynham's arrangements.

"Well, could you come back here this evening? Toward ten? We close then, on Saturdays."

"Very well." [138]

Both were silent for some time. At last, when the manicuring was almost completed, James said with a sudden burst of friendly curiosity:

"Honestly, Miss Mowbray, why did you do it? Get married to him first, I mean."

She looked coldly up at him. "I really don't see why I should answer that question, Mr. Wimbourne."

"Of course not. There's not the slightest reason why you should answer it, if you don't want to."

She was not proof against his candor or his smile. She smiled back, in spite of herself, without rancor or affectation.

"I have an idea that you are quite an unusual young man, Mr. Wimbourne. You are, without doubt, the worst enemy I have in the world, and yet you give me the impression of being a friend. I think I like you better than your brother."

James made no reply to this, but only reddened slightly, and she went on:

"I married him because I lacked the courage not to. I was afraid to burn my bridges behind me. He had been wanting me to for a long time, and at the last he became very impatient.... It was the only way I could keep him, and I dared not let him go. Things had not been going well here.... So I went back and married him, on condition that it was to be kept an absolute secret. I was determined to come out here and try my luck for one more year.... Of course I was very sorry that I did it, this fall. But I determined to go through with ... the business, for there was a big prize at stake."

"And you never knew he had a brother in Minneapolis?"

"No—he simply told me he had an elder brother in the West. I had no suspicion of anything; it seemed perfectly safe. How did you find out, anyway, if I may ask?"

"I happened to see you—perhaps a minute after you were married, coming out of the marriage

license office, with a man. Compromising! You had been pointed out to me before, here, so I knew what you looked like. But what made you so keen to go through with—with the business? You don't look like that kind, somehow...."

She gave the last finishing touch to his hand and started to gather up her belongings before replying. "You don't know what it is not to have plenty of money, Mr. Wimbourne, or you would [139] not ask that question. You don't know what it is to watch other people sailing by in sixty horsepower limousines and realize that you would look every bit as well there as any of them, and better than most, and to realize, above all, that you could make so much more out of your wealth than most of them. I am under no delusions about myself; I know perfectly well that I'm not a manicure type. I have brains, I have good looks, I have social possibilities. Only, I happened to be born without money or social position, and the handicap is too great.... Well, it's all up now. There's no hope for anything better now."

The tone in which she spoke these words was so perfectly quiet and resigned, so utterly lacking in vulgar desire to advertise her woes, that James felt deeply moved. He could not think of anything to say to reassure or encourage her. Presently he blurted out, desperately:

"You've got a good husband in Edward Jennings, anyway. He's a good chap, according to all accounts...."

She smiled, deprecatorily. "He's a nice boy. But he'll never make any money."

James made up an excuse to consult Mr. Raynham again, and after that walked the snow-covered streets till dinner time. His first impulse was to look up Harry, but he discarded the idea; he would not see him, Aunt Selina, any one, till his task was done, every detail completed. He dined alone in an obscure restaurant and with some difficulty succeeded in frittering away the time till ten o'clock, at which hour he returned to the barber shop on Chapel Street.

He proceeded at once to business, taking out two papers which he gave to Miss Mowbray to sign. She read and signed without comment. When she had finished he said: "Would you mind delivering this for me?" and handed her an unsealed envelope bearing the simple superscription "Mr. Edward Jennings."

Miss Mowbray fingered the envelope indecisively a moment; then she opened it and took out the contents.

She rose from her seat and glanced apprehensively at James. "I can't—we—thank you, but I simply can't accept this," she whispered.

"Nobody asked you to do anything, except deliver the letter," replied James cheerfully. "I'd like to know what business you have opening other people's letters, anyway. It isn't nice.—Wedding [140] present, you know," he went on, with a change of voice; "I'm rather hoping to have the honor of giving you your first. Please try to make him accept it from me, won't you? Good-by!"

He shook her hand quickly and was actually off before she had time to offer another word of objection.

He made his way straight across the snowy street to Harry's rooms in Vanderbilt Hall. There was no answer to his knock, but the door yielded to a turn of the knob—how like Harry to leave it unlocked! The room was dark and empty, but he went in and found the embers of a fire dying on the hearth. He threw off his hat and overcoat, struck a light and looked about for materials with which to rebuild the fire.

In a few minutes the logs were blazing merrily before him. He turned out the gas, drew up an armchair and sat down in front of the fire to wait for Harry.

CHAPTER XIV [141]

UN-ANGLO-SAXON

He came in before long, stamping the snow from his boots. In the second or two that passed before he spoke, James saw that though he looked haggard and depressed, there was no trace of weakness of dissipation about his eyes or mouth. Nor did he slink; he blundered in with the impetuosity of a schoolboy for whom the world has no terrors. For which, though he was shocked to see how badly he looked, James was profoundly thankful.

He was aware of Harry's eyes trying to pierce the half-gloom; there was a touch of pathos, to James, in his momentary bewilderment.

"Hullo, Harry," he said gently.

"James!" The immediate, unconscious look of delight that came over Harry's face—even though it faded to something else within the second—pleased James more than anything had pleased him yet. Harry was glad to see him; that mattered much more than his almost instant recovery of his self-possession, his continuing, in the manner of the Harry of two years ago, the Harry of the previous Commencement: "Whatever are you doing here now, James?"

"I've got good news for you, Harry," he replied, rising and taking hold of the other's hand. "The Mowbray woman has withdrawn her suit. It's all right; she's signed things, and you have no more to fear from her." He dropped Harry's hand and moved off a step, as though to give him a chance to take in the news.

There was something rather fine in the simplicity, the humility, even of his manner as he did this, that did not escape Harry. He was deeply moved; self-possession and all it implied fell from him again.

"James, have you done this? What has happened? Tell me all about it! You haven't paid her all that money, James—don't tell me you've done that!"

"No, of course I haven't—there was no need for it. She was married out in Minneapolis last [142]
September, and I happened to get onto the fact—that's all. She had no business to be suing at all."

"And you—"

"I came here and told her so, to-day."

James sat down again where he had been sitting, as though to close the incident. Harry stood and gasped; he tried to speak but could not; his eyes filled with tears. Then he dropped at James' feet, clasping his knees in the manner of a suppliant of old. He buried his face in James' lap and gave a few deep sobs of joy and relief.

The Anglo-Saxon race being what it is, a good deal of courage is needed to go on with the relation of what occurred next. However, there is no help for it; history is history, and we can only tell it as it actually occurred, regardless of whether the undemonstrative are outraged or not. After Harry had thrown himself at his feet James took his brother's head gently between his hands, and then, with the greatest simplicity and naturalness in the world, bent forward and kissed it.

"Poor old thing," he said softly; "you have been having sort of a hard time of it, haven't you?"

"I wish you would tell me, James," said Harry somewhat later, as they sat gazing into the fire, James in the armchair and Harry on the floor, leaning back against James' legs, "I wish you would tell me just how you found out about her being married, and all about it. It seems so incredible—both that she should have been married and that you, of all people, should have been on the spot to discover it."

"Well, I just saw her, coming out of the marriage office with a man; that was all there was to it. I thought she probably wouldn't have been there unless she had just been married to him, so I had the register looked up, and there she was. She was under the name of Rosa Montagu—that gave us some trouble at first, because of course I didn't know that was her stage name. I put a fellow called Laffan, a young lawyer, onto the business, and he messed about with the register and the detective bureau and communicated with Raynham till he wormed it all out. Finally he got hold of a photograph of Rosa Montagu and showed it to me, and after that it was easy enough—Of course, it was a most God-given chance that I stumbled on her just at that compromising [143]
moment. She really wasn't as foolish as she sounds; she hadn't lived in Minneapolis for years and knew almost nobody there except her young man. It was a long chance, what with using her stage name and all, that any one would ever find her out."

"Yes. But I don't quite see—You say she was married in September?"

"Yes—the third."

"Well, if you knew she was married then, I don't quite see why you didn't make use of your knowledge before. When I was playing round with her, I mean—of course I, like the brazen idiot I was, didn't write you, but you must have heard—"

"Oh, yes. Well, it was a very funny thing. I didn't remember about having seen her in that place till months afterward; not till the night I heard about the breach of promise business. You see, it was only the barest, vaguest glimpse, there in the City Hall; she didn't even see me and I didn't even remember where I had seen her face before, then. I scarcely thought about it at all, at the time; I was in a great hurry to get to a hearing before some commission or other, and the thing went bang out of my mind. Then, when I read of the breach of promise, it all came back, in one flash! Funny!"

"Yes. It's the kind of humor that appeals to me, I can tell you."

"The man, Jennings, curiously enough, happened to be in McClellan's for a while, once, in the counting department. He left there to become a clerk in some bank. We worked up his end too, a little....

"Harry, I wish you'd tell me one thing," went on James, after a pause.

"Anything I can, James."

"Why on earth, when you found you were getting in deep with that woman, didn't you call on me to do something? You couldn't be so far gone as to think that I wouldn't—"

"Oh, couldn't I? You have no idea of what depths of idiocy I can descend to, if I want.—I don't know—at the time, the more I wanted help the less I could talk of it to any one, and you least of all. The person that gave me the most comfort was Trotty, and he never once mentioned the [144] subject to me, except when I introduced it myself! Yet even so, all through that time, it was you that I really wanted.—Look here, James, if you don't believe me, see what I've been carrying around with me all this time, as a sort of talisman!"

He took his wallet from his pocket and after a short search produced an old and dirty postal card bearing on its face the blurred but still readable legend "All right. James." He handed it to his brother.

"Gosh," said James, when he had read it, "do you mean to say you've kept that old thing ever since?"

"Ever since the day I got it. There was something about it that was comforting and optimistic and —well, like you; and I used to take it out and look at it occasionally when I got particularly down in the mouth. And I used to persuade myself, after a while, that it all would come out right, in the end; that somehow James would make it all right—you see how the prophecy has come true!... And the extraordinary part of it is that even while I thought that way about you, I simply couldn't break the ice and tell you about it all. I don't know why—I just couldn't!"

"I know," said James; "I know the feeling."

"Isn't it incredible, James, that what seemed perfectly natural and reasonable—inevitable, even—a few weeks, or days, or even an hour ago, should appear so utterly asinine now!... Pride, vainglory and hypocrisy—all of them, and a lot more! Sometimes I can't believe it possible for one person to assemble in himself all the vices that I do."

"Well, you don't, either," said James seriously. "That's one thing I want to clear up. Harry, don't you see that the blame for all this lies with me just as much as with you—more than with you—entirely with me?—"

"No, I don't," began Harry stoutly, but James continued:

"And that the real reason you didn't call on me was because I had steadily shut myself away from you? Oh, Harry, I've behaved like the devil during the last three years! It's just as you say; a course of action you never even question at one time, a little later seems so silly, so criminally silly, that you can't believe you seriously thought of following it!... I know perfectly well that a lot of the things I thought were horribly important a few years ago really aren't worth the paper they're printed on. The perspective changes so, even with these two years—less than two years— [145] out of college! Good Lord, if a man is really the right sort, if he has a good, warm-hearted nature at the bottom of him, thinks good thoughts, does nice things, uses to the best of his judgment what gifts and talents Providence is pleased to give him, what in Heaven's name does it matter whether he manages the crew or goes Bones, in the end?... I've been a fool, Harry. I've set the greatest value on the most worthless things; I've worshiped stone gods; I've let things irritate me that no sane man has any business to be irritated by. Worst of all, I've let these silly, worthless things come between you and me and spoil—well, one of the best things that ever came into my life!... All this estrangement business has been mainly my fault. I'm older, and have had more experience, and, I always thought, more common sense—though I haven't really—and I was the one that ought to have kept things straight. Harry, I'm sorry for it all!"

Harry was more moved than he would have liked to show by this confession. He was still enough of an undergraduate to be much impressed by his brother's casual mention of his senior society—the first time since he had been tapped the name had ever passed James' lips in his presence.

"It's a pleasure to hear you talk, James," he said, "but I hope you won't misunderstand me when I say that there's not one word of truth in all you've said—the last part of it, I mean. It's only convinced me more thoroughly of my own fault. Before, there might have been a shadow of doubt in my mind about my being entirely to blame. Now there is absolutely none.—Funny, that a person you like blaming himself should really be blaming you! It always seems that way, somehow...."

"James," he went on, a little later; "it makes you feel as if you were getting on, doesn't it?"

"How? In years?"

"Yes! I don't know about you, but I feel as old as Methusaleh to-night, and a whole lot wiser! And I must say I rather enjoy it!"

"Yes," said James reflectively, "it does seem a good deal that way."

"There are lots of questions you haven't asked me yet, James," continued Harry, after another interval. [146]

"Are there? Well, tell me what they are and I'll ask them, if you're so crazy to answer them."

"The first is, What on earth could you ever have seen in That Woman?"

"There was no need to ask that question," replied James, laughing; "not after I saw her to-day, at any rate."

"She was so damned refined," sighed Harry. James laughed again at the coincidence of Harry's hitting on the very words of his own mental description of her. "I was most horribly depressed, and she looked so kind and sympathetic, and was, too, when I got to telling her my woes.... And she never used a particle of rouge, or anything of that kind.... Once I kissed her, and after that she managed, in that diabolical refined manner of hers, to convince me that she wouldn't have any more of that sort of thing without marriage. That made me respect her all the more, of course, as she knew it would. At one time, for a whole week, I should say, I was perfectly willing to marry her, whenever she wanted, and I didn't care whom I said it to, either.... Do you know, James, she would have been in for the devil of a time if I had gone on and pressed her to? I wonder what little plans she had for making me cease to care for her and back out at the right time.... There was no need for that, though; one day she called me 'kid,' and things like that before people, and I began to see."

"That was part of her little plan, of course," said James.

"Well, well—I shouldn't wonder if it was! You always were a clever child, James!..."

"What are some more of the things I've got to ask?" inquired the clever child after a brief silence.

"What? Oh—yes! Why don't you ask me to cut out the lick?" (He meant, abstain from alcoholic beverages.)

"Well, do you want me to?"

"Well, yes, I think I do, rather!"

"Well, will you?"

"Well—yes!"

Both laughed, and then Harry went on: "It strikes me that we are both talking a prodigious lot of nonsense, James. We've been making a regular scene, in fact—"

"I rather like scenes, myself," interrupted James, just for the pleasure of their being how he had expressed exactly the opposite opinion to some one else a few hours before. [147]

"And no doubt we shall be heartily ashamed when we look back on it all in the cold gray light of to-morrow morning. One always is."

"I don't know," objected James, serious again, "I don't think that I shall be sorry for anything I've said or done."

"Well, as a matter of strict truth, I don't know that I shall either. I suppose one needn't necessarily be making a fool of oneself just because it's twelve o'clock at night; that is—oh, you know what I mean—!"

So they sat and talked on far into the night, loath to break up the enjoyment of the rediscovery of each other. They both seemed to bask in a sort of wonderful clarity and peace—do you know these rare times when life loses its complexity and uncertainty and becomes for the moment wholly sane and enjoyable and inspiring? When a person is actually able to live, if only for a little time, entirely in his better self, without being troubled by even a recollection of his worser? That was, substantially, the condition of those two boys as they sat there, at first talking, then thinking, and at last, as drowsiness slowly asserted itself over them, simply sitting.

"Well," said James at last; "unless you intend taking permanent possession of my legs, I suppose we'd better go to bed. Am I sleeping here, somewhere?"

"Yes," said Harry; "in my bed; I shall sleep on the sofa," and he forthwith embarked on a search for extra sheets and blankets.

They both slept uninterruptedly till nearly ten, at which hour they sallied forth in search of breakfast. During the night the snow had changed to rain, which still fell out of a leaden sky, turning the earth's white covering to dirty gray and clogging the gutters with slush. Everything looked sordid, prosaic, ugly, especially Chapel Street, which they crossed on their way to the nearest "dog"; especially the "dog" itself as they approached it, with its yellow electric lights still shining out of its windows. It was an unattractive world.

"Well, how does it look this morning?" James asked, studying his brother's face.

Harry shuffled along several steps through the slush before he answered:

"Just the same, James, and I for one, don't mind saying so." Then they looked at each other and smiled slightly.

CHAPTER XV [148]

CHIEFLY CARDIAC

Life appeared, nevertheless, to have recovered all its normal complexity and variety. Things change with the return of daylight, even if they do not deteriorate, and though the two boys were still, in a manner of speaking, happy in each other's proximity, the thoughts of each were already busy on matters in which the other had no direct share. Harry was already foreseeing unpleasantnesses in the way of the restoration of cordial relations with the world. Exile has its palliations; he had taken a sort of grim pleasure in the state of semi-warfare in which he had lived. But that sort of thing was now over; he wanted to be right with the whole world—he even looked forward to astonishing people with the thoroughness of his conservatism. And he would have to make all the first advances. Thoughts of apologies, unreciprocated nods, suppressed sneers, incredulous glances and all the rest did not dismay him, but they might be said to bother him. At least, they were there.

As for James, he had thought so much about Harry during the last ten days that it is easy to understand why, the affair Harry having been satisfactorily cleared up, his mind should be busy with other things. James' control over his mind was singularly perfect and methodical; its ease of concentration suggested that of an experienced lawyer examining the contents of several scraps of papers and returning each one again to its proper pigeon-hole, neatly docketed. The papers bearing the label of "Harry," neatly tied up in red tape, were again reposing comfortably in their pigeon-hole; the bundle that now absorbed his attention was marked "Beatrice."

Outside of his work, to which he had conscientiously devoted the best of his mental powers, Beatrice had occupied the most prominent place in his thoughts for over a year and a half. For six days in the week, between the hours of nine and five, she had not been conspicuous in his mind; [149] but how often, outside that time, had his attention wandered from a book, a conversation, a play, and fastened itself on the recollection of that softly aquiline profile of hers, the poise of her head on her beautifully modeled shoulders, her unsmiling yet cordial manner of greeting, and which she somehow managed to convey the impression of being unaffectedly glad to see him! It would probably be too much to say that James had been in love with her during that time, but James was not the sort of person who would easily be carried off his feet in an affair of the heart. Often, as the memory of her face obtruded itself on his day-dreams—or still oftener, his night-dreams—he had calmly put to himself, for open mental debate, the question "Am I really in love with her?" and had never been able to answer it entirely satisfactorily.

On the whole, in view of the fact that the memory of her showed no tendency to fade in proportion to the time he was absent from her presence, he had become rather inclined to the opinion that the answer must be in the affirmative. Yet even now he could not be sure. He might be only cherishing an agreeable memory. He had not seen her since the previous June, and could not be absolutely certain, he knew, till he saw her again. He was anxious to see her!—Not that mere friendship would not account for that, of course.

Harry had to attend Sunday Chapel, and it was arranged that James should not go with him, but should proceed directly to the house. Harry himself would turn up at dinner-time—Aunt Selina, it will be remembered, had dinner in the middle of the day on Sundays. Harry was naturally anxious to have all news-breaking over before he came, and James—well, on the whole James was entirely willing to take the burden of news-breaking on himself.

He found Aunt Selina at home; a slight cold in the head and the inclemency of the weather had been sufficient to make her forego church for this Sunday. Beatrice had proved herself of stauncher religious metal—"Though I am sure she would not have gone, if she had known you were in town," as Aunt Selina told James.

Aunt Selina took the good news much as a duchess of the old régime might have learned that the Committee of Public Safety had decided not to chop off her husband's head. It was agreeable [150] news, but it was nothing to make one forget oneself. Her manner of saying "This is splendid news, James; I am proud of you" indicated a profound belief in the sanctity of the Wimbourne destiny and an unshakable faith in the ultimate triumph of the Wimbourne character rather than unbecoming thankfulness for something she ought not to have had to be thankful about. James advised her that Harry would talk much more freely and relations in general would be much more agreeable if she refrained from mention of the subject till he introduced it himself. Aunt Selina calmly agreed. She had great faith in James' judgment.

After an hour's chat with his aunt James exhibited visible signs of restlessness. Half-past twelve; it was time Beatrice returned. He rose from his chair and stood watching in front of the window. Soon he saw her; she alighted from a trolley car and started to walk up the path. There was something rather fine, something high-bred and gently proud about the way she grasped her umbrella and embarked on the long slushy ascent to the house. Her manner rather suggested a daughter of the Crusaders; it was as though she hated the wind and rain and slush, but disdained to give other recognition of their existence than a silent contempt.

As he beheld her distant figure turn in at the gate and plod unflinchingly up the walk a curious

sensation came over James. He suddenly found himself wanting to wreak an immediate and violent vengeance on the elements that dared to make things so unpleasant for her, and that almost immediately passed into an intense desire to seize upon that small figure and clasp it to him, sheltering her from the rain, the wind, the slush, every evil in this world that could ever befall her.... In that moment he felt all the beauty of man's first love. All the worries of doubt and introspection fell from him; he felt the full glow of love shining in his heart like a star, giving significance, sanctity, even, to those moments of wondering, fearing, hoping, doubting that had filled so many months. He was in love with her!... He came into the realization of the fact in a spirit of humility and prayer, like a worshiper entering a temple.

Of course he gave no outward sign of all this. He merely said, as soon as he could trust himself to be articulate, in a perfectly ordinary tone of voice: [151]

"There's Beatrice, now. She's walking."

"Yes," answered his aunt; "I tried to make her stay at home, but she would go." Then after a moment she gently added, as though in answer to James' unspoken reproach: "I would have let her take the carriage, but of course I could not ask Thomas to go out in such weather."

James entirely failed to see why not. He would willingly have condemned Thomas and the horses to perpetual driving through something much more disagreeable than rain and slush if it could have saved Beatrice one particle of her present discomfort.

But being, in fact as well as in appearance, a daughter of Crusaders, and consequently well used to climatic rigors in the country from which her ancestors had marched to meet the Paynim foe, Beatrice was really not suffering nearly as much as James' lover-like anxiety supposed her to be. She had thick boots, a mackintosh, an umbrella and a thick tweed skirt to protect her from the weather, and could have walked miles without so much as wetting her feet. If she had got wet, she certainly would have changed her garments immediately on reaching home, and even if she had not changed then she probably would not have caught cold, having a strong constitution. Nevertheless James stood at the window and silently worried about her, and his first words as he met her at the front door were expressive of this mood.

"Beatrice!" he cried eagerly, as he threw the door open, "I do hope you're not wet through!"

She had not seen him standing at the window, so his appearance at the door was consequently a complete surprise to her, and the expression that came over her face as she saw him was one of pure pleasure. James' heart leaped within him at her unaccustomed smile, and then fell again as he saw it change to an expression of ever so slight and well-restrained surprise, not at his being there, but at the manner and words of his greeting. He realized in a second that he had allowed his tongue to betray his heart.

Beatrice paid no immediate attention to the remark, and her welcoming words "James, of all people in the world!" gave no sign of anything more than a friendly pleasure. She was entirely at her ease. James found himself running on, quite easily: [152]

"Yes—just got a day or two off and came on to say Howdy-do to you all. Got to start back this afternoon, worse luck. How well you're looking!"

By this time they were practically in the library, in the restraining presence of Aunt Selina, and Beatrice had no more chance to introduce the topic clamoring for discussion in the minds of both than the question "You've seen Harry?" uttered in an undertone as they went through the door, allowed her. Church, the weather and the unexpected pleasure of James' arrival were politely discussed for a few moments, and then Aunt Selina withdrew to prepare for dinner.

"James," Beatrice burst out, "tell me about Harry. I know you've come on about that; tell me all about it! Has anything been done? Can anything be done?"

"It can," said James, smiling at her impetuosity. "Like-wise, it has. In fact, it's all over!"

"What do you mean?... Have you paid her off?"

"No; she withdrew of her own accord."

"James, don't be irritating! Tell me about it. You've done something, I know you have!"

"Well—possibly!" He smiled tantalizingly at her—so like a man!

"What?"

"Well, I'll tell you—on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That you'll promise not to thank me when you've found out!" James considered this rather a masterly piece of deceptive strategy, more than making up for his indiscretion at the front door.

Beatrice dropped her eyes and drew down the corners of her mouth, with an expression half humorous, half contemptuous. "Go ahead," said she.

James went ahead and told her the whole affair at some length. His position during this narrative was a not unenviable one; it is not often that one gets a chance to recount to one's lady-love a story in which one is so obviously the hero. Nor did he lose anything by being the narrator of his

own prowess; his omissions spoke louder in his favor than the most laudatory comments of a third person could have. [153]

"So, he is free!" she said at last, when she had cross-questioned the whole thing out of him. "He is free again!..."

What was there about these words that seemed to blast James' feeling of triumph, to chill the very marrow in his bones? Was it only the words; was it not rather the extraordinary intensity of the pleasure on her face; a pleasure which did not fade with her smile, but lived on in the dreamy expression of the eyes, gazing sightlessly out of the window?... She spoke again in a moment or two, asking a question about some detail in the case, and the feeling left him again. He answered her question with perfect composure. Such hysterical vapors must be incidental to love, he supposed. He was not troubled about it at all, unless, very vaguely, by the fleeting memory of a similar experience, occurring—oh, a long time ago. Nothing to worry about.

He did not say much after he had completed his narrative. He was content simply to sit and look at her, drinking in her smiles, her comments, her little ejaculations of pleasure and answering her stray questions about the great affair. The joy of discovery was not yet even tinged with the thirst for possession. It was enough to watch her as she talked and laughed and moved about; to watch her, the living original, and think how much more glorious she was than the most vivid of his recollections of her. Oh, how wonderful she was!

Presently he was aware of her making remarks laudatory of himself, and primed his ears to listen.

"But how clever it was of you, James," she was saying, "to work out the whole thing, just from that one little glimpse—and so quickly, too! Of course it was just a Heaven-sent chance, your seeing her at that moment, but I can see how much more there was to it than that. What a frightfully clever person you are, James—a regular detective! You really must give up making motor cars and be another Sherlock Holmes!"

All this fell very pleasantly on his ears, though he could have wished, if he had taken the time to, that she could have employed some other adjective than "clever." But there was no time for such minor considerations. Just at that moment they heard the rattle of the front door latch, and Beatrice, knowing that none but Harry ever entered the house without first ringing, jumped from [154] her chair and started towards the hall, the words "There he is now!" glowing on her lips....

And then the universe crumbled about James' ears. Had his father's early readings extended into the minor Elizabethan Drama, he might have remembered the words of Beaumont—

> This earth of mine doth tremble, and I feel
> A stark affrighted motion in my blood

and applied them quite aptly to his present state. For a moment the earth literally seemed to reel; he staggered slightly, unnoticed, and caught hold of the back of a chair. Then, while Beatrice went out to meet Harry, he stood there and wished he had never been born to live through such a moment.

Beatrice was in love with Harry—that was the long and the short of it. There was no mistaking the import of the look of utter glorification that came over her face as she heard his hand on the doorknob; such an expression on the face of a human being could mean but one thing.... He wondered, despairingly, if his face had borne such a look a little while ago, when he caught sight of Beatrice....

Whether or not Harry was on similar terms with Beatrice he could not say. He rather thought that he was, or if not, it was only a question of time till he would be. He was not a witness of the actual moment of meeting; that occurred in the hall, and all he got of it was Harry's initial remark: "Well, Beatrice, have you heard the good news? James has made a respectable woman of me!" drowned in a sort of flutter from Beatrice, in which he could distinguish nothing articulate—nor needed to. The character of the remark—flippant to the verge of good taste!—might at another time have excited his disgust; but now it made as little impression on him as it did on Beatrice.

Harry himself might not have made it at another time; it was the result of his embarrassment. So, also, was the expression which he wore when he came into the room with Beatrice a moment later—a very unusual look, due to a very unusual cause. Beatrice had, in fact, all but given herself away to him. He followed her into the room embarrassed and flustered. It was incomparably the worst of the series of strained moments in his intercourse with Beatrice, and it gave point and [155] coherency to the others in a way he hated to think of.... Once in the library he found himself leading conversation, or what passed for conversation among the three for the next few moments. The others appeared conversationally extinct; Beatrice—he hardly dared look toward her—trying to recover her composure; James preternaturally grave and silent, for some unknown reason. The atmosphere seemed surcharged with an unexpected and, to him, inappropriate gravity. He felt like a schoolboy among grown-ups.

Presently Aunt Selina returned and dinner was announced.

Poor James—he had won Paradise only to lose it the next instant! No one could have guessed anything from his behavior—he was not the sort of person to make an exhibition of his emotional crises; but he really lived very hard during the meal that followed. His state of mind was at first nothing but a ghastly chaos, from which but one thing emerged into certainty—he must not betray himself or Beatrice; he must go on exactly as if nothing unusual had occurred. It never paid to make a fool of oneself, and—this was the next thought, the next plank that floated to him from the wreck of his happiness—he had not, that he knew of, given himself away. That was a tremendous thing to be thankful for; what a blessing that he had got wind of Beatrice's true feelings before he had the chance to blunder into making love to her and so precipitate a series of horrors which he could not even bear to contemplate! Now, he told himself reassuringly, as he tried desperately to contribute his fourth to the none too spontaneous conversation, he had only to keep himself in check, keep his mouth shut, keep from making of himself the most unthinkable ass that ever walked God's earth—and it would all come out right!

By the time the roast beef made its appearance he saw there was only one thing to do and without a moment's hesitation he embarked on the doing of it. Beatrice sat on his right; he raised his eyes to her and passed them over each enthralling feature of her, her soft dark hair; her eyes, brown almost to black, gentle yet fearless in their gaze, and at the same time, quite calmly and unemotionally, told himself that she could never be his. She was Harry's. These two were [156] intended for each other all along, made for each other. Could he not have seen that in the beginning, if he had kept his eyes open? Could he not have seen that their childish companionship, dating from Harry's English days, their being placed again, as though by a divine sort of accident, in the same town, and above all their obvious fitness for each other, was going to lead to love?

Well—thus he found himself to his one substantial comfortable support—he had hurt no one but himself. He had only to put Beatrice resolutely out of his mind and all would be well. She was Harry's; was that not the next best thing to her being his?—better, even? No longer ago than last night he had convinced himself that Harry was, when all was said and done, a better man than he was. Was it not perfectly just that the prize should go to him?

The thought helped him through the meal astonishingly. Unselfishness is a great stimulus. Once he saw that he could do something definite toward the happiness of those he loved best, he seemed, rather to his own surprise, perfectly willing and able to do it, at no matter what sacrifice to himself. His righteousness supported him not only through the meal, but well through that part of the afternoon that he spent in the house—up, indeed, to the very moment of parting.

James' plan was to take a five-o'clock train to New York, whence he would take a night train to Chicago and arrive in Minneapolis early Tuesday morning, having missed only three working days at the office. It was still raining at four o'clock and a cab was telephoned for. As it was plodding up the slushy drive, James, overcoated and hatted, stood on the porch ready to get into it. Harry, who was to go to the station with him, was "having a word" with Aunt Selina—or, more exactly, being had a word with by her—in the hall. Beatrice, by some fiendish chance, determined to do the same by James.

"James," she said, "I want you to know how perfectly splendid I think it was of you—all this about Harry, I mean. You may say it was no more than your duty, and all that; but it was fine of you, nevertheless. Thank you, James, and good-by."

It really was rather awful. It amounted to his being rewarded and dismissed like a faithful servant. And her tacit, unconscious assumption of her right to thank people for favors conferred [157] upon Harry—that was turning the knife in the wound. Of course she could have no idea of the pain she was giving, and James shook her hand and said good-by trying to give no sign of the pain he felt. All the comfortable stability of his logic faded from him as she spoke those words. All the way to the station, sitting by Harry's side in the smelly cab, he found himself crying inwardly, like a child, for what he could not have; wondering if, by the exercise of tact and patience, Beatrice could possibly be brought to love him; overcome at moments by an insane desire to throw himself on Harry's neck and beg him to let him have her—for surely, surely Harry could not be as fond of her as he! Oh, was it going to be as hard as this right along?...

"James," said Harry suddenly as the two paced the dreary platform in silence, waiting for the train to pull in; "it's sometimes awfully hard to say what you want without talking mawkish rot, but there's something I've simply got to say, rot or no rot, or drop dead on the asphalt.—I'm pretty young, of course, and haven't seen much of anything of life; but a person doesn't have to live long to get the general idea that it's rather a chaotic mess. Well, occasionally out of it there emerges a thing that appears to bring out all that's best in your nature and gives a certain coherence to the other things...."

"Yes?" said James, wondering what was to follow.

"Well, it seems to me that one of those things is—you and me. Since last night, I mean ... James, I don't know how you feel about it, but since then I've had a sense of nearness to you, such as I've never begun to have with any other human being—such as doesn't occur often in one lifetime, I imagine ... I really think very highly of you, James!" He broke off here with a smile, half embarrassed at his brother's slowness of response, ready to retreat into the everyday and the trivial if the response did not come.

But he need not have worried; James was merely choosing his words; every nerve in him was

thrilling in answer to Harry's advance. He returned the smile, but replied, in full seriousness: "You've hit it exactly; I should even say it couldn't be duplicated in one lifetime.... You're unique, Harry!"

"That's it—unique," said Harry, joining in with his mood. "You've mastered the art of uniquity, James." [158]

"And what's more," went on the other, "it always has been that way—really. Even during these last few years. With me, I mean."

"With me, too. James"—he stood still and looked his brother full in the face—"do you know, such a relation as ours is one of the few positive good things that makes life worth while? If we were both struck dead as we stand here, life would have been well worth living—just for this!"

"Yes, that's true," said James slowly; "that's perfectly true."

"And one thing more—for Heaven's sake, James, don't let's either of us mess up this thing in the future, if we can help it! It may be broken up by outside causes—well and good; we can't prevent that; but can't we have the sense not to let silly, conventional things come between us? Let's not be afraid, above all, of plain talk—at any rate, you need never be afraid to say anything to me. I may be narrow and obstinate to other people, but I don't think I could ever be so to you again. I'd take anything from you, James, anything!—" He smiled at the unintentional double meaning of his words, adding, "And there's nothing I wouldn't give you, either."

It would not be too much to say that James was literally inspired by Harry's words. They seemed to bring out every vestige of what was good and noble and unselfish in his nature, lifting him high above his everyday, weak, commonplace self—such as he had shown it in the cab, for instance—making life as clear, as sensible, as inspiring as it had seemed last night. His "sacrifice" now appeared nothing; he scarcely thought of it at all, but its nature, when it did appear in the back of his brain, was that of an obvious, pleasant, easy duty; a service that was a joy, a denial that was a self-gratification.

"All right, I'll remember. And if I telegraph you to dye your face pea-green, I shall expect you to do it!" He spoke with a lightness of spirit wholly unfeigned. Then he continued, somewhat more seriously: "I'll tell you what it is; each of us has got to behave so well that it'll be the fault of the other if we do fall out. There's a poem Father used to read that says something of the kind; something about there being none but you—'there is none, oh, none but you—'" [159]

"'That from me estrange your sight,'" finished Harry. "I remember—Campion, I think."

"That's it—that from me estrange your sight. It's funny how those things come back sometimes...." The train pulled noisily in at that moment and made further discussion impossible, but enough had been said to start the same thoughts running in the minds of both and give them both the feeling, as they clasped hands in parting, that the future had the blessing of the past.

CHAPTER XVI [160]

THE SADDEST TALE

With the beginning of the next term Harry embarked on the task of setting himself right with the world. He found it on the whole easier than he had expected. He had only to make a few formal apologies, as in the cases of Shep McGee and Junius LeGrand, and let it become generally known that he had definitely given up drinking, et cetera, to make the cohorts of the commonplace glad to receive him in their ranks once more.

Reinstatement in the social life of New Haven followed quite easily—almost as a matter of course, for he had not actively offended any members of what might be described as the entertaining classes. The female element, practically all of whom knew him, or at least of him, through his family connection, had evolved a mythical but interesting conception of him as "rather a fast young man"; and that, alas! served to endear him to their hearts rather than otherwise.

So the last months of his college course passed in a sort of sunset haze of enjoyment, marred only by one thing, indecision as to his subsequent career. His friends were inclined to look rather askance at this; one or two, in a tactful way, pointed out to him the danger of "drifting." In reality there was small danger of this; although his inherited income would make him independent of his own efforts for livelihood during the rest of his natural life, Harry would never "drift" very far. His brain was too active, his ambition too lively, his sense of the seriousness of life too deep to allow that. He could never be content doing nothing. He wanted, in turn, to do very nearly everything; the professions of lawyer, doctor, "business man," engineer, clergyman, soldier, sailor—tinker and tailor, even were considered and rejected in turn.

"It's not that I don't want to do all these things," he explained to Trotty, who sometimes showed impatience at his vagueness; "the trouble is that I can't do any of them. I'm not fitted for them— [161] I'm not worthy of them, if you like to put it that way. If I were a conscienceless wretch, now, it would be different!"

One Sunday afternoon in June, rather saddened by the feeling of his apparent uselessness in the world, he went to call on Madge Elliston.

"Well, what are you going to do this summer?" she began. "That seems to be the one topic of conversation at this time of year."

"This summer? Oh, I'm going to walk, with the rest of my class, in the more mountainous portions of Europe. At present I am under engagement to walk through the hilly parts of England, Scotland and Wales, the Black Forest, the Alps, the Tyrol, the Dolomites and some of the cooler portions of the Apennines; but the Cévennes and the Caucasus are still open, if you care to engage them.... In between times I expect to roister, shamelessly, in some of the livelier resorts of the Continent. That's all quite simple; what I'm worrying about is what I'm going to do next winter."

"Why don't you write, if I may be pardoned for asking so obvious a question?" asked Madge.

"One simple but sufficient reason—I haven't got anything to write about," answered Harry, smiling. "That's what everybody asks, and the answer is always the same. This prevalent belief in my literary ability is flattering, but unfortunately it's wholly unfounded."

"I shouldn't say so. I've read most of what you've written in college, and it seems to me extremely clever."

"Clever—that's just it! Nothing more! The awful truth is, there's nothing more in me. I have rather a high regard for literature, you see, and on that very account I'm less willing to inflict myself on it. I wouldn't care, though, if there was anything else I appeared to be cut out for. If I felt that I could sweep crossings better than other people, I assure you I would go into the profession with the greatest cheerfulness!"

Madge laughed. "I know very much how you feel—I've been going through much the same thing myself, though you might not have guessed it. Only as it happens I have received a call for something very like the profession you speak of." [162]

"Crossing-sweeping?"

"The next thing to it—teaching in a dame's school in town—Miss Snellgrove's. I think it's rather a pretty idea, don't you? Society flower, withered and faint with gaiety, seeking refreshment in the cloistral, the academic!—You don't approve?"

"Woman's sphere is the home," said Harry doubtfully.

"Not when the home is a two-by-four box; you couldn't call that a sphere, could you? Of course," she went on, more seriously, "of course the real, immediate reason why I'm doing it is financial. These are times of—well, stringency.... Not but what we could scrape along; but it seems rather absurd to be earning nothing when one could just as well be earning something, doesn't it? And the only alternative is playing about eternally with college boys younger than myself."

"Yes, I think you're very sensible, if that's the case. Not that it is, of course; you'll find plenty of people coming back to the graduate and professional schools to console you. Also my brother James at week-ends, if that's any comfort to you!"

"James? Is he in this part of the country?"

"Yes, in New York. He's going to be in McClellan's branch there next winter—assistant manager, or something of the sort—something important and successful sounding. We are all very much set up over it. And it's so near that he can come up for Sunday quite regularly, if he wants.—It does give me quite a solemn and humble feeling, though, to think that you have found a profession before me."

"Oh, yes; teaching at Miss Snellgrove's is more than a profession—it's a career!—I refuse to believe, though," she continued with a change of manner, "that you have not found your profession already, even though you may not care to adopt it yet. For after all, you know, you have the creative ability. Every one says that. All that's wanting in you, as you say, is having something to write about, and nothing but time and development will bring that. Meanwhile I think it's very nice and high-minded of you not to go ahead and write nothing, with great ease and fluency! That's what most people in your position do."

"Thank you; that's very encouraging," said Harry. He looked thoughtfully at her for a moment and [163] continued: "Has it ever occurred to you, Madge, that you are quite a remarkable young woman?"

"Heavens yes, hundreds of times!"

"That's a denial, I suppose. However, it's true. Look at the way you've just been talking to me!... You have what I've come to admire very much during the past few months—perfect balance of viewpoint. You have what one might call a sense of ultimacy—is there such a word? It's like a number of children, each playing about in his own little backyard, surrounded by a high fence that he can't see over, suspecting the existence of a lot of other backyards, with children in them

wondering what lay beyond in just the same way. Then occasionally there is born a happy being to whom is given the privilege of looking down on the whole lot of them from the church steeple, and being able to see each backyard in its exact relation to all the other backyards. That's you.... It's a rare gift!"

Madge was at first amused by this elaborate compliment, but she ended by being rather touched by it.

"It's very nice of you to say that," she replied after a moment, "no matter how little foundation there may be for it. It proves one thing, at any rate—I have no monopoly of the quality of ultimacy! You wouldn't be able to think I was ultimate, would you, unless you were a wee bit ultimate yourself? And that goes to prove what I said about your attitude toward your profession."

"I'm afraid you can't make me believe in my own ultimacy, no matter how hard you try," said Harry. "In fact I pursue the rival study of propinquity—the art of never seeing beyond one's own nose!"

"Well, you must at least let me believe in the ultimacy of your finding your profession," insisted Madge. But Harry only shook his head.

Commencement arrived at last, and Aunt Cecilia, attended by a representative delegation of her progeny, flopped down upon Aunt Selina, prepared to do as much by Harry as she had by his brother two years earlier. Aunt Cecilia belonged to the important class of American women who regard a graduation as a family event second in importance only to a wedding or a funeral, ranking slightly higher than a "coming out." The occasion was a particularly joyous one to her because of Harry's being able to celebrate it in a full blaze of righteousness and truth, and [164] because of the consequent opportunities for motherly fluttering.

"Dear Harry," she said, as she kissed, him on his arrival; "I am so glad to be here to see you graduate, and so glad that—that everything has gone so splendidly. It is so much, much nicer—that is, it is *so* nice to think that—"

"Yes, dear; you mean, isn't it nice that I'm respectable again," said Harry, with a flippancy made gentle by the sight of her kind blue eyes. "I am respectable now, you know, so you needn't be afraid to talk about it. We can all be respectable together; you're respectable, and I'm respectable, and Ruth is respectable and Lucy is respectable, and Aunt Selina is respectable—we hope; how about that, Aunt Selina?—and altogether we're an eminently respectable family. All except Beatrice, that is, who is far, far too nobly born, being related, in fact, to a marquis. No one in the peerage, Aunt C. dear, likes to be called respectable—it's considered insulting. No one, that is, above the rank of baron; the barons are now all reformed brewers, who get their peerages by being so respectable that people forget all about the brewing, and that is English democracy, and isn't it a splendid thing, dear? When you marry Ruth to an English peer, you must be sure to have him a baron, because none of the others are respectable."

"Harry, what nonsense you do talk!" said his aunt. "Before these girls—!"

"I imagine these girls know Harry by this time," remarked Aunt Selina. "If they don't, it's time they did. You're a hundred times more innocent than they, Cecilia, and always will be."

"Exactly always what I tell Mama," put in Ruth, the eldest of Aunt Cecilia's brood. "Besides, what Harry said is all quite true, I'm sure. Except about me; I shan't marry a foreigner at all, but if I do, I certainly shan't marry a brewer. Mama is far too rich for me to take anything less than a duke."

This was literally, almost painfully true. A succession of deaths in Aunt Cecilia's family, accompanied by a scarcity of male heirs, had placed her in possession of almost untold wealth —"more than I bargained for when I took you," as Uncle James jocularly put it, for the pleasure of [165] seeing her bridle and blush. Aunt C. was one of the richest women in the country, but it never changed her a particle. Not all her wealth, not all her social prominence, not all the refining influences that several generations' enjoyment of these brings, could ever make her even appear to be anything but the simple, warm-hearted, motherly creature she was.

Harry, realizing all this as well as any one, exerted himself to make Aunt C. glad she had made the effort to come to see him graduate, and he manfully escorted her and the girls to the play, the baccalaureate service, his class-day exercises, the baseball game and various other entertainments, where, as Ruth rather aptly put it, "we can sit around and watch somebody else do something." He also did his full duty by his cousin, and danced away a long and perspiring evening with her at the senior promenade. He found Ruth very good company, in spite of her active tongue, or rather, perhaps, because of it.

The final Wednesday, pregnant with fate, arrived at length, and after an immense deal of watching other people receive degrees, some earned and some accorded by the pure generosity of the University, Harry became entitled to write the magic initials "B.A." after his name. Being one of the leaders of his class in point of scholarship, he was one of the twenty or so who mounted the platform and received the diplomas for the rest. This was too much for Aunt Cecilia, who occupied a prominent place in the front row of the balcony.

"Oh, dear," she sighed, wiping away a furtive tear, "there he goes, and no mother to see him do it! No one to be proud of him! And the brightest of all the family—I shall never live to see a son of

mine do as well, never, never!"

"I'm not so sure," said her eldest daughter, comfortingly; "the doctrine of chances is in your favor. You have four boys—four chances to Aunt—what was her name?—Aunt Edith's two. Harry's not so fearfully bright, anyway—only sixteenth out of three hundred."

"My dear, how can you talk so? you ought to be ashamed, after his being so nice to you all this week!"

"Yes, he's been very sweet, indeed," replied the maiden, magnanimously. "Though I don't know, on looking back at it, that he's been any nicer to me than I've been to him!" [166]

Harry himself was rather impressed by the long ceremony in which he found the qualities of dignity and simplicity nicely blended. He was impressed particularly by the giving of the honorary degrees; it seemed to him a very fine thing that these ten or fifteen people, all of them leaders in widely different spheres of activity, should make so much of receiving a bit of parchment from a university which most of them had not even attended, and equally fine of the university to do them honor; the whole giving proof of the triumph of the academic ideal in an age of materialism.

The same thought occurred to him even more vividly at the great alumni luncheon that followed; the last and in some ways the most impressive of all the Commencement ceremonies. The great Renaissance dining hall filled from end to end with graduates, upwards of a thousand strong, ranging between the hoary-headed veteran and the hour-old Bachelor, all of them gathered for the single purpose of doing honor to their alma mater, all of them thrilled by the same feeling of affection for her—all this awakened a responsive note in the mind of Harry, always ready to render honor where honor was due, or to show love when he felt it. It was pleasant to sit and eat among one's classmates and in the presence of those other, older, more exalted beings stretching away to the other end of the hall and think that they were all, in a way, on terms of equal footing —all graduates together.

At one end of the hall, on a great raised dais, sat the highest officers of the University, in company with the guests of honor of the day, the recipients of the honorary degrees. After the meal was over, certain of these were called upon to speak. Harry thought he had never heard such speeches. The men who made them were big men, foremost in the country's service and in the work of the world; one was a Cabinet minister, another a great explorer, another a scientist, another a missionary. The ultimate message of each one of them was the high mission of Yale, given in no spirit of boastful, flag-waving "almamatriotism," but with strong emphasis on the theme of service. One got from them the idea that Yale men, like all men of their station and responsibility the world over, were born to serve humanity. The mission of Yale in this scheme was one of preparation; she acted as a recruiting-station and clearing-house, developing the [167] special powers of each of her sons, equipping them with knowledge of books, other men and themselves, and at last sending them into the field where they were calculated to make the best use of themselves. One revered and loved Yale, of course, for what she had given one; to her every man owed a full measure of gratitude and affection for what he had become. But one was never to forget where Yale stood in the scheme of things; one must always bear in mind that she was not an end in herself, but a means—one of many other means—to an infinitely greater end. Only by considering her in her place in the vast order of world-service could one do justice to her true power, her true greatness.

The impression ultimately conveyed was not that of a smaller Yale but of a larger world. Harry had never considered the relation between universe and university in this illuminating light. He suddenly realized that his idea of his college had been that of a particularly reputable and agreeable finishing-school for young men; a treasury of social knowledge and the home of sport. He had mistaken the side-shows for the main exhibition; he had admired and criticized them without regard to the whole of which they were but small parts. In a flash he looked back and realized the vanity and recklessness of his earlier revolt against college institutions and traditions. Who was he that he should criticize them? What had he to offer as substitute for them except an attitude of idle receptivity and irresponsible dalliance? He had recovered from that first foolishness, to be sure, and thank Heaven for that slight evidence of sanity; but what had he done since his recovery except sit back and watch the days slide by? Had he ever made the slightest attempt toward serious thinking, toward placing himself, his college and the world in their proper relations to each other? Had he succeeded in learning a single important lesson from the many that had been offered to him? Was it possible that he had completely wasted these four precious years of golden youth?

Suddenly he felt tears of humiliation and self-contempt burn behind his eyes. It would be absurd to shed them. He shifted his position and lit a cigarette. He inhaled the comforting smoke deeply and listened with meticulous attention to the speech from which his mind had wandered into [168] introspection, trying not to think any more of himself. Gradually, however, there penetrated into his inner consciousness the comforting thought that he had been hysterical, had judged himself too harshly in his anxiety to be sufficiently hard on himself. Those years were not wholly wasted —he had learned something in them. He was ahead of where he was when he entered college, if only a little. The thought of James occurred to him; James would be an inspiration in the future as he had been a help in the past. No, there was yet hope for him, though he must be very careful how he acted in the future. He had been a fool, but he hoped now that he had been merely a young fool, and that his mistakes could be at least partly rectified by age and effort. He would try hard, at least; he would be receptive, industrious, thorough, tolerant, unbiased and humble—

above all, humble. He glanced up at the speaker's table and reflected that the men who had the most reason to be proud were in fact the humblest.

The last speaker sat down amid a round of applause. The men on the floor of the hall stood up to sing before departing. Harry, looking at his watch, was surprised at the lateness of the hour; he had promised to see Aunt Cecilia and her daughters off at the station and must hurry away at once if he were to catch them.

He laboriously made his way through the ranks of singing graduates toward the door, listening to the familiar words of the song as he had never before listened.

> Mother of men, grown strong in giving
> Honor to them thy lights have led,

sang the men. Yes, thought Harry, there was plenty of honor to give. Would that he might ever be one of those to whom such honor was due, but that was not to be thought of. It was enough for him to be one of those who were led by those lights. Yes, that was the first step, steadfastly to follow the light that the grave Mother held above and before him; to keep his eyes constantly on it, never looking down or behind.

> Rich in the toil of thousands living,
> Proud of the deeds of thousands dead,

Deeds, deeds! That was what counted; any one could see visions and dream dreams; the veriest fool could mean well. Oh, might a merciful Heaven help him to convert into deeds the lofty ideals [169] that now surged within his brain!—What a ripping song that was, and how well it sounded to hear a thousand men singing it together! He forgot Aunt Cecilia for a moment, and checked his pace near the door to hear the last verse.

> Spirit of youth, alive, unchanging,
> Under whose feet the years are cast,
> Heir to an ageless empire, ranging
> Over the future and the past—

Half blinded with tears he staggered out into the empty vestibule and steadied himself for a second against a pillar. He never had realized before how much it all meant to him, how he loved what he was leaving. And yet—"Spirit of youth, alive, unchanging"—he had never quite caught the full meaning of those words. They now seemed, in a way, to soften the pain of parting, to give him comfort and strength with which to face the years. Surely growing old would not be so bad if one could think of the spirit of youth as still there, alive, unchanging, spreading joy and hope through the world!

And then, sweet and sudden as a breeze at sundown came the thought to him that here lay his life's work, his own little mission in the world: in using his intelligence and his power of interpretation, the only gifts he could discover himself as possessing, to guide and assist those who happened to come a little after him in the long procession of human life—in becoming, in short, a teacher. A sudden feeling of calmness and surety took possession of him; he was able to consider himself and his place in the world with a more complete detachment than he had ever before attained. He found himself able, for the moment, to rate his powers and limitations exactly as an unprejudiced observer might have done. Within him he suddenly, unmistakably felt those qualities of priest and prophet which, combined with that of the scholar, make up the ideal teacher.

"Spirit of youth," he whispered, "to you I dedicate myself, such as I am, and my life, such as it may be."

He stood still for a moment and listened as the great chorus behind the closed door brought the song to a finish, ending on a note both solemn and exalted. For a second or two there was [170] silence, and then there burst forth the sound of the Yale cheer. The contrast between the last notes of the song and the brazen bellow of that cheer, hallowed by the memories of a hundred close-fought fields, struck Harry as both dramatic and comic, and caused a corresponding change in his own mood.

"Spirit of youth, alive, unchanging!" he quoted again, laughing. Then he hurried off to say good-by to his aunt.

PART II

[171]

CHAPTER I

CAN LOVE BE CONTROLLED BY ADVICE?

Madge Elliston lived alone with her mother in a small house on an unpretentious but socially unimpeachable side street, just off one of the main avenues. Their means, as Madge has already intimated, were modest—"modest," as the young lady sprightly put it, "to the point of prudishness." Joseph Elliston, her father, had been a brilliant and promising young professor when her mother married him, with, as people said, a career before him. If by career they meant affluence, they were wholly right in saying it was all before him. But though the two married on his prospects, they could not fairly have been said to have made an unwise venture. Nothing but death had kept Joseph Elliston from becoming a popular and respected teacher, a foremost authority on economics, the author of standard works on that subject, and the possessor of a comfortable income. But he had died when Madge, his only child, was five years old, leaving his small and sorrowing family barely enough to live on.

The straitened circumstances in which the sad event threw Mrs. Elliston and her daughter were somewhat relieved by the generosity of the only sister of the widow, Eliza Scharndorst, herself a widow and the possessor of a large fortune. She was extremely fond of Madge, who always got on beautifully with her "Aunt Tizzy"—an infantile corruption allowed to survive into maturity—having more in common with her, if the truth must be known, than with her mother. She was a festive soul, much given to entertaining, and she was not long in discovering that the assistance of her niece was a distinct asset in making her home attractive to guests. It is not to be wondered at that Madge's occasional services in the way of decorating a dinner table or brightening up an otherwise stodgy reception would redound to her material benefit as well as to her spiritual [172] welfare. Such good things as trips to Bermuda, occasional new frocks and instruction under the best music masters, came her way so frequently that by the time we next meet her, nearly five years after our last sight of her, Madge was a far better dowered young woman, socially speaking, than the penniless orphaned daughter of a college professor could normally hope to be.

For when we next see her Miss Elliston is—and in no mere figurative sense—holding the center of the stage. A real stage in a real theater, under the full blaze of real footlights, and if no real audience sits on the other side of those footlights, it is no great matter, for a very real audience will sit there soon enough. On Friday night, to be exact, and this is Tuesday. To be even more exact, it is the first formal, dress rehearsal of an amateur performance of "The Beggar's Opera" (immortal work!) organized primarily for charitable purposes by a number of prominent citizens, among them Mrs. Rudolph Scharndorst, and secondarily, if we are to give any weight to the opinion of those present at the rehearsal, for the purpose of giving scope to the talents of Mrs. Rudolph Scharndorst's niece.

For Madge is cast for the part of Polly Peachum, heroine of the piece. And if there was originally the slightest doubt as to the wisdom of such an assignment, it has vanished into thin air before now. For Madge is lovely—! It is not merely a matter of voice; there never was any doubt but that she had the best voice available for the part. What the scattered few in the dark auditorium are busy admiring now is the extraordinary charm, grace, actual beauty, even, of the girl performing before them. The more so because it is all so unattended; no one thought that she would give that effect on the stage. Of a type usually described as "attractive," slight and rather short, with hair sandy rather than golden, and a face distinguished only by a nice pair of blue eyes and a particularly ingratiating smile, Madge could not fairly be expected to turn herself into a vision of commanding beauty and charm with the slight external aids of paint and powder and a position behind a row of strong lights.

The only unimpressed and indifferent person in the theater was the coach. That was quite as it should be, of course; coaches must not exhibit bursts of enthusiasm, like common people. Yet it is [173] perhaps worth mentioning that the coach in question made none of his frequent interruptions during the first few moments of Polly's presence on the stage, but sat silently biting his pencil and frowning in the back row of the theater till after she had finished her second song.

"One moment!" he cried, running down the aisle. "I'm going to change that song." He exchanged a few whispered remarks with the leader of the orchestra, who had charge of the musical side of the production. "All right—never mind now—go on with the act ... No, don't cross there, Mrs. Peachum; stay where you are, and Miss Elliston! what are the last words of the second line of that song?"

"'Mothers obey.'"

"All right—let's have 'em. I didn't get them that time. Go on, please."

The act continued, and admiration grew apace. When at length the act reached its close there was a faint but spontaneous outburst of applause from the almost empty theater.

"Well, what do you think of Madge?" asked Mrs. Scharndorst, waylaying the coach on his progress down the aisle.

"Oh, she'll do! There's a lot there to improve, though.—Strike for the second act—drinking scene!" This last uttered in a shout as he rushed on down to the stage. Not very fulsome praise, to be sure, but Mrs. Scharndorst knows her man, and is satisfied. Indeed, she respects him the more for not being fulsome.

So do the other members of the cast and chorus; at least, if they do respect him, it cannot be for the enthusiasm of his approval. His demeanor, as he stands there on a chair in the orchestra pit, shouting directions to his minions, is not indicative of very profound satisfaction with the progress of the rehearsal.

"Thompson! If you're going to use your spot on Polly's entrance, for Heaven's sake keep it on her face and not on her feet! I didn't see a thing but her shoes then ... No, you there, that table way down front—so, and oh, Mrs. Smith! is that Tilman's idea of a costume for an old woman, middle class?... I thought so ... no, I'm afraid not! That train might be quite suitable for a duchess, but it [174] won't do for a robber's wife. You see Miss Banks about it, will you please?... Mr. Barnaby! I want to get you and Miss Elliston to go through the business of that Pretty Polly song once again—you're both as stiff as pokers still.... No, just the motions. No, stand on both feet and keep your chest out while you're singing your part, and when she comes in, 'Fondly, fondly,' you half turn round, so—so that when she falls back on your arm she'll have a chance to show more than her chin to the audience.... No, I think I'll have you wait till the encore before you kiss her—it looks flat if you do it too often, and by the bye, Mr. Barnaby, will you make an appointment with Mrs. Adams for to-morrow to get up a dance for that prison scene—'How happy could I be with either'.... Four o'clock—all right.... What song?"

This last is in answer to an inquiry from Miss Elliston.

"Oh, of course—'Can love be controlled by advice'.... Come down here and we'll talk it over. Careful, step in the middle of that chair and you'll be all right ... there!" And Miss Elliston and the great man sit down companionably in the places belonging respectively to the oboe and the trombone, just as though they had been friends from earliest youth.

If there is one thing we despise, it is transparent roguishness on the part of an author. Let us hasten to admit, then, that the coach is none other than our friend Harry; a Harry not changed a particle, really, from his undergraduate days, though a Harry, to be sure, in whom the passage of five years has effected certain important developments. Such, for instance, as having become able to coach an amateur production of a musical show. These will be described and accounted for, all in good time. The story cannot be everywhere at once.

"About that song ... I know nothing about music, of course, but it struck me to-night that that was rather a good tune—one of the best in the show.... It may have been the singing, of course."

"Not a bit of it—it's a ripping tune!—Let's see what the trombone part for it looks like.... There isn't any—just those little thingumbobs. Oh, the accompaniment is all on the strings, of course; I forgot."

"Well, what I want to get at is, do you think Gay's words are up to it?" [175]

"Nowhere near. I'd much rather sing some of yours, if that's what you're getting at.... They're not quite *jeune fille*, either; I just discovered that to-day."

"There's a great deal in this show that isn't. We've cut most of it, but there's a good bit left, only no one who hasn't studied the period can spot it.... You needn't tell any one that.—Well, let's see about some words. 'Can love be controlled by advice, will Cupid our mothers obey'—we'll keep that, I think ..."

He produced a scrap of paper from his pocket and scribbled rapidly on it. In a minute or two he had evolved the following stanzas, retaining the first four lines of Gay's original song:

> Can love be controlled by advice?
> Will Cupid our mothers obey?
> Though my heart were as frozen as ice
> At his flame 'twould have melted away.
> Now love is enthroned in my heart
> All your threats and entreaties are in vain;
> His power defies all your art,
> And chiding but adds to my pain.
>
> Ah, mother! if ever in youth
> Your heart by love's anguish was wrung;
> If ever you thrilled with its truth
> Too sweet to be spoken or sung;
> If ever you've longed for life's best,
> Nor reckoned the issue thereof;
> If heart ever beat in your breast
> Have pity on me—for I love!

"There!" said he, handing it to the prima donna; "see what you think of that."

"Oh ... much better! There'll be much more fun in singing it."

"It isn't much in the way of poetry," explained Harry, "but it gives a certain dramatic interest to the song, which is the main thing. You can change anything you want in it, of course; I daresay some of those words are quite unsingable on the notes of the song."

"No—I think they'll be all right. Thank you very much; it was hard to make anything out of the other words. Also, I shall be able to tell Mama that you've cut out some of Gay's naughty words and put in some innocent ones of your own instead. She's been just a little worried lately, I think; she seems to have an idea that 'The Beggar's Opera' isn't quite a nice play for a young lady to act in!" [176]

"Well, one can hardly blame her...." This sentence trailed off into inaudibility as Harry turned to give his attention to some one else coming up with a question at the moment. Perhaps Miss Elliston did not even hear the beginning of the sentence; it is easier to believe that she did not, in view of what followed. Certainly every extenuating circumstance is needed, on both sides, to help account for the fact that so trivial conversation as that which just took place should have led directly to unpleasantness and indirectly to consequences of a far-reaching kind. It is easier to comprehend, also, if one remembers that Miss Elliston's thoughts when she was left alone by Harry occupying the position of the trombone, remained on, or at any rate quite near, the point at which the conversation broke off, whereas Harry's had flown far from it. So that when, after an interval of a few minutes, Harry's voice again became articulate to her in the single isolated sentence "given her something to say to her old frump of a mother," addressed to the leader of the orchestra, she at first misconstrued his meaning, interpreting his remark not as he meant it, as referring to her stage mother, Mrs. Peachum, but as referring to quieting the puritanical scruples of her own mother, Mrs. Elliston.

The whole affair hung on an incredibly slender thread of coincidence. If Harry had not unconsciously raised his voice somewhat on that one phrase, if he had not happened to use the word "frump," which might conceivably be twisted into applying to either mother, Miss Elliston would never, even for a moment, have been tempted to attribute the baser meaning to his words. As it was the thought did not remain in her head above five seconds, at the outside; she knew Harry better than to believe seriously that he would say such a thing. But by another unfortunate chance Harry happened to be looking her way during those few seconds, and marked her angry flush and the instantaneous glance of indignation and contempt that she shot toward him. He saw her flush die down and her expression soften again, but the natural quickness that had made him realize her state of mind was not long in giving him an explanation of it.

All might yet have been well had not Harry's sense of humor played him false. As usually happened at these evening rehearsals he escorted Miss Elliston home, her house lying on the way [177] to his. In the course of the walk an unhappy impulse made him refer to the little incident, which had struck him as merely humorous.

"By the way," said he "your sense of filial duty almost led you astray to-night, didn't it?"

"Filial duty?"

"Yes—you thought I was making remarks about your mother to-night when I was talking to Cosgrove about Mrs. Peachum and that song...."

"Oh, that—!" Any one who knew her might have expected Miss Elliston to laugh and continue with something like "Yes, I know; wasn't it ridiculous of me?" since she really knew perfectly well that Harry was talking about Mrs. Peachum. That she did not is due partly to the fatigue incident to rehearsing a leading part in an opera in addition to teaching school from nine till one every day, and partly to the eternally inexplicable depths of the feminine nature. She had been very much ashamed of herself for having even for a moment done that injustice to Harry, and she wished intensely that the affair might be buried in the deepest oblivion. Harry's opening of the subject, consequently, seemed to her tactless and a trifle brutal. She had done penance all the evening for her after all very trifling mistake; why should he insist upon humiliating her this way?... Obviously she was very tired!

"Yes," went on Harry, "don't expect me to believe that you were angry on behalf of Mrs. Peachum!"

"No. I suppose I had a right to be angry on behalf of my own mother, if I wanted to, though."

"But I wasn't talking about your mother—you know that!"

"Oh, weren't you?"

"Well, do you think so?"

"How should I know? I was only eavesdropping, of course, I have no right to think anything about it."

"Madge, don't be silly."

"Well?"

"Do you really, honestly think that I am guilty of having spoken slightingly of your mother? Just answer me that, yes or no."

"As I say, I have no right to any opinion on the subject. I only heard something not intended—" [178]

"Oh, the—" The remainder of this exclamation was fortunately lost in the collar of Harry's greatcoat. "You had better give me back that song—I presume you won't want to sing it now."

"Why not? Art is above all personal feelings." It was mere wilfulness that led her to utter this cynical remark. What she really wanted to say was "Of course I want to sing it, and I know you meant Mrs. Peachum," but somehow the other answer was given before she knew it.

"Madge, you may not know it, but you are positively insulting."

"Oh, Harry—! Who began being insulting? Not that I mind your insulting me...."

"Oh. That's the way it is, is it? I see." They were now standing talking at the foot of Madge's front steps. Harry continued, very quietly: "Now perhaps you'd better give me back that song."

"I don't see the necessity."

"I'll be damned if you shall sing it now!" His voice remained low, but passion sounded in it as unmistakably as if he had shouted. The remark was, in fact, made in an uncontrollable burst of anger, necessitating the severing of all diplomatic relations.

"Just as you like, of course." Madge's tone, cold, expressionless, hopelessly polite, is equivalent to the granting of a demanded passport. "Here it is. Good-night."

"Good-night."

So they parted, in a white heat of anger. But being both fairly sensible people, in the main, beside being the kind of people whose anger however violently it may burn at first, does not last long, they realized before sleep closed their eyes that night that the quarrel would not last over another day.

Morning brought to Harry, at any rate, a complete return of sanity, and before breakfast he sat down and wrote the following note:

> Dear Madge:
>
> I send back the song merely as a token of the abjectness of my submission—I don't suppose you will want to sing it now. I can't tell you how sorry I am about my behavior last night; I can only ask you to attribute as much, of it as possible to the fatigue of [179] business and forgive the rest!
>
> HARRY.

which he enclosed in an envelope with the words of the song and sent to Madge by a messenger boy.

Madge received it while she was at breakfast. She went out and told the boy to wait for an answer, and went back and finished her breakfast before writing a reply. Her face was noticeably grave as she ate, and it became even graver when at last she sat down at her desk and started to put pen to paper. She wrote three pages of note-paper, read them, and tore them up. She then wrote a page and a half, taking more time over them than over the three. This she also tore up. Then she sat inactive at her desk for several minutes, and at last, seeing that she was due at her school in a few minutes, she took up another sheet of paper and wrote: "All right—my fault entirely. M. E.," and sent it off by the boy.

When Harry saw her at the rehearsal that evening she greeted him exactly as if nothing had happened. She had rather less to say to him than was customary during rehearsals, but Harry was so busy and preoccupied he did not notice that. He did notice that she sang the original words to the disputed song, which, as he told himself, was just what he expected.

For the next two days he was fairly buried in responsibility and detail and hardly conscious of any feeling whatever beyond an intense desire to have the performance over. It was not until this desire was partially fulfilled, the curtain actually risen on the Friday night and the performance well under way, that he was able to sit back and draw a free breath. The moment came when, having seen that all was well behind the scenes, he dropped into the back of the box occupied by Aunt Selina and one or two chosen friends to watch the progress of the play from the front.

Then, for the first time, he was able to look at it more from the point of view of a spectator than that of a creator. Now that his work was completed and must stand or fall on its own merit, he could watch from a wholly detached position. On the whole, he rather enjoyed the sensation. It occurred to him, for instance, as quite a new thought, that the excellent make-up of the stolid Mr. [180] Dawson in the part of Peachum very largely counteracted his vocal "dulness"; and that Mrs. Smith as Mrs. Peachum, in spite of the innumerable sillinesses and bad tricks that had been his despair for weeks, was making an extremely good impression upon the audience.

Then Madge made her entrance, and he saw at a glance, as he had never seen it before, just how good Madge was. She had a certain way of carrying her head, a certain sureness in adjusting her movements to her speech, a certain judgment in projecting her voice that went straight to the spot. Madge was a born actress, that was all there was to it; she ought to have made the stage her profession. He smiled inwardly as he thought how many people would make that remark after this performance. Then his amusement gave place to a sudden and strange resentment against the very idea of Madge's going on the stage; a resentment he made no effort either to understand

or account for....

The strings in the orchestra quavered a few languorous notes and Madge started her song "Can love be controlled by advice." Her voice was a singularly sweet one, of no great volume and yet possessed of a certain carrying quality. The excellence of her instruction, combined with her own good taste, had brought it to a state of what, for that voice, might be called perfection. She also had the good sense never to sing anything too big for her. But though her voice might not be suited to Wagner or Strauss it was far better suited to certain simpler things than a larger voice might have been, and the song she was singing now was one of these. Probably no more happy combination could be effected between singer and song than that of Madge and the slow, plaintive, seventeenth-century melody of "Grim king of the ghosts," which Gay had the good sense to incorporate into his masterpiece.

To say that the audience was spellbound by her rendering of the song would be to stretch a point. It sat, for the most part, silently attentive, enjoying it very much and thinking that it would give her a good round of applause and an encore at the end. Harry, standing in the obscurity of the back part of Aunt Selina's box, was of very much the same mind. For about half of the song, that is. For near the end of the first verse he suddenly realized that Madge was singing not Gay's [181] words, but his own.

It was absurd, of course, but at that realization the whole world seemed suddenly to change. The floor beneath his feet became clouds, the theater a corner of paradise, the people in it choirs of marvelous ethereal beings, Mrs. Peachum (alias Smith) a ministrant seraph, Madge's voice the music of the spheres, and Madge herself, from being an unusually nice girl of his acquaintance, became....

What nonsense! he told himself; the idea of getting so worked up at hearing his own words sung on a stage!—You fool, replied another voice within him, you know perfectly well that that's not it at all.—Don't tell me, replied the other Harry, the sensible one; such things don't happen, except in books; they don't happen to real people—ME, for instance.—Why not? obstinately inquired the other; why not you, as well as any one else?—Well, I can't stop to argue about it now, the practical Harry answered; I've got to go out and see that people are ready for their cues.

He went out, and found everything running perfectly smoothly. People were standing waiting for their entrances minutes ahead of time, the electricians were at their posts, the make-up people had finished their work, the scene-shifters and property men had put everything in readiness for setting the next scene; no one even asked him a question. He flitted about for a few moments on imaginary errands, asking various people if all was going well; but the real question that he kept asking himself all the time was Is this IT? Is this IT?

"I don't know!" he said at last, loudly and petulantly, and several people turned to see whom he was reproving now.

When he got back to the box he found Madge still singing the last verse of her song. He wondered how many times she had had to repeat it, and hoped Cosgrove was living up to his agreement not to give more than one encore to each song. In reality this was her first encore; his hectic trip behind the scenes had occupied a much shorter time than he supposed. Madge was making a most exquisite piece of work of her little appeal to maternal sympathy; she was actually taking the second verse sitting down, leaning forward with her arms on a table in an attitude of conversational pleading. He had not told her to do that; it was so hard to make effective that he [182] would not have dared to suggest it. When she reached the line, "If heart ever beat in your breast" she suddenly rose, slightly threw back her arms and head, and sang the words on a wholly new note of restrained passion, beautifully dramatic and suggestive. The house burst into applause, but Harry was seized with a fit of unholy mirth at the irony of the situation—Madge, perfectly indifferent, singing those words, while he, their author, consumed with an all-devouring flame, stood stifling his passion in a dark corner. An insane desire seized him to run out to the middle of the stage and shout at the top of his voice "Have pity on me, for I love!" It would be true then. He supposed, however, that people might think it peculiar.

From then on, as long as Madge held the stage, he stood rooted to the spot, unable to lift his eyes from her. Presently her lover came in, and they started the lovely duet, "Pretty Polly, say." At the end of the encore, according to Harry's instructions, Barnaby leaned over and kissed his Polly on the mouth. A sudden and intense dislike for Mr. Barnaby at that moment overcame Harry....

The act ended; the house went wild again; the curtain flopped up and down with no apparent intention of ever stopping; ushers rushed down the aisles with great beribboned bunches of flowers. This gave Harry an idea; as soon as the second act was safely under way he rushed out to the nearest florist's shop and commandeered all the American Beauty roses in the place, to be delivered to Miss Elliston with his card at the end of the next act.

As he was going out of the shop he stopped to look at some peculiar little pink and white flowers in a vase near the door.

"What are those?" he asked.

"Bleeding hearts," said the florist's clerk. "Just up from Florida; very hard to get at this time of year."

Harry stood still, thinking. If he sent those—would she Know—Of course she would, answered the

practical Harry immediately; she would not only Know but would call him a fool for his pains.—Oh, shut up! retorted the other.

"I'll have these then, instead of the roses, please," he said aloud. "All of them, and don't forget the card." [183]

They did not meet till after the performance was over. He caught sight of her making a sort of triumphal progress through the back of the stage, on her way to the dressing rooms, and deliberately placed himself in her path. She was looking rather surprisingly solemn, he noticed. Her face lighted up, however, when she saw him. She smiled, at least.

"Well, what did *you* think of it?" she asked.

"I think the performance was very creditable," he answered. "To say what I think of you would be compromising."

She laughed and went on without making any reply. He could not see her face, but something gave him the impression that her smile did not last very long after she had turned away from him.

He walked home alone through the crisp March night, breathing deeply and trying to reduce his teeming brain to a state of order and clarity. The walk from the theater home was not sufficient for this; he walked far beyond his house and all the way back again before he could think clearly enough. At last he raised his eyes to the comfortable stars and spoke a few words aloud in a low, calm voice.

"I really think," he said, "that this is IT. I really do think so ... But I must be very careful," he added, to himself; "*very* careful. I must take no chances—this time. Both on Madge's account and on mine."

"No," he added after a moment; "not on my account. On Madge's."

CHAPTER II [184]

CONGREVE

Little had happened to mark the greater part of the time that had elapsed since Harry's graduation. For three years he had studied hard for his doctor's degree, and during the fourth year he had been set to teaching English literature to freshmen, which task, on the whole, he accomplished with marked success. But during the fifth year, the year in which we next see him, he was not teaching freshmen, though he was still living in New Haven, and working, according to his own accounts, like a galley slave. The events which led up to this state of things form a matter of some moment in his career.

These began with the production, during his fourth year out of college, of a play of his by the college dramatic association. Or, to be more exact, it really began some months before that, when Harry, leaving a theater one evening after witnessing a poor play, had remarked to his companion of the moment: "I actually believe that I could write a better play than that." To which the friend made the obvious answer, "Why don't you, then?" "I will," replied Harry, and he did.

It was his first venture in that field of composition. In all his literary activities he had never before, to borrow his own phrase, committed dramaturgy. To the very fact that his maiden effort came so late Harry was wont, in later years, to attribute a large measure of his success. His idea was that if he had begun earlier his first results would have been so excruciatingly bad as to discourage him from sustained effort in that direction.

However this may be, the play was judged the best of those submitted in a competition organized by the dramatic association, and was produced by it during the following winter with a very fair amount of success. Nobody could fairly have called it a remarkable play, but neither could any one have been justified in calling it a bad one. Its theme was, apart from its setting, singularly characteristic of the subsequent style of its author and may be said to have struck the tragi-comic [185] note that sounded through all his later work. It concerned the experiences of a struggling young English author, poor, but of gentle birth, who is first seen inveighing against the snobbery, coldness and indifference shown toward him by people of wealth and position, and later, after coming unexpectedly into a peerage and a large fortune, is horrified to find himself forced into displaying the very qualities which he had so fiercely condemned in others. The machinery of the play was somewhat artificial, but the characterization and dramatic interest were skilfully worked out. The dialogue was everywhere delightful and the contrast afforded between the conscientious, introspective sincerity of the young author and the gaily unscrupulous casuistry of his wife was a forecast, if not actually an early example, of his best work.

Harry was never blind to the faults of the play, but he remained convinced that it was good in the

main, and, what was more important, retained his interest in dramatic composition. He worked hard during the following spring and summer and at length evolved another play, which he called "Chances" and believed was a great improvement upon his first work. Early in August he sent the play to a New York manager to whom he had obtained an introduction and after a week or two made an appointment with him.

The secret trepidation with which he first entered the office of the great, the redoubtable Leo Bachmann was largely allayed by the appearance of the manager. He was a large flabby man, with scant stringy hair and a not unpleasant smile. He sat heavily back in an office chair and puffed continually at a much-chewed cigar, the ashes of which fell unnoticed and collected in the furrows of his waistcoat. He spoke in a soft thick voice, with a strong German accent. Harry did not see anything particularly terrifying about him.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Vimbourne," said the manager when Harry had made himself known. "You have sent me a play, yes? Ah, here it is.... Unfortunately I have not had time to read it; I am very, very busy just now, but my man Jennings has read it and tells me it is very nice. Very nice, indeed ..." he puffed in ruminative silence for a few seconds. "Could you come back next week, say Friday, [186] Mr. Vimbourne? and we will talk it over. I am sorry to trouble you, but you see I am so very, very busy...."

Harry made another appointment and left, not wholly dissatisfied. He returned, ten days afterward, to his second interview, which was an almost exact replica of the first. He allowed himself to be put off another ten days, but when he returned for the third time and was greeted by precisely the same soft words he was irritated and hardly able to conceal the fact.

"Ah, yes, your play," said the manager, as though he had just heard of it for the first time. "Jennings was speaking to me of it only the other night. I am sorry to say I have not read it yet." He took the manuscript from a pile on his desk and turned over the leaves. "I am sorry—very sorry—I have so little time...."

"I don't believe you, Mr. Bachmann," said Harry.

"Ah?" said the manager, without the slightest apparent interest. "Why not, Mr. Vimbourne?"

"Well, you turned straight to the best scene in it just now, for one thing.... Beside, you wouldn't keep me hanging on this way if you didn't see something in it, and if you see anything in it of course you've read it. And I don't mind telling you, Mr. Bachmann, that isn't my idea of business."

Mr. Bachmann's next remark was so unexpected that Harry nearly swooned in his chair. "I read it the day after it came," he said softly.

"Then why on earth didn't you say so in the first place?" stammered Harry.

The manager made no reply for some moments, but sat silently puffing and turning over the pages of Harry's manuscript.

"I like to know people," he murmured at last, very gently and with apparent irrelevance. Harry, however, saw the bearing of the remark and suddenly felt extraordinarily small. He had been rather proud of his little burst of spirit and independence; he now saw that Leo Bachmann had drawn it from him with the ease and certainty of touch with which a musician produces a note from a flute. He wondered, abjectly, how many other self-satisfied young authors had sat where he sat and been played upon by that great puffing mass of pulp. [187]

Bachmann was the next to speak. "I like your play very much, Mr. Vimbourne," he said. "It is very nice—some things in it not so good, but on the whole, it is very nice. I think I vill try to produce it, Mr. Vimbourne, but not yet—not till I see how my September plays go. I shall keep yours in reserve, and then, later, we may try it. About the first of November, when the Fifth Avenue crowd comes back to town...." He smiled slightly. "They are the people that vill vant to see it. Not Harlem. Not Brooklyn. The four hundred. Even so," he continued, ruminatively, "even so, I shall not make on it."

This seemed to Harry a good opening for a proposition he had been longing to make since the very first but had never quite dared. "If you want me to put anything up on it, Mr. Bachmann, why—I...."

"No," said Mr. Bachmann gently; "I never do that, I produce my own plays, for my own reasons. I vill pay you a sum, down. And a small royalty, perhaps—after the hundredth performance."

Harry looked up and smiled, and the manager smiled back at him. His smile grew quite broad, almost a laugh, in fact. Then he rose from his chair—the first time Harry had seen him out of it—and clasped Harry's hand between his two large plump ones.

"I think we shall get on very well, Mr. Vimbourne," he said. "Very well, indeed. I vill let you know when rehearsals begin. And you must write more—a great deal more. But—vait till after the rehearsals!"

"Yes, I think I understand you," said Harry, laughing. "I'll wait. And I'll come to the rehearsals, too!"

In October the rehearsals actually started, and Harry began to see what he told Mr. Bachmann he thought he understood. Day after day he sat in the dark draughty theater and watched the

people on the stage slash and cut and change his carefully constructed dialogue without offering a word of remonstrance. At first the pleasure of seeing his own work take tangible form, on a real professional stage and by the agency of real professional actors more than made up for the loss. Then as the rehearsals went on, he perceived that there was a very real reason for every cut and change, and that the play benefited tremendously thereby. He began to see how acting accomplishes a great deal of what he had always considered the office of dialogue. A dialogue of [188] five speeches, to take a concrete example, on the probable reasons why a certain person did not arrive when he was expected was made unnecessary by one of the characters crossing the stage and looking out of a window at just the right moment and with just the right facial expression.

Harry made no secret of his conviction that his play improved immensely under the care of Bachmann and his people. His attitude was that they knew everything about play-producing and he knew nothing, and that the extraordinary thing was that he had been able to provide them with any dramatic material whatever. He joked about it with the actors and managers, when occasion offered, as callously as if he had been a third person, and rather surprised himself by the light-heartedness he displayed. Whether this was entirely genuine, whether it did not contain elements of a pose, a desire to appear as a man of the theatrical world, a fear of falling into all the usual errors of youthful playwrights, he did not at first ask himself.

One day, about a week before the opening night, he received a jolt that made him look upon himself and his calling in rather a new light. This came through an unexpected agent—none other, indeed, than a woman of the cast, and not the player of the principal female part at that, but a lesser light, Bertha Bensel by name, a plain but pleasant little person of uncertain age. Harry was lunching alone with her and carrying on in what had become his customary style when talking of his play.

"You know," he was saying, "I thought at one time I had written a play, but I haven't, I've written a moving picture show. Everybody is writing movies these days, even those that try to write anything else, which just shows. I'm going regularly into the movie business, after this. Seriously. And I intend to write the real kind of movies, the kind that don't bother about the characters at all, but just dramatize scenery. I shall call things by their proper names, too. Let's see—a Devonshire parsonage is beloved and wooed by a Scotch moor, but turns him down for a Louis Onze château with a Le Nôtre garden. She discovers, just in time, that his intentions are not honorable, and is rescued by a Montana prairie, who happens along just at the right moment. The [189] situation is still awkward, however, because the parsonage finds that her prairie has a wife living, a New York gambling hell, whom he hates but who won't release him. So the parsonage refuses his disinterested offers and starts life for herself. After various adventures with a South Carolina plantation, an Indian Ocean trawler, an Argentine pampas and the Scala theater at Milan, the poor parsonage ends up in a London sweat shop, to which she is at last discovered by the Scotch moor, who had been looking for her all these years. Embrace. Passed by the national board of censors."

Miss Bensel smiled, but did not seem to see much humor in this foolery. That was due, thought Harry, to the fatigue of her long morning's work, and he determined not to bother her with any more nonsense. The silence which he allowed to ensue, however, was broken by an unexpected remark from his *vis-à-vis*, who said with a dispassionate air:

"I think, Mr. Wimbourne, you stand in a great danger."

"Danger?"

"Yes, that is, I hope you do. If not, I'm very much disappointed in you."

"Thank you so much, but just how?"

"You're in danger of getting to take your art as lightly as you talk about it. Then you'll be lost, for good. It's a real danger. I've seen the thing happen before, to people of as much talent as you, or nearly so."

Harry looked at her in blank astonishment, and she went on:

"If you go on talking that way about your profession, you'll get to think that way and finally *be* that way. All roses and champagne—nothing worth while. You may go on writing plays, but they'll get sillier and sillier, even if they get more and more popular. So your life will pass away in frivolity and popularity.... That's not your place in the world, Mr. Wimbourne. You've got talent—perhaps more. You know that? This play, now. I say nothing about the dialogue, because good dialogue is not so rare—though yours is the best I've seen for some time—but how about the rest of it, the story, the ideas? It's good stuff—you know it is."

Harry leaned back in his chair and tapped the table meditatively with a spoon. He had the lack of [190] self-consciousness that enables a person to take blame exactly in the spirit in which it is given, with no alloying mixture of embarrassment or resentment.

"Yes," he said after a while, "I suppose you're right about it. I have a certain responsibility.... I suppose the stuff is good, when all is said and done—though I don't dare to think it can be."

Miss Bensel leaned forward with her elbows on the table and allowed her face to relax into a smile, a curious little smile that did not part her lips but drew down the corners of her mouth.

"That's it—I thought that probably was it! You're so modest you're afraid to take yourself

seriously. Well, that's a pretty good fault; I think on the whole it's better than taking yourself too seriously. But don't do it, even so. Take it from me, my dear boy, you can't accomplish anything worth while in this world, *anything*, whatever it is, unless you take your work seriously—at bottom."

Harry did a good deal of serious thinking on the subject during the rest of the day, and the more he thought about it the more convinced he became that Miss Bensel was right. He thought of Dickens' famous utterance on the subject of being flippant about one's life's work; he thought of the example of Congreve. Congreve, there was an appropriate warning! Congreve, whose life was a duel between the painstaking artist and the polished man-about-town, who never would speak other than lightly of his best work, whose boast and whose shame it was deliberately to stifle the fires of his own genius. Was he, Harry, guilty of something like the pose of Congreve? He thought of his attitude of exaggerated *camaraderie* with the actors and managers, of his attitude toward his own work; he realized that frivolity had become not merely a pose, but a habit. Was he not, in such doings, following in the steps of Congreve—the man who insisted that the work that made him famous had been written for the sole purpose of whiling away the tedium of convalescence after an illness?

As he watched his own play being enacted before his eyes that afternoon he realized that his work was, in the main, good, and that he had known it all along. He had felt it while he was [191] writing it; Bachmann's astonishingly prompt (as he had since learned it to be) acceptance of it had given conclusive proof of it. If anything further was needed, he had it in the enthusiasm with which the actors played it and spoke of it. Somehow, by some incredible chance, the divine gift had fallen upon him. To belittle that gift, to fail to devote his best efforts to making the most of it, would be to shirk his life's duty.

The third act, upon which most of the work of the afternoon was done, drew to its close. It had been immensely shortened by cuts; Harry was not sorry, though he missed some of what he had thought the best lines in the play. Then the heroine made her final exit, and Harry suddenly realized she had done so without her and the hero's having delivered two little speeches that ought to have come just before; speeches on which he had spent much care and labor. Those two lines had, in fact, contained the whole gist of the play, or at any rate driven home its thesis in a particularly striking way. The point of the play was that living was simply a system of chances, and these speeches made clear the distinction between the wrong kind of chancing, the careless, risking-all kind, whose final result was always ruin, and the sober, intelligent, prayerful kind, as shown in the lives of those who, after careful consideration of all the chances that may affect them, do what they decide is best and await the result with the calmness of a Mohammedan fatalist.

Harry suddenly became imbued with the profound conviction that those two speeches were absolutely necessary to the understanding of his play. He hastily read over the last half of the act in his typewritten copy, and failed to see how any spectator could catch the true meaning of the work without them. Well, here was a chance to show how seriously he could take his art! The whole affair took on a new and strange momentousness; he stood at this instant, he told himself, at the very turning-point of his artistic career. He would not take the wrong road, cost him what it might; he would not be found wanting.

Bachmann was in the theater, sitting in the back row of the orchestra, as was his custom. Harry determined to go straight to him and ask him to put those lines in again. As he walked up the aisle he thought feverishly of the tremendous import of this interview. Bachmann would refuse at [192] first, he knew that well enough. Bachmann would not easily be convinced by the opinion of an inexperienced scribbler. But Harry was determined not to be beaten; he was prepared to fight, prepared to make a scene, if necessary; prepared to sacrifice the production of his play, if it came to that. He could see Bachmann's slow smile as he reminded him of practical considerations. "Your contract?" "Damn the contract," Harry would reply. "Ha, ha! I've got the whip hand of you there, Mr. Bachmann! I can afford to break all the contracts I want!" "And your career?" retorted Bachmann, with a sneer, but turning ever so slightly pale. "Ho! my career! What the devil do I care for my career! I choose to write for all time, not for my own! I...."

"Vell, Mr. Vimbourne," Bachmann, the live, fleshly Bachmann, was saying in a startlingly mild and everyday tone of voice, "what can I do for you?"

"Oh ... I just wanted to speak to you about this last scene," said Harry, trying hard to keep his voice steady. "They've cut out two lines just before Miss Cleves' exit that I think ought to be kept."

"Let's see."

Harry handed him the manuscript and anxiously watched him as he glanced rapidly over the pages. "They're pretty important lines, really. They explain a lot; I'm afraid people won't understand...." He could feel his voice weakening and his knees trembling, but his determination remained.

"Burchard!" Bachmann bellowed, in the general direction of the stage.

"Yes!"

"What about those two speeches before Miss Cleves' exit?"

There was a short and rather flurried silence from the stage, after which the voice of Burchard again emerged:

"Miss Cleves said she couldn't make her exit on that line."

"Where is she? Tell her to come back and try it."

The battle was won without a shot being fired. Harry, almost literally knocked flat by the surprise and relief of the moment, sank into the nearest seat. Bachmann got up and lumbered off toward the stage; Harry leaned his head against the back of his chair and gave himself over to an [193] outburst of internal mirth, at his own expense.

He raised his eyes again to the stage. Curiously enough, the first person his glance fell on was Miss Bensel, with her trim little figure and humorously plain face. It seemed to him she was smiling out at him, with a mocking little smile that drew down the corners of her mouth.

Everybody knows what happened to the play "Chances"; its history is a page of the American stage. Much has been said and written about it; it has been called a landmark, a stepping-stone, a first ditch, a guiding light, a moral victory, a glorious failure, a promising defeat and various similar things so often that people are tired of the very name of it. What actually happened to it can be told in a few words; it was well received, but not largely attended. It was withdrawn near the end of its fourth week.

The critics were unanimous in praising it. Its dialogue was hailed as the ideal dialogue of contemporary comedy. The characterization, the humor of the lines, the universality of the theme, its wonderfully logical and convincing development all received their due meed of praise. It was compared to the comedies of Clyde Fitch, of Oscar Wilde, of Sheridan, and of Congreve—yes, actually Congreve! Harry smiled when he read that, and renewed his resolution never to let the comparison apply in a personal way. But to be seriously compared to Congreve, not Congreve the man but Congreve the author—! The thought made him fairly dizzy.

But what took the eye of the critics, the best and soberest of them, that is, more than anything else was the mixture of the humorous and serious shown in the choice of the theme and its development. "To treat the element of humor," wrote one critic, "not as a colored glass through which to look at all life, as in farce, nor as a refreshing contrast to its serious side, as in the 'comic relief' of a host of plays from the Elizabethans down to the present day, but as part and parcel of the very essence of life itself, co-existent with its solemnity, inseparable from its difficulty, companion and friend to its unsolvable mystery; to put people in such a mood that they can laugh at the greatest things in their own lives, neither bitterly nor to give themselves Dutch courage, but for the pure, life giving, illuminating exaltation of laughing—this, we take it, is the [194] whole essence and mission of comedy. And this—we say it boldly and in no spirit of empty flattery—is the type of comedy shown in Mr. Wimbourne's play."

It is not hard to see how such words should bring joy to the heart of Harry and smiles of admiration and respect to the faces of his friends, from Leo Bachmann right up to Aunt Selina. But they did not bring people to the theater. For the first three performances the attendance was satisfactory; then it began steadily to fall off and by the end of the first week it became merely a question of how long it could survive.

Leo Bachmann was, curiously enough, the least affected of all the theater crowd by the poor success of the work. He viewed the discouraging box office reports with an untroubled smile, and cheerfully began rehearsals for a new play. "Never you mind, my boy," he told Harry, "I knew I should not make money off your play. I told you so in the beginning. Never you mind! That is not your fault. It's just the way things go. I have only one word to say to you, and that is—write!" Even in his discouragement Harry could not help feeling that Mr. Bachmann was strangely calm and cheerful.

Within a week from the end of the play's run a curious thing happened. A visiting English dramatist and critic, a confirmed self-advertiser, but a writer and thinker of unquestioned brilliancy, and a wit, withal, of international reputation, was greatly struck by the play and wrote an unsolicited letter about it which appeared in the pages of a leading daily.

"No more striking proof," wrote this self-appointed defender of Harry, "could be offered of the consanguinal intellectual stupidity of the Anglo-Saxon race than I received at a performance of Mr. Harold Wimbourne's play 'Chances' at the —— Theater last night. For the first time during my stay in this country as I looked over the almost empty stalls and realized that this, incomparably the best play running in New York, was also the worst attended, I could have fancied myself actually in my own country.

"What are the lessons or qualities in Mr. Wimbourne's play which the American people cannot stomach? I suppose, when all is said and done, he has committed the unpardonable offense of [195] giving them a little of their own medicine. He has rammed down their throats some few corollaries of the Calvinistic doctrines for which the ancestors of the very people who stay away from his play sailed an uncharted sea, conquered a wilderness, and spilt their blood to champion against a usurping power. The Pilgrim fathers founded the United States of America in order to publish the greatness of God and the littleness of man. Their descendants either ignore or

condemn one of their number because he does not extol the greatness of man and the littleness of God. Because Mr. Wimbourne ventures to show, in a very mild—if very artistic and compelling way—how slight a hold man has on the moving force of life, God, the universe, a group of atoms—whatever you choose to call the world—he becomes a pariah. He has escaped easily after his first offense, but it will go hard with the Anglo-Saxon character if he is not stoned in the streets after the next one. America is a great and rich country; what does it care about religion or philosophy or art or any of that poppycock? Serious and devout thinking simply *are not done*; it has become as great a solecism to mention the name of the Deity in society—except as the hero of a humorous story—as to talk about Kant or Hegel. Americans have lost interest in that sort of stuff; they do not need it. Why, now that they have become physically strong, should they bother about the unsubstantial kind of strength known as moral to which they were forced to resort when they were physically weak? Why, having become mountain lions, should they continue to practise what upheld them when they were fieldmice?

"Of course I should not have made such a point in favor of a play if it were not, technically and artistically speaking, a very good play. The truth when it is badly spoken hardly merits more attention than if it were not spoken at all. But 'Chances' is as beautifully constructed as it was conceived; it is a play that I should be proud to have written myself. Its technical perfections have already been praised, even by that class of people least calculated to appreciate them; I mean the critics. I will, therefore, mention but one small example, which I believe, in the presence of so many greater beauties, has been overlooked; namely, the short dialogue near the end of the first act in which Frances, in perhaps half a page of conversation with the man to whom she is then engaged, realizes that her engagement is empty, that she has no heart for the man, that a new way of looking at love has transcended her life;—realizes all this, and betrays it to the audience without in the smallest degree giving herself away to the man with whom she is talking or saying a word in violation of the probability of their conversation. Such a feat in dramaturgy is, perhaps, appreciable only to those who have tried to write plays themselves. Still, whom does that not include? [196]

"But I do not expect Americans to appreciate artistic perfection any more than I expect Englishmen to. The shame, the disgrace to Americans in not appreciating this play lies in the fact that it is fundamentally American; American in its characters, in its setting, and above all in its motive principles, which are the principles to which America owes its very existence."

Such opinions, appearing over a famous signature, could not but revive interest and talk about its subject, and the play experienced a slight boom during the last few days of its existence. Its run, indeed, would have been extended but for the fact that Bachmann had made all the arrangements for its successor and advertised the date of its appearance. Altogether the incident tended to show that if the play was a failure it was at least a dynamic failure, indicative of future success.

Harry was as little elated by the praise of the foreigner as he was cast down by the condemnation of his countrymen. His demeanor all along, ever since the day of his interview with Miss Bensel, had been characterized by an observant calmness. He dissuaded as many of his relations and friends as he could from being present at the first performance of the play and ignored those who insisted on being there. He himself occupied an obscure seat in the gallery and listened with the greatest attention to the comments of those about him. He thereby began to form an idea of what the general public thought of his work; knowledge which, as he himself realized, would be of inestimable value if he could put it to use in his next play.

A letter Harry wrote to his Uncle Giles just after the play was taken off expresses his state of mind at this time. "'Chances' has gone by the board," he wrote; "that splendid American institution, the Tired Business Man, would have none of it, and it has ceased to be Drama and has become merely Literature. But I have learned a lot during its brief existence, and this knowledge I shall, please God, make use of if I ever write another play. Which is a mere figure of speech, as I have started one already. [197]

"I have learned the point of view of the Tired Business Man. That was what I wanted to know from the very first—not what the critics thought. They could do no more than say it was good, and I knew that already. And what the T. B. M. said was substantially, that my play was nice enough, but that it had no *punch*. I don't know whether you recognize that expression or not; it is one of those vivid American slang words that English people are so fascinated by. People thought the play wasn't interesting enough, and that is the simple truth about it. Therefore it wasn't a good play. For my idea is that to be really good a play must hold the stage, at least at the time it is written. And if we are ever going to build up such a thing as the 'American drama' our critics are continually bellowing about, we've got to begin with our foundations. We can't create a full-fledged literary drama and then go to work and make the people like it; we've got to begin with what the people like and build up our drama on that. That's the way all the great 'dramas' of history have grown up—the Greek, the French, the Spanish and the Elizabethan; and it is interesting to notice that the drama that came nearest to being the product of a mere literary class, the French, is the weakest of the lot and is standing the test of time worst of them all.

"I may never write a more successful play than 'Chances'; I may never get another play on the stage at all. But one thing I am sure of; I shall never offer another play to the public without being convinced that it is a better stage play than 'Chances.'"

Of course that a mere boy, fresh from college, with no practical experience of the stage whatever, should get a play produced at all was an unusual and highly gratifying thing. Harry became quite a lion that autumn, in a small way. He remained in New York till after the play was taken off,

living with the James Wimbournes, and was the guest of honor at one or two of Aunt Cecilia's rather dull but eminently important dinners. He became the object of the attention of reporters, [198] and also of that section of metropolitan *literati* who live in duplex apartments and wear strings of pearls in their hair and can always tell Schubert from Schumann. He was especially delighted with these, and determined some day to write a play or a novel portraying the inner side of their painstaking spirituality.

He saw a good deal of James during those weeks; more than he had seen of him since their college days. James had been rather sparing of his week-end visits to New Haven since moving to New York; Harry noticed that. He was sorry, for he now found James a great help and stimulus. He discovered that a walk or a motor ride with James between the hours of five and seven would obliterate the effects of the caviar-est of luncheons and the pinkest of teas and give him strength with which to face evenings in the company of people who appeared unable even to perspire anything less exalted than pure Pierian fluid.

"Well, it's nice to meet some one who doesn't smell of Russian cigarettes," he observed one day as he took his place in the long, low, slightly wicked-looking machine in which James whiled away most of his leisure moments. "Do you know, sometimes I actually rush into the nursery at Aunt Cecilia's and kiss the youngest and bread-and-butteryest child there, just to get the Parnassian odors out of my lungs. Next to a rather slobby child, though, I prefer the society of an ex-All-American quarter-back."

"Half," said James.

"Oh, were you? Well, you don't smell of anything æsthetic-er than the camphor balls you put that coat away for the summer in.... James, if you go round another corner at eighty miles an hour I shall leap out and telephone for a policeman!"

"Oh, that's all right. They all know me, anyway. They know I don't take risks."

"Hm.... Well, it's all over for me next week, thank Heaven. I'm going back to Aunt Selina and Sunday night suppers, and I *shall* be glad!"

"Well, I will say," said James slowly and carefully, with the air of one determined to do the most meticulous justice, "that you have kept your head through it all pretty well." [199]

"Oh, it's not hard, when you come right to it," said Harry, laughing. "Of course there are moments when I wonder if I'm not really greater than Shakespeare. And it does seem funny to realize that the rising genius, the person people are all talking about, and poor little Me are the same. But then I remember what a failure my play was, and shrivel into the poor graduate student.... After I've written a successful play, though, I won't answer for myself. And after I've written 'Hamlet,' as I mean to some day, I shall be simply unbearable. You won't own me then."

"Watch-chain round your neck?" suggested James.

"Oh, worse than that—diamond bracelets! And corsets—if necessary. I saw a man wearing both the other day, I really did."

"A man?"

"Well, an actor. That's the sort of thing they run to now-a-days. Long hair and general sloppiness are quite out of date—among the really ultra ones, that is."

"Well," said James, "I give you permission to be as ultra as you like, after you've written 'Hamlet.'"

"That helps, of course. I daresay I'm lacking in proper seriousness, but it seems to me that if the choice were offered me, right now, between being the author of 'Hamlet' and being also an ultra, and not writing 'Hamlet' and staying as I am, I would choose the latter. I don't know what my point of view may be at some future time, but that's what it is now, or at least I think it is. And after all, nobody can get nearer the truth than saying what he thinks his point of view at any given moment is, can he, James?"

CHAPTER III [200]

NOT TRIASSIC, CERTAINLY, BUT NEARLY AS OLD

To return again to the events attendant on the "Beggar's Opera." Harry slept late the morning after the performance, and when he awoke it was with a mind rested and vacant except for an intangible conviction that something pleasant had happened. He yawned and stretched delectably, and in a leisurely sort of way set about discovering just what it was.

"Let's see, now, what can it be?" he argued pleasantly. "Oh, yes, the 'Beggar's Opera.' It's all over, thank Heaven, and it went off creditably well. The wigs arrived in time and the prison set didn't fall over, and nobody lost a cue—so you could notice it." He lay back for a moment to give full rein to the enjoyment of these reflections. "There was something else, though." His mind languidly returned to the pursuit, as a dog crosses a room stretching at every step. "I'm sure there was something else...."

"Oh, yes, of course," he said at last; "I remember now. Madge Elliston."

If, say, ten seconds sufficed for enjoyment of the recollection of the "Beggar's Opera," how long should you say would be necessary for the absorption of the truth contained in those two words? A lifetime? An honest answer; we won't undertake to say it's not the right one. Harry, at least, seemed to be of that opinion.

"After all, though, it would be rather absurd to spend a whole lifetime in bed," he observed, after devoting twenty minutes to the subject. Then he jumped out of bed and pulled up the shade.

Vague flittings of poetry and song buzzed through his brain. One little phrase in particular kept humming behind his ears; a scrap from a song he had heard Madge herself sing often enough: —"What shall I do to show how much I love her?" The thing rather annoyed him by its insistence. He stood by the open window and inhaled a few deep breaths of the quickening March air. "What [201] shall I do to show how much I love her!" sang the air as it rushed up his nose and became breath and out again and became carbon dioxide. "I really don't know, I'm sure," he answered, impatiently breaking off and starting on some exercises he performed on mornings when he felt particularly energetic and there was time. Their rhythm was fascinating; he found he could do them in two different ways:—What shall—I do—to show—how much—I love her, or, What shall I—do to show—how much I—? "Oh, hang it!" He suddenly lost all interest in them. With one impatient, dramatic movement he tore off the upper half of his pajamas, ripping off three buttons as he did so. With another slightly more complicated but even more dramatic, he extricated himself from the lower half, breaking the string in the process.

"Ts! ts! More work for somebody!" he said, making the sound in the roof of his mouth indicative of reproof. He kicked the damaged garments lightly onto the bed and sauntered into the adjoining bathroom.

He turned on the water in the bathtub and stood watching it a moment as it gushed out in its noisy enthusiasm. "WhatshallIdotoshowhowmuchIloveher?" it inquired uncouthly. "Oh, do stop bothering me," said Harry, turning disgustedly away; "I've got to shave."

He lathered his face and took the razor in his right hand, while with his left he delicately lifted the end of his nose, so as to make a taut surface of his upper lip. It was a trick he had much admired in barbers. "Somehow it's not so effective when you do it to yourself," he said regretfully, watching the effect in the mirror. It helped his shaving, however, and shaving helped his thinking. He was able to think quite clearly and seriously, in fact, in spite of the roaring of the water nearby.

"I suppose I might keep away from her for a while," he said presently.

That really seemed a good idea; the more he thought of it the better he liked it. "I'll go down and stay with Trotty," he said as he scraped the last strip of lather off his face, remembering how fervently Trotty, recovering from a severe illness on the Trotwood estate in North Carolina, had begged him to come down and cheer his solitude. "And I won't come back until I know," he continued. "One must be sure. Absolutely." [202]

He plunged into his bath and the stimulus of the cold water set his brain working faster. "I'll start this very morning. Let's see; I've missed the ten-thirty, but I can catch the twelve-three, if I look alive, and get the three-fifty from New York.... No, on second thoughts, I'd better have lunch and pack comfortably and start this afternoon. That'll be better; it never does to be in too much of a hurry!"

It never did; he became even more convinced of that when he remembered at breakfast the many post-mortem arrangements to be made in connection with the "Beggar's Opera." However, he spent an active afternoon in completing what he could of these and delegating the remainder to subordinates, with the calm explanation that he was called away on business, and started for southern climes the next morning.

As soon as he had telegraphed Trotty and was actually on his way he became inclined to fear he had not done the right thing. It was so confoundedly quiet down there; he would have nothing to do but think about her. He should have plunged himself into some all-absorbing activity; he should have traveled or taken a nine-till-five clerkship or gone to New York for a while. This suspicion continued through his journey and even survived, though in a mangled form, Trotty's enthusiastic welcome of him. But after he had passed a few days among those pine-clad solitudes he began to see that he had done the wisest possible thing. Trotty was required to be out-of-doors practically the whole time, and the two drove endless miles in a dogcart through the quickening oaks and pines, or lay on fragrant carpets of needles, content with mere sensuous enjoyment of the wind and sun, sky and landscape.

Somehow these things brought calm and conviction to the heart of Harry. They seemed to rest and purge his soul from the fatigues of the past months; the anxiety and effort of the autumn

before, the pangs of composition that had marked the winter, the hurry and worry to which these had given place during the last few weeks, and to give coherence and sanctity to the tremendous discovery of that Friday night. He could not tell why it was that the sight of a flock of feathery clouds scurrying across a blue sky or the sound of warm wind among pine needles should work [203] this change in him, but it was so. "You're quite right," they seemed to say; "perfectly right. The thing has come, and it's not distracting or disturbing or frightening, as you feared it might be; it's just simple and great and unspeakably sweet. And you were quite right to come to us to find out about it; you can learn among us a great deal better than in all that hectic scrambling up north. So lay aside every thought and worry and ambition and open your whole heart and soul to us while we tell you how to take this, the greatest thing that ever was, is, or shall be!"

Trotty was also a source of comfort to him; Trotty had lost nothing of his former singular faculty of always rubbing him the right way. Not that either of them made any open or covert allusion to Harry's state of mind, for they did not, but there was something particularly reassuring, something strangely in tune with the great natural forces about them in his silent presence. For they would drive or read or simply lie about together for hours without speaking, after the manner of certain types of people who become very intimate with each other.

Whether these silences were to Trotty merely the intimate silences of yore or whether they had taken on for him also something of the character that colored them for Harry is not particularly clear; it is probable that he guessed something, but no more. As much might be gathered, at least, from the one occasion upon which their conversation even touched on anything vital.

This occurred on the eve of Harry's departure. For of course he had to leave some time. The birds and trees and sky were all very well for a while, but after three weeks the thought forced itself into his mind that any more time spent among them would smack of laziness if not of cowardice.

"Trotty," said he, "I'm going north on the twelve-fifty to-morrow."

"Oh," replied Trotty. "Bad news?"

"No."

"In love?"

"Yep."

"Oh." A silence of some length ensued.

"Carson?" asked Trotty at last.

"No, no—Elliston." [204]

"Oh.... Well, here's luck."

"Thanks. I need it."

In this matter-of-fact, almost coarse form was cast the most intimate conversation the two ever had together.

Harry determined to "have it out," as he mentally expressed it, with Madge as soon as possible, and went to call on her the very first evening after his return. As he walked in the front door he caught sight of her ahead of him crossing the hall with a sheaf of papers under her arm, and immediately his heart began thumping in a way that fairly shocked him. Her appearance was so wonderfully everyday, so utterly at variance with the way his silly heart had been going on about her these weeks! He felt as if he had been intending to propose to an archangel who happened to be also a duchess.

"Hello! This is an unexpected pleasure! I thought you were away shooting things." Her manner was friendly enough; she was obviously glad, as well as surprised, to see him. He murmured something explanatory, which apparently satisfied her, for she went on: "I'm glad you're back, anyway, because you're just in time to help me with my arithmetic papers. Come along in."

He sat down almost in despair, with the idea of merely making an evening call and postponing more important matters to a time when he should be better inured to the effects of her presence. But as he sat and watched her as she talked to him and looked over her arithmetic papers he felt his courage gradually return. Her physical presence was simply irresistible, distant and difficult of approach as she seemed.

"Do tell all about North Carolina," said Madge; "it's a delightful state, isn't it?"

"Oh, delightful."

"So I understand. My idea of it is a fashionable place where people go to recover from something, but I suppose there's more to it than that. The only other thing I know about it is geological; a remnant of physical geography, ages ago. I seem to remember something about triassic.... What is your North Carolina like, fashionable or triassic?"

"Not triassic, certainly." [205]

"No, I suppose not. It's very nice triassic, though; coal, and all sorts of lovely things, as I remember it. You must have been fashionable. Asheville, and that sort of thing."

"Not at all. I was helping Trotty to recover from something."

"Oh, really? What?"

"Pneumonia. Also pleurisy."

"Indeed! I didn't know anything about that; I thought you went simply to shoot things. So Jack Trotwood has had pleural pneumonia, has he? That's a horrid combination; poor Uncle Rudolph Scharndorst died of it. You often do if you have it hard enough and are old enough, or drink enough...."

"Well, Trotty doesn't," said Harry; "so he didn't."

"My dear man, neither did Uncle Rudolph," rejoined Miss Elliston. "That wasn't what I meant; he just had it so hard he died of it—that was all.—How is he getting on?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure."

"I mean Trotty, of course! Poor Uncle Rudolph!"

"Very well, indeed.—Madge!" he went on, gathering courage for a break, "I didn't come here to-night to talk about Uncle Rudolph!"

Miss Elliston raised her eyebrows ever so little and went on, with unabated cheerfulness: "We were talking about Jack Trotwood, I thought. However, here's this arithmetic; you can help me with that. Do you know anything about percentage? It's not so hard, when you really put your mind to it. Given the principal and interest, to find the rate—that's easy enough. Useful, too; if you know how much a person has a year all you have to do is to find what it's invested in and look it up on the financial page, and you can tell just what their capital is! It's quite simple!"

"Oh, yes, perfectly simple."

"Let's see—Florrie Vicars; did you ever hear of any one whose name was really Florrie before?... Florrie gets a C—she generally does. That isn't on a scale of A B C, it stands for 'correct.' Did you ever hear of anything so delightfully Victorian? That's the way we do things at Miss Snellgrove's.... Sadie Jones—wouldn't you know that a girl called Sadie Jones who wrote like that [206]
—look at those sevens—would have frizzy yellow hair and sticky-out front teeth?"

"Yes, indeed, without any doubt."

"Well, as a matter of fact she has straight black hair and a pure Grecian profile and is altogether the most beautiful creature you ever saw!... Marjorie Hamlin—she never could add two and two straight.... Jennie Fairbanks...."

Harry realized more sharply than before that ordinary conversational paths would not lead where he wanted to go; he must break through the hedge and he must break with courage and determination.

"Madge!" he burst out again, "I didn't come here to talk about little girls' arithmetic papers, either! I am here to-night to declare a state of—" He stopped, unable, when the moment came, to treat the matter with even that amount of lightness. He had been over-confident!

"Of what?" asked Madge, looking up from her arithmetic and smiling brightly yet distantly at him. There was just a chance that she might shame him back into mere conversation, even at this late moment.

"You know, perfectly well!" He sprang from his chair and took a step or two toward her. The thing was done now. A minute ago they had been occupied in trivial chatter; now they were launched on the momentous topic.

"Madge, don't pretend not to understand, at any rate!" He was by her side on the sofa now. "I used to think that when I was—when I was in love I should be able to joke and laugh about it as I have about every earthly thing in life. I thought that if love couldn't be turned into a joke it wasn't worth having. But it isn't that way, at all!... Oh, Madge, Madge, don't you see how it is with me?"

"Dear Harry, indeed I do!" said Madge impulsively, feeling a great wave of pity and unhappiness swell in her bosom. "Indeed I do!"

"Then don't you think that you could ever ... Madge, until you tell me you could possibly—feel that way—toward me, it's Hell, that's what it is, Hell!"

"Indeed it is, Harry; that's just what it is!"

"Then you think you can't—love me?"

"No—God forgive me, I can't!" [207]

He sat still for a moment, looking quietly at her from his sad brown eyes in a way she thought would break her heart. "I was afraid so," he said at last; "I suppose I really knew it, all along. It's been my fault."

"Oh, Harry," she burst out, "if you only knew how much I wanted to! If you only knew how terrible it is to see you sit there and say that, and not be able to say yes! I like you so much, and you are such a dear altogether, and you're so wonderful about this—oh, why, why, in Heaven's name, can't I love you?"

"But Madge, surely you must be mistaken! How can you talk that way and not have—the real feeling? Madge, you must be in love with me, only you don't know it!"

"That's just what I've said to myself, time after time—I've lain awake whole nights telling myself that. But it isn't so, it isn't! I can't deceive myself into thinking so and I won't deceive you.... I just—can't—love you, because I'm not good enough! Oh, it is so terrible!..." Her voice suddenly failed; she sank to her knees on the floor and buried her head among the cushions of the sofa in an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

For a moment Harry was overcome by a desire to seize that grief-stricken little figure in his arms and kiss away her ridiculous tears. A second thought, however, showed the fruitlessness of that; small comfort to his arms if their souls could not embrace! Instead he quietly arose from his seat and shut the door, which seemed the most sensible thing to do under the circumstances. He then walked over to the piano and stood leaning on it, head on hands, thoughtfully and silently watching the diminishing sobs of Madge.

When these at last reached the vanishing point their author turned suddenly. Harry continued to stare quietly back at her for a second or two and then slowly and solemnly winked his right eye. Madge emitted a strange sound between a laugh and a sob, turned her face away again and plied her handkerchief briskly.

"Here I am, of course," she said presently, "thinking of nothing but indulging my own silly feelings, as usual. And you, poor Harry, who really are capable of feeling, just stand there like Patience on a monument.... Harry, why don't you swear at me, kick me? do something to make it easier for me?..." She picked herself up, walked over toward the piano and laid her hands on its [208]
smooth black surface in a caressing sort of way. The piano had been given to her by her Aunt Tizzy and she loved it very much, but she did not think of it at all now. "Harry," she began again, "Harry, dear, I'll tell you what we'll do—I'll marry you, if you like, anyway.... I'll make you a lovely wife; I'll do anything in the wide world to be a comfort to you, just to show you how much I would love to love you if I could...."

Harry, still looking gravely at her, shook his head slowly. "It would never do, Madge," he said; "never in the world. We must wait until we can start fair. You see that?"

She nodded. "I suppose I do—from your point of view."

"No—from *our* point of view."

"Well, yes.... It is just a little bit hard, though, that the first offer of marriage I ever made should be turned down."

Harry laughed, loudly and suddenly. "That's right!" he said; "that's *you*! Not that self-denunciatory thing of a minute ago. Don't ever be self-denunciatory again, please. Just remember there's nothing in the world that can possibly be your fault, and *then* you'll be all right!... Now then, we can talk. I suppose," he went on, with a change of tone, "you like me quite well, just as much as ever, and all that; only when it comes to the question of whether you could ever be happy for one instant without me you are forced to admit that you could. Is that it?"

Madge nodded her head. "That's just about it. For a long time—oh, but what's the use in *that*...?"

"No, go ahead."

"Well, one or two people have been in love with me before—or thought they were, and though that disturbed me at times, it never amounted to much. In fact I thought the whole thing rather fun, as I remember it—Heaven forgive me for it! But then you came along and after a while—several months ago—it became borne in on me that you were going to—to act the same way, and I immediately realized that it was going to be much, *much* more serious than the others. And I—well, I had a cobblestone for a heart, and knew it. So I tried my best to keep you off the scent, in every way I could, knowing what a crash there would be if it came to *that*.... But I never knew [209]
what I missed till to-night, when you showed me what a magnificent creature a person really in love is, and what a loathsome, detestable, contemptible creature—"

"Come, come, remember my instructions," interpolated Harry.

"—a person incapable of love is. And it just knocked me flat for the moment."

"I see," said Harry thoughtfully; "I see."

"I suppose," continued Madge, "it would have been easier all around if I didn't like you so much. I could conceive of marriage without love, if the person was thoroughly nice and I was quite sure there was no chance of my loving any one else, just because it's nicer to be rich than poor, but with you—no!... And on the other hand, I daresay I *might* have come nearer falling in love with you if you hadn't been—such a notoriously good match ... you never realized that, perhaps?... I just couldn't bear the thought of giving *you* anything but the real thing, if I gave you anything—that's what it comes to!"

"Madge, what I don't see is how you can go on talking that way and feeling that way and not be in love with me! Not much, of course, but just a teeny bit!... Don't you really think your conscience is making—well, making a fool of you?"

"No, no, Harry—please! I can't explain it, but I really am quite, *quite* sure! No one could be gladder than I if it were otherwise!"

"One person could, I fancy. Well, the thing to do now is to decide what's to be done to make you love me.... For that is the next thing, you know," he went on, in reply to an inarticulate expression of dissent from Madge. "You don't suppose I'm going to leave this house to-night and never think of you again, do you? You don't suppose I'm ever going to give up loving you and trying to make you love me, as long as we two shall live and after?"

"I thought," murmured Madge, apparently to her handkerchief. The rest was almost inaudible, but Harry succeeded in catching the phrase "some nice girl."

"Oh, rot!!" he exclaimed vociferously. Then he sank down on the piano bench, rested his elbows on the keyboard cover and burst into paroxysms of laughter. The idea of his leaving Madge and going out in search of "some nice girl"! Madge, still leaning on the edge of the piano, watched [210] him with some apprehension, occasionally smothering a reluctant smile in her handkerchief.

"Excuse me, Madge," he said at last, wiping his eyes, "but that's probably the funniest remark ever made!... A large, shapeless person, with yellow hair and a knitted shawl ... a sort of German type, who'd take the most wonderful care of my socks ... with a large, soft kiss, like ... like a hot cross bun!..." He was off again.

"Hush, Harry, don't be absurd! Hush, you'll wake Mama! Harry, you're impossible!" Madge herself was laughing at the portrait, for all that. It was some minutes before either of them could return to the subject in hand.

"Oh, you'll love me all right, in time!" That laugh had cleared the atmosphere tremendously; it seemed much easier to talk freely and sensibly now. "Of course you don't think so now, and that's quite as it should be; but time makes one look at things differently."

"No, no, you mustn't count on that. If I don't now, I can't ever possibly! Really—"

"What, not love me? Impossible! Look at me!" He became serious and went on: "Madge, granting that you don't care a hang for me now, can you look into your inmost heart and say you're perfectly sure you never, never could get to care for me, some time in the dim future of years?"

"I—don't know," replied Madge inconclusively.

"There you are—you know perfectly well you can't! However, I don't intend to bother you about that now. What I want to suggest now is that we had better be apart for a while, now that we know how things stand between us—not see anything of each other for a long time. That's the best way. That's how I fell in love with you—how I became sure about it, at any rate. That was why I went to North Carolina, of course."

Madge thought seriously for a moment or two. What he said seemed reasonable. If he did go entirely out of her head after a few months' absence, he would be out of it for good and all, and there was the end of it. Whereas, in the unlikely event of his *not* going out of her head, but going into her heart, she would be much surer of herself than if under the continual stimulus and charm of his presence. [211]

"Well," she said at length. "But how will you arrange it?"

"I shall simply go away—to-morrow. Abroad. You'll be here?"

"Yes."

"What do you do this summer?"

"I'm not sure—that is, I had thought of going to Bar Harbor, with the Gilsons—as governess. They have a dear little girl."

Harry made a gesture of impatience. "I suppose that's as good as anything. If you'll be happy?"

"Oh, perfectly. I should enjoy that, actually, more than anything else. Mama'll be with Aunt Tizzy. I think I'll do it, now. I'd rather be doing something."

"Well, we'll meet here, then, at the end of the summer, in September. I suppose we'd better not write. Unless, that is, you see light before the time is up. Then you're to let me know—that's part of the bargain. Just wire to my bankers the single word, 'Elliston.' I'll know."

"On one condition—that you do the same if you change your mind the other way!"

"Madge, what idiocy!"

"No, no; you must agree. Why shouldn't you be given a chance of changing your mind, as well as I?"

"Very well; it's probably the easiest bargain any one ever made.... Well, that's all, I think." They both paused, wondering what was to come next. The matter did seem to be fairly well covered.

He made as if to go.

"Oh, one thing—your work!" Madge apparently was suffering a slight relapse of self-denunciation. "How absolutely like me, I never thought of that!"

"I can work abroad as well as here. I can work anywhere better than here—you must see that."

"I suppose so." She fixed her eyes on the carpet. A hundred thousand things were teeming in her brain, clamoring to be said, but she turned them all down as "absurd" and contented herself at last with: "You sail immediately, then?"

"Saturday, I expect. To the Mediterranean. I shall leave town to-morrow, though; you won't be bothered by me again!"

"You must give yourself plenty of time to pack. Be sure—" she checked herself, apparently embarrassed. [212]

"Be sure what?"

"Nothing—none of my business."

"Yes, please! My dying request!"

"Well, I was going to tell you to be sure to take plenty of warm things for the voyage. Men are so silly about such things!"

As with Madge a minute ago, all sorts of things shouted to be done and said in his brain, but he shut the door firmly on all of them and replied quietly, "All right, I will," and started toward the door.

She could not let it go at that, after all. Before the door had swung to behind him she had rushed up and caught it.

"Oh, Harry!" she exclaimed; "if it does—if it should come off, wouldn't it be simply—Nirvana, and that sort of thing?"

"Madge," replied Harry solemnly from the doorstep, "it will make Nirvana look like the Black Hole of Calcutta!"

If there rose in her mind one pang of remorse for her behavior that evening, one suggestion of a desire to rush out on the doorstep and fling herself into his arms and tell him what a fool she was, it was reduced to subjection before she had closed the door and entirely smothered by the time she reached the parlor again.

"No," she told herself quite firmly as she rearranged the tumbled sofa cushions, "that would never do—that was part of the Bargain." Just what was part of the bargain or exactly what the bargain was she did not bother to specify. "No, I must wait," she continued, trying the locks of the windows; "I must wait, a long time, a long, *long* time. Till next September, in fact. One always has to wait to find out; nothing but time can show. And of course one must be *sure*"—she turned out the gas—"first. *Perfectly* sure—beyond all manner of doubt and question. Both on my own account"—she reached up with considerable effort and turned out the hall light—"and Harry's."

"No," she amended as she felt with her foot for the first step of the dark staircase; "not on my account. On Harry's."

CHAPTER IV [213]

WILD HORSES AND CHAMPAGNE

James Wimbourne always had the reputation of being an exceptionally strong-willed person. None of his friends would have been in the least surprised to see him come so triumphantly through the first real test that life offered him, if they had known anything about it. Not one of them did know anything about it; no human being ever vaguely surmised that he renounced—the word is a big one but the act was worthy of it—Beatrice in favor of his brother. Beatrice may have suspected it at first, but her suspicion, if it existed at all, died an easy and natural death. Harry suspected it least of all, which was just what James wanted. The one reason why the renunciation did not turn out entirely as James intended was one over which he had no control, namely, the simple fact that Harry was never in love with Beatrice.

But as a matter of fact one must look deeper into James' character to discover how it was that, long before the completion of the four years that the story has recently skipped, James was able to think of Beatrice without even a flutter of the heart. Deeply imbedded in his nature there lay a motive force to which his will power, as other people knew it, was merely the servant. This may

perhaps be most safely described as James' attitude toward Harry. It is not easy to describe it. It does not do to lay stress upon the elements of brotherly affection, desire to protect, unselfishness and so forth, which made it up; those things all appear to smack of priggishness and cant and are at variance with the spontaneity of the thing we are talking about. One might perhaps refer to it as an ineradicable conviction in the soul of James that Harry was always to be thought of first.

Very few people are capable of entertaining such a feeling. Very few are worthy of it. James had just the sort of nature in which it is most likely to occur. The Germans have an apt phrase for this type of nature—*schöne Seele*. James had a *schöne Seele*. He had his tastes and feelings, of [214] course, like any one else, but the good always came naturally to him; the bad was abnormal. And this was why he found it possible and even—after a certain time—easy to erase from his brain the image of Beatrice, and set up in its place a vision of Harry and Beatrice coming into a mutual realization of each other.

Well, it couldn't have been much of a love in the first place if it wasn't stronger than brotherly affection, does some one suggest? some one, we fancy, who is thoroughly familiar with the poems of the late Robert Browning and entertains a *penchant* for the Paolo and Francesca brand of love. Well, possibly. We confess to our own moments of Paolomania; every healthy person has them. But we would call the attention of the aforesaid some one to the stern fact that love in the United States of America in the twentieth century is of necessity a different thing from love in—Rimini, we were going to say, but Rimini is a real place, with a railroad station and hotel omnibusses, so let us change it to Paolo-and-Francescadom. Also that he may have fostered his cult of Paoloism rather at the expense of his study of the *schöne Seele*. And we would also suggest, meeting him on his own ground, that there is no evidence of Paolo ever having got along very well with Giovanni. For if he had, of course, that whole beautiful story might have been spoilt.

Then, of course, James' remoteness from Beatrice made it easier for him. Love is primarily a matter of geography, anyway. With the result that finally, when the month of June arrived and with it the offer of the New York position, the danger implied in New York's proximity to New Haven and Beatrice was not enough to deter James from closing with it. He accepted the offer, as we know, and took up his duties in New York in September.

He took Stodger McClintock with him. Stodger by this time simply belonged to James, as far as the Emancipation Proclamation and other legal technicalities permit of one person belonging to another. He had already obtained for him a job as office boy in McClellan's and now proposed to take him east and educate him, with the eventual idea of turning him into a chauffeur. Stodger seemed delighted with the prospect.

"Only," he objected, "please, I'll have to ask me grand-mudder!" [215]

"Oh, of course," said James gravely. "You couldn't go without her consent. I'll have a talk with her myself, if you like."

Stodger seemed to think that would not be necessary. It ended by James taking a small apartment and installing Stodger as chore boy under the command of an eagle-eyed Swedish woman, where he could divide his time between cleaning shoes and attending high school.

October arrived; it was ten months since James had seen Beatrice and he decided it was now time to see her again, to make the sight of her and Harry together chase the last shreds of regret from his mind. So he wrote to Aunt Selina announcing that he would spend his next free Saturday night in New Haven.

It happened that Aunt Selina had fixed upon that night to have some people to dinner. When she learned that James would be one of the number that idea vanished in smoke and from its ashes, phoenix-like, arose the conception of making it a real occasion; not dinner, nor people-to-dinner, but frankly, out-and-out, A Dinner, like that. She arranged to have eighteen, and sent out invitations accordingly.

James did not see Beatrice until nearly dinner-time on the Saturday night. He came downstairs at five minutes or so before the hour and discovered Harry standing before the drawing-room fireplace with Aunt Selina placidly sitting on a sofa and Beatrice flying about giving a finishing touch here and there. There was no strain or uneasiness about the meeting; his "Hello, Beatrice," received by her almost on the wing as she passed on some slight preprandial mission, was a model of cordial familiarity. And if she had not been too preoccupied to let the meeting be in the least awkward, Harry, gaily chattering from the chimney-piece, would have been enough to prevent it anyway.

"Well, here we all are," Harry was saying, "and nobody here to entertain. Of course if we had all happened to be a minute or two late there would have been a crowd of people waiting for us. We won't complain, though; being too early is the one great social sin. Yes, Aunt Selina dear, I know people didn't think so in the Hayes administration ... Beatrice, do stop pecking at those roses; they look very well indeed. You make me feel as if my hair wasn't properly brushed, or my shirt-front spotted. This suspense is telling on me; why doesn't somebody come?" [216]

Somebody did come almost immediately. Aunt Selina arose and stood in state in front of the fireplace to receive, and she made James stand with her, as though as a reward for returning to the eastern half of the country. He looked extremely well standing there. There was not one of the guests that came up and shook his hand that did not mentally congratulate the house of Wimbourne upon its present head.

In some ways, indeed, one might say that those few minutes formed the very apex of James' life, the point toward which his whole past appeared to rise and his future to descend from. There are such moments in men's careers; moments to which one can point and say, Would that chance and my own nature had permitted me to stay there for the rest of my natural days! Surely there can be no harm in a soul remaining static if the level at which it remains is sufficiently high. Here was James, for example, not merely rich, good-looking, clever rather than otherwise, beloved of his fellow men, but with a very palpable balance on the side of good in his character. Why could not fate leave him stranded on that high point for the rest of his life, radiating goodness and happiness to every one who came near him? *Schöne Seelen* are rare enough in this world anyway; what a pity it is that they should not always be allowed to shine to the greatest possible advantage! What a pity it is that so many of them are overwhelmed with shadows too deep for their struggling rays to pierce; shadows so thick that the poor little flames are accounted lucky if they can manage to burn on invisibly in the darkness, illuminating nothing but their own frail substance, content merely to live! The thought, indeed, would be intolerable were it not for certain other considerations; as for example, that the purest flames burn clearest in the darkness, or that a candle at midnight is worth more than an arc-light at noonday.

Having successfully survived the first meeting, James found himself performing the duties of the evening with astonishing ease. He devoted himself chiefly to his right-hand neighbor, who for some reason was always referred to as "little" Mrs. Farnsworth. He was not conscious of the slightest feeling of strain in his conversation; he got on so well and so easily that he perhaps failed to realize that his was a real effort, made with the undoubted though unconscious purpose [217] of keeping his mind off other things. If he had not succeeded so well, it might have been better. Certainly he would have been spared the let-down that he subsequently realized was inevitable. It came about halfway through dinner, in a general conversation which started with an account by James of Stodger's grandmother.

He had made rather a good thing of this. "Of course I never force his hand," he was explaining; "I never ask him out and out what her name is and where she lives; I try to give the impression of believing in her as profoundly as himself. But it's most amusing to see how cleverly he dodges the questions I do ask. When we were about to come east, for instance, I asked him how his grandmother dared to trust him so far away without seeing me or knowing anything about me. He replied that she was satisfied with the description he gave her of me. 'But Stodger,' I said, 'doesn't she want to see with her own eyes?' 'She's my *grand*mother, not my mother,' he answered, which really covered the matter pretty well."

"But he's never shown you either her or a letter from her?" asked Mrs. Farnsworth.

"Of course not—how could he? Oh, I must say I admire him for it! You see, I found him living practically in the gutter, sleeping Heaven knows where and eating Heaven knows what; but through it all he hung onto this grandmother business as his one last tie with the world of respectability and good clothes and enough to eat. I think I never saw a person get so much out of a mere idea."

"It shows imagination, certainly," murmured Mrs. Farnsworth appreciatively, but her remark was drowned in the question of her right-hand neighbor, who had been listening to James' narrative and joined in with:

"Have you ever succeeded in getting any idea of what the old lady is like? I should think the boy's mental picture of a grandmother might form a key to his whole character."

"No," replied James; "I've never asked him anything very definite. I must find out something more about her some time."

"What would the ideal grandmother be like, I wonder?" queried Mrs. Farnsworth. "Yours or mine, for example? Mine would be a dear old soul with a white cap and curls, whom I should always go [218] to visit over Thanksgiving and eat too much pumpkin pie."

"Yes, I think that comes pretty near my ideal, too," said James; "provided she didn't want to kiss me too often and had no other bad habits."

"How idyllic!" said Mrs. Farnsworth's other neighbor. "Arcadians, both of you. I confess to something much more sophisticated; something living in town, say, with a box at the opera. Mrs. Harriman, it's your turn."

"Oh, leave me out!" answered Mrs. Harriman, a woman who still, at forty, gave the impression of being too young for her husband. "You see, I have a grandmother still living."

"So have I," irrepressibly retorted her neighbor, whose name was Nesmith; "two of them, in fact, and neither is anything like my ideal! You can feel quite at your ease."

"Well, if I had to choose, I think I would have one more like yours, Mr. Nesmith; only very old and dignified, something of the dowager type, who would tell delightful stories of Paris under Louis Philippe and Rome under the Popes, and possibly write some rather indiscreet memoirs. Something definitely connecting my own time with hers, you know."

"Oh, I say, no fair!" interrupted James in unthoughtful high spirits. "No fair stealing somebody else's grandmother! You've described Miss Carson's grandmother, Mrs. Harriman, unless I'm greatly mistaken. Beatrice, isn't Mrs. Harriman's ideal grandmother suspiciously like old Lady Moville?"

Beatrice, who was sitting two places down the table from Mrs. Harriman, had heard the description; the grandmother conversation had, in fact, absorbed the attention of very nearly half the table.

"Very like, I admit; but Mrs. Harriman is quite welcome to her.... She is not exactly my ideal of a grandmother...!" She turned directly toward James and made the last remark straight at him with a sort of deprecating smile of comprehension. It was as though she said: "I say that to *you* because I know you'll understand!" It did not amount to much; it was one of the fleeting signs of mutual comprehension that friends will frequently exchange in the presence of acquaintances. But unfortunately the remark and the way it was given were extremely ill-timed as far as James [219] was concerned. The effect they caused in him may perhaps be best likened to one of those sudden fits of faintness that overcome people convalescing from a long illness; the sort of thing where you are all right one minute and gasping and calling for brandy the next, and the stronger you feel beforehand the harder the faintness seizes you when it comes. If James had been on the watch for such occurrences, the incident would not have had half the effect on him that it did. As it was, however, Beatrice's little speech and glance stirred into momentary activity much of the feeling that he had been striving all these months to keep down.

It was not really much; it did not actually undo the work of those ten months. James was really convalescent. But the suddenness of the thing overcame him for the moment and gave him a feeling approaching that of actual physical faintness. He saw a glass of champagne standing at his side and involuntarily reached toward it.

No one noticed him much. Mrs. Farnsworth was chattering easily with Mr. Nesmith; conversation had resumed its normal course. Possibly the knowledge that James had touched on a rather doubtful topic, Beatrice's father's family, gave conversation a slight added impetus; certainly if anybody noticed James' embarrassment they assumed that his slight indiscretion amply accounted for it. At any rate, when his embarrassment led him so far as not only to reach for his left-hand neighbor's glass of champagne instead of his own but to tip it over in the process, the said left-hand neighbor, who happened to be Madge Elliston, attributed his action to that reason and acted accordingly.

With a tact that would have seemed overdone if it had not been so prompt and sufficient, she immediately assumed that it had been she who had knocked the glass over.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she exclaimed. "I *am* such an awkward idiot; I hope it didn't go all over you, James?... No, my dress is all right; apparently nothing but the tablecloth has suffered," and so forth, and so forth, to an accompaniment of gentle swabbings and shifting of table utensils.

"Oh, Madge?" said James vaguely. "That's all right—I mean, it's my fault, entirely...." He joined in the rescue work with grateful fervor, and in a moment a servant came up and did something [220] efficient with a napkin. Madge chattered on.

"I never do get through a party without doing something silly! I'm glad it's nothing worse than this; I generally count that dinner as lost when I don't drop a hairpin into my food. I used to be quite embarrassed about it, but I've got so now that I eat shamelessly on, right down to the hairpin. I wonder if your aunt saw? No—or rather, she did, and is far too polite to show it. She just won't ask me again, that's all!"

"She will if I have any influence with her," said James; "and I don't mind saying, between you and me and the gatepost, that I have a good deal! Only you must sing to us after dinner. You will, won't you?"

"My dear James, I don't suppose wild horses—"

"Oh, come now, you must!"

"I was going to say, wild horses couldn't stop me from singing, if I'm asked! Did you ever know me to refrain from singing, loudly and clearly, whenever I received the slightest encouragement?"

"I can't say—I haven't been here enough. I'm pretty sure, though, that there are no wild horses here to-night."

"I'm not so sure...." She took a rapid glance around the table. "Yes, there are at least two wild horses right here in this room. See if you can guess who they are."

"Oh, this is getting beyond me!"

"Guess!" said Madge, inexorably.

"Well ... Professor Dodd?"

"Right. Now the other."

"Oh—old George Harriman."

"No. You're on the wrong track; it isn't the unmusical people that keep me from singing; it's those who make me feel silly and *de trop*, somehow, when I'm doing it."

"I can't guess," said James after a pause.

"Well, it's Beatrice Carson!"

"No, not Beatrice! Why, she's very fond of music!"

"It's not that, as I tried to explain. She is such a wonderful, Olympian sort of person, so beautiful, so well-bred, so good, and tremendously wise and capable—you've heard about the work she's doing here in the Working Girls' League?"

"Something, yes." [221]

"Well, it's perfectly extraordinary; they say she's been able to reach people no one else has ever been able to do anything with. Altogether, the thought of her listening to me makes me feel like a first-class fool when I stand up and warble, and even more so when I think of the time and money I waste on learning to do a little bit better something that isn't worth doing at all!"

"But you teach school," objected James. "That's sound constructive work."

"That," replied Miss Elliston, "is not for eleemosynary reasons."

"But you do it very well."

"No, you're mistaken there, and beside, I hate teaching school; I simply *loathe* it! Whereas ... let me tell you a secret. This singing business, this getting up in a drawing-room and opening my mouth and compelling people's attention, even for a moment—seeing people gradually stop talking and thinking about something else and wishing I'd stop, and at last just listening, listening with all their ears and minds to me, plain, stupid, vapid little ME—well, I just love it! It's meat and drink to me. Whenever I receive an invitation to dinner I want to write back, Yes, if you'll let me sing afterward!"

"Really," said James thoughtfully, "that's the way it is with you, is it?"

"I'm afraid so! You won't give me away though, will you, James?"

"Oh, no danger! And I'll promise you another thing—wild horses shan't have a chance when I'm around! Not one chance! Ever!"

He was flattered by her confidence, of course, as well as grateful for her tact. She had not only dragged him out of the water where he was floundering on to the dry land, but had gone so far as to haul him up an agreeable eminence before leaving him.

Conversation shifted again at that point and James turned again to Mrs. Farnsworth. He got on very well with her from his eminence; so well that they remained conversationally united for the rest of dinner. In the course of their talk he thought of another thing that made him even happier; something he had not had a chance to realize before. Madge thought his momentary embarrassment had been due to having broached the doubtful topic of the Carson family. She [222] had no inkling of his feeling for Beatrice; the freedom of her references to Beatrice was proof positive of that. And if she did not suspect, probably no one else did! His secret was as safe as it had ever been.

The full joy of this realization began to spread itself through him about the time when fingerbowls came into use and Aunt Selina was gathering eyes preparatory to starting an exodus. Just as they all rose he chanced to catch Madge's eye and, unable to withhold some expression of his relief, smiled and said softly: "Thank you, Madge!"

"What?" she asked, not understanding.

"Champagne," said James.

"Oh, nonsense!" As she started to walk doorward she turned her face directly toward his and gave him a deprecatory little smile of understanding, exactly like the one Beatrice had thrown him a short time ago.

The coincidence at first rather took him aback. He was conscious, as the men rearranged themselves for coffee and cigars, of a feeling of loss, almost of desecration; the sort of feeling one might experience on seeing somebody else wear one's mother's wedding gown. Nobody but Beatrice had any real business to smile like that—to him, at least. Then it occurred to him that that was all nonsense; either it was all on or all off between him and Beatrice. After all, Madge's smile was just about as good to look at as Beatrice's, if one made allowance against the latter's unusual beauty. Madge was not unattractive in her way, either....

Madge sang, of course. James enjoyed her singing very much, the more so for what she had told him at dinner. During her performance an inspiration came to him which he presently made an opportunity to impart to her.

"Look here," he asked; "have you ever sung for Beatrice's working girls?"

"No," answered she in some surprise. "Why?"

"Why not?"

"I've never been asked, for one thing!"

"Would you, if you were? I'd like to suggest it to Beatrice, at any rate."

"That's all very well for me, but what about the poor working girls?"

"I should say that any working girl that didn't want to hear you sing didn't deserve to be helped. I may suggest it to her, then?" [223]

"Certainly, if you like. I don't really imagine that she'll have any use for it, though."

"We'll see." He dismissed the subject with a smile. It pleased him to be quite brief and businesslike. As the party broke up and the guests dispersed he was busy, in a half-conscious sort of way, constructing a vision of him and his whole future life on this scheme; irretrievably blighted in his own career he would devote himself to doing helpful little services for people he liked, without thought of other reward than the satisfaction of performing them.

Sustained by this vision he embarked quite fearlessly and efficiently on a *tête-à-tête* with Beatrice before going to bed that night. He made the suggestion to her that he had told Madge he would make, and was pleased to find that Beatrice welcomed it warmly.

Once in bed, with the light turned out and absolute quiet reigning throughout the house, of course disturbing things did force their way into his brain. It was bound to be that way, of course; had it not been that way for the past ten months? Fears, pains, doubts, memories, regrets—all passed in their accustomed procession before his mind's eye, gradually growing dimmer and fewer as drowsiness came on and at last dwindling to occasional mental pictures, as of a characteristic gesture, a look, a smile. A humorous little smile, for instance, suggestive of mutual understanding....

Jove, that was a funny thing! He sat up in bed, shaking off his sleepiness and subjecting his mental vision to the test of conscious reason. That was Madge's smile that he had just seen, not Beatrice's; it was all there, the different position, the eyes, the hair and everything; all complete and unmistakable. Well, it was strange what a heavy dinner could do to a man—that, and a glass of champagne!

CHAPTER V [224]

A SCHÖNE SEELE ON PISGAH

More than four years have elapsed before we see James Wimbourne again.

Time has dealt easily with him, as far as appearances are concerned. No periods of searching care have imprinted their lines upon his face; no rending sorrow has dimmed the sweetness of its expression. No one could even be tempted to say that he had begun to grow stout. And if his face is a trifle thinner and more firmly molded than of old, if he has a more settled manner of sinking back in to a club chair, if he takes rather more time to get through the evening newspaper, or if, after the manner of many ex-athletes, he is inclined to become fidgety and bilious unless he has exactly the proper amount of physical exercise—well, who ever reaches his late twenties without showing similar preliminary symptoms of age; not so much the first stages of the process of ageing as indications of what the process will be like when it begins in earnest?

The process in which we now find James engaged is mental rather than senescent, but you would hardly guess it to look at him. He is sitting on a rock on the top of a hill at sunset, smoking a cigarette and patently enjoying it. One leg is thrown easily over the other, his body is bent slightly forward; one hand rests on the rock by his side and the other, when not employed in propelling the cigarette to and from his mouth, lies quietly on his lap. He is very quiet; James is not the sort of person to make many unnecessary motions; he picks out a comfortable position and usually remains in it until it is time to do something else. He would do this even if he were not gazing at an absorbingly lovely view over the roofs of Bar Harbor, Frenchman's Bay and the tumbled hills of the Maine Coast, and even if the mental process were not such an absorbing one as a review of his relation with Madge Elliston,—a sort of indexing of the steps by which it had developed from the vaguest of acquaintanceships into its present state. [225]

It had really begun, he reflected, on the evening of that dinner. Before that Madge had been merely one of the group of chattery young women that he had danced with and was polite to and secretly rather afraid of; one of the genus débutante. After that she merged from her genus and, almost without going through the intermediate stages of species and variety, became an individual.

At first he had deliberately fostered and encouraged the thought of Madge, for obvious reasons. It was clearly profitable to do anything that would help weed out the thought of Beatrice. It would be fruitless even to try to enumerate the stages by which from that point on Beatrice faded from his heart and that of Madge took her place; to a far larger place, as he now realized, than Beatrice had ever occupied there.

It appeared to him now, as he looked back on the whole process, that Beatrice herself was responsible for a large part of it, Beatrice and her Working Girls' League. That had all grown quite logically out of that first evening and his inspiration about having Madge sing to the working girls. Beatrice adopted the suggestion, and the result was so successful that on the Saturday a month or two afterward, when James made his next visit to New Haven, Madge was engaged to sing to them for a second time. He accompanied Beatrice to that meeting and from that evening dated his acquaintance with the Working Girls' League and social work in general.

Madge sang for the most part old English songs, things the girls could understand, and they followed them all with the most unaffected interest and pleasure. James was surprised to see several of them actually wipe tears from their eyes when she sang the plaintive ditty "A young country maid up to London had strayed," and during one intermission he was conscious of certain inarticulate sounds coming from the audience, of which the only intelligible part was the word "husband" uttered in beseeching accents again and again.

"They want her to sing 'Oh, for a husband,'" explained Beatrice to James. "She sang that the last time and they all went crazy about it." Madge complied with a really very spirited rendering of the old song, and the girls applauded with an enthusiasm that rather touched James. There was [226] something appealing to him in the unaffected way in which these poor shop and factory drudges, physically half-starved and mentally wholly starved, responded to the slightest efforts to give them pleasure. He felt himself suddenly warming toward the movement.

"Tell me something about this place," he found a chance to say to Madge later on, when the gathering had broken up, and even before she replied he reflected that he had had ample opportunity to ask Beatrice that.

"Oh, *I'm* not the person to ask—I've only just come into it.... It was started simply as a working girls' club, I believe; a place more especially for the homeless ones to come to after work hours and meet each other and spend a little time in cheerful surroundings before going back to their hall bedrooms.... Now it's become more than that; they have entertainments and dances and classes of various kinds, and we're trying to raise money enough to build them a lodging house."

"You've become one of them then, have you?"

"Oh, yes, I'm one of those that have been drawn in. The thing has flourished amazingly lately, both among the helpers and the helped. The purpose of the League is entirely secular—I suppose that's what made it go so well. The churches don't seem—they don't get a chance at many people, do they?... This is aimed to help the very lowest class of workers; all unmarried wage-earners are eligible, regardless of age or race or religion.... Poor things, they are so glad to have their bodies and minds cared for and their souls left alone! The souls follow easily enough, we find, just as Shaw says—you've read 'Major Barbara'?"

"I don't think I have," replied James.

"Well, that shows what the League is trying to do better than I can.... It's had its results, too. The thing has been running about a year, and already the number of arrests for certain kinds of offenses has fallen off over fifty per cent. Keeping them off the streets alone is enough to make us feel proud and satisfied...."

"I should think so," said James, blushing hotly. He had never heard a young woman make such a remark before, and was at a loss how to take it. But there was something at once fearless and modest in the way Madge made it that not only put him at his ease but set him thinking. "Good [227] Lord, why can't we live in a world where every one talks like that?" he suddenly asked himself.

Madge went on to give him a fuller account of the purposes and methods of the League, outlining some of its difficulties and indicating, as far as she knew it, the path of its future development. She paid him the compliment of asking him several questions, and he was displeased to find that he had either to bluff answers for them or confess ignorance.

"I wish I could do something of this sort," he said presently, in a musing sort of way.

"Why don't you? There's plenty of chance in New York, I should say."

"Oh, New York, yes. I hadn't thought of that. I don't know what use I could be, though."

"No difficulty about that, I should think. What about athletics? You'd work among boys, I presume?"

"Yes, I suppose so." Somehow the prospect did not attract him particularly. Then he thought of Stodger; of what Stodger's evenings would have been but for him. What did he do to illuminate Stodger's evenings under actual conditions, now that he come to think of it?

"You'll find there are plenty of things you can do for them. Practically every one who knows anything at all can conduct an evening class. Even I—I have a class in hat trimming! One of the few subjects I can truthfully say I have practical knowledge in."

Thus the germ of the desire for social service was sowed in him. It thrived pretty steadily during the winter that followed. He got himself introduced to the proper people and almost before he knew it he found himself volunteering in gymnasium work and pledged to give occasional evening talks on athletic subjects. The organization in which he worked was, he found to his satisfaction, like Madge's—Madge's, you observe, not Beatrice's—Working Girls' League, designed to help the

very lowest classes of wage-earners. It had its clubrooms on the lower East Side and set itself up as a rival attraction to the saloon-haunting gangs of that interesting neighborhood, and since it dealt with the roughest section of the population it did not hesitate to employ means that other organizations would have hesitated to sanction. Beer and tobacco were sold on the place; billiards and card games were freely encouraged, though there was a rule against playing [228] anything for money; but the chief interest of the place was athletic. Herein lay a problem, for it was found that in the hands of the descendants of Nihilists and pillars of the Mano Negra such respectable sports as boxing and wrestling were prone to degenerate into bloody duels.

It was in this matter that James first made himself felt. Happening into the building at an unaccustomed hour one afternoon, he became aware of strange noises issuing from an upper floor, and dashing up to the gymnasium discovered two brawny young Italians apparently trying to brain each other with Indian clubs. In a storm of righteous and unaffected wrath he rushed into the fray, separated the combatants and treated them to such a torrent of obloquy as they had never heard even among their own associates. Too astonished and fascinated to reply, they allowed themselves to be hustled from the room by James and literally kicked down the stairs and out of the building without so much as getting into their clothes, running several blocks in their gymnasium costumes. They aroused no particular attention, for at that time even the East Side was becoming accustomed to the sight of scantily clad youths using the streets as a cinder track, but it was more than an hour before, timid and peaceful, the offenders ventured to slip back into the clubhouse and their trousers.

From that day on James practically ran the Delancy Street Club. It never became a very large or famous organization, partly for the reason that it was purposely kept rather small, but it did much good in its own quiet way. It soon became the chief extra-business interest in James' life; it effectually drove the last vestiges of what he learned to refer to mentally as "that foolishness" from his head; his nights became full of sleep and empty of visions. And by the spring of the next year he found himself slipping into an intermittent but perfectly easy friendship with Madge Elliston, founded, naturally enough, on their common interest in social matters. He fell into the habit of running up to New Haven for week-ends, and into the habit of seeing Madge on those Saturday evenings. He liked talking to her about social problems; he soon caught up with her in the matter of knowledge and experience, and it was from a comfortingly similar viewpoint that [229] they were able to discuss such matters as methods of handling evening classes, the moral effects of workmen's compensation and the great and growing problem of dance halls and all that it involves. They both found much to help and instruct them in each other's views; the mere dissimilarities of the state laws under which they worked furnished ample material for discussion, and their friendship was always tightened by the fact that they were, so to speak, marching abreast, running up against successive phases of their work at about the same time.

It need cause no surprise that such a relation should have remained practically static for a period of three years or more. Each of them had much to think of beside social work. James had eight or nine hours' work per day and all the absorbing interests of metropolitan life to keep him from spending overmuch time over it. And Madge, as we know, was already an extremely busy young woman. For a long time their common interest hardly amounted to more than an absorbing topic of conversation during their meetings. The stages by which it became the agent of something greater were quite imperceptible.

There was just one exterior fact that served as a landmark in the progress of his feeling. Some months before—shortly after Harry had so unexpectedly gone abroad—Madge had started a series of Saturday night dances for her working girls—that was at the time when the dance craze was spreading among all classes of society—and she asked James to help her give some exhibitions of new dances, to get the thing well launched. James rather hesitated in accepting this invitation.

"I'll do it, of course, if you really want me to," he said; "but I don't see why you want to drag me all the way up here for that. Why don't you ask somebody in town?"

"That's just the point," replied Madge; "I shall want you to give a little individual instruction to the girls, if you will, and I think it would be just as well if the person who did that had no chance of meeting the girls about town, in other capacities...! Beside, you happen to dance rather better than any one I know up here."

"Oh, nonsense!" said James. "I'll come," he added in the next breath.

It was from just about the time of those dances, James thought, that the personal element in his relation to Madge began to overbalance the intellectual. He had had his moments of being rather [230] attracted by her, of course—the episode of Aunt Selina's dinner was a fair example—but such moments had been mere sparks, soulless little heralds of the flame that now began to burn brightly and warmly. Hitherto he had primarily been interested in her; now he began definitely to like her. And then, before long, something more.

It is interesting to compare the processes by which the two brothers fell in love with the same woman. Harry's experience might be likened to a blinding but illuminating flash of lightning; James' to the gentle but permeating effect of sunrise. Both were held at first by the purely intellectual side of Madge's character, but by different aspects of it. Harry was primarily attracted to her by her active wit; this had at first repelled James, made him somewhat afraid of her, until he discovered the more solid qualities of her mind. Both at last fell in love with her as a person, not as a member of the female sex nor as a thinking machine. Both passions were

founded upon solid rock; neither could be uprooted without violent and far-reaching results.

How beautifully it had all worked out in the end, James reflected; how wisely the progress of things was ordained! How fortunate it was that his first futile passion for Beatrice had not been allowed to develop and bear ill-conceived fruit! Now that he almost went so far as to despise himself for that passion as unworthy both of himself and of her. What had he fallen in love with there? A lip, a cheek, a pair of eyes, a noble poise of a head, a thing to win and kiss and at last squeeze in his arms—nothing more! He had set her up as the image of a false, fleshly ideal, an empty Victorian husk of an ideal, a sentimental, boyish, calfish vision of womanhood. How paltry that image looked when compared to that newer one combining the attributes of friend, comrade, fellow-worker, kin of his mind and spirit! His first image had done injustice to its material counterpart, to be sure; Beatrice had turned out to be far different from the alluring but empty creature he had pictured her. She was a being with a will, ideas, powers, purposes of her own. Well, all the better—for Harry! How admirably suited she was to Harry! What a pair they would make, with their two keen minds, their active ambitions, their fine, dynamic personalities! The [231] thought furnished almost as pleasing a mental picture as that of his union with a small blue-eyed person at this very moment covered by the sloping gray roof he had already taken pains to pick out from the ranks of its fellows....

The contemplation of material things brought a slight diminution of pleasure. When one came down to solid facts, things were not going quite so well as could be desired. Harry was at this moment kiting unconcernedly about the continent of Europe and his match with Beatrice seemed, as far as James could make out, as much in the air as ever. Also, his own actual relation with Madge was not entirely satisfactory. That was due chiefly to sordid facts, no doubt; he could not expect to have the freedom of meeting and speech he naturally desired with a governess in a friend's house. Still, in the two or three conversations he had been able to arrange with her during the past three weeks he had been conscious of an unfamiliar spirit of elusiveness. Once, he remembered, she had gone so far as to bring the subject of conversation round to impersonal things with something little short of rudeness, just as he was getting started on something that particularly interested him, too....

Plenty of time for that, though; it would never do to hurry things. He arose from his rock and stretched himself, lifting his arms high above his head in the cool evening air with a sense of strength and ease. There was nothing to worry about; things were fundamentally all right; ends would meet and issues right themselves, all in due time.

It was time, or very nearly time, for Aunt Selina's evening meal, so he started off at a brisk pace down the hill, whistling softly and cheerfully to himself. He thought of Aunt Selina, how pleased she would be with it all, when she knew. Good old soul! He remembered how pointedly she had asked him to spend his month's vacation with her when she told him she had taken a house at Bar Harbor for the summer; could it be that she suspected anything? Perhaps she had, perhaps not; it had all worked in very conveniently with Madge being at Gilsons', at any rate. Let her and every one else suspect what they wished; it did not matter much. Nothing did matter much, when you [232] came to that, except that small person in white linen and lawn who had flouted him when he had last seen her and whom he would show what was what, he promised himself, on the next favorable opportunity....

"Thank God for Madge," he breathed softly to himself as he walked on and the peace of the evening descended more deeply around him; "oh, thank God for Madge!"

CHAPTER VI [233]

A LONG CHAPTER. BUT THEN, LOVE IS LONG

Aunt Selina was almost the only person with whom Harry spoke during the interval between his last interview with Madge and his departure for foreign parts. He was living in the old house now, so he could not very well avoid seeing her. At the last moment, with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand, he sought out his aunt, and found her in a small room on the ground floor known as the morning-room, going over her accounts.

"Good-by, Aunt Selina," he said. "I'm going to sail for Europe on the first steamer I can get, so I shan't see you for some time."

Aunt Selina calmly took off her glasses, laid them beside her pen on the desk and paused before replying.

"Good-by, my dear," she said at length; "I'm sure I hope you'll enjoy yourself. Brown Shipley, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Harry. He was a little disconcerted; Aunt Selina played the game almost too well.

Then as he stood unconsequently before her, he was seized by a sudden desire to confide in her. "Do you know why I'm going, Aunt Selina?" he asked.

"No, my dear."

"Well, why do you *think*?"

"I prefer not to guess, if that is what you mean. You may tell me, if you wish."

"Madge Elliston," mumbled Harry.

Aunt Selina stared immovably at her bank book for a moment; then she got up and faced her nephew.

"There is a streak of horse sense in the Wimbourne blood that has been the saving of all of us," she said. "I'm glad to see it come out in you. Good-by, my dear." She kissed him on the cheek.

"How do—how would you like it?" he asked, still hesitating, uncertain as to her meaning.

"Nothing better. I wish you the best of luck. And I think you're doing the wisest possible thing." [234]

"I'm glad you do." He looked at her gratefully. "Did you suspect anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Then I don't believe any one does.... Good-by, Aunt Selina."

"You've done me a great honor. Good-by, dear."

They kissed again and he went out, feeling greatly strengthened and encouraged. As he drove down to the station he determined to go to a hotel in New York and keep out of the way of the James Wimbournes and all other possible confidants. The interview with Aunt Selina had been so perfect that he could not bear the thought of risking anti-climaxes to it. Suddenly he remembered that certain Cunard and White Star boats sailed to the Mediterranean from Boston. He could go directly there and wait for a steamer in perfect security.

So he took the next train to Boston and that very afternoon engaged passage to Gibraltar on a steamer sailing two days later. The interval he spent chiefly in laying up a great store of books on Spain and Portugal, which countries he planned to visit *in extenso*.

The dull, wet voyage he found enchanting when brightened up by the glowing pages of Lope de Vega, Calderon, "Don Quixote," "The Lusiads," "The Bible in Spain," and Lea's "History of the Inquisition," a galaxy further enhanced by the businesslike promises of guide books and numerous works on Hispanic architecture and painting. He landed at Gibraltar with something almost approaching regret at the thought that land traveling would allow him less time for reading.

In leisurely fashion he strolled through southern Spain and Portugal, presently reaching Santiago de Compostela. It had been his intention, when this part of the trip was finished, to go to Biarritz and from there work on through the towns of southern France, but a traveling Englishman told him that he ought on no account to miss seeing the cathedral of Gerona. So he changed his plans and proceeded eastward. When he reached Gerona he called himself a fool for having so nearly missed it, but after a week or ten days among the huge dark churches of Catalonia he suddenly sickened of sight-seeing and that very night caught a through express from Barcelona to Paris.

Harry had never known Paris well enough to care for it particularly, but just now there was [235] something rather attractive to him in its late June gaiety. He arrived there just at the time of the Grand Prix, and as he strolled, lonely and unnoticed, through the brilliant Longchamps crowd he felt his heart unaccountably warming to these well-groomed children of the world. He had been outside the realm of social intercourse so long that he felt a sudden desire for converse with smart, cheerful, people of their type.

His desire was not difficult of fulfilment, as nothing but seven hours' traveling lay between him and a welcoming Belgrave Square. The next day he crossed the Channel and took his uncle and aunt completely by surprise. They were delighted to see him and were unaffectedly disappointed at having to leave him almost immediately for a dinner in Downing Street.

"But we're going to see a lot of you while you're here, dear boy," said Aunt Miriam, "if we have to break every engagement on our list. It isn't every day that I have a nephew turn into a successful playwright! What about a dinner, now? Giles, have you anything on for a week from Monday?"

"The truth is," observed Sir Giles to his nephew, "you've become a lion, and a lion is a lion even if he is in the family. Poor Harry, I feel for you!"

"That'll do, G. It's good for the boy."

"There's small danger of my being a lion in London, anyway," said Harry.

"Oh, I don't know," ruminated Uncle Giles: "adoration of success is the great British vice, you know."

"Monday the fourth, then, Giles," said his wife.

"Hooray, the national holiday!" retorted the irrepressible baronet. "I say, we'll have the room

decorated with American flags and set off fireworks in the square afterward. We might make a real day of it, if you like, and go to tea at the American Embassy!"

"No, I don't think we'll do that," answered Aunt Miriam, closing her lips rather firmly.

Harry had a short talk alone with his aunt that night after she came back from the evening's business.

"Come in and help me take off my tiara," she said, leading the way into her bedroom. "I rather want to talk to you. Do you know, dear boy, I fancy something's come over you lately, you're [236] changed, somehow. Is it only your success? What brought you over here, in the first place?"

"Spanish churches," answered Harry promptly. He had at one time half decided to confide in Aunt Miriam, but he definitely gave up the idea now. She was too sympathetic, by half. "Do you know Barcelona and Batalha? There's nothing like them."

"No, I've never been to Spain. They say there are fleas, and the beds are not reliable. I also understand that other arrangements are somewhat primitive."

"Oh, not always," replied Harry, smiling. "Still, I don't think I do quite see you in Spain, Aunt Miriam." Then he kissed her good night quite affectionately. He could be very fond of her, from a short distance.

As he strolled down Bond Street next morning Harry sighted an old school acquaintance; a man whom he had known as plain Tommy Erskine, but whom a succession of timely deaths, as he now vaguely remembered, had brought into the direct line of an earldom. Harry wondered if he would remember him; they had not met since their Harrow days. The other's somewhat glassy stare relaxed quickly enough, however, when he saw who it was.

"Well, Harry! Jolly old Harry!" he said in a tone of easy cordiality, as though he had not seen Harry perhaps for a week. "I say, turn around and toddle down to Truefitt's again with me, will you? Fellah puts stinking stuff on my hair three times a week; never do to miss a time, wot? Well, jolly old Harry; wherever have you been all these yahs? Didn't go up to Oxford, did you?"

"No," said Harry, "I went home, to America, and I've stayed there ever since. I'm a thorough Yankee again now; you won't know me. But Tommy, what's all this rot about you being a viscount or something?"

"Oh, bilge! Such a bilgy name, too—Clairloch—like a fellah with phlegm in his throat, wot? Never call me that, though; call me Tommy, and I'll call you Wiggers, just like jolly old times, wot?"

Harry felt himself warming to this over-mannered, over-dressed, over-exercised dandy who was such a simple and affectionate creature beneath his immaculate cutaway, and rather hoped he might see something of him during his stay in London.

"Do you ever ride these days, Tommy?" he asked presently. "That is, would you ride with me [237] some day, if I can scratch up an animal?"

"Oh, rather. Every morning, before brekker. Only I'll mount you. Lots of bosses, all eating their silly heads off. Oh, rot!" he went on, as Harry demurred; "rot, Wiggers, of course I shall mount you. No trouble 't all. Pleasure. You come to England, I mount you. I go to America, you mount me. Turn about, you know."

"I'm afraid not, as we haven't got any saddle horses at present," answered Harry. "You can drive with Aunt Selina in the victoria, though, if you like," he added, smiling at the thought.

"Wot? Wot's that? Delighted, I'm shaw," said Tommy, vaguely scenting an invitation. "Oh, I say, Wiggers, speaking of aunts, wotever became of that jolly cousin of yaws? Carson gell—oldest—sister married Ned Twombly—you know." (For Jane had fulfilled her mission in life by marrying the heir to a thoroughly satisfactory peerage.)

"She's not my cousin," said Harry, "but she's still living in America, keeping house for my aunt—the one I mentioned just now—and doing lots of other things. Settlement work, and such. She and my aunt are thick as thieves."

"I say, how rum. Fancy, gell like that—good looks, and all that—trotting off to do slum work in a foreign country. Wot's the matter with London? Lots of slums here. Can't und'stand it, 't all. Never could und'stand it. Rum."

"Oh, no one ever understands Beatrice," said Harry. "Her friends have given up trying. Well, Tommy, I think I won't go into Truefitt's with you. See you to-morrow morning?"

"Righto—Achilles statue—seven-thirty sharp."

"Righto," answered Harry, and laughed to think how well he said it.

That was the beginning of a long month of gaiety for Harry, a month of theaters and operas, of morning rides in the Row, of endless chains of introductions, of showering invitations, of balls, dinners, parties of all kinds, of lazy week-ends in the Surrey hills or beside the Thames, of sitting, on one occasion at least, enthroned at Aunt Miriam's right hand and gazing down a long table of people who were not only all asked there to meet him but had actually jumped at the invitation; [238] of tasting, in short, the first fruits of success among the most congenial possible surroundings.

And as his relish outlasted the season he saw no reason for not accepting an invitation to a yachting party over Cowes week and another to one of Tommy's ancestral seats in Rosshire over the twelfth; the more so as Uncle Giles and Aunt Miriam decamped for Marienbad early in August. So he became in turn one of the white-flanneled army of pleasure-seekers of the south and one of the brown-tweeded cohorts of the north. His month in Tommydom ran into five, into six, into seven weeks almost before he knew it; it threatened shortly to become two months. And then, instantaneously, the revulsion seized him, even as it had seized him in June at Manresa.

It happened one morning when the whole party were in the butts. Harry was ordinarily a tolerable shot, but to-day he shot execrably. After he had missed every bird in the first drive he cursed softly and broke his shooting-stick; after he had missed every bird in the second he silently handed his gun to his loader and walked down to his host, who had the next butt to his.

"Good-by, Tommy," he said, holding out his hand. "I'm going."

"Oh, don't do that," said Tommy. "Birds flying rotten high to-day."

"It's not that. I'm going home."

"Righto. See you at tea time, then."

"No, you won't see me again. I'm going to catch the three-eighteen for Glasgow, if I can make it. Sail from Liverpool Saturday."

Tommy's face, like his mind, became a blank, but he lived up to the traditions of his race and class. "Well, so long, old thing," he said, shaking Harry's hand. "Call on me if I can ever be any use. You'll find the motor down at the crossroads, and do look alive and get off before the next drive, there's a dear, or birds won't fly within a mile of the first butt."

Harry reached Liverpool next day and succeeded in getting a berth on a steamer sailing the day after. He landed in New York late one afternoon and took a night train for Bar Harbor, arriving [239] there next morning. He telegraphed ahead the hour of his arrival, and James and Beatrice met him at the dock. They both seemed glad to see him, and he supposed he was glad to see them, but he found it strangely difficult to carry on conversation with them as they all drove up to the house together.

Aunt Selina kissed Harry affectionately and wholly refrained, he could not help noticing, from anything like knowing smiles or sly little asides. Aunt Selina could always be depended on.

The Gilsons were New Haven people whom Harry had always known, though never very well. He rather liked Mrs. Gilson, who was a plump, chirpy, festive little person, but as he drove over the two miles that lay between her house and Aunt Selina's he prayed with all his might that both she and her husband might be from home that afternoon. Half his prayer was granted, but not the most important half. Mr. Gilson was away, but Mrs. Gilson, not content with being merely in, came bounding to the door to meet him and was whirling him down a broad green lawn to the tennis court before he knew which end he was standing on.

"I do so want you to meet my cousin Dorothy Fitzgerald," she said. "Such a sweet girl, and it's so hard to get hold of men in Bar Harbor—you've no idea! She plays such a good game of tennis. I'm so glad to see you've got tennis shoes on—we were just trying to get up a four when you came. And how was your trip—do tell me all about it! Spain? Oh, I've always longed so to go to Spain! Young Mrs. Dimmock is here too—you know her? And a Mr. McLean—I'll introduce you. Portugal, too? Oh, how delightful; I do so want to hear all about Portugal. We've just got a new tennis net—I do hope it will work properly...."

She buzzed pleasantly along by his side, neither asking nor requiring attention. Harry's glance wandered back to the house; he caught a glimpse of two little figures bent over a table on a verandah; Madge and that confounded child, of course.

"Where is your little girl?" he asked.

"Oh, Lily—she's having her French lesson, I suppose. We find it works better that way, to leave the morning free for golf and bathing and use this first stupid part of the afternoon for lessons. [240] She's doing so well, too, with dear Madge Elliston...."

"I want to see Lily before I go," said Harry firmly; "I don't think I have ever made her acquaintance. Madge Elliston, too," he added, trying to make this seem like a polite afterthought.

"Oh, yes, indeed; I'll tell them both to come down to the court after the lesson," replied his hostess.

By this time they were at the tennis court and introductions flew fast. Tennis ensued immediately and continued, quietly but absorbingly, through set after set till the afternoon was well-nigh gone. Presently they stopped playing and sat about sipping soft drinks, it seemed, for hours, and still Madge did not show up. At length he found himself being dragged into a single with Miss Fitzgerald. He played violently and nobly for a time, but when at last Madge with her small charge joined the group at the side of the court it was more than flesh or blood could stand. He left Miss Fitzgerald to serve into the backstop and walked across the court to where Madge stood.

"How do you do?" he said, holding out his perspiring hand.

"How do you do?" she answered, politely shaking it. It was the flattest meeting imaginable; nothing could have been more unlike the vision he had formed of it.

Lily was introduced and he stood making commonplace remarks to both of them until he became aware that he had been rude to Miss Fitzgerald. He went off to make his apologies to her, and found her willing to receive them and also to discontinue their game. But if he hoped that general conversation would give him a chance for a private word with Madge he was bound to be disappointed. Mrs. Gilson had other plans.

"Oh, Mr. Wimbourne, we're all going off on a picnic and we do so want you to join us! You will, won't you? Mrs. Dimmock knows such a sweet place on the Somesville road, and we're going to start right away. I'm not at all sure there's enough to eat, but that doesn't matter on a picnic, does it? Especially an evening picnic, when no one can see just how little there is! I do think it's so nice to get up things just on the spur of the moment like this, don't you? So much nicer than planning it all out ahead and then having it rain. Let's see, two, four, six—we shall all be able to [241] pile in somehow...."

"But I'm afraid I shall have to change," objected Harry. "I don't quite see how I can manage."

"We shall see the moon rise over McFarland," observed young Mrs. Dimmock in a rapt manner, as though that immediately solved the problem.

Harry was at first determined not to go on any account; then he gathered that Madge was to be included in the expedition, and straightway became amenable. A picnic, an evening picnic, would surely give him the best possible opportunity....

The plan as at last perfected was that Harry should be driven home where he would change and pick up James and Beatrice, if possible, and with them drive out in the Wimbournes' buckboard to the hallowed spot on the Somesville road in plenty of time to see the moon rise over McFarland. This was substantially what occurred, except that Beatrice elected to remain at home with Aunt Selina. James and Harry took the buckboard and drove alone to the meeting place. They found the others already there and busy preparing supper. A fire crackled pleasantly; the smell of frying bacon was in the air. Harry, refreshed by a bath and the prospect of presently taking Madge off into some shadowy thicket, was in higher spirits than he had been all day. He bustled and chattered about with Mrs. Gilson and Mrs. Dimmock and joined heartily with them in lamenting that the clouds were going to cheat them of the much-advertised moonrise. He engaged in spirited toasting races with Miss Fitzgerald and sardine-opening contests with members of the strong-wristed sex. He vied with Mrs. Gilson herself in imparting a festive air to the occasion.

Then suddenly he realized that Madge was not there. He had been vaguely aware of something lacking even before he overheard something about "headache" and "poor little Lily," from which it became clear to him that Madge's professional duties had again dealt him a felling blow. He made some excuse about gathering firewood and darted off in a bee-line to the place where the horses were tethered.

He caught sight of James on the way and dragged him out of the others' hearing. [242]

"James!" he whispered hoarsely, "you'll have to get home as you can. I'm going to take the buckboard—now—right off! Something very pressing—tell you about it later. Say I've got a stomach ache or something."

He jumped into the buckboard and started off at a fast clip. The night air rushing by him fanned his fevered senses and before the village was reached he was calm and deliberate. He drove straight to the Gilsons' house, tied his horse at the hitching-post, rang the front doorbell and asked for Miss Elliston.

He allowed her to come all the way down the stairs before he said anything. Half curious, half amused she watched him as he stood waiting for her.

"Nothing the matter with that kid?" he inquired at last.

She shook her head.

"Come with me then."

Without a word he turned and walked off through a French window which he held open for her. As she passed him she glanced at his set face and gave a slight choking sound. He supposed he was rather amusing. No matter, though; let her laugh if she wanted. He led her across the lawn to the tennis court where they had met this afternoon and beyond it, until at last they reached a small boathouse with a dock beside it. To this was moored a canoe. He had seen that canoe this afternoon and it had recurred to him on his drive. He stooped and unfastened the painter and then held out his hand.

"Get in there," he commanded.

She hesitated. "It's not safe, really—"

"Get in," he repeated almost roughly.

She settled herself in the bow and he took his place at the other end. With a few vigorous strokes of the paddle he sent the canoe skimming out over the dark, mysterious water. The night was

close and heavy and gave the impression of being warm; it was in fact as warm as a Bar Harbor night at the end of August can respectably be. The sky was thickly overcast, but the moon which had so shamelessly failed to keep the evening's engagements shed a dim radiance through the clouds, as though generously lending them credit for having shut in a little daylight after the normal time for its departure. Not a breeze stirred; the surface of the water was still, though not with the glassy stillness of an inland lake. Low, oily swells moved shudderingly about; when they [243] reached the shore they broke, not with the splashy cheerfulness of fair weather ripples, but gurgling and sighing among the rocks, obviously yearning for the days when they would have a chance to show what they really could do in the breaking business. The whole effect was at once infinitely calm and infinitely suggestive.

Neither of the occupants of the canoe spoke. Harry paddled firmly along and Madge watched him with a sort of fascination. At length her eyes became accustomed to the light and she was able to distinguish the grim, unchanging expression of his features and his eyes gazing neither at her nor away from her but simply through her. His face, together with the deathly calm of the night, worked a strange influence over her; it became more and more acute; she felt she must either scream or die of laughing....

"Well, Harry?"

"Well, Madge?"

His answer seemed less barren as she thought it over; there had been just enough emphasis on the last word to put the next step up to her. The moment had come. She drew a deep breath.

"The answer," she said, "is in the affirmative."

The next thing Madge was aware of was Harry paddling with all his might for the shore.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Going to get out of this confounded thing," he replied.

When they reached the dock he got out, helped her out and tied the canoe with great care. Then he gathered her to him and kissed her several times with great firmness and precision.

"You really are quite a nice young woman," he remarked; "even if you did propose to me."

"Harold Wimbourne! I never!"

"You said, 'Well, Harry.' I should like to know what that is if it isn't a proposal."

They turned and started up the steps toward the house. Madge seemed to require a good deal of helping up those steps. When they reached the top she swung toward him with a laugh.

"What is it now?" he asked. [244]

"Nothing ... only that it should have happened in a canoe. You, of all people!"

They walked slowly across the tennis court and sat down in one of the chairs scattered along its western side. Here they remained for a long time in conversation typical of people in their position, punctuated by long and interesting silences.

"Suppose you tell me all about it," suggested Harry.

"Well, now that it's all done with, I suppose I was merely trying to be on the safe side, all along. I know, at least, that I had rather a miserable time after you left. All the spring. Then I came up here and it seemed to get worse, somehow. It was early in June, and everything was very strange and desolate and cold, and I cried through the entire first night, without stopping a moment!"

"Yes," said Harry thoughtfully, "I should think you might have gathered from that that all was not quite as it should be."

"Yes. Well, next morning I decided I couldn't let that sort of thing go on. So I took hold of myself and determined never to discuss the subject with myself, at all. And I really succeeded pretty well, considering. Whenever the idea of you occurred to me in spite of myself, I immediately went and did something else very hard. I've been a perfect angel in the house ever since then, and I don't mind saying it was rather brave of me!"

"You really knew then, months ago? Beyond all doubt or question?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Then why in the world didn't you telegraph me?"

"As if I would!" exclaimed Miss Elliston with an indignant sniff.

"That was the arrangement, you know."

"Oh, good gracious, hear the man! What a coarse, masculine mind you have, my ownest! You call yourself an interpreter of human character, but what do you really know of the maiden of bashful twenty-six? Nothing!"

"Well, well, my dear," said Harry easily, "have it your own way. I daresay it all turned out much better so. I was able to do up the Spanish churches thoroughly, and I had a lovely time in

England. Just fancy, of all the hundreds of people I met there I can't think of a single one, from beginning to end, who said I had a coarse masculine mind." [245]

"Brute," murmured Miss Elliston, apparently to Harry's back collar button.

"I suppose," she observed, jumping up a little later, "that you were really right in the beginning. That first evening, you know."

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it. How?"

"When you said I couldn't talk that way to you without being in love with you. I expect I really was, though the time hadn't come for admitting it, even to myself. In fact, I was so passionately in love with you that I couldn't bear to talk about it or even think about it, for fear of some mistake. If I kept it all to myself, you see, no harm could ever have been done."

"How sane," murmured Harry. "How incontrovertibly logical."

"Yes. You see," explained Miss Elliston primly, "no girl—no really nice girl, that is, can ever bring herself to face the question of whether she is in love with a man until he has declared himself."

"Consequently, it's every girl's—every nice girl's—business to bring him to the point as soon as possible. Any one could see that."

"And for that very reason she must keep him off the business just as long as she can. When you realize that, you see exactly why I acted as I did that night and why I worked like a Trojan to keep you from proposing. I failed, of course, at last—I hadn't had much experience. I've improved since...." She wriggled uncomfortably. "You acted rather beautifully that night, I will say for you. You made it almost easy."

"Hm. You seemed perfectly sure that night, though, that you were very far from being in love with me. You even offered to marry me, as I remember it, as an act of pure friendship. I don't see quite why you couldn't respectably admit that you were in love with me then, since in spite of your best efforts I had broken through to the point. How about that?"

"It was all too sudden, silly. I couldn't bring myself round to that point of view in a minute. I had to have time. Oh, my dear young man," she continued, resuming her primmest manner, "how little, how singularly little do you know of that beautiful mystery, a woman's heart." [246]

"A woman's what?"

"Heart."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. As I understand it, the only mystery is whether it exists or not."

"How can you say that?" cried Madge with sudden passion, grasping at him almost roughly.

"I didn't," replied Harry.

"No, dear, excuse me, of course you didn't. Only I have to make a fool of myself every now and then...."

"But, oh, my dearest," she whispered presently with another change of mood, "if you knew what a time I've been through, really, since you've been gone! If you knew how I've lain awake at night fearing that it wouldn't turn out all right, that something would happen, that I'd lose you after all! I've scanned the lists of arrivals and departures in the papers; I've listened till I thought my ears would crack when other people talked about you. The very sound of your name was enough to make me weep with delight, like that frump of a girl in the poem, when you gave her a smile.... You see, I haven't been brave *all* the time. There were moments.... Do you know that backbone feeling?"

"I think so," said Harry. "You mean the one that starts very suddenly at the back of your neck and shoots all the way down?"

"Yes, and at the same time you feel as if your stomach and lungs had changed places, though that's not so important. I don't see why people talk about loving with their hearts; the real feeling is always in the spine. Well, no amount of bravery could keep that from taking me by surprise sometimes, and even when I was brave it would often leave me with a suspicion that I had been very silly and weak to trust to luck to bring everything to a happy ending. But I never could bring myself to send word to you. I was determined to give you every chance of changing your mind; I knew you would come back at last, if you cared enough.... And if anything had happened, or if you had decided not to come back—well, I always had something to fall back on. The memory of that one evening, and the thought that I had been given the chance of loving you and had lived up to my love to the best of my ability...." [247]

"That doesn't seem very much now, does it?" suggested Harry.

"No. Oh, to think how it's come out—beyond all my wildest dreams!... I never thought it would be

quite as nice as this, did you?"

"Never. The truth has really done itself proud, for once."

"The truth—fancy, this is the truth! This!... Oh, nonsense, it can't be! We aren't *really* here, you know. This is simply an unusually vivid subconscious affair—you know—the kind that generally follows one of the backbone attacks. It will pass off presently. It will, you know, even if it is what we call reality.... For the life of me, I don't really know whether it is or not!—Harry, did it ever occur to you that people are always marveling that dreams are so like life without ever considering the converse—that life is really very much like a dream?"

"A few have—a very few. A great play has been written round that very thing—*La Vida Es Sueño* —life is a dream. We'll read it together sometime.—Heavens, I never realized what it really meant till now! Do you know what this seems like to me? It seems like the kind of scene I have always wanted to write but never quite dared—simply letting myself go, without bothering about action or probability or motivation but just laying it on with a trowel, as thick as I could. All that, transmuted into terms of reality—or what we call reality! Heavens, it makes me dizzy!"

"See here, Harold Wimbourne," said Madge, suddenly jumping up again; "it seems to me you've been talking a great deal about love and very little about marriage. What I want to know is, when are you going to marry me?"

"Oh, the tiresome woman! Well, when should you say?"

"To-morrow morning, preferably. If that won't do, about next Tuesday. No, of course I've got heaps of things to do first. How about the middle of October?"

"I was just thinking," said Harry seriously. "You see, my dear, I'm at present working on a play. Technically speaking. Only, owing to the vaporous scruples of a certain young person I haven't [248] been able to put in any work on it for several months. Bachmann has been very decent. He has practically promised to put it on in January, if it's any good at all. That means having it ready before Christmas, and I shall have to work like the very devil to do that. I work so confoundedly slowly, you see. Then there'll be all the bother of rehearsals, lasting up to the first night, which I suppose would be about the end of January. I should like to have up till then clear, but I should think by about the middle of February—say the fifteenth...."

"Oh, indeed," replied Miss Elliston, "you should say about the fifteenth, should you? I'm sorry, very sorry indeed, but as it happens I have another engagement for the fifteenth—several of them. Possibly I could arrange something for next June, though, or a year from next January; possibly not. Better let the matter drop, perhaps; sorry to have disturbed—"

"When will you marry me?" interrupted Harry, doing something that entirely destroyed the dignity of Miss Elliston's pose. "Next week—to-morrow—to-night? I daresay we could wake up a parson...."

"Sorry, dear, but I've arranged to be married on the fifteenth of February, and no other date will do. You're hurting my left shoulder-blade cruelly, but I suppose it's all right. That's better.... Oh, Harry, I do want you to work like the very devil on this play! Don't think about marriage, or me, or anything that will hinder you. Because, dearest, I have a feeling that it's going to be rather a good one. A perfect rip-snorter, to descend to the vulgar parlance."

"Yes," said Harry, "I have a feeling that it is, too."

The sound of carriage wheels crunching along the gravel drive floated down and brought them back with a start to the consideration of actualities. They both sat silently wondering for a moment.

"What about Mrs. Gilson?" suggested Madge.

"Might as well," replied Harry.

"All right. You'll have to do it, though."

"Very well, then. Come along."

They rose and stood for a moment among the scattered chairs, both thinking of their absurd meeting on that spot this very afternoon, and then turned and started slowly up toward the [249] house. When they had nearly reached the verandah steps Harry stopped and turned toward Madge.

"Well, the whole world is changed for us two, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Nothing will ever be quite the same again, but always better, somehow. Even indifferent things. And nothing can ever spoil this one evening?"

"Nothing?"

"Not all the powers of heaven or earth or hell? We have a sort of blanket insurance against the whole universe?"

"Exactly," said Madge. "We're future-proof."

"That's it, future-proof. I'll wait here on the porch. No Fitzgerald, mind."

He did not have to wait long. Madge found Mrs. Gilson in the hall, as it happened, with Miss Fitzgerald receding bedward up the stairs and far too tired to pay any attention to Madge's gentle "Mr. Wimbourne is here and would like to see you, Mrs. Gilson." So the good lady was led out into the dark porch and as she stood blinking in the shaft of light falling out through the doorway Harry appeared in the blackness and began speaking.

"I do hope you'll excuse my being so rude and leaving your party, Mrs. Gilson. There was a real reason for it. You see Madge and I"—taking her hand—"have come to an understanding. We're engaged."

Mrs. Gilson stood blinking harder than ever for one bewildered moment, and then the floodgates of speech were opened.

"Oh, my *dear*, how *wonderful*! Madge, my dearest Madge, let me kiss you! Whoever could have *dreamed*—Harry—you don't mind my calling you Harry, do you?—you must let me kiss you too! It's all so wonderful, and so unexpected, and I can't help thinking that if your dear mother—oh, Madge, you double-dyed creature, how long has this been going on and I never knew a thing? We all thought—your brother was so tactful and gave us to understand that you had acute indigestion or something, left over from the voyage, and we all quite understood, though I did think there might be something afoot when I saw your buckboard at the door. And I haven't heard a thing about Spain and Portugal, not a *thing*, though goodness knows there's no time to think of that [250]
now and you must let me give a dinner for you both at the earliest possible moment. When is it to be announced? I do hope before Labor Day because there's never a man to be had on the island after that...."

And so on. At last Harry made the lateness of the hour an excuse for breaking away and went round to the front door to get his buckboard. Madge had to go with him, though she had no particular interest in the buckboard.

"She's a good woman," said Harry as he fumbled with the halter. "Though—whoa there, you silly beast; you're liable to choke to death if you do that."

"The rein's caught over the shaft," explained Madge. "It makes her uncomfortable. Though what, dear?"

"That's the trace, and it's him, anyway. Oh, nothing. Only I never was so awfully keen on slobbering."

"She's a dear, really. If you knew what an angel she's been to me all summer! What makes her look round in that wild-eyed way?"

From Harry's answer, "He's tired, that's all," we may assume that this question referred to the horse, though her next remark went on without intermission: "I don't want you to go away to-night thinking—"

"I like slobbering," asserted Harry. "Always did.... Now if that's all, dear, perhaps I'd better make tracks." The last ceremonies of parting had been performed and he was in the buckboard.

"Just a moment, while I kiss your horse's nose. It doesn't do to neglect these little formalities.... I'm glad you like slobbering, dear, because your horse has done it all over my shoulder ... no, don't get out. It had to go in the wash anyway. He's a sweet horse; what is his name?"

"Dick, I think. Oh, no—Kruger. Yes, he's that old."

"Because, dear," went on Madge, with her hand on the front wheel; "there's one thing one mustn't forget. There was—Mr. Gilson, you know."

"Good Lord," said Harry, struck by the thought.

"Yes, and what's more, there still is!"

"A true model for us?"

"Yes. After all, we have no monopoly, you know."

"Good Lord, think of it! Millions of others!" [251]

"It gives one a certain faith in the human race, doesn't it?"

"For Heaven's sake, Madge, don't be ultimate any more to-night! You make me dizzy—how do you suppose I'm going to drive between those white stones? Do you want me to be in love with the whole world?" And Madge's reply "Yes, dear, just that," was drowned in the clatter of his wheels.

CHAPTER VII

[252]

A VERY SHORT CHAPTER, IN ONE SENSE

The next day it rained. Harry shut himself up in his room and wrote violently all the morning, less in the hope of accomplishing valuable work than in the desire to keep his mind off the one absorbing topic. It proved to be of little use. At lunch time he threw all that he had written into the fireplace and resolved to tell the immediate members of his family.

It worked out very well. After lunch he arranged with James to take a walk in the rain. Beatrice, it appeared, would be occupied at a bridge party all the afternoon. There remained Aunt Selina—the easiest, by all odds. Just before starting out with James he walked into the living room, rustling in his raincoat, and found her alone by the fire.

"It's all right, Aunt Selina." He felt himself grinning like a monkey, but couldn't seem to stop himself.

But Aunt Selina herself could do nothing but laugh. Presently she rose from her seat and embraced her nephew.

"That top button has come off," she said. "I'm afraid you'll get your neck wet." Then they looked at each other and laughed again. There was really nothing more to be said.

James' feet sounded on the stairs above.

"I shan't be home for dinner," said Harry, starting toward the door. "And you might tell Beatrice," he added.

He walked with James for three hours or more. It may have been the calming influence of exercise or it may have been the comforting effect that James' society generally had on him; at any rate, when the time came he found himself able to say what he had to without any of the embarrassment he had expected.

He chose the moment when they had all but reached the crossroad that would take him off to the Gilsons'.

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"James," he said, breaking a long silence, "I've got something rather important to tell you. I'm engaged."

"To whom?"

"Madge Elliston."

"When?"

"Last night. That was it." They now stood facing each other, at the crossroads. James did not speak for a moment, and Harry scanned his face through the dusk. Its expression was one of bewilderment, Harry thought. Strange, that James should be more embarrassed than he! But that was the way it went.

"Harry! See here, Harry—"

"Yes, James!"

"I ..." He stopped and then slowly raised his hand. "I congratulate you."

"Thanks, awfully. It does sort of take one's breath away, doesn't it?... I'm going there now. Why don't you come too? No? Well, I may be rather late, so leave the door on the latch. I'll walk home." And he walked off down the crossroad.

James knew, perfectly well, the moment Harry said he had something to tell him. His subsequent questions were prompted more by a desire to make the situation between them legally clear, as it were, than by real need of information. His first dominant impulse was to explain the situation to Harry and show him, frankly and convincingly, the utter impossibility of his engagement. The very words formed themselves in his mind:—"See here, Harry, you can't possibly marry Madge Elliston, because I'm in love with her myself—have been for years, before you ever thought of her!" He drew a long breath and actually started in on his speech. But the words would not come. As he looked at his brother standing happy and ignorant before him he realized in an instant that, come what might, he would never be able to utter those words.

There was nothing left to do but mumble his congratulations. As he lifted his hand to that of his brother the thought occurred to him that he might easily raise it higher and put Harry out of his way, once and for all. He knew that he could, with his bare hands, do him to death on the spot; knee on chest, fingers on throat—he knew the place. That was perhaps preferable to the other; kinder, certainly, but equally impossible. It was not even a temptation.

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As he walked off he reflected that he had just come through one of the great crises of his whole life, and yet how commonplace, how utterly flat had been its outward guise! He had always vaguely wondered how people acted at such times; now the chance had come to him and he had shown less feeling than he would have at missing a trolley car. In him, at this present moment, were surging some of the most terrific passions that ever swayed human beings—love, jealousy, disappointment, hate of the order of things—and he could not find a physical vent for one of them! Not only that, but he never would be able to; he saw that clearly enough; people of his time and class and type never could. This was what civilization had brought men to! What was the use? What was the meaning of all civilization, all progress, all human development? Here he was, as perfect a physical specimen as his age produced, unable to do more than grit his teeth in the face of the most intolerable emotions known to mankind, under pain of suffering a debasement even more intolerable. Some people did give way to their passions, but that was only because they were less able to think clearly than he. They always regretted it in the end; they always suffered more that way; his knowledge of the world had taught him nothing if it had not taught him that.

Just in order to prove to himself how ineffectual physical expression of his mental state was he tore a rail off the top of a nearby fence—he had wandered far out into the country again—and, raising it above his shoulders, brought it down with all his strength upon a rock. The rail happened to be a strong one and did not break, and the force of the blow made his hands smart. He took a certain fierce joy in the pain and repeated the blow two or three times, but long before his body tired with the exertion his soul sickened of the business. He threw the rail lightly over the fence and wandered hopelessly on into the hills.

After the first shock of surprise and disappointment had passed his feelings boiled down to a slow scorching hate of destiny. The thought of God occurred to him, among other things, and he laughed. Why did people ever take it into their heads to deny the existence of God? Of course [255] there was a God; nothing but a divine will could possibly have arranged that he should be thwarted in an honest love—not merely once, mind you, but twice—by the one person in the world whom he could not oppose. Such things were beyond the realm of chance or reason. During one part of his wanderings he laughed aloud, several separate times, at the monumental humor of it all. A man such as he was, in the full pride of his youth and strength, strong in body, strong in mind, strong in will and character, twitched hither and yon by the lightest whimsical breath of an all-powerful divinity—it was supremely funny, in its coarse, horrible way.

"Oh, yes, it's a good joke, God," he said aloud once or twice; "it's a damned good joke."

It is significant that he thought very little of Madge now. He experienced none of the sudden sharp twinges of memory that he had known on a former occasion. At that time, as he now realized, only one side of his nature had been stirred, and that a rather silly, unimportant side. Now his whole being, or at least all that was best and strongest in his being, was affected. He had loved Beatrice only with his eyes and his imagination. He loved Madge with the full strength of his heart and soul and mind. And heart, soul and mind being cheated of their right, united in an alliance of hate and revenge against the fate that had cheated them.

He did not return to the house for dinner, and Aunt Selina supposed he had gone with Harry to the Gilsons'. He walked most of the night and when at last he reached home he found the door locked. Harry, of course, not finding him downstairs, had thought he had gone to bed and had locked everything. So he lay down in a cot hammock to await the coming of a hopeless day.

He got some sleep; he did not see that dawn, after all. Awakened shortly after seven by a housemaid opening doors and windows, he slipped unobserved up to his room, undressed and took a cold bath. He supposed nothing would ever keep him from taking a cold bath before breakfast; nothing, that is, except lack of cold water. Strange, that cold water could effect what love, jealousy and company could not. He glanced out of the window. The weather had changed [256] during the night and the day was clear and windy and snapping, a true forerunner of autumn. The sun and wind between them were whipping the sea into all sorts of shades of blue and purple, rimming it with a line of white along the blue coast of Maine over to the left. There was cold water enough for any one, enough to drown all the wretched souls ever born into a world of pain. How strange it was to think of how many unwilling souls that sea drowned every year, and yet had not taken him, who was so eminently willing! He could not deliberately seek death for himself, but he would be delighted to die by accident. No such luck, though; the fate, God, destiny, whatever you chose to call it, that had brought him twice into the same corner of terrestrial hell would see to that....

As he was rubbing himself dry his eye fell on his reflection in a full-length mirror and almost involuntarily stopped there. He still had the pure Greek build of his college days, he noticed; the legs, the loins, the chest, the arms, the shoulders all showed the perfect combination of strength and freedom. He had not even the faults of over-development; his neck was not thick like a prize-fighter's nor did his calves bulge like those of many great athletes. And his head matched the rest of him, within and without. And all this perfection was brought to naught by the vagrant whim of a cynical power! A new wave of hate and rebellion, stronger than any he had yet felt, swept over him. Moved by a sudden impulse he threw aside his towel and advanced a step or two toward the mirror, raising his hands after the manner of a libation-pourer of old.

"I swear to you," he muttered between clenched teeth to the reflection that faced him; "I swear to you that nothing in me shall ever rest until I have got even with the Thing, god, devil or blind chance, that has brought me to this pass. It may come early or it may come late, but somehow, some day! I swear it."

There was something eminently satisfying in the juxtaposition of his nakedness of body to the stark intensity of his passion and the elemental fervor of his agnosticism. For James was now a thorough agnostic; turned into one overnight from a "good" Episcopalian—he had been confirmed way back in his school days—he realized his position and fairly reveled in the hopelessness and [257] magnificence and bravery of it all. For it takes considerable bravery to become an agnostic, especially when you have a simple religious nature. James was in a state where the thought of being eternally damned gave him nothing but a savage joy. It was all very wicked, of course, but strong natures have a way of turning wicked when it becomes impossible for them to be good. There are some things that not even a *schöne Seele* can put up with.

Having thus taken pact with himself he experienced a sense of relief and became almost cheerful. He had breakfast alone with Harry—both ladies customarily preferring to take that intimate meal in their own rooms—and talked with him quite normally about various matters, chiefly golf. He became almost garrulous in explaining his theories concerning the proper use of the niblick. Harry was going to play golf that morning with Madge. He looked extremely fresh and attractive in his suit of tweed knickers; James did not blame Madge in the least for falling in love with his brother rather than him. Nor was he in the least inclined to find fault with Harry for falling in love with Madge. Only ... but what was the use in going over all that again?

He walked briskly down to the town after breakfast and engaged a berth on the New York express for that night. Living in immediate propinquity to the happy lovers would of course be intolerable. Then he walked back to the house. It was rather a long walk; the house stood on a height at some distance back of the town. A feeling of lassitude overcame him before he reached home; the exertions of last night were beginning to tell on him. Oh, the horror of last night! The memory of it was almost more oppressive than the dreadful thing itself.

He supposed he ought to go up and begin to pack, but he did not feel like it. Instead he wandered out on the verandah to lie in the sun and watch the sea for a while. He came at last to a hexagonal tower-like extension of the verandah built over an abutment of rock falling sharply away on all sides except that toward the house. There was a drop of perhaps twenty-five feet from the broad railing of this extension to the ground below. Harry, who knew the house from his early days, had dubbed its peak-roofed excrescence the chamber up a tower to the east that [258] Elaine guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot in; it was sometimes more briefly referred to as Elaine. It was a pleasant place to sit, but very windy on a day like this, and James was rather surprised to discover Beatrice sitting in one angle of the railing gazing silently out over the sea.

"Hullo," he said, listlessly sinking into a chair. "You've heard, I suppose?"

"Yes, I've heard."

"Fine, isn't it?"

"Oh, splendid."

"I'm going to New York to-night," said James after a moment.

"I'm going home next month," said Beatrice.

Neither spoke for a while and then it began to dawn on them both that those two carelessly spoken sentences had much more to them than their face-value. They both had the uneasy sensation of being forced into a "situation."

"What for?" asked James at last.

"For good."

"But why?" he persisted, knowing perfectly well why, at bottom.

"You ought not to have to ask that," she replied. "You, of all people.—Why are you going away to-night?" she added, turning toward him with sudden passion.

James' first impulse was to make a sharp reply, his second was to get up and walk away, and then his glance fell upon her face.... Oh, was there no end to mortal misery?

"I'm sorry, Beatrice," he said wretchedly; "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Oh, it's all right," she answered in his own tone of voice. Then for a long time neither of them moved nor spoke.

The situation was on them now in full force, and it was a sufficiently terrific one, for actual life; one which under other circumstances they would both have made every effort to break up. Yet neither of them thought of struggling against it now—there was so much else to struggle against. Great misfortunes inoculate people to small embarrassments; no one in the throes of angina pectoris has much time to bother about a cold in the head. Then, as their silence wore on, they [259]

began to be conscious of a certain sense of companionship.

"I suppose it's pretty bad?" ventured James at last, on a note of tentative understanding.

"I suppose it is...."

An idea occurred to James. "At least you're better off than I am, though. You can try to do something about it. You see how my hands are tied. You can fight against it, if you want. That's something."

Beatrice gazed immovably out over the sea. "You can't fight against destiny," she said at last.

James pricked up his ears; his whole being became suddenly alert. Couldn't one? Had he not dedicated his whole future to that very thing? "I'm not so sure of that," he answered slowly. "Have you ever tried?"

"I've tried for seven years."

Well, that was something. He became curious; seven years' experience in the art of destiny-fighting would surely contain knowledge that would be valuable to a novice like himself. And in the manner of getting this he became almost diabolically clever. Guessing that all direct inquiries in the matter would merely flatten themselves against the stone wall of her reticence he determined to approach her through the avenue of her pride.

"I find it hard to believe that," he remarked; "I haven't seen the slightest indication of such a thing."

"No, of course not. How should you? I haven't advertised it, like a prize fight!"

"I don't mean that; I mean that I haven't ever discovered anything in your character to make me believe you were—that sort of person. That sort of thing takes more than strength of character and intellect; it takes passion, capacity for feeling. And I shouldn't have said there was much of that in you. You have always seemed to me—well, rather aloof from such things. Cold, almost—I don't mean in the sense of being ill-natured, but...."

James was perfectly right; it is a curious trait of human character, that sensitiveness on the point of capacity for feeling. People who will sincerely disclaim any pretensions to strength of mind, body or character will flare into indignant protest when their strength of heart is assailed. It was so with Beatrice now.

"Cold?" she interrupted with a slight laugh. "Me—cold?... Yes, I suppose I might seem so. I [260] daresay I appear to be a perfect human icicle...." She laughed again, and then turned directly toward James. "See here, James, it's more than likely that we shall never see each other again after to-day, isn't it?"

"I suppose not, if you intend to go—"

"The first moment I can. Consequently it doesn't matter particularly what I say to you now or what you think of me afterward. I should just like to give you an idea of what these years have been to me. It may amuse you to know that the pursuit of your brother has been the one guiding passion of my life since I was eighteen. I was in love with him before he left England and I've wanted him from that time on—wanted him with all the strength of my soul and body! Wanted him every living moment of the day and night!... Can you conceive of what that means for a woman? A woman, who can't speak, can't act, can't make the slightest advance, can't give the least glimmering of her feeling?—not only because the world doesn't approve but because her game's all up if the man gets a suspicion that she's after him.... I suppose I knew it was hopeless from the start, though I couldn't bring myself to admit it. At any rate, as soon as the chance came I made up my mind to come over here and just sit around in his way and wait—the only thing a woman can do under the circumstances...."

"I never—I didn't realize quite all that," stammered James. "Though I knew—I guessed about the other.... You mean you deliberately came to America—"

"With that sole purpose."

"And you—you...." He fairly gasped.

"I wormed my way into a place in your family with that one end in view, if that's what you mean. And I've remained here with that one end in view ever since."

"And all your work—the League—"

"I had to do something, in the meanwhile—No, that's not true either; that was another means to the same end. Intended to be." She smiled with the same quiet intensity of bitterness that had struck James before.

"But what about you and Aunt Selina? I always thought—"

The smile faded. "Aunt Selina might lie dead at my feet, for all I should care," she answered with another sudden burst of passion. "Oh, no, not quite that. I suppose I like her as well as I can *like* [261] any one. But that's the way it is, comparatively."

"Yes. I know that feeling," said James meditatively.

"So you see how it is with me. I'm glad, in a way, that it's all up now. Any end—even the worst—is better than waiting—that hopeless, desperate waiting. Yet I never could bring myself to give up till I heard—what I heard yesterday. I've expected it, really, for some time; I've watched, I've seen. Oh, that horrible watching—waiting—listening! That's all over, at least...."

She had sunk into a chair near the edge of the verandah and sat with her elbows on the broad rail, gazing with sightless eyes over the variegated expanse of the sea. The midday sun fell full upon her unprotected face and even James at that moment could not help thinking how few complexions could bear that fierce light as hers did. She was, indeed, perhaps more beautiful at that moment than he had ever seen her before. Her expression of quiet hopeless grief was admirably suited to the high-bred cast of her features; she would have made a beautiful model for a Zenobia or a classisized type of *pietà*. Beauty is never more willing to come to us than when we want it least.

It had its effect on James, though he did not realize it. He came over and sat down on the rail, where he could look directly down at her.

"Beatrice," he said, "I don't mind saying I think it was rather magnificent of you."

She looked up at him a moment and then out to sea again. "Well, I must say I don't. I'm not proud of it. If I had been man enough to go my own way and not let it interfere with my life in the very least, that might have been magnificent. But this.... It was simply weak. I always knew there was no hope, you know."

"No, that's not the way to look at it. You devoted your whole life to that single purpose.... After all, you did as much as it was possible to do, you know. You went about it in the very best way—you were right when you said the worst thing you could do was to let him see."

"I'm not so sure. No, I don't know about that. Sometimes I think that if I had been brave enough simply to go to him and say, 'I love you; here I am, take me; I'll devote my life to making a good wife for you,' it would have been much better. But I wasn't brave enough for that." [262]

"No," insisted James; "that wasn't why you didn't do it. You knew Harry. It might have worked with some men, but not with him. Can't you see him screwing himself to be polite and saying, 'Thank you very much, Beatrice, but I don't think I could make you a good enough husband, so I'm afraid it won't do'?... No, you picked out the best way to get at him and made that your one purpose in life, and I admire you for it. It wasn't your fault it didn't succeed; it was just—just the damned, relentless way of things...."

"What are you going to do now?" he asked after a pause. "After you get home, I mean?"

"I don't know. Work, I suppose, at something."

"What—slums?"

"Oh, I suppose so.—No, I'd rather do something harder, like stenography—something with a lot of dull, grinding routine. That's the best way."

"A stenographer!"

"Or a matron in a home.—Why not? I must do something. I won't live with Mama, that's flat."

"You think you must go home, do you?"

"You wouldn't expect me to stay here and—?"

"No, but couldn't you find something to do here as well as there?"

"Yes, but why? I suppose I want to go home, things being as they are. If I've got to live somewhere, I'd rather live among my own people. I didn't come here because I liked America best...."

"But are you sure you don't like America best now? You can't have lived here all these years without letting the place have its effect on you, however little you may have thought about it. Why, your very speech shows it! And what about your friends—haven't you got as many on this side as the other? You've practically admitted it.... And do you realize what construction is sure to be put on your leaving just now...?"

"What are you driving at?" She looked quickly up at him, curious in spite of herself to discover the trend of his arguments, in themselves scarcely worth answering. He did not reply for a moment, but stared gravely back at her, and when he spoke again it was from a different angle. [263]

"Beatrice, why have you been telling me all these things...?"

He knew what he was going to do now, what he was striving toward with the whole strength of his newly-forged determination. And if at the back of his brain there struggled a crowd of lost images—ghosts of ideals which at this time yesterday had been the unquestioned rulers of his life—stretching out their tenuous arms to him, giving their last faint calls for help before taking their last backward plunge into oblivion, he only went on the faster so as to drown their voices in his own.

"Beatrice, why did you think of confiding in me? Why did you pick out this particular time? You never have before; you're not the sort of person that makes confidences. It wasn't because you

were going away; that was no real reason at all.... Beatrice, don't you see? Don't you see the bond that lies between us two? Don't you see what's going to happen to us both?"

"No—I don't know what you're talking about. James, don't be absurd!" She rose to her feet as if to break away, but she stood looking at his face, fascinated and possibly a little frightened by the onward rush of his words. James rose too and stood over her.

"Beatrice, we've both had a damned dirty trick played on us, the same trick at the same time. Are you going to take it lying down—spread yourself out to receive another blow, or are you going to stand up and make a fight—assert your independence—prove the existence of your own soul? I'm not, whatever happens! I'm going to make a fight, and I want you to make it with me. Beatrice, marry me! Now—to-day—this instant! Don't you see that's the only thing to do?..."

"No! James, stop! You don't know what you're saying!" She broke away from him, asserting her strength for the moment against even his impetuous onrush. "James, you're mad, stark mad! Haven't you lived long enough to know that you always regret words spoken like that? Try to act like a sensible human being, if you can't be one!"

That was all very well, but why did she weaken it by adding "I won't listen to any more such talk," which admitted the possibility that there might be more such talk very soon? And if she was [264] determined not to listen, why did she not simply walk away and into the house? James did not put these questions to himself in this form, but the substance of their meaning worked its way through his excitement and lent him courage for an attack from a new quarter. He dropped his impetuosity and became very quiet and keen.

"You ask me to act like a sensible person; very well, I will. Let's look at things from a practical point of view. There's no love's young dream stuff about this thing, at all. We've lost that; it's been cut out of both our lives, forever. All there is left for us to do is to pick up the pieces and try to make something of ourselves, as we are. How can we possibly do that better than by marrying? Don't you see the value of a comradeship founded on the sympathy there must be between us?"

He stopped for a moment and stood calmly watching her. No need now to use violence against those despairing voices in the background of his thoughts; they had been hushed by the strength of a determination no longer hot with the joy of self-discovery but taking on already something of the chill irrevocability of age. He watched Beatrice almost with amusement; he knew so well what futile struggles were going on within her. He had no more doubt of the outcome now than he had of his own determination.

"It all sounds very well, James," she answered at last, "but it won't do. I couldn't do it. Marriage...."

"Well?"

"Marriage is an ideal, you know, as well as—as a contract. I can't—I won't have one without the other."

"You are very particular. People as unpopular with chance as we are can't afford to be particular."

"It would be false to—to—oh, I don't know how to put it! To the best in life."

"Has the best in life been true to you?"

"You are so bitter!"

"Hasn't one the right to be, sometimes? God—fate—what you call ideals—have their responsibilities, even to us. What claim have all those things got on us now?"

"I choose to follow them still!"

"Then you are weak—simply weak!—You act as if I were proposing something actually wicked. [265] It's not wicked at all; it's simply a practical benefit. Marriage without love might be wicked if there were any chance left of combining it with love; but now—! It's simply picking up pieces, making the best of things—straight commonsense...."

She might still have had her way against him, as long as he continued to base his appeal on commonsense. But he changed his tactics again, this time as a matter of impulse. He had been slowly walking toward her in the course of his argument and now stood close by her, talking straight down into her eyes, till suddenly her mere physical nearness put an end to speech and thought alike. Something of her old physical attraction for him, which had been much stronger than in the case of Madge, returned to him with a force for the moment irresistible. There was something about her wide eyes, her parted lips, her bosom slightly heaving with the effort of argument.... He put his hand on her shoulder and slowly yet irresistibly drew her to him. He bent his head till their lips touched.

So they stood for neither knew how long. Seconds flew by like years, or was it years like seconds? Sense of time was as completely lost as in sleep; indeed, their condition was very much like that of sleep. They had both become suddenly, acutely tired of life and had found at least temporary rest and refreshment. Neither of them was bothered by worries over the inevitable awakening; neither of them even thought of it, yet.

As for Beatrice, she was for the moment bowled over by the discovery that some one cared for

her enough to clasp her to his bosom and kiss her. What had she wanted all these years, except to be loved? A wave of mingled self-pity and self-contempt swept over her. She felt suddenly weak; her knees trembled; what did that matter, though, when James was there to hold her up? She needed strength above all things, and James was strong above all things. Tears smarted in her eyes and streamed unheeded down her cheeks.

"I was so lonely," she whispered at last, raising her welling eyes to him. "I have been alone so long ... so long...."

"James," she began again after a while, "life is so horrible, isn't it?" [266]

"It is. Ghastly."

"Oh, it *is* good to find some one else who thinks so!"

"Yes, I know."

"Anything is good—*anything*—that makes it easier to forget, isn't it?"

"Yes. And we're going to try to forget together."

Presently the moment came when they had to break apart, and they did it a little awkwardly, not caring to look at each other very closely. They sat down on the rail, side by side but not touching, and for some time remained silently busy regaining old levels and making new adjustments. There was considerable to adjust, certainly. At last James looked at his watch and announced that it was nearly lunch time.

"When shall we get married?" he inquired, brusk and businesslike. It may have been only his tone that Beatrice involuntarily shuddered at. She told herself it was, and then reviled herself for shuddering. It was better to be prosaic and practical.

"Oh, as soon as possible.... Now—any time you say."

"Yes, but when? When shall we tell people?"

"Oh, not just yet...." she objected, almost automatically.

"Why not? Why not right now—before the other?"

"You think...?"

"Yes—every moment counts." He meant that the sooner the thing came out the better were their chances of concealment, and she understood him. Yes, that was the way to look at things, she reflected; might as well do it well, if it was to be done at all. She warmed up to his point of view so quickly that when his next question came she was able to go him one better.

"And the other—the wedding? In about a fortnight, should you say?"

"Oh, no, not for a month, at least. At the very least. It must be in England, you see."

"In England?"

"Yes, that's the way it would be...." If we were really in love with each other, of course she meant. He looked at her with new admiration.

They made a few more arrangements. Their talk was pervaded now with a sense of efficiency and despatch. If they could not call reasons by their real names they could call steamships and [267] railroads by theirs, and did. In a few minutes they had everything planned out.

A maid appeared and announced lunch. They nodded her away and sat silent for a moment longer. It seemed as if something more ought to be said; the interview was too momentous to be allowed to end with an announcement of a meal. The sun beat down on them from the zenith with the full unsubtle light of noonday, prosaically enough, but the wind, blowing as hard as ever, whistled unceasingly around their exposed tower and provided a sort of counter-dose of eerieness and suggestiveness; it gave them the sense of being rather magnificently aloof from the rest of the world. The sun showed them plainly enough that they were on a summer-cottage verandah, but the wind somehow managed to suggest that they were really in a much more romantic place. Probably this dual atmosphere had its effect on them; it would need something of the sort, at any rate, to make James stand up and say aloud, in broad daylight:

"Beatrice, don't you feel a sort of inspiration in fighting against something you can't see?"

"Yes, James," she answered slowly; "I believe I do—now."

"Something we can neither see nor understand, but know is wrong and can only protest against with the whole strength of our souls? Blindly, unflinchingly?"

"Yes."

"Inevitably?"

"Yes."

"Even if uselessly?"

"Yes." Her eyes met his squarely enough; there was no sign of flinching in them.

"I'm glad you understand. For that's going to be our life, you know."

"Yes, James; that shall be our life." They got up and took each other's hands for a moment, as though to seal their compact, looking each other steadfastly in the eyes meanwhile. They did not kiss again.

CHAPTER VIII

[268]

ONE THING AND ANOTHER

Seldom have we longed for anything so much as for the pen of a Fielding or a Thackeray to come to our aid at the present moment and, by means of just such a delightful detached essay as occurs from time to time in "Tom Jones" or "The Virginians," impart a feeling of the intermission that at this point appears in our story. There is nothing like a digression on human frailty or the condition of footmen in the reign of King George the Second to lift the mind of a reader off any particular moment of a story and, by throwing a few useful hints into the discourse, prepare him ever so gently to be set down at last at the exact point where he is to take it up again. That is making an art of skipping, indeed. We admire it intensely, but realize how impossible it is in this case. Not only is such a thing frankly outside our power, but the prejudice of the times is set against it, so our only course is to confess our weakness and plod along as best we may.

Why on earth every human being who ever knew him should not have known of his engagement as soon as it occurred—or long before, for that matter—Harry could never discover. That they did not, in most cases, was due partly to reasons which could have been best explained by James and partly to the fact that the person who is most careless of concealment in such matters is very often the one who is least suspected. And then so many men had been after Madge! So that when the great news burst upon the world at the dinner that Mrs. Gilson could not decently be prevented from giving, the surprise, in the words of ninety-nine per cent. of their well-meaning friends, was as great as the pleasure.

That occurred about a week after James' sudden departure from Bar Harbor, a phenomenon amply accounted for by business. Trouble in the Balkans—there always was trouble in the Balkans—had resulted, it appeared, in Orders; and Orders demanded James' presence at his post. [269] This from Beatrice, with impregnable casualness. Beatrice was really rather magnificent, these days. When she received her invitation to Mrs. Gilson's dinner she vowed that nothing should take her there, but the next moment she knew she would go; that nothing should keep her from going. Obviously the first guiding principle of destiny-fighting was to go on exactly as if nothing had happened.

About a week after the dinner Harry received a note from his brother in New York saying that he was engaged to Beatrice; that the wedding was to take place in London in October and that he hoped Harry would go over with him and act as his best man. "I refrained from mentioning it before," added James, "because I did not want to take the wind out of your sails. We are also enabled by waiting to reap the benefit of your experience; I refer to the Gilsons. We are taking no risks; it will appear in the papers on Wednesday the sixteenth, with Beatrice in Bar Harbor and me in New York. Beatrice sails the following Saturday."

That was all very well, if a little hard. James and Beatrice were both undemonstrative, businesslike souls; the arrangement was quite characteristic.

Beatrice in due time sailed for home, and James followed her some three weeks afterward. Harry went with him, returning immediately after the wedding by the fastest ship he could get; he was out of the country just eighteen days, all told. The voyage over was an uneventful one; the ship was nearly empty and Harry worked hard at his new play. He had rather looked forward to enjoying this last week of unmarried companionship with his brother, but somehow they did not seem to have more than usual to say to each other when they were together. Rather less, in fact.

"You're looking low, seems to me," said Harry after they had paced the wet deck in silence for nearly half of a certain evening.

"I've been rather low, lately."

"What—too much work?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's nothing."

"Not seasick, are you?"

"I hope not." Both gave a slight snort expressive of amusement. This was occasioned by the fact

that Aunt Cecilia had offered James the use of her yacht—or rather the largest and most sumptuous of her yachts—for his wedding trip, and he and Beatrice were going to cruise for two months in the Mediterranean. As for the time—well, he was simply taking it, defying McClellan's to fire him if they dared. [270]

"It's funny, isn't it, our getting engaged at the same time," Harry went on after a moment. It was the first reference he had made to the coincidence.

"Oh, yes," said James, "it's one of the funniest things I can remember."

"And the funniest part of it is that neither of us seems to have suspected about the other. At least I didn't."

"Oh, neither did I; not a thing."

"And practically nobody else did either, apparently."

"No. It might have been just the other way round, for all anybody knew—you and Beatrice, and Madge and me."

Harry could not but take away from that conversation and from the whole voyage a vague feeling of disappointment. Since he heard of James' engagement he had entertained an elusive conviction that love coming into their lives at so nearly the same time should somehow make a difference for the better between them. When he tried to put this idea into words, however, he found his mind mechanically running to such phrases as "deeper sympathy" and "fuller understanding," all of which he dismissed as sentimental cant. It was easy to reassure himself on all grounds of reason and commonsense; James and he were in no need of fuller understandings. And yet, especially after the above conversation, he could not but be struck by a certain inapproachability in his brother which for some reason he could not construe as natural undemonstrativeness.

The wedding took place in an atmosphere of unconstrained formality. Harry was not able to get a boat until two days after it, and he could not resist the temptation of writing Madge all about it that very night, though he knew the letter could hardly reach her before he did:—

"It was quite a small wedding, chiefly because, as far as I can make out, there are only some thirty-odd dukes in the kingdom. It occurred at the odd hour of 2:30, but that didn't seem to prevent any one from enjoying the food, and more especially the drink, that was handed around [271] afterward at Lady Archie's. Lord Moville, Beatrice's uncle, was there and seemed greatly taken with James. After he had got outside about a quart of champagne he amused himself by feeling James' biceps and thumping him on the chest and saying that with a fortnight's training he'd back him for anything he wanted against the Somerset Cockerel, or some one of the sort, most of which left James rather cold, though he bore it smiling. His youngest daughter (Lord M.'s), a child of about eighteen, apparently the only living person who has any control over him, was quite frank about it. 'Fido's drunk again,' she announced pleasantly to all who might hear. 'Oh, so's Ned,' said Jane Twombly, Beatrice's sister; 'there's no use trying to help it at weddings, I find!' Just then Lady Archie came running up in despair. 'Oh, Sibyl,' she said, 'do try to do something with your father. He's been threatening to take off his coat because he says the room's too hot, and now he wants old Lady Mulford to kiss him!' And off darts Sibyl into the dining-room where her father and Ned Twombly stand arm in arm waving glasses of champagne and shouting 'John Peel' at the top of their lungs. 'Fido!' she shouted, running straight up to him, 'put down that glass directly and come home! Instantly! Do you hear? You're disgracing us! The next time I take you out to a wedding you'll know it!' 'Oh, Sib,' pleaded the noble Marquis, 'don't be too hard on us! Only drinkin' bride's health—must drink bride's health—not good manners not to. Sib shall drink with us; here's a glass, Sib—for his view, view HALLO! would awaken the dead—' 'Fido, do you know what you're doing? You're ruining your season's hunting! Gout-stool and Seidlitz powders all the winter for you, if you don't go easy!' But still Fido refused to obey till at last the dauntless child went up and whispered something in his ear, after which he calmed down and presently followed her out of the house, gently as a lamb. 'She threatened to tell her mother about the woman in Wimbledon,' explained Jane to me. 'Of course every one knows all there is to know about her, including Aunt Susan, but he hasn't found that out yet, and it gives Sib rather a strangle-hold on him. Good idea, isn't it? Marjorie—Ned's sister, you know—has promised to work the same trick for me with Ned, when the time comes.' I hope I am not more straight-laced than [272] my neighbors, but do you know, the whole atmosphere struck me as just a teeny-weeny bit decadent...."

After he reached home Harry saw that it would be quite useless, what with Madge and other diverting influences, to try to finish his play in New Haven, so he repaired to the solitudes of the Berkshires for the remainder of the autumn. He occupied two rooms in an almost empty inn in Stockbridge, working and living for two months on a strict régime. It was his habit to work from nine till half-past one. He spent most of the afternoon in exercise and the evening in more writing; not the calm, well-balanced writing of the morning, but in feverish and untrammeled scribbling. Each morning he had to write over all that he had done the night before, but he found it well worth while, discovering that reason and inspiration kept separate office hours.

Meanwhile Madge, though freed from the trammels of Miss Snellgrove, was very busy at home with her trousseau and other matters. She was supremely happy these days; happy even in Harry's absence, because she could feel that he was doing better work than he could with her near, and that provided just the element of self-sacrifice that every woman—every woman that is

worth anything—yearns to infuse into her love. She had ample opportunity of trying her hand at writing love letters, but, to tell the truth, she was never very good at it. Neither was Harry, for that matter; possibly because he was now putting every ounce of creative power in him into something the result of which justified the effort much better.... But suppose we allow some of the letters to speak for themselves.

Dear Inamorato: (wrote Madge one day in November) I'm not at all sure that that word exists; it looks so odd in the masculine and just shows how the male sex more or less spoils everything it touches. However! I've been hemming towels all day and am ready to drop, but after I finish with them there will be only the pillow cases to attend to before I am done. By the bye, what do you suppose arrived to-day? *Four* (heavily underscored) most *exquisite* (same business) linen sheets, beautifully hemstitched and marked and from who ("Good Heavens, and the woman taught school!" exclaimed [273] Harry) do you think? Miss Snellgrove! Wasn't it sweet of her? That makes ten in all. Everybody has been lovely and we shall do very well for linen, but clothes are much more difficult. In them, you see, I have to please not only myself but Mama and Aunt Tizzy as well. I went shopping with both of them yesterday, and they were possessed to make me order an evening gown of black satin with yellow trimmings which was something like a gown Aunt Tizzy had fascinated people in during the early eighties. It wasn't such a bad idea, but unfortunately it would have made me resemble a rather undersized wasp. We compromised at last on a blue silk that's going to have a Watteau pleat and will fall in nice little straight folds and make me look about seven feet high. Aunt Tizzy is too perfectly dear and keeps telling me not to scrimp, but her idea of not scrimping is to spend simply *millions* and always go ahead and get the very best in the *extravagantest* way, and my conscience rebels. I hope to pick up some things at the January sales in New York; if you are there seeing about your play at that time we can be together, can't we? I still have to get a suit and an afternoon gown and various other things the nature of which I do not care to specify!

I run over and look in on Aunt Selina every time I get a chance. She is *so* dear and uncomplaining about being left alone and keeps saying that having me in the house will be as good as having Beatrice, which is absurd, though sweet. Heavens, how I tremble when I think of trying to fill her shoes!

I must stop now, dearest, so good-night. Ever your own,

MADGE

O O O O O O

Those O's stand for osculations. Do you know how hard it is to kiss in a small space? Like tying a bow-knot with too short a piece of ribbon.

For Heaven's sake, my good woman (wrote Harry in reply), don't write me another letter like that! How do you think I feel when, fairly thirsting for fire and inspiration and that sort of thing, I tear open an envelope from you and find it contains an unusually chatty Woman's Column? How do you suppose poor old D. Alghieri would [274] have written his Paradiso if Beatrice had held forth on the subject of linen sheets, and do you or do you not suppose it would have improved Petrarch's sonnets if Laura had treated him to a disquisition on the ins and outs of the prices of evening gowns?

Remember your responsibility! If you continue to deny me inspiration my play will fail and you will live in disgrace and misery in the basement of a Harlem tenement in an eternal smell of cabbages and a well-justified fear of cockroaches, with one cracked looking-glass to see your face in and dinner served up in a pudding basin!

The c. of my b. (that was his somewhat flippant abbreviation of child of my brain) is coming along well enough, considering. The woman is shaping quite well. What was the name you suggested for her the last time I saw you? If it was Hermione, I'm afraid it won't do, because every one in the theater, from Bachmann down to the call-boy, will call it Hermy-one, and I shall have to correct them all, which will be a bad start. I call her Mamie for the present, because I know I can't keep it. What would be the worst possible name, do you think? Hannah? Florrie? Mae? Keren-happuch and Glwadwys also have their points.

Please forgive me for being (a) short-tempered; (b) tedious. I was going to tear up what I have written, only I decided it would not be quite fair, as you have a right to know just how dreadful I can be, in case you want to change your mind about February.—What a discreetly euphemistic phrase!—It has grown fearfully cold here, and we had the first skating of the winter to-day. I got hold of some skates and went out and, fired by the example of two or three people here who skate rather well, I swore I would do a 3-turn or die in the attempt. The latter alternative occurred. I am writing this on the mantelpiece.

Farewell. Write early and write often, and write Altman catalogues if you must, but not

if you are interested in the uplift of drahmah. Give my best to Grandmama, and consider yourself embraced.

IO EL REY.

Madge's reply to this missive was telegraphic in form and brief in substance. It read simply [275]
"Sorry. Laura." "I would have signed it Beatrice," she explained in her next letter, "only I was afraid you might think it was from your sister-in-law Beatrice, and there's nothing for *her* to be sorry about."

Another letter of Harry's, written a few weeks later, shows him in a different mood:

Querida de mis ojos—You don't know Spanish but you ought to gather what that means without great effort—I have weighty news for you. I dashed down to New York on the spur of the moment day before yesterday and showed the first draught of my completed MS to Leo. My dear, he said IT WOULD DO! You don't know what that means, of course; no one could. You all think I have simply to write and say 'Here, play this,' and it is played. You know nothing of how it hurts to put ideas on paper, nothing of the dead weight of responsibility, the loneliness, the self-distrust, the hate of one's own work that the creative brain has to struggle against. Consequently, my dearest, you will just have to take it on trust from me that an interview such as I had yesterday with Bachmann is nothing less than a rebirth. He even advised me not to try to change or improve it much, saying that what changes were needed could best be put in at rehearsals, and I think he's dead right. So I shall do no more than put the third act in shape before I hand the thing over to him and dash home for the holidays. Atmosphere of Yule logs, holly berry and mistletoe!

I really am absurdly happy. You see, it isn't merely success, or a premonition of success (for the first night is still to come); it's in a way a justification of my whole life. If this thing is as good as I think it is, it will amount to a sort of written permit from headquarters to love you, to go on thinking as I do think about certain things and to regard myself—well, it's hard to put into words, but as a dynamic force, rather than as a lucky fool that stumbled across one rather good thing. Not that I shouldn't do all three anyway, to be sure!—And every kind friend will say he knew I would 'make good'; that there never was any doubt my 'coming into my own,' and all the rest. Oh, Lord, if people only knew! But thank Heaven they don't!

I am becoming obscure and rhapsodic. I seem to 'see' things to-night, like Tilburina in [276]
the play. I see strange and distorted conceptions of myself, for one thing; endless and bewildering publicity. Oh, what a comfort it is to think that no matter what I may be to other people, to you I shall always be simply the same stupid, bungling, untidy

HARRY!

I love you with an intensity that beggars the power of human expression.

I did a bracket this afternoon.

Madge never received a letter from him that pleased her more. She was fully alive to its chaotic immaturity, and she smiled at the way he unconsciously appeared to shove his love for her into second place. But there was that about it that convinced her of his greatness as nothing had yet done. It seemed to her that when he spoke of the loneliness of genius and in his prophetic touch at the end about the different ways in which people would regard him he spoke with the true voice of a seer. It all made her feel very humble and solemn. To think that Harry, her Harry, that tall thin thing with the pink cheeks and dark brown hair and the restless black eyes, should be one of the great men of his day, perhaps one of the great ones of all time! Keats—Harry was already older than Keats when he died, but she thought he had much the same temperament; Congreve—she knew how he loved Congreve; Marlowe—she had often compared his golden idealism to that of Marlowe; Shakespeare...? No, no—of course not! She knew perfectly well he was no Shakespeare.... Still, why not, in time?... And anyway, Marlowe, Congreve, Keats—Wimbourne!

So she dreamed on, till the future, which hitherto she had seen as merely smiling toward her, seemed to rise and with solemn face beckon her to a new height, a place hard to reach and difficult to hold, but one whose very base seemed more exalted than anything she had yet known....

Now Madge was, on the whole, a very fairly modern type of young woman. Her outlook on the world was based on Darwin, and she held firmly to such eugenic principles as seemed to flow directly from the doctrine of evolution. She had long since declared war to the death on disease, filth and vice, to which she added a lesser foe generally known as "suppression of facts," and she had done a certain amount of real work in helping those less fortunate than herself to the [277]
acquisition of health, cleanliness, virtue and "knowledge." She thought that women would get the vote some day, though they weren't ready for it yet, and hadn't joined the Antis because there was no use in being a drag on the wheels of progress, even if you didn't feel like helping. She believed in the "social regeneration" of woman. It was quite clear to her that in the early years of the twentieth century women were beginning—and only just beginning—to take their place beside men in the active work of saving the race; "why, you had only to look at Jane Addams and

Florence Nightingale to see—" et cetera.

And yet, and yet....

It was at least as fine a thing to become Mrs. Harold Wimbourne and devote a lifetime to ministering to one of the great creative geniuses of the time as to be a heavy gun on her own account, was what she meant, of course. But that wasn't quite enough. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Harry were not one of the great creative geniuses of the age; suppose there were no question of Congreve, Keats, Wimbourne and so forth; suppose being his wife meant being plain Mrs. Harold Wimbourne and nothing more—what then?

"Well, I suppose I'd still rather be plain Mrs. H. W., if you will have it!" she retorted petulantly to her relentless self. But she soon became glad she had brought herself to the point of admitting it, for, the issue definitely settled, her mind became unaccountably peaceful....

New Year's was scarcely over when rehearsals began, and Harry was in for another period of lounging in shrouded orchestra chairs and watching other people air their ideas, or lack of ideas, on the child of his brain. His lounging was now, however, quite freely punctuated by interruptions and not infrequently by scramblings over the footlights to illustrate a fine point. This rather bored the actors; Harry had become almost uncomfortably acute in matter of stage technique. But they had to admit that his suggestions were never foolish or unnecessary.

In due time came the first night. It is no part of our purpose to describe "Pastures New" or its success in this place. If—which is improbable—you have to refresh your mind on it, you have only [278] to ask one of your journalistic friends—don't pretend that you haven't at least one friend on a newspaper—to show you the files of his sheet. There you will see it all, in what scholars call primary sources:—"New Yorkers Roar With Delight at Feminist Satire," and all the rest of it, like as not on the front page. Harry hated its being called a satire; that was such a cheap and easy way of getting out of it. For when all was over, when people had cried with laughing at its whimsical humor, poked each other with delight at its satirical touches—oh yes, there were plenty of them—quoted its really brilliant dialogue, sat enthralled by its swift and compelling action—for Harry had made good his promise that this play should have "punch"—when they had done all these things to their heart's content, still not a person saw the play who did not come away from it more fully convinced than ever he had been of—well, of what you had only to look at Jane Addams and Florence Nightingale to see. For there were really great moments in the play; moments when no one even thought of laughing, though one was almost always made to laugh the moment after. That was Harry's way, that was his power, to "hit 'em hard and then make 'em laugh just as they begin to feel smarty in the eyes," as Burchard the stage manager not unaptly put it.

"Pastures New" ran for six months in New York alone, and no one laughed harder or less rancorously at it than the "feminists" themselves—or all of them that were worth anything.

Of course both Harry and Madge were tired to death by the time the wedding became imminent, and the final preparations were made in what might be called broad impressionistic strokes.

Madge had at first intended to have a small informal reception in her own house, but Aunt Tizzy had been so disappointed that she had at last consented to let it be at her aunt's and attain the dimensions of a perfect tomasha—the phrase is her own—if it wanted to. Why not? Aunt Tizzy's house could hold it.

"Besides, my dear," argued Harry, "it's only once in a lifetime, after all. If you marry again as a widow you'll only have a silly little wedding, without a veil and no bridesmaids, and if we're divorced you won't have any wedding at all, worth mentioning. Much better do it up brown when [279] you have the chance."

"What about music?" asked Harry as the two stood in final consultation with the organist on the night of the rehearsal. "I've always wondered why people had such perfectly rotten music at weddings, but I begin to see now. Still, if we *could* have something other than Lohengrin and Mendelssohn I think I could face marriage with a little better heart. What about it, dear?"

Madge groaned. "Oh, anything! The Star-Spangled Banner, if you want!"

"I think I can arrange it," said the organist smiling, and he played the march from "Tannhäuser" and the march from "Athalie," which he always played when people asked for something unusual, and the effect was considered very pleasing and original. Altogether it was the prettiest wedding any one had seen in years, according to the testimony of those who attended the reception—which did become a perfect tomasha. But as tomasha-goers are notoriously biased their testimony probably wasn't legal and no respectable judge would have accepted it as evidence. The only legal thing about the whole affair was the ceremony, which was fully as much so as if it had been before a magistrate, which Madge swore it should be if she ever had to go through it again and regretted bitterly it hadn't been this time.... Well, perhaps, when she looked about her and saw how unaffectedly happy her mother and Aunt Tizzy and the bridesmaids and all the other good people were, she didn't regret it quite so much.

"Though it is rather absurd, getting married to please other people, isn't it?" she remarked as they drove off at last, leaving the tomasha-goers to carouse as long as Aunt Tizzy could make

them.

"I think I'd do almost anything to please Aunt Tizzy," said Harry. "Now that it's all over, that is. Get married again, even.... After all," he added suddenly, shamelessly going back on all his professions of the last few days; "after all, you know, it *was* rather a good wedding!"

Which shows that he was just as biased as any one, at bottom!

CHAPTER IX

[280]

LABYRINTHS

How many people should you say could be packed into a three-hundred foot barkantine-rigged steam yacht, capable of fourteen knots under steam alone, for a night in late June, presumably hot, anchored in a noisy estuary off Long Island Sound without making them all wish they had never been born? We ourselves should hate to have to answer the question offhand. So did Aunt Cecilia, whom it concerned more closely than any one else, and she did not have to answer it offhand at all, having all the available statistics within reach. In fact, she had spent the best part of one hot New York June morning over it already, sitting in her darkened front drawing-room because it was the coolest room in the house, amid ghost-like furniture whose drab slip-covers concealed nothing less than real Louis Quinze. On her lap—or what Uncle James said if she didn't look out wouldn't be her lap very long—she held a magazine and over the magazine an expensive piece of letter-paper, on one leaf of which was a list of names and on the other a plan drawn in wobbly and unarchitectural lines—obviously a memory sketch of the sleeping accommodations of the *Halcyone*. Near what even in the sketch was undoubtedly the largest and most comfortable of the *Halcyone's* cabins she had written in firm unmistakable letters the word "Me," and opposite two other rooms she had inscribed in only slightly less bold characters the initials "H. and M." and "J. and B." So far so good; why not go on thus as long as the list or the cabins held and consider the problem solved? It wasn't as simple as that, it seemed. Some of the people hadn't been asked, or might be asked only if there was room enough, and the boys might bring in people at the last moment; it was very confusing. And not even the extent of the sleeping accommodations was as constant as might have been desired. It was ridiculous, of course, but even after all these years she could not be quite sure whether there were two little single rooms [281] down by the galley skylight or only one. She was practically sure there were two, but suppose she were mistaken? And then, if it came to that, the boys and almost as many friends as they cared to bring might sleep on the smoking-room sofas....

"No ... no, I'm not sure how wise that would be," she mused, certain things she had seen and been told of boat-race celebrations straying into her mind. "The smoking-room cushions have only just been covered...."

A ring at the doorbell. She glanced up at a pierglass (also Louis Quinze) opposite her and strained her eyes at its mosquito-netting covered surface. Her hair was far from what she could have wished; she hoped it would be no one she would have to see. Oh, Beatrice.

"Howdy do, dear," said Aunt Cecilia, relieved. "I was just thinking of you. I'm trying to plan out about the boat-race; it's less than a week off now."

Beatrice sank languidly down on the other end of Aunt Cecilia's sofa. She was much hotter and more fatigued than Aunt Cecilia, but no one would have guessed it to look at her. Her clothes lay coolly and caressingly on her; not a hair seemed out of place.

"You see," went on the other, "it's rather difficult to arrange, on account of there being so many unmarried people—just the Lyles and the MacGraths and George Grainger for us older ones and the rest all Muffins' and Jack's friends. I think we shall work out all right, though, with two rooms at the Griswold and the smoking-room to overflow into. I'm tired of bothering about it. Tell me about yourself."

"Nothing much," answered Beatrice. "I much prefer hearing about you. By the way—about the races. I just dropped in to tell you about Tommy Clairloch. He's coming. You did tell me to ask him, didn't you?"

"Yes ... oh, yes, of course. I had forgotten about Lord Clairloch for the moment. I thought he was going west the middle of the month."

"He was, but he didn't. Tommy's rather a fool." Tommy, it may be mentioned, was in the process of improving himself by making a trip around the world, going westward. He had left home in April and so far Upper Montclair was his farthest point west. As Beatrice said, Tommy was rather a fool. [282]

"Oh, not a bit ... only.... By the bye, dear, do you happen to remember whether there are one or two rooms down that little hall by the galley?"

"Two, as I remember it. But don't bother about Tommy. Really, Aunt Cecilia, don't. He needn't come at all—I'll tell him he can't."

"Of course he must come.... That's it—I'll put him in the other little single room and tell the boys that they and any one else they ask from now on must go to the Griswold or sleep in the smoking-room. I'm glad to have it settled."

Aunt Cecilia beamed as one does when a difficult problem is solved. It occurred to her that Beatrice might beam back at her just a tiny bit, if only in mock sympathy. Especially as it was her guest.... But Beatrice remained just as casual as before, sitting easily but immovably in her corner of the sofa with her parasol lying lightly in her slim gloved hands. Aunt Cecilia noticed those hands rather especially; it seemed scarcely human to keep one's gloves on in the house on a day like this! Characteristically, she gave her thought outlet in words.

"Do take off your gloves and things, dear, and make yourself comfortable! Such a day! New York in June is frightful—eighty-eight yesterday, and Heaven knows what it will be to-day. You'll stay to lunch, won't you?"

"Thanks, perhaps I will," replied Beatrice listlessly.

"I never have stayed in town so late in June," ran on Aunt Cecilia, "but I thought I wouldn't open the Tarrytown house this spring—it's only for six weeks and it is so much extra trouble.... I shall take the yacht and the boys directly on up to Bar Harbor afterward; we should love to have you come with us, if you feel like leaving James—you're looking so fagged. You must both come and pay us a long visit later on, though I suppose with Harry and Madge in the Berkshires you'll be running up there quite often for week-ends...."

Beatrice stirred a little. "Thanks, Aunt Cecilia, but I don't mind the heat especially. If James can bear it, I can, I suppose. I expect to stay here most of the summer."

She was perfectly courteous, and yet it suddenly occurred to Aunt Cecilia that perhaps she wouldn't be quite so free in showering invitations on Beatrice and James for a while. There was that about her, as she sat there.... Languid, that was the word; there had been a certain languor, [283] not due to hot weather, in Beatrice's reception of most of her favors, now that she came to think of it. There had been that wedding trip in the *Halcyone*, to begin with. Both she and James had shown a due amount of gratitude, but neither, when you came right down to it, had given any particular evidence of having enjoyed it. Everything was as it should be, no doubt, but—one didn't lend yachts without expecting to have them enjoyed!

"That trip cost me over five thousand dollars," she had remarked to her husband shortly after the return of the bridal pair. "Of course I don't grudge it, but five thousand dollars is a good deal of money, and I'd rather have subscribed it to the Organized Charities than feel I was spending it to give those two something they didn't want!"

Aunt Cecilia gazed anxiously at Beatrice for a moment, memories of this sort floating vaguely through her mind. She scented trouble, somewhere. The next minute she thought she had diagnosed it.

"You're bored, dear, that's the long and the short of it, and I think I know what's the matter. I'm not sure that I didn't feel a little that way myself, at the very first. But I soon got over it. My dear, there's nothing in the world like a baby to drive away boredom...."

Beatrice tapped with the end of her parasol on what in winter would have been a pink and gray texture from Aubusson's storied looms but was now simply a parquet flooring. But she did not blush, not in the slightest degree.

"Yes," she answered, a trifle wearily, "I daresay you're right. Sometimes I think I would like to have a baby. It doesn't seem to come, though.... After all, it's rather early to bother, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't want you to *bother*—! Only—" She was just a little taken aback. This barren agreement, this lack of natural shyness, of blushes! It was unprecedented in her experience.

"Only what, Aunt Cecilia?"

"Only—it's a sure cure for being bored. But Beatrice, there must be others, while you're waiting. What about your studies, your work? You haven't done much of that since you came home from abroad, have you? It's too late to begin anything this summer, of course, but next autumn I [284] should think you'd like to take it up again, especially as you don't care so much for society, and I'm sure I don't blame you for that...." She beamed momentarily on her niece, who this time smiled back ever so slightly in return. "After all, it's nice to be of some use in the world, isn't it?"

Why not have left it there, on that secure impregnable pinnacle? Why weaken her position by giving voice to that silly unprovoked fancy that had hung about the back of her mind since the beginning of the interview, or very near it? We can't explain, unless the sudden suspicion that Beatrice had smiled less with than at her, and the sight of her sitting there so beautiful and aloof, so well-bredly acquiescent and so emotionally intangible, exercised an ignoble influence over her. There is a sort of silent acquiescence that is very irritating.... And after all, was the impulse so ignoble? A word of warning of the most affectionate kind, prompted by the keenest sympathy—

surely it was wholly Beatrice's fault if anything went wrong!

"More than that, my dear, there's a certain danger in being too idle—a danger I'm sure you're as free from as any one could be, but you know what the psalm says!" (Or was it original with Isaac Watts? However!) "Of course marriage isn't so easy, especially in the first year, and especially if there are no children—what with the husband away at work all day and tired to death and like as not cross as a bear when he comes home in the evening—I know!—a young wife can't be blamed for feeling a little out of sorts sometimes. And then along comes another man...."

Here Beatrice, to use a sporting expression, froze. From that moment it ceased to be question of two women talking together and became a matter of Aunt Cecilia apostrophizing a statue; a modern conception, say, of Artemis. Marble itself could not be more unresponsive than Beatrice when people tried to "get at her." It was not rudeness, it was not coldness, it was not even primarily self-consciousness; it was the natural inability to speak of matters deeply concerning oneself which people of Aunt Cecilia's temperament can never fully understand.

"Of course other men have things to offer that husbands have not, especially if they are free in the daytime and are nice and good-natured and sympathetic, and often a young wife may be [285] deceived into valuing these things more than the love of her husband. They are all at their best on the surface, while her husband's best is all below it. And that, I think, is the way most married unhappinesses begin; not in unfaithfulness or in jealousy or in loss of love, but merely in idleness. I've seen it happen so often, dear, that you must be able to understand why I never like to see a young wife with too little to do...."

For Aunt Cecilia was personal, you see, to a degree. Did she imagine she was making things any easier, Beatrice asked herself with a little burst of humorous contempt, by her generalities and her third persons and her "young wives"? If she had been perfectly frank, if she had come out and said, "Beatrice, if you don't look out you'll be falling in love with Tommy Clairloch," there was a possibility that Beatrice could have answered her, even confided in her; at least put things on a conversational footing. But as for talking about her own case in this degrading disguise, dramatizing herself as a "young wife"—!

She remained silent long enough to make it obvious that her silence was her real reply. Then she said "Yes, indeed, perfectly," and Aunt Cecilia rather tardily became aware of her niece's metamorphosis into the modern Artemis. She made a flurried attempt to give her own remarks, retrospectively, something of the Artemis quality; to place a pedestal, as it were, on which to take her own stand as a modern conception of Pallas Athene.

"I hope, my dear, you don't think I mean anything...."

"Not at all," said Beatrice kindly but firmly. "And now if you don't mind, Aunt Cecilia, I think I'll go up and get ready for luncheon."

But Aunt Cecilia was afraid she had gone too far.

A week later came the gathering of the clans at New London for the Yale-Harvard boat-race. Aunt Cecilia had not been to a race in years. Races, you see, were not in a class with graduations; they were optional, works of supererogation. But this year, in addition to one of the largest yachts extant and money that fairly groaned to be put into circulation, she had two boys in college, and altogether it seemed worth while "making an effort." And the effort once made there was a certain pleasure in doing the thing really well, in taking one's place as one of the great Yale [286] families of the country. So on the afternoon before the race the *Halcyone* was anchored in a conspicuous place in the harbor, where she loomed large and majestic among the smaller craft, and a tremendous blue flag with a white Y on it was hoisted between two of the masts. People from the shore looked for her name with field glasses and pointed her out to each other as "the Wimbourne yacht" with a note of awe in their voices.

"It's like being on the *Victory* at Trafalgar, as far as conspicuousness goes," said Harry on his arrival. "Or rather," he added magnificently, "like being on Cleopatra's galley at Actium."

"Absit omen," remarked Uncle James, and the others laughed, but his wife paid no attention to him. She was not above a little thrill of pride and pleasure herself.

Muffins and Jack and their friends were much in evidence; the party was primarily for the "young people." They kept mostly to themselves, dancing and singing and making personal remarks together, always detaching themselves with a polite attentive quirk of the head when an older person addressed them. Nice children, all of them. Muffins and Jack were of the right sort, emphatically, and their friends were obviously—not too obviously, but just obviously enough—chosen with nice discriminating taste. Jack especially gave one the impression of having a fine appreciation of people and things; that of Muffins was based on rather broad athletic lines. Muffins played football. Ruth, the brains of the family, was not present; we forget whether she was running a summer camp for cash girls or exploring the headwaters of the Yukon; it was something modern and expensive. Ruth was not extensively missed by her brothers.

They all dined hilariously together on the yacht and repaired to the Griswold afterward to dance and revel through the evening. All, that is, except Beatrice and James; they did not arrive till well on in the evening, James having been unable to leave town till his day's work was over. The

launch with Uncle James in it went to the station to meet them and brought them directly back to the yacht to get settled and tidied up; they could go on over to the Griswold for a bit, if they weren't too tired.

"How about it?" inquired James as he stood peering at his watch in the dim light on deck. [287]

"Oh, just as you like," said Beatrice.

"Well, I don't care. Say something."

Beatrice was rather tired.... Well, perhaps it was better that way; they would have another chance to see all they wanted to-morrow night. This from Uncle James, who thought he would drop over there and relieve Aunt Cecilia, who had been chaperoning since dinner.

His head disappeared over the ship's side. James walked silently off to unpack. Beatrice sank into a wicker armchair and dropped her head on her hands....

It seemed as if scarcely a moment had passed when she became aware of the launch again coming up alongside and voices floating up from it—Aunt Cecilia and Lord Clairloch. Salutations ensued, avuncular and friendly. Aunt Cecilia was tired, but very cheerful. She buzzed off presently to see about something and Lord Clairloch dropped down by Beatrice.

Tommy was very cheerful also, apparently much impressed by what he had seen at the Griswold. "I say, a jolly bean-feast, that! Never saw such dancin' or drinkin' in my life, and I've lived a bit! They keep 'em apart, too—that's the best of it; no trouble about takin' a gell, provided she don't go to the bar, which ain't likely.... Jove, we've got nothing like it in England! Rippin' looking lot of gells, rippin' fellahs, rippin' good songs, too. All seem to enjoy 'emselves so much!—I say, these Yankees can teach us a thing or two about havin' a good time—wot?"

Beatrice listened with a growing sense of amusement. Tommy always refreshed her when he was in a mood like this; he kept his youth so wonderfully, in spite of all his super-sophistication; he was such a boy still. Tommy never seemed to mind being hot or tired; Tommy was always ready for anything; Tommy was not the sort that came home at six o'clock and sank into the evening paper without a word—She stopped that line of thought and asked a question.

"Why did you leave it all, Tommy, if it amused you so?"

"Oh, had enough of it—been there since dinner. Beside, I heard you'd come. Thought I'd buzz over and see how you were gettin' on. Have a horrid journey?"

Beatrice nodded.

"Hot?" [288]

"No, not especially." They were silent a moment. Tommy opened his mouth to ask a question and shut it again. And then, walking like a ghost across their silence, appeared the figure of James, stalking aimlessly down the deck. He nodded briefly to Tommy and walked off again.

The effect, in view of the turn of their conversation, of Tommy's unasked question, was almost that of a spectral apparition. The half-light of the deck, James' silence and the noiseless tread of his rubber-soled shoes had in themselves an uncanny quality. Presently Tommy whistled softly, as though to break the spell.

"Whew! I say, is he often like that?"

Beatrice laughed. Tommy *was* refreshing! "Lately, yes. Do you know," she added, "he only spoke twice on the way up here—once to ask me if I was ready to have dinner, and once what I wanted for dinner?" Her tone was one of suppressed amusement, caught from Tommy; but before her remark was fairly finished something rather like a note of alarm rang through her. Why had she said that? It wasn't so frightfully amusing, come to think of it. Her pleasure, she saw in a flash, came not from the remark itself but from her anticipation of seeing Tommy respond to it....

That was rather serious, wasn't it? Just how serious, she wondered? Joy in seeing another man respond to a disparaging remark about her husband—that was what it came to! For the first time in her life she had the sensation of reveling in a stolen joy. For of course Tommy did respond, beautifully—too beautifully. "Oh, I say! Really, now! That *is* a trifle strong, wot?" and so on. He was doing exactly what she had meant him to, and there was a separate pleasure in that—a zest of power!

Heavens!

For the first time she began to feel a trifle nervous about Tommy. Was Aunt Cecilia right? Had all her careful euphemisms about young wives some basis of justification as applied to her own case? She and Tommy.... Well, she and Tommy?... Half an hour ago she could have placed them perfectly; now her sight was a trifle blurred. There was not time to think it all out now, anyway; another boatload of people from the shore was even now crowding up the gangway; to-morrow she would go into the matter thoroughly with herself and put things, whatever they might be, on [289] a definite business footing. To-night, even, if she did not sleep....

Everybody was back, it appeared, and things shortly became festive. There were drinks and sandwiches and entertaining reminiscences of the evening from the young people, lasting till bedtime. Thought was out of the question.

Once undressed and in bed, to be sure, there was better opportunity. She slipped comfortably down between the sheets; what a blessing that the night was not too hot, after all! Aunt Cecilia had said ... what was it that Aunt Cecilia had said? Something about a young wife—a young wife ought to have something to do. Of course. These were linen sheets, by the way, and the very finest linen, at that. Aunt Cecilia did know how to do things.... What was it? Something more, she fancied, about valuing something more than something else. Tommy Clairloch was the first thing, she was sure of that. Aunt Cecilia had not said it, but she had meant it.... She was going to sleep, after all; what a blessing!... What was that other thing? It was hard to think when one was so comfortable. Oh, yes, she had it now—the love of a husband!

Whose husband? The young wife's, to be sure. And who was the young wife? She herself, obviously. But—the thought flared up like a strong lamp through the thickening fog of her brain —*her* husband did not love her! She and James were not like ordinary young wives and husbands.... How silly of her not to have seen that before! That changed everything, of course. Aunt Cecilia was on a wrong track altogether; her—what was the word?—her premises were false. That threw out her whole argument—everything—including that about Tommy.

Gradually the sudden illumination of that thought faded in the evergrowing shadow of sleep. Now only vague wisps of ideas floated through her mind; even those were but pale reflections of that one truth; Aunt Cecilia was mistaken.... Aunt Cecilia was wrong.... It was all right about Tommy.... Tommy was all right.... Aunt Cecilia ... was wrong....

Psychologists tell us that ideas make most impression on the mind when they are introduced into it during that indefinite period between sleeping and waking; they then become incorporated directly with our subconscious selves without having to pass through the usual tortuous channels [290] of consciousness and reason. And the sub-consciousness, as every one knows, is a most intimate and important place; once an idea is firmly grounded there it has become substantially a part of our being, so far as we can tell from our incomplete knowledge of our own ideal existence. We are not sure that a single introduction of this sort can give an idea a good social standing in the realm of sub-consciousness; probably not. But it can help; it can give it at least a nodding acquaintance there. Certain it is, at any rate, that when Beatrice awoke next morning it was with a mind at least somewhat more willing than previously to take for granted, as part of the natural order of things, the fact of the inherent wrongness of Aunt Cecilia and its corollary, the innate rightness of Tommy. (Possibly this corollary would not have appeared so inevitable if the matter had all been threshed out in reason; they are rather lax about logic and such things in sub-consciousness, making a good introduction the one criterion of acceptance.) With the net material result that Beatrice was less inclined than ever to be nervous about Aunt Cecilia and also less inclined than ever to be nervous about Tommy.

The day began in an atmosphere of not unpleasant indolence. Breakfast was late and was followed by the best cigarette of the day on deck—Beatrice's smoking was the secret admiration and envy of all the female half of the younger section. A cool breeze ruffled the harbor and gathered in a flock of clouds from the Sound that left only just enough sunlight to bring out the brilliant colors of the little flags all the yachts had strung up between their mastheads and down again to bowsprit and stern. It was rather pleasant to sit and watch these and other things; the continual small traffic of the harbor, the occasional arrivals of more slim white yachts.

Presently Harry and Madge and Beatrice and Tommy and one or two others made a short excursion to the shore, for no other apparent reason than to join the procession of smartly dressed people that for one day in the year convert the quiet town of New London into one of the gayest-looking places on earth. Tommy was much in evidence here, fairly crowing with delight over each new thing that pleased him. It was all Harry could do to keep him from swathing himself in blue; Tommy had become an enthusiastic Yalensian. He had spent a week-end with Harry in New Haven during the spring; he had driven with Aunt Selina in the victoria, he had [291] been shown the university and had met a number of pretty gells and rippin' fellahs; what business was it of Wiggers if he wanted to wave a blue flag? Wiggers ought to feel jolly complimented, instead of makin' a row!

"You'd say just the same about Harvard, if you went there—the people are just as nice," said Harry. "Besides, Harvard will probably win. You may buy us each a blue feather, if you like, and call it square at that."

Beatrice smiled, but she thought Harry a little hard.

"Never mind, Tommy," said she; "you can sit by me at the race this afternoon and we'll both scream our lungs out, if we want."

That was substantially what happened. Luncheon on the yacht—an enormous "standing" affair, with lots of extra people—was followed by a general exodus to the observation trains. Tommy had never seen an observation train before and was full of curiosity. They didn't have them at Henley. It was all jolly different from Henley, wasn't it, though? As they walked through the railroad yards to their car he was inclined to think it wasn't as good fun as Henley. One missed the punts, and all that. Once seated in the car, however, with an unobstructed view of the river, it was a little better, and by the time the crews had rowed up to the starting-point he had almost come round to the American point of view. It might not be so jolly as Henley, quite, but Jove! one could see!

Tommy sat on Beatrice's left; on her right was Mr. MacGrath and beyond him again was Aunt

Cecilia. The others were scattered through the train in similar mixed groups. Beatrice thought it a good idea to split up that way.... She began to have an idea she was going to enjoy this race.

So she did, too, more than she had enjoyed anything in—oh, months! She couldn't remember much about it afterward, though she did remember who won, which is more than we do. She had a recollection, to begin with, of Tommy joining in lustily in every Yale cheer and of Mr. MacGrath trying not to thump Aunt Cecilia on the back at an important moment and thumping herself instead. He apologized very nicely. Presently Tommy committed the same offense against her and neglected to apologize entirely, but she didn't mind in the least. (That was the sort of race it [292] was.) Perhaps there lurked in the back of her brain a certain sense of joy in the omission.... She herself became infected with Tommy-mania before long.

And the spectacle was an exhilarating one, under any circumstances. The noble sweep of the river, the keen blue of the water and sky, the green of the hills, the brilliant double row of yachts and the general atmosphere of hilarity were enough to make one glad to be alive. And then the excitement of the race itself, the sense of participation the motion of the train gave one, the almost painful fascination of watching those two little sets of automatons, the involuntary, electric response from the crowd when one or the other of them pulled a little into the lead, the thrill of bursting out from behind some temporary obstruction and seeing them down there, quite near now, entering the last half-mile with one's own crew just a little, ever so little, ahead! From which moment it seemed both a second and an age to the finish, that terrific, heart-raising finish, with its riot of waving colors and its pandemonium of toots from the water and cries from the land....

On the whole, we suppose Yale must have won that race. For after all, it isn't quite so pleasant when the other crew wins, no matter how close the race was and no matter how good a loser one happens to be. Tommy was as good a loser as you could easily find, but not even he could have been as cheerful as all that on the ride back if his crew had lost. Indeed, cheerful was rather a weak word with which to describe Tommy by this time. Beatrice, doing her best to calm him down, became aware, from glances shot at him from various—mostly feminine—directions, that some people would have characterized his condition by a much sharper and shorter word. Involuntarily, almost against her will, Beatrice indignantly repelled their accusation. What nonsense! They didn't know Tommy; he was naturally like this. Though there had been champagne at lunch, of course....

Rather an interesting experience, that ride back to town. The enforced inactivity gave one a chance to think, in the intervals of tugging at Tommy's coat tails. Why should she be enjoying herself so ridiculously? Whole-souled enjoyment was not a thing she had been accustomed to [293] during the last few years, at any rate since.... Yes, she had enjoyed herself more this afternoon than at any time since she had been married; but what of it? She attached no blame to James; it was not James' fault; nothing was anybody's fault. She was taking a little, a very little fun where she found it, that was all.

The train pulled up in the yards and thought was discontinued. It was resumed a few minutes later, however, as they sat in the launch, waiting for the rest of their party to join them. She happened to be sitting just opposite to Aunt Cecilia, on whom her eyes idly rested. Aunt Cecilia! What about Aunt Cecilia? She was wrong, of course! She did not understand; she was wrong! Tommy was all right....

So sub-consciousness got in its little work, till conscious reason sallied forth and routed it. Oh, why, Beatrice asked herself, with a mental motion as of throwing off an entangling substance, why all this nonsensical worrying about a danger that did not exist? What danger was there of her—making a fool of herself over Tommy when.... She did not follow that thought out; it was better to leave those "when" clauses hanging in the air, when possible.

But Tommy! Poor, good-natured, simple, ineffective Tommy!

She resolved to think no longer, but to give herself entirely over to what slight pleasure the moment had to offer She dressed and dined in good spirits, with a sense of anticipation almost childlike in its innocence.

After dinner there was a general exodus to the Griswold. From the moment she stepped on to the hotel dock, surrounded by its crowd of cheerfully bobbing launches, she became infected with the prevailing spirit of gaiety. Tommy was right; Americans did know how to enjoy themselves!

They made their way up the lawn toward the big brilliant hotel. They reached the door of the ballroom and stopped a moment. In this interval Beatrice became aware of James at her elbow.

"You'd better dance with me first," he said.

They danced two or three times around the room in complete silence. Beatrice did not in the least mind dancing with James, indeed she rather enjoyed it, he danced so well. But why address her in that sepulchral tone; why make his invitation sound like a threat; why not at least put up a [294] pretense of making duty a pleasure? She was conscious of a slight rise of irritation; if James was going to be a skeleton at this feast.... She was relieved when he handed her over to one of the other men.

But James had no intention of being a skeleton. He went back to bed before any of the others, alleging a headache. Beatrice learned this indirectly, through Harry, and felt rather disappointed.

She would have preferred to have him remain and enjoy himself; she did not bother to explain why. But he was apparently determined that nothing should make him enjoy himself. James was rather irritating, sometimes. She said as much, to Harry, who assented, frowning slightly. She saw a chance to get in some of the small work of destiny-fighting.

"He's not been at all natural lately," she said; "I've been quite worried about him. I wish you'd watch him and tell me what to do about it. I feel rather to blame for it, naturally."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry," said Harry. "Working in the city in summer is hard on any one, of course."

"I'm afraid it's more than that, and I want your help. You understand James better than I do, I think."

"No, you're wrong there. I don't understand James at all. No one really understands any one else, as a matter of fact. We think we do, but we don't. The very simplest nature is a regular Cretan labyrinth."

"But a wife ought to be the Theseus of her husband's labyrinth, that's the point."

"Perhaps you're right. Here's hoping you don't find a minotaur in the middle!"

She didn't worry much about it, however. Tommy cut in soon afterward, and they didn't talk about James or labyrinths either. Tommy had not danced with her before that evening. She was going to say something about that, but decided not to. It was too jolly dancing to talk, really. Tommy danced very well—quite as well as James. They danced the contemporary American dances for some time and then they broke into an old-fashioned whirling English waltz; the dance they had both been brought up on. It brought memories to the minds of both; they felt old times and places creeping back on them. [295]

"Do you remember the last time we did this?" asked Tommy presently.

"At the Dimchurches', the winter before I came here."

"Didn't last long, though. You were the prettiest gell there."

"I suppose I was.—And you were just Tommy Erskine then, and awfully ineligible!"

What an absurd remark to make! If she was going to let her tongue run away with her like that, she had better keep her mouth shut.

They danced on in silence for some time, rested in the cool of a verandah and then danced again. The room was already beginning to empty somewhat, making dancing more of a pleasure than ever. They danced on till they were tired and then sat out again.

"We might take a stroll about," suggested Tommy presently.

They walked down the steps and out on the lawn. Presently they came near the windows of the bar, which was on the ground floor of the hotel, and stopped to look in for a moment. It was a lively scene. The room—a great white bare place—was filled with men laughing and shouting and slapping each other on the shoulder and bellowing college songs, all in a thick blue haze of tobacco smoke. They were also drinking, and Beatrice noticed that when they had drained their glasses they invariably threw them carelessly on the floor, adding a new sound to the din and fairly paving the room with broken glass. Many of them were mildly intoxicated, but none were actually drunk; the whole sounded the note of celebration in the ballroom strengthened and masculinized. It had its effect on Beatrice; it was a pleasure to think that one lived in a world where people could enjoy themselves thoroughly and uproariously and without becoming bestial about it.

"It's really very jolly, isn't it?" she said at last.

"Oh, rippin'," assented Tommy.

"Perhaps you'd rather go in there now?"

"No, no. Don't know the fellahs—I should feel out of it. Wiggers was right.—Besides, I'd rather stay with you."

Beatrice wondered if she had intended to make Tommy say that. [296]

They wandered off through the hotel grounds and saw other couples doing the same. Doing rather more, in fact. After some search they found an empty bench and sat down.

Tommy's education had been in many ways a narrow one, but it had equipped him perfectly for making use of such situations as the present. He turned about on the bench, leaning one arm on its back and facing Beatrice's profile squarely.

"Jove!" he said reminiscently. "Haven't done that since Oxford."

"What?"

"That." He waved his head in the direction of the well populated shadows.

"Oh," answered Beatrice carelessly. The profound lack of interest in her tone had its effect.

"I did it to you once, by Jove! Remember?"

"No. You never did, Tommy; you know that perfectly well."

"Well, I will now, then!"

He did.

The next moment he rather wished he had not, Beatrice's slow smile of contemptuous tolerance made him feel like such a child.

"Tommy, it's only you, of course, so it really doesn't matter, but if you try to do that again I shall punish you."

Her power over him was as comforting to her as it was disconcerting to him. For a moment; after that she felt a pang of irritation. The idea of a married woman being kissed by a man not her husband was in itself rather revolting, and the thought that she was that married woman stung. As if that was not enough, the thought came to her that she could have stopped Tommy at any moment and had not. Had she not, in fact, secretly—even to herself—intended that he should do that very thing when they first sat down? She had used her power for contemptible ends. The thought that after all it was only poor ineffectual Tommy only increased her sense of degradation. All her pleasure had fled.

"Come along, Tommy," she said, rising; "it's time to go home."

It was indeed late—long after twelve. The launch, as she remembered it, was to make its last trip back to the yacht at half-past; they would be just in time. Tommy walked the length of the dock [297] two or three times calling "Halcyone! Halcyone!" but there was no response from the already dwindling throng of launches. They sat down to wait, both moody and silent.

From the very first Beatrice suspected that they had been left. It was the natural sequence of the preceding episode; that was the way things happened. Her sense of disillusionment and irritation increased. The dancing had stopped, but the drinking continued; people were wandering or lying about the lawn in disgusting states of intoxication. What had been a joyous bacchanal had degenerated into a horrid saturnalia. Once, as they walked down to see if the launch had arrived, a man stumbled by them with a lewd remark. Beatrice remained on the verandah and made Tommy go down alone after that. His mournful "Halcyone!" floated up like the cry of a soul from Acheron.

By one o'clock or so it became obvious to everybody that they had been forgotten, and Beatrice instructed Tommy to hire any boat he could get to take them to the yacht. He had a long interview with the chief nautical employee of the hotel, who promised to see what he could do. That appeared to be singularly little. At last, with altered views of the American way of running things, Beatrice went down herself and talked to him. He would do what he could, but.... It was two o'clock; the dock was deserted.

Beatrice knew he would do nothing and bethought herself of the two rooms in the hotel that Aunt Cecilia had engaged. Her impression was that they were not being used to-night; their party was smaller than it had been the night before. She went to the hotel office and asked if there were some rooms engaged for Mrs. James Wimbourne and if they were already occupied. After some research it appeared that there were and they weren't. Well, Beatrice and Tommy would take them. The night clerk was interested. He understood the situation perfectly and refrained from commenting upon their lack of baggage.

So Beatrice was shown into one room and Tommy into the other, the two parting with a brief good night in the corridor.

The first thing Beatrice noticed about the room was that there was a communicating door [298] between it and Tommy's room. She saw that there was a bolt on her side, however, and made sure that it was shut.

Then she rang for a chambermaid and asked for a nightgown and toothbrush.

CHAPTER X [299]

MR. AND MRS. ALFRED LAMMLE

It was generally looked upon as rather a good joke. Aunt Cecilia, of course, was prolific of apologies; the launch had made so many trips, and every one thought Beatrice and Lord Clairloch had gone at another time; there had been no general gathering afterward, they had all gone to bed as soon as they reached the yacht, and James, as Beatrice knew, had gone to bed early with a headache; how clever it was of Beatrice to have thought of those two rooms and wasn't it lucky they had been engaged, after all, and so forth. But most of the others were inclined to be

facetious. Breakfast, thanks to their efforts, was quite a merry meal.

For the two most nearly concerned the situation was almost devoid of embarrassment. They arrived at the yacht shortly after eight in a launch they had ordered the night before at the hotel, and repaired to their respective rooms without even being seen in their evening clothes. By the time breakfast was over Beatrice had quite recovered from her irritation at Tommy and had even almost ceased to blame herself for the events of the previous night.

The party broke up after lunch, the yacht proceeding to Bar Harbor and the guests going their various ways. Beatrice and James went directly back to New York. James was very silent in the train, as silent as he had been on the way up, but Beatrice was less inclined to find fault with him for that than before. As she looked at him quietly reading in the chair opposite her it even occurred to her that his silence was preferable to Tommy's companionable chirpings, even at their best. And with Tommy at his worst, as he had been last night, there was no comparison. Oh, yes, she was thoroughly tired of Tommy!

Dinner in their apartment passed off almost as quietly as the journey, yet quite pleasantly, in Beatrice's opinion. The night was cool, and a refreshing breeze blew in from the harbor. After the [300]
maid had left the room and they sat over their coffee and cigarettes, James spoke.

"About last night," he began, and stopped.

"Yes?" said Beatrice encouragingly.

"I thought at first I wouldn't mention it, and then I decided it would be rather cowardly not to ... I want to say that—"

"That what?"

"That I have no objections."

"To what?" Her bewilderment was not feigned.

"To last night! I don't want you to think I'm jealous, or unsympathetic, or anything like that.... You are at liberty to do what you please—to get pleasure where you can find it. I understand."

"You don't understand at all!" Her manner was still one of bewilderment, though possibly other feelings were beginning to enter.

"I understand, and shall understand in the future. I shan't mention the matter again. Only one thing more—whenever our—our bargain interferes too much, you can end it. I shan't offer any opposition."

She sat frozen in her chair, making no sign that she had understood, so he explained in an almost gentle tone of voice: "I mean you can divorce me, you know."

"Divorce!"

"Oh, very well, just as you like. Of course our marriage ceases to be such from now on...."

So unprepared, so at peace with herself and the world had she been that it was only now that she fully comprehended his meaning. James was accusing her, making the great accusation ... James thought that she.... Of course, not being the kind of a woman who dissolves in tears at that accusation, her first dominant emotion was one of anger; an anger sharper than any she had ever felt; an anger she would have thought to be impossible to her, after all these months of lassitude, all these years of chastening. She rose from her chair and made a step toward the door; her impulse being to walk out of the room, out of the house, out of James' life, without a word. Not a word of self-defense; some charges are too vile to merit reply!

Then commonsense flared up, conquering anger and pride. No, she must not give way to her pride; she must act like a sensible being. After all, James was her husband, he had some right to [301]
accuse if he thought proper; the falseness of his accusation did not take away his right of explanation; he should be made to see.

Slowly she turned and went back to her place. She sat down squarely facing James with both hands on the table in front of her, and prepared to talk like a lawyer presenting a case. James was watching her quietly, interested, perhaps ever so slightly amused, but not in the least moved.

"James, as I understand it, you think that I—that Tommy and I...."

"Yes?"

"Well, you've made a great mistake, that's all. You've condemned me without a hearing. You've assumed that I was guilty—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, let's not talk about being guilty or innocent or wronging each other or being faithful to each other! Those things have no meaning for us. I'm not blaming you—I've tried to explain that to the best of my ability!"

"Very well, then, let us say you have made a mistake in facts."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean—what should I mean? That Tommy and I are not lovers."

"Well, what then?"

"What then—?"

"Yes, what of it? I never said you were, did I? Suppose you're not, then; if you're glad, I'm glad, if you're sorry, I'm sorry. It doesn't alter our position."

"James, you don't understand!"

"What?"

"When you spoke before you thought that I was—that I had sinned.—I do consider it a sin; perhaps you'll allow me to call it so if it pleases me."

"Certainly." He smiled.

"Well, you were wrong. I haven't."

"All right; I was wrong. You haven't."

"Very well, then!"

"Very well WHAT?"

"James!"

"I'm sorry.—But what are you driving at? I wasn't accusing you, you know; I was simply telling you you were free, which you knew before, and offering you more freedom if you wanted it. Why this outburst of virtue?" [302]

"James, you are rather brutal!"

"I'm sorry if I seem so; I don't mean to be." He shifted his position slightly and went on quite gently with another smile: "Beatrice, if you have successfully met a temptation—or what you look upon as a temptation—I'm sure I'm very glad. After all, we are friends, and what pleases my friend pleases me, other things being equal. But does that pleasing fact in itself alter things between us when, from my own selfish point of view, I don't care in the least whether you overcame the temptation or not? And does it, I ask you, alter facts? Does it make you any less fond of Tommy than you are; does it make you as fond of me as you are of him?"

"Oh, James! You understand so little—"

"Whatever I may understand or not understand I know that you spent all of last evening and practically all yesterday and a great part of the evening before with Tommy, and that you gave no particular evidence of being bored ... Beatrice, you were happy with him, happy as a child, the happiest person in the whole crowd, and you showed it, too! Do you mean to say that you've ever, at any time in your life, been as happy in my society as all that! No! Deny it if you can!"

"James, you are jealous!" The discovery came to her like an inspiration, sending a thrill through her. She did not stop to analyze it now, but when she came to think it over later she realized that there was something in that thrill quite distinct from the satisfaction of finding a good reply to James' really rather searching (though of course quite unfounded) charges.

"There's a good deal of the cave-man left in you, James, argue as you may. Do you think any one but a jealous man could talk as you are talking now? 'Deny it if you can'—what do you care whether I deny it or not, according to what you just said? Oh, James, how are you living up to your part of the bargain?"

Her tone was free from rancor or spite, and her words had their effect. James was not beyond appreciating the justice in what she said. He left his chair and raised his hand to his forehead with a gesture of bewilderment. [303]

"Oh, Lord, I suppose you're right," he muttered, and began pacing the room.

So they remained in silence for some time, she sitting quietly in her chair as before and he walking aimlessly up and down, desperately trying to adjust himself to this new fact. It is strange how people will give themselves away when they begin talking; he had been so sure of himself in his thoughts; he had gone over such matters so satisfactorily in his own head! Beatrice understood his plight and respected it; it was not for her, after these last few days, to minimize the trials of self-discovery....

The maid popped in at the pantry door and popped out again.

"All right, Mary, you can take the things," said Beatrice, and led the way into the living room.

There was no air of finality in this move, but the slight domestic incident at least had the effect of putting a check on introspection and restoring things to a more normal footing. Once in the living room—it was a large high room, built as a studio and reaching up two stories—they were both much more at ease; they began to feel capable of resuming negotiations, when the time arrived, like two normal sensible beings. James threw himself on a couch; Beatrice moved about the room, opening a window here, turning up a light there, arranging a vase of flowers somewhere else. At last, deeming the time ripe, she stopped in one of her noiseless trips and spoke down at her husband.

"James, do you realize that you alone, of all the people on the yacht, had the remotest suspicion? You remember how they all joked about it?"

Oh, the danger of putting things into words! Beatrice's voice was as gentle as she could make it; there was even a note of casual amusement in it, but in some intangible way, merely by reopening the subject vocally, Beatrice laid herself open to attack. James' lip curled; he could no more keep it from doing so than keep his hair from curling.

"You must remember, however, that they were not fully acquainted with the circumstances...."

Beatrice turned away in despair, not angry at James, but realizing the inevitability of his reply as well as he himself. She sat down in an armchair and leaned her head against the back of it; she [304] wished it might not be necessary ever to rise from that chair again. The blind hopelessness of their situation lay heavy on them both.

James spoke next.

"Beatrice, will you tell me what it's all about? Why are we squabbling this way? How can we find out—what on earth are we going to do about it all?"

"I've no more idea than you, James."

"Every time we get talking we always fall back on our bargain, as if that was the one reliable thing in the whole universe. Always our bargain, our bargain! Beatrice, what in Heaven's name is our bargain?"

"Marriage, I take it."

"You know it's more than that—less than that—not that, anyway! At first it was all quite clear to me; we were two people whose lives had been broken and we were going to try to mend them as best we might. And as it seemed we could do that better together than alone we determined to marry. Our marriage was to be a perfectly loose, free arrangement, and we were to stick to its terms only as long as we could profit by doing so. We were to part without ill feeling and with perfect understanding. And now, at the first shred of evidence—no, not even evidence, suspicion—that you want to break away we start quarreling like a pair of cats, and I become a monster of jealousy, like any comic husband in a play...."

Beatrice's heart sank again at those words; there was no mistaking the bitterness in them. That heightened a fear she had felt when James had answered her about the people on the yacht; James was still smarting with the discovery of his jealousy, and the trouble was that the smart was so sharp that he might not forgive her for having made him feel it. She felt the taste of her little triumph turn to ashes in her mouth.

"No, James, no!" she interrupted hurriedly. "You weren't, really. That was all nonsense—we both saw that...."

"No, it's true—I was jealous. Jealous! and for what? And what's more, I still am. I can't help it. When I think of Tommy, and the boat-race, and all that. Oh, Lord, the idiocy of it!"

"I don't particularly mind your being jealous, James, if that's any comfort to you." [305]

"No! Why on earth should you? You're living up to your part of the bargain, and I'm not—that's what it comes to. Oh, it's all my fault, every bit of it—no doubt of that!"

His words gave Beatrice a new sensation, not so much a sinking as a steeling of the heart. His self-accusation was all very well, but if it also involved trampling on her—! And she did begin to feel trampled upon; much more so now than when he had directly accused her.... That was odd! Was it possible that she would rather be vilified than ignored, even by James?

Meanwhile James was ranting on—it had not occurred to her that it was ranting before, but it did now:—"There's something about the mere institution of marriage, I suppose, that makes me feel this way; the old idea of possession or something.... You were right about the cave-man! It's something stronger than me—I can't help it; but if it's going on like this every time you—every time you speak to another man, it'll make a delightful thing out of our married life, won't it? This free and easy bargain of ours, this sensible arrangement! Why, it's a thousand times harder than an ordinary marriage, just because I have nothing to hold you with!...

"Beatrice, we're caught in something. Trapped! Don't you feel it? Something you can't see, can't understand, only feel gradually pressing in on you, paralyzing you, smothering you! There's no use blaming each other for it; we're both wound up in it equally; it's something far stronger than either of us. A pair of blind mice in a trap!..."

He flung himself across the room to an open window and stood there, resting his elbows on the sill and gazing out over the twinkling lights of the city. Beatrice sat immovable in her chair, but her bosom was heaving with the memory of certain things he had said. Another revulsion of feeling mastered her; she no longer thought of him as ranting; she felt his words too strongly for that. A pair of blind mice in a trap—yes, yes, she felt all that, but that was not what had stirred her so. What was that he had said about having nothing to hold her with?...

She watched him as he stood there trying to cool his tortured mind in the evening air. He was tremendously worked up; she wondered if he could stand this sort of thing physically; she [306] remembered how ill he had been looking lately.... She watched him with a new anxiety, half

expecting to see him topple over backward at any moment, overcome by the strain. Then she could help him; her mind conjured up a vision of herself running into the dining room for some whisky and back to him with the glass in her hand; "Here, drink this," and her hand under his head.... It was wicked of her to wish anything of the kind, of course; but if she could only be of some use to him! If he would but think of turning to her for help in getting out of his trap! He would not find his fellow-mouse cold or unsympathetic.

She could not overcome her desire to find out if any such idea was in his mind. She went over to him and touched him gently on the shoulder.

"James—"

"No, not now, please; I want to think."

And his shoulder remained a piece of tweed under her hand; he did not even bother to shake her off.

She sat down again to wait.

When at last he left the window it was to sit down by a lamp and take up a book. That was not a bad sign, in itself, as long as he made his reading an interlude and not an ending. But as she sat watching him it became more and more evident that he regarded their interview as closed. And so they sat stolidly for some time, James determined that nothing should lead him into another humiliating exhibition of feeling and Beatrice determined that whatever happened she would make him stop ignoring her. And though she was at first merely hurt by his indifference she presently began to feel her determination strengthened by something else, something which, starting as hardly more than natural feminine pique shortly grew into irritation, then into anger of a slow-burning type and lastly, as her eyes tired of seeing him sit there so unaffectedly absorbed in his reading, into something for the moment approaching active dislike. We all know what hell hath no fury like, and Beatrice, as she fed her mind on the thought of how often he had insulted and repelled and above all ignored her that evening, began to consider herself very much in the light of a woman scorned.

"Is that all, James?" she ventured at length. [307]

He put down his book and looked up with the manner of one making a great effort to be reasonable.

"What do you want, Beatrice?"

Beatrice would have given a good deal to be able to say that what she really wanted was that he should take her to him as he had that day at Bar Harbor and never once since, but as she could not she made a substitute answer.

"We can't leave things as they are, can we?"

"Why not? Haven't we said too much already?"

"Too much for peace, but not enough for satisfaction. We can't leave things hanging in the air this way."

"Very well, then, if you insist. How shall we begin?"

"Well, suppose we begin with our bargain—see what its terms are and whether we can live up to them and whether it's for our benefit to do so."

"All right. What do you consider the terms of our bargain to be?"

They were both talking in the measured tones of people determined to keep control over themselves at all costs. They looked at each other warily, as though guarding against being maneuvered into a betrayal of temper or feeling.

"Well, in the first place, I assume that we want to present a good front to the world. Bold and united. We want to prevent people from knowing...."

"Certainly."

"And if we give the impression of being happy together we've gone a good way toward that end."

"Yes, that's logical."

"Well—?"

"What?"

"It's your turn now, isn't it?"

"Oh, no; you've begun so well you'd better go on."

"Well, I've only got one more idea on the subject, and that is just tentative—a sort of suggestion." She sat down on the sofa by him and strove to make her manner a little more intimate without becoming mawkish or intrusive. "It has occurred to me that we haven't given that impression very much in the past, and I think the reason for that may be that we—well, that we don't work together enough. Does it ever occur to you, James, that we don't understand each other very

well? Not nearly as much as we might, I sometimes think, without—without having to pretend anything. We know each other so slightly! Sometimes it gives me the oddest feeling, to think I am married to you, who are stranger to me than almost any of my friends...." [308]

She feared the phrasing of that thought was a little unfortunate, and broke off suddenly with: "But perhaps I'm boring you?"

"No, no—I'm very much interested. How do you think we ought to go about it?"

"It's difficult to say, of course. How do you think? I should suggest, for one thing, that we should be less shy with each other—less afraid of each other. Especially about things that concern us. Even if it is hard to talk about such things, I think we ought to. We should be more frank with each other, James."

"As we have been this evening, for example?"

The cynical note rang in his voice, the note she most dreaded.

"No, I didn't mean that, necessarily. I don't mind saying, though, that I think even our talking to-night has been a good thing. It has cleared the air, you know. See where we are now!"

"Yes, and it's cleared you too. But what about me?"

"I don't understand."

"Oh, you've come out of it all right! You've behaved yourself, vindicated yourself, done nothing you didn't expect to, nothing you have reason to be ashamed of afterward. I have! I haven't been able to open my mouth without making a fool of myself in one way or another...."

"Only because you're overtired, James...."

"I've said things I never thought myself capable of saying, and I've found I thought things that no decent man should think. It was an interesting experience."

"James, my dear, don't be so bitter! I'm not blaming you. I can forget all that!"

She laid her hand on his knee and the action, together with the quality of her voice, had a visible effect on him. He paused a moment and looked at her curiously. When he spoke again it was without bitterness.

"That's awfully decent of you, Beatrice, but the trouble is I can't forget. Those things stay in the memory, and they're not desirable companions. And as talking, the kind of frank talking you suggest, seems to bring them out in spite of me, I think perhaps we'd better not have much of that kind of talk. It seems to me that the less we talk the better we shall get on." [309]

Beatrice was silent a moment in her turn. She had not brought him quite to where she wanted him, but she had brought him nearer than he had been before. She resolved to let things stay as they were.

"Very well, James," she said, leaning back by his side; "we won't talk if you don't want to. About those things, that is. There are plenty of other things we can talk about. And let's go to places more together and do things more together. I see no reason why we shouldn't get on very well together. After all, I do enjoy being with you, when you're in a good mood, more than with any one else I know—that I could be with—"

"Then why—Oh, Lord!" He stopped himself and sank forward in despair with his head on his hands.

"Well, go on and say it."

"No, no."

"Yes. It's better that way."

"I was going to say, why did you appear to enjoy yourself with Tommy so much more than—Oh, it's no use, Beatrice! I can't help it—it's beyond me!"

"Oh, James!"

"Yes, that's just it! It's the devil in me!"

"When that was all over, James!"

"All over! Then there was something!... Oh, good *Lord*! We can't go through it all over again!"

"James, I meant that you were all over feeling that—"

"Yes, yes, I know you did, and I thought you meant the other and said that, and of course I had no right to because of what we are, and so forth, over and over again! Round and round and round, like a mouse in a trap! Caught again!..."

He got up and walked across the room once or twice, steadying himself with one last great effort. In a moment he stopped dead in front of her.

"See here, Beatrice!"

"Yes?"

"It can't happen again, do you see? It's got to stop right here and now! I can't stand it—call it weak of me if you like, but I can't. It'll drive me stark mad. We are not going to talk about these things again, do you see?" [310]

"What sort of things?"

"Anything! Anything that can possibly bring these things into my head and make a human fiend of me. And you're not to tempt me to talk of them, either. Do you promise?"

"I promise anything that's reasonable—anything that will help you. But do you intend to let this—this weakness end everything—spoil our whole life?"

"Spoil! What on earth is there to spoil? We've got on well enough up to now, haven't we? Well, we'll go back to where we were, where we were this morning! And we'll stay there, please God, as long as we two shall live! You're free, absolutely free, from now on! I shan't question anything you may care to do from this moment, I promise you!"

She remained silent a moment, awed in spite of herself by the fervency of his words. She was cruelly disappointed in him. She had made so many attempts, she had humbled herself so often, she had suffered his rebuffs so many times and she had brought him at one time in spite of himself so near to a happier state of things that his one-minded insistence on his own humiliation seemed to her indescribably petty and selfish. His jealousy, his vile, rudimentary dog-in-the-manger jealousy; that was what he couldn't get over; that was what he could not forgive her for! What a small thing that was to resent, in view of what she herself had so steadfastly refrained from resenting!... However, since he wished it, there was nothing more to be done. She could be as cold and unemotional as he, if it came to the test.

"Then you definitely give up every effort toward a better understanding?"

"Yes!"

"And you prefer, once for all, to be strangers rather than friends?"

"Strangers don't squabble!"

"Very well, then, James," she said with a quiet smile, "strangers let it be. I daresay it's better so, after all. I shouldn't wonder if you found me quite as good and thorough a stranger, from now on, as you could desire. It was foolish of me to talk to you as I did." [311]

"No, no—don't get blaming yourself. It's such a cheap form of satisfaction."

She stood looking at him a moment with coldly glittering eyes.

"It's quite true," she repeated; "I was a fool. I was a fool to imagine that you and I could have anything in common. Ever. Well, nothing can very well put us farther apart than we are now. There's a certain comfort in that, perhaps."

"There is."

"At last we agree. Husbands and wives should always agree. Good-night, James."

"Good-night,"

He watched her as she glided from the room, so slim and beautiful and disdainful. Perhaps a shadow of regret for her passed across his mind, a thought of what a woman, what a wife, even, she might have been under other circumstances; but it did not go far into him. Things were as they were; he had long since given up bothering about them, trying only to think and feel as little as possible. He took up his book again and read far into the night.

CHAPTER XI [312]

HESITANCIES AND TEARS

Thomas Mackintosh Drummond Erskine, by courtesy known as Viscount Clairloch, was not a remarkably complicated person. His life was governed by a few broad and well-tried principles which he found, as many had found before him, covered practically all the contingencies he was called upon to deal with. One wanted things, and if possible, one got them. That was the first and great commandment of nature, and the second was akin to it; one did nothing contrary to a thing generally known as decency. This was a little more complicated, for though decency was a natural thing—one always wanted to be decent, other things being equal—it had a rather difficult technique which had to be mastered by a long slow process. If any one had asked Tommy how

this technique was best obtained he would undoubtedly have answered, by a course of six years at either Eton, Harrow or Winchester, followed by three years at one of half a dozen colleges he could name at Oxford or Cambridge.

Occasionally, of course—though not often—the paths of desire and decency diverged, and this divergence was sometimes provocative of unpleasantness. Treated sensibly, however, the problem could always be brought to an easy and simple solution. Tommy found that in such a case it was always possible to do one of two things; persuade oneself either that the desire was compatible with decency or that it did not exist at all. Either of those simple feats of dialectic accomplished, everything worked out quite beautifully. It is a splendid thing to have been educated at Harrow and Christchurch.

Ever since he arrived in America it had been evident to Tommy that he wanted Beatrice. He did not want her with quite the absorbing intensity that would make him one of the great lovers of history—Harrow and Christchurch decreed that one should go fairly easy on wanting a married [313] woman—but still he wanted her, for him, very much indeed. Up to the night of the boat-race everything had gone swimmingly. Then, indeed, he had received a setback; a setback which came very near making him abandon further pursuit and proceed forthwith to those portions of America which lie to the west of Upper Montclair. If Aunt Cecilia had not casually invited him to accompany the yacht on its trip round Cape Cod he might have started the very next morning. But he went to Bar Harbor, and before he left there it had become plain to him that he could probably have what he had so long desired.

Everything had favored him. Aunt Cecilia had made it pleasant for him for a while, and when the time came when Aunt Cecilia might be expected to become tired of making it pleasant for him others came forward who were more than willing to do as much. Tommy was a desirable as well as an agreeable guest; he looked well in the papers. With the result that he was still playing about Bar Harbor at the end of July, at which time Beatrice, looking quite lovely and wan and heat-fagged, came, unattended by her husband, to be the chief ornament of Aunt Cecilia's spacious halls.

And how Beatrice had changed since he last saw her! She was as little the cold-eyed, contemptuous Artemis of that night in New London as she was the fresh-cheeked débutante of his early knowledge; and she was infinitely more attractive, he thought, than either of them. She had a new way of looking up at him when he came to greet her; she was willing to pass long hours in his sole company; she depended on him for amusement, she relied on him in various little ways; and more important, she soon succeeded in making him forget his fear of her. For the first time in his knowledge of her he had the feeling of being fully as strong as she, fully as self-controlled, as firm-willed. This was in reality but another symptom of her power over him, but he never recognized it as such.

Appetite, as we know, increases with eating, and every sign of favor that came his way fanned the almost extinguished flame of Tommy's desire into renewed warmth and vigor. Before many weeks it had grown into something warmer and more vigorous than anything he had ever experienced, till at last his gentle bosom became the battlefield of the dreaded Armageddon between desire and decency. It wasn't really dreaded, in his case, because he was not the sort of person who is [314] capable of living very far ahead of the present moment, and perhaps, in view of the strength of both the contending forces, the term Armageddon may be an exaggeration; but it was the most serious internal conflict that the good-natured viscount (by courtesy) ever knew.

But the struggle, though painful, was short-lived. After going to bed for five evenings in succession fearing that care would drive sleep from his pillow that night, and sleeping soundly from midnight till eight-thirty, the illuminating thought came to him that, owing to the truly Heaven-made laws of the country in which he then was, the conflict practically did not exist. In America people divorced; no foolish stigma was attached to the process, as at home; it was easy, it was respectable, it was done! He blessed his stars; what a marvelous stroke of luck that Beatrice had married an American and not an Englishman! He thought of the years of carking secrecy through which such things are dragged in England, and contrasted it with the neat despatch of the Yankee system. A few weeks of legal formalities, tiresome, of course, but trivial in view of the object, and then—a triumphant return to native shores, closing in a long vista of years with Beatrice at his side as Lady Clairloch and eventually as Lady Strathalmond! Sweet ultimate union of desire and decency! He gave thanks to Heaven in his fervent, simple-souled way.

Nothing remained save to persuade Beatrice to take the crucial step. Well, there would be little trouble about that, judging by the way things were going....

As for Beatrice, she was at first much too exhausted, both physically and mentally, to think much about Tommy one way or the other. That last month in New York had been a horribly enervating one, both meteorologically and domestically speaking. Scarcely had she been able to bring herself to face the impossibility of winning her husband's affection when the hot weather came on, the crushing heat of July, that burned every ounce of a desire to live out of one and made the whole world as great a desert as one's own home.... It was James who had suggested her going to Aunt Cecilia's—"because he didn't want me to die on his hands," Beatrice idly reflected, as she lay at last in a hammock on the broad verandah, luxuriating in the sea breeze that made a light [315] wrap necessary.

Then Tommy came back to the Wimbournes' to stay, and a regular daily routine was begun. Beatrice remained in her room all the morning, while Tommy played golf. They met at lunch and

strolled or drove or watched people play tennis together in the afternoon. After dinner Beatrice generally ensconced herself with rugs on the verandah while Tommy buzzed about fetching footstools or cushions or talked to her or simply sat by her side. After a while she found that Tommy was quite good company, if you didn't take him seriously. Tommy—she supposed this was the real foundation of her liking for him—was her countryman. He knew things, he understood things, he looked at things as she had been brought up to look at them. Tommy, to take a small instance, never stifled a smile when she used such words as caliber or schedule, pronouncing them in the English way—the proper way, when all was said and done, for was not England the home and source of the English language?

A few days later, as returning health quickened her perceptions, she realized that another thing that made Tommy agreeable was the fact that he strove honestly to please her. A pleasant change, at least!... She was well enough to be bitter again, it seemed. Not only was Tommy attentive in such matters as rugs and cushions, but he made definite efforts to fit his speech and his moods to her. He found that she liked to talk about England and he was at some pains to read up information about current events there, a thing he had not bothered much about since his departure from home. She had only to ask a leading question about a friend at home and he would gossip for a whole evening about their mutual acquaintance.

Presently she began to discover—or fancy she discovered—hitherto unsounded depths—or what were, comparatively speaking, depths—in Tommy's character.

"I say, how jolly the stars are to-night," he observed as he took his place by her one evening. "Never see the stars, somehow, but I think of tigers. Ever since I went to India. Went off on a tiger hunt, you know, out in the wilds somewhere, and we had to sleep out on a sort of grassy place with a fire in the middle of us, you know, to keep the beasties off. Well, I'd never seen a tiger, outside of the zoo, and I had 'em on the brain. I had a dream about meeting one, and it got [316] so bad that I woke up at last with a shout, thinkin' a tiger was standin' just over me with his two dev'lish old eyes staring down into mine! Then I saw it was only two bright stars, rather close together. But I never can see stars now without thinkin' of tiger's eyes, though I met a tiger quite close on soon after that and his eyes weren't like that, at all....

"Rather sad, isn't it?" he added after a moment.

"Sad? Why?"

"Well, other people have something better than an old beast's blinkers to compare stars to. Women's eyes, you know, and all that."

There was something in the way he said this that made Beatrice reply "Oh, rot, Tommy!" even as she laughed. But his mood entertained her.

"Tommy," she went on, "I believe you'd try, even so, to say something about my eyes and stars if I let you! Though anything less like stars couldn't well be imagined.... Honestly now, Tommy, do my eyes look more like stars or tiger's eyes?"

"Well," answered Tommy with laborious truthfulness, "I suppose they really *look* more like tiger's eyes. But they make me *think* of stars," he added, with a perfect burst of romance and poetry.

"And stars make you think of tiger's eyes! Oh, my poor Tommy!"

"Well, they're dev'lish good-lookin'—you ought to feel jolly complimented!" He wanted to go on and say something about her acting like a tiger, but did not feel quite up to it, at such short notice. But they laughed companionably together.

Yes, Tommy really amused her. There was much to like in the simplicity and kindliness of his nature; Harry had not been proof against it. And there was no harm in him. Beatrice could imagine no more innocuous pleasure than talking with Tommy, even if the conversation ran to eyes—her eyes. She was not bothered this time by any nervous reflections on what fields of amusement were suited to the innocent ramblings of a young wife. And if she was inclined to emphasize the pleasant part of her intercourse and minimize its danger—if indeed there was any —the reason was not far to seek. Even if things went to the last resort, what of it? What had she [317] to lose—now?

Nothing. Not one earthly thing. She was free to glean where she could.

James would be glad—as glad as any one.

Though of course it had not come to that yet....

It was at about this time, however, that Tommy determined it should come to that. Just that. And though he was not one to rush matters, he decided that the sooner it came the better. He learned that James was to come up for a fortnight at the end of August—James' vacation had for some reason dwindled to that length of time—and he desired, in some obscure way, to have it decided before James was actually in the house. But the way had to be paved for the great suggestion and Tommy was not perceptibly quicker at paving than at other intellectual pursuits.

One evening, however, he resolved to be a man of action and at least give an indication of the state of his own heart. With almost devilish craft he decided beforehand on the exact way he would bring the conversation round to the desired point.

"I say, Beatrice," he began when they were settled in their customary place.

"Yes, Tommy?"

"How long do you suppose your aunt wants me kickin' my heels about here?"

"Oh, as long as you want, I suppose. She hasn't told me she was tired of you."

"Yes, but ..."

"But what?"

"I've been here a goodish while, you know. First the boat-race, then the cruise up here, then most of July and now most of August.... Stiffish, wot?... Don't want to wear out my welcome, you know...."

Oh, but it was hard! Why on earth couldn't she do the obvious thing and say, "Why do you want to leave, Tommy?" or something like that? She seemed determined not to give him the least help, so he plunged desperately on.

"Not that I *want* to go, you know. Jolly pleasant here, and all that—rippin' golf, rippin' people, rippin' time altogether...."

He felt himself perspiring profusely. [318]

"Beatrice, do you know *why* I don't want to go?" he burst forth.

Beatrice remained silent, lightly tapping the stone balustrade with her foot. When she spoke it was with perfect self-possession.

"You're not going to be tiresome again, are you, Tommy?"

"Yes!" said Tommy fervently.

Again she paused. "Are you really fond of me, Tommy?" she asked unexpectedly.

"Oh, Lord, yes!"

"How fond?"

"Oh ... frightf'ly!... What do you mean, how fond? You know! Do you want me to throw myself into the sea?... I would," he added in a low voice.

"I didn't mean how much, exactly, but in what way? What do you mean by it all?"

"What's the use of asking me? You know!"

"No, I don't think I do.... Are you fond enough of me to desire everything for my good?"

"Yes!"

"Even at the sacrifice of yourself?"

"Yes!"

"Well, don't you think it's for my ultimate good as a married woman that you shouldn't try to make love to me?"

"What the—Beatrice, don't torment me!"

"I don't want to, but you must see how impossible it is, Tommy. You can't go on talking this way to me."

"Why not?"

"Why, because I'm *married*, obviously! Such things are—well, they simply aren't done!"

Tommy waited a moment. "Do you mean to say, Beatrice...."

"What?"

"Can you truthfully tell me that you—that you aren't fond of me too? Just a little?"

"Certainly!"

"Rot! Utter, senseless rot! You know it isn't so!—"

"Hush, Tommy! People will hear."

"Let 'em hear, then. Beatrice!" he went on more quietly; "there's no use trying to take me in by that 'never knew' rot. Of course you knew, of course you cared. Why've you sat talking with me here, night after night, why've you been so uncommon jolly nice—nicer 'n you ever were before? Why did you ever let me get to this point?—Don't pretend you couldn't help it, either!" He paused a moment. "Why did you let me kiss you that night?" [319]

That shaft hit. She lost her head a little, and fell back on an old feminine ruse.

"Oh, Tommy, you've no right to bring that up against me!" she said, with a little flurried break in

her voice.

Tommy's obvious answer was a quiet "Why not?" but he was not the kind who can give the proper answer at such moments. He was much more affected by Beatrice's evident perturbation than Beatrice was by his home truth, and was much slower in recovering.

"I'm sorry, Beatrice," he went on again after a short silence, "but I—well, dash it all, I *care*, you know!"

"You mustn't, Tommy."

"But what if I jolly well can't help myself? After all, you know, you must give a fellah a chance. Of course, I want you to be happy, and I'd do anything I could to make you so, but—well, there it is! I'm *fond* of you, Beatrice!"

She could smile quite calmly at him now, and did so. "Very well, Tommy, you're fond of me. Suppose we leave it there for the present.—And now I think I shall go in. It's getting chilly out here."

Evidently it had not quite come to *that* with her.

Nor did it, for all Tommy could do, before James' arrival a few days later. Aunt Selina came with him; she had elected to spend the summer at her Vermont house, and found it, as she explained to her hostess, "too warm. The interior, you know." With which she closed her lips and gave the impression of charitably refraining from, richly deserved censure of the interior's shortcomings. Aunt Cecilia nodded with the most perfect understanding, and said she supposed it must have been warm in New York also.

James allowed that it had.

Aunt Selina said she had read in the paper that August was likely to be as hot as July there.

Beatrice, just in order to be on the safe side, said that she felt like Rather a Brute.

Tommy, with a vague idea of vindicating her, remarked that some days had been jolly warm in Bar Harbor, too. [320]

Aunt Cecilia, politely reproachful, said that he had no idea what an American summer could be, and that anyway, the nights had been cool.

Tommy said oh yes, rather.

Inwardly he was chafing. He felt his case lamentably weakened by the presence of James. He had not bargained for an abduction from under the husband's very nose. The thought of what he would have to go through now made him feel quite uncomfortable and even a little, just a little, suspicious that the case of decency had not been decisively settled. Still, there was nothing to do but stay and go through with it.

But James, if he had but known it, was in reality his most powerful ally. Continued residence in sweltering New York had not tended to soften James, either in his attitude to the world in general or in his feeling toward his wife in particular. He now adopted a policy of outward affection. "When others were present he lost no opportunity of elaborately fetching and carrying for Beatrice, of making plans for her benefit, of rejoicing in her returning health. As she evinced a fondness for the evening air he made it a rule to sit with her on the verandah every night after dinner. Tommy could not very well oust him from this pleasant duty, and writhed beneath his calm exterior every time he watched them go out together."

He need not have worried, however. The contrast of James' warmth in public to his wholly genuine coldness in private, together with the change from Tommy's sympathetic chatter to James' deathly silence on these evening sojourns had a much more potent effect on Beatrice than anything Tommy could have accomplished actively. James literally seemed to freeze the blood in Beatrice's veins. She became subject to fits of shivering, she required twice as many wraps as before; she began going to bed much earlier than previously. Ten o'clock now invariably found her in her room.

One evening James was suddenly called upon to go out to dinner with Aunt Cecilia and fill an empty place at a friend's table, and Tommy took his place on the verandah. Tommy knew that this would be his best chance, possibly his last. The stars burned brightly in a clear warm sky, but there was no talk of tiger's eyes now. There was no talk at all for a long time; the pleasure of sheer propinquity was too great. Beatrice fairly luxuriated. She wondered why Tommy's silence affected her so differently from that of James.... [321]

"Beatrice," began Tommy, but she switched him off.

"No, please don't try to talk now, Tommy, there's a dear."

They were silent again. The night stretched hugely before and above them; it was very still. A little night-breeze arose and touched their cheeks, but its message was only peace. Land and sea alike slept; not a sound reached them save the occasional clatter of distant wheels. Only the sky was awake, with its hundreds of winking eyes. Oh, these stars! Beatrice knew them so well. Antares, glowing like a dying coal, sank and fell below the hills, leaving the bright clusters of Sagittarius in dominion over the southern heavens. Fomalhaut rose in the southeast, shining with

a dull chaotic luster, now green, now red. Fomalhaut, she remembered, was the southernmost of all the great stars visible in northern lands; its reign was the shortest of them all. And yet who could tell what might happen before that star finally fell from sight in the autumn?...

"Beatrice!" at length began Tommy again, and this time she could not stop him. "Beatrice, we can't go on like this. We can't do it, I say, we can't! Don't you feel it?... That husband of yours.... Oh, Beatrice, I *can't* stand by and watch it any longer!"

He caught hold of her hand and clasped it between his. It remained limp there, press it as he would.... Then he saw that she was crying.

He flung himself on his knees beside her, covering her hand with kisses. There was no conflict in him now, only a raging thirst for consummation. Harrow and Christchurch were thrown to the winds.

"Beatrice," he whispered, "come away with me out of this damned place—away from the whole damned lot of them—frozen, church-going rotters! Let *me* take care of you! I understand, Beatrice, I know how it is! Only come with me! Leave it all to me—no trouble, no worry, everything all right! *He'll* be glad enough to free you—trust him! Oh, dear Beatrice...."

He bent close over her, uttering all sort of impassioned foolishnesses. He kissed her, too, not [322] once, but again and again, and with things he scarcely knew for kisses, so unlike were they to the lightly given and taken pledges of other days.

And Beatrice was limp in his arms, as little able to stop him as to stop her tears.

"Beatrice, we must go on *always* like this! We *can't* go back now, we can't let things go on as they were! Come away with me, Beatrice, to-night, now...."

Beatrice thought how, only a year ago, not far from this very place, some one had used almost those very words to her, and the thought made her weep afresh. But her tears were not all tears of misery.

At last she dried her eyes and pushed him gently away.

"No, no more, Tommy—dear Tommy, you must stop. Really, Tommy! I don't know how I could let you go on this way—I seem to be so weak and silly these days.... I must take hold of myself...."

"But, Beatrice—"

"No, Tommy—not any more now. I know, I know, dear, but it can't go on any more. Now," she added with a momentary relapse of weakness. Then she pulled herself together again. "You must be perfectly quiet and good, now, Tommy, if you stay here. I've got to have a chance to get over this before we go in. It's very important—there's a lot at stake. Just sit there and don't speak a word. You can help me that way."

They sat quietly together for some time. At last Beatrice rose.

"I think I'll go," she said. "I shall be all right now."

"But we can't leave it like this!" protested Tommy. "Beatrice, you can't go up there now...."

"Can't I? I'm going, though."

"No, you've got to give me an answer, Beatrice!"

She turned to him for a moment before walking off. "I can't tell you anything now, Tommy. I don't know. Do you see? I honestly don't know. You'll have to wait."

The hall seemed rather dark as they came into it; the others must have gone to bed. They locked doors and turned out lights and walked upstairs in the dark. They parted at the top with a whispered good-night, almost conspiratorial in effect, Beatrice found James still dressed and [323] sitting under a droplight, reading. He put down his book as she entered and looked at his watch, which lay on the table by him.

"After half-past twelve," he said. "Quite a pleasant evening."

Beatrice made no observation.

"The air has done you good," he went on. "We shall soon see the roses in your cheeks again."

"If you have anything to say, James, perhaps you'd better go ahead and say it."

"I? Oh, dear no! Any words of mine would be quite superfluous. The situation is complete as it is."

Beatrice merely waited. She knew she would not wait in vain, nor did she.

"Only, after this perhaps you'll save yourself the trouble of making up elaborate denials. You and your Tommy!..."

He got up and started walking up and down the room with slow, measured steps. To Beatrice, still sitting quietly on the edge of her bed, the fall of his feet on the carpeted floor sounded like the inexorable tick of fate for once made audible to human ears. The greatest things hung in the balance at this moment; his next words would decide both their destinies for the rest of their mortal life. She thought she knew what they would be, but if there were to sound in them the

faintest echo of a regret for older and better times she was ready, even at this last moment, to throw her whole being into an effort to help restore them. Tommy's passionate whisper still echoed in her ears, Tommy's kisses were scarcely cold upon her cheeks, but Tommy was not in her heart.

At last James spoke. At the first sound of his voice Beatrice knew.

"I shall receive a telegram calling me back to town to-morrow, in time for me to catch the evening train...."

She was so occupied with the ultimate meaning of his words that their immediate meaning escaped her. She raised her eyes in question.

"You're going away to-morrow? Why?"

"Yes. I prefer not to remain here and watch it going on under my very eyes. It's a silly prejudice, no doubt, but you must pardon it...." [324]

He continued his pacing, keeping his eyes fixed on the floor in front of him. Occasionally he uttered a few sentences in the same cold, lifeless tone.

"It's all over now, at any rate. I had hoped we might be able to tide these things over through these first years, till we got old enough to stop caring about them, but I was wrong. You can't govern things like that.... I always had a theory that any two sensible people could get along together in marriage, even though they didn't care much about each other, if they made up their minds to take a reasonable point of view; but I was wrong there too. Marriage is a bigger thing than I thought. I was wrong all around....

"Just a year—not even that. I should have said it could go longer than that, even at the worst....

"It's all in the blood, I suppose—rotten, decadent blood, in both of you. I don't blame you, especially. Your father's daughter—I might have known. I suppose I oughtn't to blame your father much more—it's the curse of your whole civilization. Only it's hard to confine one's anger to civilizations in such cases....

"The strange part about you is that you gave no sign of it whatever beforehand. I had no suspicion, at all. I don't think any one could have told....

"There's just one thing I should like to suggest. I don't know whether it will be comprehensible to you, but I have a certain respect for my family name and a sort of desire to spare the members of the family as much as possible. So that, although you're perfectly free to act exactly as you wish, I should appreciate it if you—if you could suspend operations as long as you remain under my uncle's roof. Though it's just as you like, of course.

"I shall be in New York. You can let me know your plans there when you are ready. I suppose you'll want to sue, in which case it can't be done in New York state; you'll have to establish a residence somewhere else. Or if you prefer to have me sue, all right. That would save time, of course.... Let me know what you decide.

"Well, we might as well go to bed, I suppose. It will be the last time...."

Beatrice watched him as he took off his coat and waistcoat and threw them over a chair and then attacked his collar and tie. Then she arose from where she sat and addressed him. [325]

"I don't suppose there's any use in my saying anything. We might get quarreling again, and naturally you wouldn't believe me, anyway. I agree with you that it's impossible for us to live together any longer. But I can't forbear from telling you, James, that you've done me a great wrong. You've said things ... oh, you've said things so wrong to-night that it seems as if God himself—if there is a God—would speak from heaven and show you how wrong you are! But there's no use in mere human beings saying anything at a time like this....

"You've been a very wicked man to-night, James. May God forgive you for it."

She turned away with an air of finality and started to prepare for bed. She hung up her evening wrap in the closet and walked over to her bureau. She took off what jewelry she wore and put it carefully away, and then she seemed to hesitate. She stood looking at her reflection in the mirror a moment, but found no inspiration there. She walked inconclusively across the room and then back. Finally she stopped near James, with her back toward him.

"It seems an absurd thing to ask," she said, "but would you mind? As you say, it's the last time...."

"Certainly," said James.

CHAPTER XII [326]

It is all very well to be suddenly called back to town by telegram on important business, but suppose the business is wholly fictitious—what are you going to do with yourself when you get there? Especially if you have your own reasons for not wanting Business to know that you have returned before the appointed time, and consequently are shy about appearing in clubs and places where it would be likely to get wind of your presence? And if, moreover, your apartment has been closed and all the servants sent off on a holiday?

That is a fair example of the mean way sordid detail has of encroaching on the big things of life and destroying what little pleasure we might take in their dramatic value. When he arrived in New York James had the chastened, exalted feeling of one who has just passed a great and disagreeable crisis and got through with it, on the whole, very tolerably well. What he wanted most was to return to the routine of his old life and, so far as was possible, drown the nightmare recollection in a flood of work. Instead of which he found idleness and domestic inconvenience staring him in the face. He also saw that he was going to be lonely. He walked through the dark and empty rooms of his apartment and reflected what a difference even the mute presence of a servant would make. He longed whole-heartedly for Stodger—for Stodger since we last saw him has been promoted into manhood by nature and into full-fledged chauffeurhood—with the official appellation of McClintock, if you please—by James. With Stodger, who still retained jurisdiction over his suits and shoes, James was accustomed, when they were alone together, to throw off his role of employer and embark on technical heart-to-heart talks on differential gears and multiple-disc clutches and kindred intimate subjects. But Stodger was tasting the joys of leave of absence on full pay, James knew not where. [327]

He sought at first to beguile the hours with reading. He selected a number of works he had always meant to read but never quite got around to: a novel or two of Dickens, one of Thackeray, one of Meredith, "The Origin of Species," Carlyle's "French Revolution," "The Principles of Political Economy" and "Tristram Shandy." Steadily his eyes sickened of print; by the time he came to Mill his brain refused to absorb and visions of the very things he wished most to be free from hovered obstinately over the pages. "Tristram Shandy" was even more unbearable; he conceived an insane dislike for those interminable, ineffectual old people and their terrestrial-minded creator. At last he flung the book into the fireplace and strode despairingly out into the streets.

Oh, Beatrice—would she never send him word, put things definitely in motion, in no matter what direction? Oh, this confounded brain of his; would it never stop trying to re-picture old scenes, revive dead feelings, animate unborn regrets? What had he done but what he should have done, what he could not help doing, what it had been written that he should do since the first moment when thoughts above those of a beast were put into man's brain? Oh, the curse of a brain that would not live up to its own laws, but continually kept flashing those visions of outworn things across his eyes—not his two innocent physical eyes, which saw nothing but what was put before them, but that redoubtable, inescapable, ungovernable inward sight which, as he remembered some poet had said, was "the bliss of solitude." The bliss of solitude—how like a driveling ass of a poet!...

The next day he gave up and went back to his office as usual, saying that he had returned from his vacation a few days ahead of time in order to transact some business that had come up unexpectedly. Just what the business was he did not explain; he was now the head of McClellan's New York branch and did not have to explain things.

So the hours between nine and five ceased to be an intolerable burden, and the hours from five till bedtime could be whiled away at the club in discussing the baseball returns. He could always find some one who was willing to talk about professional baseball. He remembered how he had once similarly talked golf with Harry....

That left only the night hours to be accounted for, and sleep accounted for most of them, of course. Sometimes. At other times sleep refused to come and nothing stood between him and the inmost thoughts of his brain, or worse, the thoughts that he did not think, never would think, as long as a brain and a will remained to him.... Such times he would always end by turning on the light and reading. They gave him a feeling like that of which he had spoken to Beatrice about being caught in a trap, deepened and intensified; a feeling to be avoided at any price. [328]

At last he heard, not indeed from Beatrice, but from Aunt Selina. "Beatrice arrives New York noon Thursday; for Heaven's sake do something," she telegraphed. James knew what that meant, and thanked Aunt Selina from the bottom of his heart. No scandal—nothing that would reflect on the family name! So Beatrice had determined not to accede to his last request; she was bent on rushing madly into her Tommy's arms, perhaps at the very station itself? Oh, no, nothing of *that* sort, if you please; he would be at the station himself to see to it.

It was extraordinary how much getting back to work had benefited him. He was no longer subject to the dreadful fits of depression that had made his idleness a torment. Only keep going, only have something to occupy hands and mind during every waking hour, and all would yet be well. Beatrice and all that she implied had only to be kept out of his mind to be rendered innocuous; all that was needed to keep her out was a little will power, and he had plenty of that. As for the sleeping hours—well, he had come to have rather a dread of the night time. No doubt some

simple medical remedy, however, would put that all right—sulphonal, or something of the sort. He would consult a doctor. No unprescribed drugs for him—no careless overdose, or anything of that sort, no indeed! The time had yet to come when James Wimbourne could not keep pace with the strong ones of the earth and walk with head erect under all the burdens that a malicious fate might heap upon him.

In such a vein as this ran his thoughts as he walked from his apartment to the station that Thursday morning. It was a cool day in early September; a fresh easterly breeze blew in from the Sound bringing with it the first hint of autumn and seeming to infuse fresh blood into his veins. As he walked down Madison Avenue even the familiar sounds of the city, the clanging of the [329] trolley cars, the tooting of motor horns, the rumbling of drays, even the clatter of steam drills or rivet machines seemed like outward manifestations of the life he felt surging anew within him. Was it not indeed something very like a new life that was to begin for him to-day, this very morning? Not the kind of new life of which the poets babbled, no youthful dream, but something far solider and nobler, a mature reconstruction, a courageous gathering together, or rather regathering—that made it all the finer—of the fragments of an outworn existence. That was what human life was, a succession of repatchings and rebuildings. He who rebuilt with the greatest promptness and courage and ingenuity was the best liver.

Viewed in this broad and health-bringing light the last months of his life appeared less of a failure than he had been wont to think. He became able to look back on this year of destiny-fighting as, if not actually successful, better than successful, since it led on to better things and gave him a chance to show his mettle, his power of reconstruction. He had made a mistake, no doubt; but he was willing to recognize it as such and do his best to rectify it. Beatrice and he were not cut out for team-mates in the business of destiny-fighting; it had become evident that they could both get on better alone. Well, at last they had come to the point of parting; to the point, he hoped, of being able to part like fellow-soldiers whose company is disbanded, in friendship and good humor, without recrimination or any of that detestable God-forgive-you business....

He wished the newsboys would not shout so loud; their shrill uncanny shrieks interrupted his line of thought, in spite of himself. It didn't matter if they were calling extras; he never bought extras. Or was it only a regular edition? They might be announcing the trump of doom for all one could understand.

It was too bad that Beatrice had not arrived at anything like his own state of sanity and calmness. This business of eloping—oh, it was so ludicrous, so amateurish! That was not the way to live. He hoped he might be able to make her see this. It would be easier, of course, if Tommy were not at the station; one could not tell what arrangements a woman in her condition might make. But he did not fear Tommy; there would be no scene. A few firm words from him and they would see [330] things in their proper light. He pictured himself and Beatrice repairing sanely and amicably to a lawyer's office together;—"Please tell us the quickest and easiest way to be divorced...."

As he approached Forty-second Street the traffic grew heavier and noisier. He could not think properly now; watching for a chance to traverse the frequent cross streets took most of his attention. And those newsboys—! Why on earth should those newspaper fellows send out papers marked "Late Afternoon Edition" at half-past eleven in the morning? Oh, it was an extra, was it? A fire on the East Side, no doubt, two people injured—he knew the sort of thing. If those newspaper fellows would have the sense only to get out an extra when something *really* important had happened somebody might occasionally buy them.

Seeing that he had plenty of time he walked slowly round to the Forty-second Street entrance instead of going in the side way. He observed the great piles of building and rebuilding that were going on in the neighborhood, and compared the reconstruction of the quarter to his own case. He wondered why they delayed in making the Park Avenue connecting bridge—such an integral part of the scheme. If *he* had shilly-shallied like that, a nice mess he would have made of his life! He gazed up at the great new front of the station and bumped into a stentorian newsboy. Everywhere those confounded newsboys—!

He was actually in the station before he had any suspicion. There was about the usual number of people in the great waiting-room, but there seemed to be more hurrying than usual. He saw one or two people dart across the space, and observed that they did not disappear into the train gates.... Had he or had he not caught the word "wreck" on one of those flaunting headlines in the street? He turned off suddenly to a news stand and bought a paper.

There it all was, in black and white—or rather red and white. Red letters, five inches high.

Train 64, the Maine Special, had run through an open switch and turned turtle somewhere near Stamford. Fifteen reported killed, others injured. No names given.

The Maine Special. Beatrice's train.

He knew that he must devote all his efforts at this juncture to keep himself from thinking. Until he knew, that was. He did not even allow himself to name the thoughts he was afraid of giving [331] birth to. Anxiety, hope, fear, premonition, horror, satisfaction, pity—he must put them all away from him. There was no telling what future horrors he might be led into if he gave way ever so little to any one of them. The one thing to do now was to *find out*.

This was not so easy. He went first to the bulletin board where the arrivals of trains were announced, and found a small and anxious-eyed crowd gazing at the few uninforming statements

marked in white chalk. There was nothing to be learned from them. He spoke to an official, who was equally reticent, and spoke vaguely of a relief train.

"Do you mean to say there's no way of finding out the names of those killed before the relief train comes in?" he asked.

"We can't tell you what we don't know!" replied the man, already too inured to such questions to show feeling of any sort. He then directed James to the office of the railroad press agent, on the eighth floor.

James started to ask another question, but was interrupted by a young woman who hurried up to the official. She held a little girl of seven or eight by the hand, and the eyes of both were streaming with tears. The sight struck James as odd in that cold, impersonal, schedule-run place, and he swerved as he walked off to look at them. He turned again abruptly and went his way, stifling an involuntary rise of a feeling which might have been very like envy, if he had allowed himself to think about it....

And no one else had even noticed the two.

He found no one in the press office except a few newspaper reporters who sat about on tables with their hats balanced on the backs of their heads. They eyed him suspiciously but said nothing. An inner door opened and a young man in his shirtsleeves, a stenographer, entered the room bearing a number of typewritten flimsies. The reporters pounced upon these and rushed away in search of telephones.

James asked the young man if he could see Mr. Barker, the agent.

The young man said Mr. Barker was busy, and asked James what paper he represented.

James said none. [332]

On what business, then, did James want to see Mr. Barker?

To learn the fate of some one on the Maine Special.

A friend?

A wife.

The stenographer dropped his lower jaw, but said nothing. He immediately opened the inner door and led James up to an older man who sat dictating to a young woman at a typewriter. He was plump and clean-shaven and very neat about the collar and tie; James did not realize that this was the agent until the younger man told him so.

"My dear sir," replied Mr. Barker to James' question, "I know absolutely no more about it than you do. If I did, I'd tell you. The boys have been hammering away at me for the past hour, and I've given 'em every word that's come in. These two names are all I've got so far." He handed James a flimsy.

James' eye fell upon the names of two men, both described as traveling salesmen. He went back to the outer office and sat down to think. It was, of course, extremely improbable that Beatrice had been killed. There had been, say, two hundred people on the train, of whom fifteen were known to have died—something like seven and a half per cent. Two of these were accounted for; that left thirteen. He wondered how long it would be before those thirteen names came in.

The room began to fill up again; the reporters returned and new recruits constantly swelled their number. From their talk James gathered why there was such a dearth of detailed news. The wreck occurring during the waking hours of the day had been learned, as far as the mere fact of its occurrence was concerned, and published within half an hour after it had happened. It naturally took longer than this to do even the first work of clearing the wreckage and the compiling of the lists of dead and injured would require even more time. With the results that interested friends and relations, learning of the wreck but none of its particulars, were rushing pell-mell to headquarters to get the first news. One young man described in vivid terms certain things he had just witnessed down in the concourse.

"Best sob stuff in months," was his one comment.

Just then one of their number, a slightly older man and evidently a leader among them, emerged from the inner office. [333]

"What about it, Wilkins?" they greeted him in chorus. "Slip it, Wilkins, slip it over! Give us the dope! Any more stiffs yet? Come on, out with it—no beats on this story, you know...."

Harpies!

The outer door opened and two women burst into the room. The first of them, a tall, stout, good-featured Jewess, clothed in deep mourning, was wildly gasping and beating her hands on her breast.

"Can any of you tell me about a young man called Lindenbaum?" she asked between her sobs. "Lindenbaum—a young man—on Car fifty-six he was! Has anything been heard of him—anything?"

The reporters promptly told her that nothing had. She sank into a chair, covered her face with her hands and burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. The younger woman, evidently her daughter, stood by trying to comfort her. At length the other raised her veil and wearily wiped her eyes. James studied her face; her sunken eyes no less than her black clothes gave evidence of an older sorrow. Moved by a sudden impulse he went over and spoke to her, telling her that her son was in all probability safe and basing his assurance on the calm mathematical grounds of his own reasoning. The woman did not understand much of what he said, but the quiet tones of his voice seemed to comfort her. She rose and started to go.

"Thank you," she said to James, "you're a nice boy.—Oh, I do hope God will spare him to me—only nineteen, he is, and the only man I have left, all I have left...."

Sob stuff!

Scarcely had the door closed behind her when a business man of about forty-five, prosperous, well-dressed and unemotional-looking, came in and asked if the name of his daughter was on the list of the dead. Some one said it was not.

"Thank God," said the man in a weak voice. He raised his hand to his forehead, closed his eyes and fell over backward in a dead faint. When he came to he had to be told that the names of only three of the dead were as yet known.

These were the first of a long series of scenes such as James would not have thought possible off [334] the stage. He had never seen people mastered by an overwhelming anxiety before; it was interesting to learn that they acted in such cases much as they were generally supposed to. Anxiety, he reflected, was perhaps the most intolerable emotion known to man. Yet as he sat there calmly waiting for the arrival of the relief train he could have wished that he might have tasted the full horror of it.... No, that was mere hysteria, of course. But there was something holy about such a feeling; it was like a sort of cleansing, a purifying by fire.... Was it that his soul was not worthy of such a purifying? Oh, hysterics again!

But the purifying of others went on before his eyes as he sat trying not to think or feel and reading the bulletins as they came out from the inner office. Grotesquely unimportant, those bulletins, or so they must seem to those concerned for the fate of friends!

"General Traffic Manager Albert S. Holden learned by telegram of the accident to Train 64 near Stamford this morning and immediately hurried to Stamford by special train. Mr. Holden will conduct an investigation into the causes of the accident in conjunction with Coroner Francis X. Willis of Stamford."

"One young woman among the injured was identified as Miss Fannie Schmidt of Brooklyn. She was taken to the Stamford hospital suffering from contusions."

"Patrick F. McGuire, the engineer of Train 64 which ran through an open switch near Stamford this morning, has been in the employ of the Company for many years. He was severely cut about the face and head. He has been engineer of the Maine Special since the 23rd of last May, prior to which he had worked as engineer on Train 102. He began his service in the Company in 1898 as fireman on the Naugatuck Division...."

"Vice-President Henry T. Blomberg gave out in New Haven this morning the following statement concerning the accident at Stamford...."

"Whew!" exclaimed a reporter, issuing suddenly from a telephone booth near James, "this is *some* story, believe me!" He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. He was a young man and looked somewhat more like a human being than the others.

"Oh, you'd call this harrowing, would you?" said James. [335]

"Well," said the other apologetically, "I've only been on the job a few months and this human interest stuff sort of gets me. This is the first big one of the kind I've been on. I guess there's enough human interest here to-day for any one, though!"

"There doesn't seem to be enough to inconvenience you," observed James. "Not you, so much, but —" with a wave toward the reporters' table—"those—the others."

The young man laughed slightly. "Oh, you can stand pretty near anything after you've been on the job for a while! You see, when you're on the news end of a thing like this you don't have time to get worked up. When you're hot foot after every bit of stuff you can get, and have to hustle to the telephone to send it in the same minute, so's not to get beaten on it, you don't bother about whether people have hysterics or not. You simply can't—you haven't got time! That's why these fellows all seem so calm—it's *business* to them, you see. They're not really hard-hearted, or anything like that. Gosh, it's lucky for me, though, that I'm here on business, if I have to be here at all!"

"You mean you're glad you don't know any one on the train?"

"Oh, Lord yes, that—but I'm glad I have something to keep me busy, as long as I'm here. If I were just standing round, watching, say—gosh, I wouldn't answer for what I'd do! I'd probably have hysterics myself, just from seeing the others!"

This gave James something more to think about.

He saw now that he had misjudged the reporters; even these harpies gave him something to envy. If one was going to feel indifferent at a time like this it would be well to feel at least an honest professional indifference.... But that was not all. Had not this young man admitted that the mere sight of such suffering would have stirred him to the depths if he did not have his business to think of, and that without being personally concerned in the accident? While he himself, with every reason to suffer every anxiety in this crucial moment, was quite the calmest person in the room, able to lecture a hysterical mother on the doctrine of chances! Was he dead to all human feeling?

There was a moment of calm in the room, which was broken by the entrance of a tall blonde young man—a college undergraduate, to all appearances. [336]

"Can any of you tell me if Car 1058 was on the Maine Special?" he asked the reporters.

No one had heard of Car 1058. Research among the bulletins failed to reveal any mention of it.

"What's the name of the person you're interested in?" asked some one. "We might be able to tell you something."

"Oh, it wasn't any *person*," the young man explained; "it was my dog I was looking for. I've found he was shipped on Car 1058. A water spaniel, he was. I don't suppose you've heard anything?"

A moment of silence followed this announcement, and then one of the reporters began to laugh. There was nothing funny about it, of course, except the contrast. They all knew it was by the merest accident that Fannie Schmidt's contusions had been flashed over the wires rather than the fate of the water spaniel.

The youth flushed to the roots of his yellow hair.

"Oh, yes, it's very funny, of course," he said, and stalked out of the room. But there shone another light in his eyes than the gleam of anger.

"Say, there's copy in that," observed one reporter, and straightway they were all busy writing.

James had smiled with the others, but his merriment was short-lived. This indeed was the finishing stroke. That young fellow actually was more concerned about his dog....

The relief train was due to arrive at 1:30, and shortly before that hour there was a general adjournment to the concourse. A crowd had already gathered before the gate through which the survivors would presently file. James looked at the waiting people and shuddered slightly. He preferred not to wait there.

Passing by a news stand he bought the latest extra. It was curious to see the contents of those press agent flimsies transcribed on the flaring columns as the livest news obtainable. Well, all that would be changed shortly.... His own name caught his eye; a paragraph was devoted to telling how he had waited in the station, and why. "Mr. Wimbourne was entirely calm and self-contained," the item ended. Calm and self-contained. And those people took it for a virtue!... [337]

The gates were opened to allow the friends of passengers on the ill-fated train to pass through to the platform. The reporters were unusually silent as James walked by. James knew what their silence meant, and writhed under it.

The platform was dark and chilly. Like a tomb, almost.... The idea was suggestive, but his heart was stone against it. The thought of seeing Beatrice walking up the platform in a moment was enough to check any possible indulgence of feeling. That was the way such things always had been rewarded, with him. He could not remember having entertained one such emotional impulse in the past that had not led him into fresh misery.

He had waited nearly two hours and there was absolutely no indication as to whether Beatrice had suffered or not. He had telephoned several times to his flat, to which the servants had lately returned, and to his office and had learned that no word had been received at either place. That meant nothing. Five names of people killed had been received when he left the press office, and hers was not among them. But the number of dead was said to be larger than was at first expected; it would probably reach into the twenties. Part of one Pullman, it appeared, had been entirely destroyed by fire, and several people were believed to have perished in it. There was no telling, of course, till the train came in. The chances were still overwhelmingly in favor of Beatrice's safety, of course....

One torment had been spared him: Tommy had not turned up. There would be no scene; he would not have to look on while his wife and her lover, maddened by the pangs of separation and suspense, rushed into each other's arms.... Ah, no; he would not deceive himself. His relief at Tommy's absence was really due to the fact that he had been spared the sight of some one genuinely and whole-heartedly anxious about Beatrice's fate.

The train crawled noiselessly into the station. James posted himself near the inner end of the platform, so as to be sure not to miss her. Soon groups began to file by of people laughing and crying and embracing each other, as unconscious to appearances as children. How many happy reunions, how many quarrels and misunderstandings mended forever by an hour or two of intense suffering!... No, that was a foolish thought, of course.

Presently he saw her, or rather a hat which he recognized as hers, moving up the platform. He [338]

braced himself and walked forward with lowered eyes, trying to think of something felicitous to say. He dared not look up till she was quite near. At last he raised a hand toward her, opened his mouth to speak, and found himself staring into the face of a perfectly strange woman.

The mischance unnerved him. He lost control of himself and darted aimlessly to and fro through the crowd for a few moments, like a rabbit. Then he rushed back to the gate and stood there watching till the last passenger had left the platform and white shrouded things on wheels began to appear.

He saw a uniformed official and addressed him, asking where he could find a complete list of the dead and injured. The man silently handed him a paper. James ran his eyes feverishly down the list of names. There it was—Wim—no, no, Wilson. Her name was not there. He raised his eyes questioningly to the official.

"No, that list is not complete," said the man.

He led James away to one or two other uniformed officials, and then to a man who was not in uniform. At length it was arranged; James was to take the first train for Stamford. Some one gave him a pass.

But before he went he telegraphed to Bar Harbor. It was necessary to have conclusive proof that Beatrice was on the train. As he recrossed the concourse, now converted into a happy hunting ground for the reporters, he caught sight of Mrs. Lindenbaum, the anxious mother. She was alone, but the expression on her face left no doubt as to how the day had turned out for her. He stopped and spoke to her:

"Your son is all right, is he?"

"Yes!" She turned toward him a face fairly transfigured with joy. "He wasn't hurt at all—just scratched a little by broken glass. He and my daughter have just gone to telephone to some people.... What do you think—he was the first one in his car to break open a window and let the smoke out! He reached up with his umbrella and smashed it open—that was how he got out. And he dragged out three people who were unconscious...." She stopped and laughed. "You must excuse me—I'm foolish!"

"Not at all," replied James. "I'm so glad—" He started to move on, but the woman stopped him, [339]
suddenly remembering.

"But what about—I do hope—" she began.

"No," said James quietly. "I'm sorry to say my news is bad." He had little doubt now as to the verdict, but bad—! Was it? Oh, was it?

It was early evening before he returned. His expedition had been painful in the extreme, but wholly without definite results. There had been one or two charred fragments of clothing that might or might not have been.... It was too horrible to think much about.

He knew for certain no more than when he started out, but conviction was only increased, for all that. What was there left to imagine but what that heap of cinders suggested? There was just one other chance, one bare possibility; Beatrice might not have left Bar Harbor, at any rate not on that train. The answer to his telegram would settle that.

He found the yellow envelope awaiting him on the hall table. He lifted it slowly and paused a moment before opening it, wondering if he could trust himself to hope or feel anything in this final instant of uncertainty. Anything! Any human feeling to break this shell of indifference....

No use. Something in his brain refused to work.

He tore open the envelope. "Beatrice left last night on the seven o'clock ferry; nothing more known. Please wire latest news," he read.

Well, that settled it, at any rate. He knew what the facts were; now he had only to bring himself face to face with them. Yet still he found himself dodging the issue, letting his thoughts wander into obscure by-paths. His brain was strangely lethargic, his heart more so, if possible, than in the station this morning. It was not that he felt bitter or cruel; he explained the situation to the maid, as she served him his dinner, with great tact and consideration, and afterward arranged certain matters of detail with all his usual care and foresight. It was only when he looked into himself that he met darkness.

Uncle James, who was in town on business, dropped in during the evening. James told him the
results of his labors and watched the first hopefulness of his uncle's face freeze gradually into [340]
conviction.

"I see, I see," said Uncle James at last. "There's nothing more to be done, then? Any use I can be, in any way—"

"Thank you," replied James gravely, "there's nothing more to be done."

Uncle James rose to go and then hesitated. "Well, there it is," he said; "it's just got to be faced, I

suppose. A major sorrow—the great blow of a lifetime. Not many of us are called upon to bear such great things, James. I never have been, and never shall, now. We feel less sharply as we grow older.... It's a great sorrow, a great trial—but I can't help feeling, somehow, that it's also a great chance.... But I'm only harrowing you—I'm sorry." He turned and went out without another word.

Presently James wandered into the bedroom that had once been hers. He turned on all the lights as if in the hope that illuminating the places she had been familiar with would bring the memory of her more sharply to his mind. Yes, it all seemed very natural; he would not say but what it made death less terrible. The fact that her chair was in its accustomed place before her dressing table did somehow make it easier to remember the events of that afternoon. He sat down before the dressing table. There was little on it to bring an intimate recollection of her to his mind; most of her small possessions she had naturally taken away with her to Bar Harbor. He opened a drawer and discovered nothing but a small box of hairpins.

He took them out and handled them gently for a moment. Hairpins! Even so, they brought her back more vividly than anything had yet done—the soft dark hair sweeping back from the forehead, the lovely arch of her nose, and all the rest of it.... He supposed she ought to seem aloof and unapproachable, now that she was dead, but it was not so at all. He remembered her only as feminine and appealing. She certainly had been very beautiful. And of all that beauty there remained only—hairpins. The fact of human mortality pressed suddenly down on him. Some time, a few days or a few decades hence, he would cease to exist, even as Beatrice, and nothing would remain of him but—Not hairpins, indeed, but hardly anything more substantial. A society pin, a little gold football, a few papers bearing his signatures in McClellan's files.... [341]

Poor Beatrice!

A feeling touched his heart at last; one of pity. Poor Beatrice! Fate had treated her harshly, far beneath her deserts. She had sinned.... Had she? It was not for him to settle that; she had been human, even as he. She had been frail; leave it at that. The strongest of us are weak at times. Only most of us are given a chance to regain our strength, pull ourselves together after a fall, make something out of ourselves at last. This opportunity had been denied Beatrice. Surely it was hard that she should be cut off thus in the depth of her frailty, at the lowest ebb of all that was good in her. The weakest deserved better than that.

So he sat meditating on the tragedy of her life as he might, in an idle mood, have brooded over the story of a lovely and unhappy queen of long ago, some appealing, wistful figure of the past with whom he had nothing in common but mortality. The sense of his own detachment from the story of his wife's life struck him at last and roused him to fresh pity. He went into his dressing room and fetched the photograph of her that he had thought it advisable to keep on his bureau. He stood it up on her dressing table and sat down again to study it. Poor Beatrice! It was pathetic that she, so young, so beautiful, so lonely, should be unmourned, since his feeling could not properly be described as mourning....

"Poor Beatrice," he murmured, "is pity all I can feel for you?"

A bell sounded somewhere, the front door bell. He scarcely noticed it.

No, there was one person to mourn her, of course—Tommy. The thought of him sent a sudden shudder through him. Tommy! He wondered if he could bring himself to be decent to Tommy in case he should turn up.... Just like him, the nauseous little brute!

No, that thought was unworthy of him. What particular grudge had he against Tommy? Hitherto he had not even taken the trouble to despise Tommy, and surely there was no point in beginning now. No, he must be decent to Tommy, if the occasion should arise.

But that Tommy should be chief mourner! Poor Beatrice!... [342]

Presently he roused himself with a slight start. He did not wish to grudge his wife what slight homage he could pay her, but he felt that he had perhaps gone far enough. One felt what one could; harping over things was merely morbid. He rose and quietly left the room.

The lights in the hall seemed dim and low. A gentle glow shone through the living room door. That was odd; he thought he remembered turning out the light in the room before he left it. Then he became aware of a sentence or two being spoken in a low voice in that room, and the next moment one of the servants walked out of the door and into the hall.

He brushed past her, wondering who could have arrived at this time of night. At the door he stopped, strained his eyes to pierce the half-gloom and became aware of a figure standing before him, a silent, black-robed figure, full of a strange portent....

Aunt Selina.

CHAPTER XIII

[343]

RED FLAME

"James, is it true—what she just told me?" Her voice was full of anxiety and horror, but in some curious way she still managed to be the self-possessed Aunt Selina of old. Even in that moment James found time to admire her.

"Yes, Aunt Selina, I'm afraid it's true."

"Is there no hope, no chance—"

"None, that I can see."

"Then ... oh!" She gave way at that, seeming to crumple where she stood. James helped her to a sofa and silently went into the dining room and mixed some whisky and water. Aunt Selina stared when he offered it to her, and then took it without a word. How like Aunt Selina again! A fool would have raised objections. James almost smiled.

"How do you happen to be here, Aunt Selina?" he asked after a few moments, less in the desire of knowing than in the hope of diverting her. "You didn't come from Bar Harbor to-day?"

"From Boston."

"Boston?"

"I took the boat to Boston last night. I learned of the accident there. I supposed she was safe—the papers said nothing."

"Yes, I know. But—but how did you happen to leave Bar Harbor at all?"

"I was going to meet her here."

"Her?"

"Beatrice."

"I don't understand."

"No, and oh, my poor boy, I've got to make you!" She said this quietly, almost prayerfully, with the air of a person laboring under a weighty mission. James had no reply to offer and walked off feeling curiously uncomfortable. There was a long silence.

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"Come over here and sit down, James; I want to talk to you," said Aunt Selina at last. She spoke in her natural tone of voice; there was no more of the priestess about her. There was that about her, however, that made him obey.

"James, I've got to tell you a few things about Beatrice. Some things I don't believe you know. Do you mind?"

"No," said James slowly, "I don't know that I do."

"Well, in the first place, I suppose you thought she was in love with that Englishman?"

James nodded.

"Well, she wasn't—not one particle. Whatever else may or may not be true, that is. She despised him."

James froze, paused as though deciding whether or not to discuss the matter and then said gently: "I have my own ideas about that, Aunt Selina."

She nodded briefly, almost briskly. It was the most effective reply she could have made. The more businesslike the words the greater the impression on James, always, in any matter. Aunt Selina understood perfectly. She let her effect sink in and waited calmly for him to demand proof. This he did at last, going to the very heart of the subject.

"Then perhaps, Aunt Selina, you can account for certain things...."

"No, I shall only tell you what I know. You must do your own accounting." She paused a moment and then went on: "You've heard nothing since you left Bar Harbor, I suppose?"

"Nothing."

"Beatrice was quite ill for a time after you left. For days she lay in bed unable to move, but there seemed to be nothing specific the matter with her. We called in the doctor and he said the same old thing—rest and fresh air. He knew considerably less what was the matter with her than any one else in the house, which is saying a good deal.

"Lord Clairloch left the day after you did. Beatrice saw him once, that evening, and sent him away. The next day he went, saying vaguely that he had to go back to New York.

"James, of course I knew. I couldn't live in the house with the two people I cared most for in the world and not see things, not *feel* things. The only wonder is that nobody else guessed. It seemed

incredible to me, who was so keenly alive to the whole business. Time and time again when [345]
Cecilia opened her mouth to speak to me I thought she was going to talk about that, and then she would speak about some unimportant subject, and I blessed her for her denseness. And how I thanked Heaven that that sharp-nosed little minx Ruth wasn't there! She'd have smelt the whole thing out in no time.

"Gradually Beatrice mended. Her color came back and she seemed stronger. At last one evening —only Tuesday it was; think of it!—she came down to dinner with a peculiar sort of glitter in her eyes. She told us that she felt able to travel and was going to New York the next day. She had engaged her accommodations and everything. Of course I knew what that meant....

"Knowledge can be a terrible thing, James. For days it had preyed on me, and now when the moment for action came I was almost too weak to respond. Oh, how I was tempted to sit back and say nothing and let things take their course!... But I simply couldn't fall back in the end, I simply couldn't. After bedtime that evening I went to the door of her room and knocked.

"I found her in the midst of packing. I told her I had something to say to her and would wait till she was ready. She said she was listening.

"'Beatrice,' said I, 'I've always tried to mind my own business above all things, but I'm going to break my rule now. I'm fond of you, Beatrice; if I offend you remember that. I simply can't watch you throw your life away without raising a finger to stop you.'

"She didn't flare up, she didn't even ask me how I knew; she only gave a sort of groan and said: 'Oh, but Aunt Selina, I haven't any life to throw away! It's all been burned and frozen out of me; there's nothing left but a shell, and that won't last long! Can't you let me pass the little that remains in peace? That's all I ask for—I gave up happiness long ago. It won't last long! It can hurt no one!'

"'You have an immortal soul,' said I; 'you can hurt that.'

"She sat looking at the floor for a while and then said imploringly: 'Don't ask me to go back to James, Aunt Selina, for that's the one thing I can't do.' 'I shan't ask you to do anything,' I told her, but I knew perfectly well that I was prepared to go down on my knees before her, when the time [346]
came....

"But it hadn't come yet—there was a great deal to be done first. What I did was to tell her something about my own life, in the hope that it might throw a new light on her situation. I told her things that I've never told to a human being and never expected to tell another....

"James, I think I ought to tell you the whole thing, as I told it to her. It may help you to understand ... certain things you must understand. Do you mind?"

She paused, less for the purpose of obtaining his consent than in order to gain a perfect control over her voice and manner. Taking James' silence as acquiescence she folded her hands in her lap and went on in a low quiet voice:

"I haven't had much of a life, according to most ways of thinking. All I ever knew of life, as I suppose you know it, was concentrated into a few months. Not that I didn't have a good time during my girlhood and youth. My mother died when I was a baby, but my stepmother took as good care of me as if I had been her own child, and I loved her almost like my own mother. I've often thought, though, that if my mother had lived things might have turned out differently. Stepmothers are never quite the same thing.

"Well, I grew up and flew about with the college boys in the usual way. I never cared a rap for any of them, beyond the bedtime raptures that girls go through. I was able to manage them all pretty easily; I see now that I was too attractive to them. I had a great deal of what in those days was referred to as 'animation,' which is another way of saying that I was an active, strong-willed, selfish little savage. I was willing to play with the college men, but I always said that when I fell in love it would be with a *real* man. I laughed when I said it, but I meant it.

"Presently there came a change. Father died, and when I came out of mourning the college men I knew best had graduated and the others seemed too young and silly for me even to play with. It was at about this time, when I was adjusting myself to new conditions and casting about for something to occupy my mind that I came to know Milton Leffert."

James stirred slightly. Aunt Selina smiled.

"Yes, you've heard of him, of course. It gives one a curious feeling, doesn't it, to learn that dead [347]
people, or people who are as good as dead, have had their lives? I know, I know ... I think you'd have liked Milton Leffert. He was very quiet and not at all striking in appearance, but he was strong and there was no nonsense about him. He was more than ten years older than I. I had known him only slightly before that time. Then after Father's death he began coming to see me a good deal and we fell into the habit of walking and driving together. I always liked him. I loved talking with him; he was the first man I ever talked much with on serious subjects. He stimulated me, and I enjoyed being with him. Only, it never occurred to me that he could be the Real Man.

"You've often heard of women refusing men because of their poverty. Well, the chief thing that prejudiced me against Milton Leffert was his wealth. He happened to possess a large fortune made and left to him by his father, and he didn't do much except take care of it, together with

that of his sister Jane. He was president of the one concern his father had not sold out before he died, but that was the sort of thing that ran itself; he didn't spend an hour a day at it. That wasn't much of a career, according to the way I thought at that time, and when he first began asking me to marry him I laughed outright.

"'You can't know me very well, Milton,' I said, 'if you suppose I could be content with a ready-made man. I like you very much, but you're not the husband for me.'

"'What do you mean by a ready-made man?' he asked, looking at me out of his quiet gray eyes.

"'I should say it was sufficiently obvious,' I said. 'There's nothing the matter with you, and I hate to hurt you, but—well, you're not dynamic.'

"I stopped to see how he would take that. He was silent for a while, then at last he said: 'I don't think that's a very good reason for refusing a man.'

"I laughed; the grave way he said it was so characteristic of him. 'Oh, Milton,' I said, 'I really think that's the only reason in the world to make me refuse a man. I don't much believe I shall ever marry, but if I do it will be to a man that I can help win his fight in the world; somebody with whom I can march side by side through life, whom I alone can help and encourage and inspire! He's got to be the kind that will start at the bottom and work his way up to the top, and who [348] couldn't do it without me! That's not you, Milton. You have no fight to make—your father made it for you. You start in at the top, the wrong end. Of course there are still higher summits you could aim for, but you never will, Milton. You're not that kind; you'll hold on to what you have, and no more. I'm not blaming you; you were made that way. And there must be a great many people like you in the world. And I *like* you none the less. Only I can't marry you.'

"'But I don't see what difference all this would make,' he said, 'if you only loved me.'

"'My dear man,' said I, 'don't you see that it's only that sort of a man who could make me love him? If you had it in you, I suppose I should love you. You don't suppose I could love you without that, do you? I'm afraid you don't understand me very well, Milton!'

"'I'm learning all the time,' he answered, and that was the nearest thing to a witty or humorous remark that I ever heard him make.

"'Then again,' I went on, 'our ages are too far apart. Even if you were the sort I mean, we shouldn't be starting even. The fight would be half won when I came in, and that would never do. I shouldn't feel as if I were part of your life. A marriage like that wouldn't be a marriage, it would be a sweet little middle-aged idyll!'

"He flushed at that. 'A man can't change his age, Selina; you have no right to taunt me with that.'

"'I didn't mean to taunt you—I only wanted to explain,' said I. 'And the last thing in the world I want to do is to hurt you.'

"'But that's the only thing a man can't change,' he went on after a moment, paying no attention to my apology. After another pause he added: 'I shan't give you up, mind,' and when we talked again it was of other things.

"I went on seeing him as before, though not quite so often. Then presently I went away on some long visits and did not see him for several months. When I came back I noticed that his manner was more animated than before, and that somehow he looked younger. I remember being quite pleased.—He was thirty-four at the time, and I not quite twenty-three.

"It was perfectly evident, even to me, that he was working to win me. I saw it, but I did not pay [349] any attention to it; when I thought about it at all it was with a sort of amusement. One day he came to me apparently very much pleased about something.

"'Congratulate me, Selina,' he said; 'I've just got my appointment.'

"'Appointment?' said I. I truthfully had no idea what he was talking about.

"'Yes,' he went on, 'I begin work on the board next week.'

"'What board?'

"'Why, the tax board—the city tax board. Surely you knew?'

"Then I laughed—I remember it so distinctly. 'Good gracious, Milton,' I said, 'I thought it must be the Cabinet of the United States, at the very least!' Then I saw his face, and knew that I had hurt him.

"'It's splendid, of course,' I added. 'I do congratulate you, indeed, most heartily. Only—only Milton, you were so serious!'

"I laughed again. He stared at me and after a moment laughed himself, a little. I suppose that laugh was the greatest effort he had made yet. I know I liked him better at that moment than ever before. If he had let it go at that who knows what might have happened?

"But he changed again after a few seconds; he scowled and became more serious than ever. 'No!' he said angrily, 'why should I laugh with you over the most serious thing in my life? Why should you want to make me? First you blame me for not making anything of myself, and now, when I

am trying my best to do it, you laugh at me for being serious! Of course I'm serious about my work—I shan't pretend to be anything else.'

"Of course that was all wrong, too. Every one admires a man who can laugh a little about his work. But I felt a sort of hopelessness in trying to explain it to him; I was afraid he would never really understand. So instead I drew him out on the new work he had taken up and tried to make him talk about the plans he had in mind, of which the tax board was only the first step. He seemed rather shy about talking of the future.

"'It's a case for actions, not words,' he said. 'I don't want to give you the impression that I'm only a talker. You'll see, in time, what you've made of me,' and he smiled at me in a way that rather [350] went to my heart.

"'Milton,' I said, 'I'm more than glad if I can be of help to you, in any way, but I should be deceiving you if I let you think there's any hope—any more hope, even, than there was.'

"But that was the kind of talk he understood best. 'Selina,' he said, 'don't you bother about caring for me. The time hasn't come for that yet. I'm not even ready for it myself—there's a lot to be done first. The time will come, at last; I'm sure of it. A woman can't have such a power over a man as you have over me without coming to have some feeling for him in the end, if it's only pride in her own handiwork. But even if it never should come, do you think I could regret what I've done, what I'm going to do? You've made a man of me, Selina. That stands, no matter what happens!'

"Of course that sort of thing can't help but make an impression on a woman, and it had its effect on me. It made me a little nervous; it was like raising a Frankenstein. I began to wonder if I should come to be swallowed up in this new life I had unwillingly created. Once or twice I caught myself wondering how it would feel to be the wife of Milton Leffert....

"But about that time my stepmother began talking to me about it and trying to persuade me to marry him, and that had the effect of making me like the thought less. Somehow she made it seem almost like a duty, and if there was one thing I couldn't abide it was the idea of marrying from a sense of duty. Then other things came into my life and for a time I ceased to think of him almost entirely.

"We went abroad for several months, my stepmother and the two boys and I. Hilary had been seriously ill, and we thought the change would do him good. And as he had a good deal of study to make up—he was fourteen at the time—my stepmother engaged a young man to go with us and tutor him and be a companion to the boys generally.

"You might almost guess the rest. I saw my stepmother wince when he met us at the steamer—we had engaged him by letter and had no idea what he looked like. I suppose it had never occurred to her before that there might be danger in placing me in daily companionship with a man of [351] about my own age. It certainly occurred to her then.

"James, I know I can't make it sound plausible to you, but even now I don't wonder I fell in love with him. I don't suppose a more attractive man was ever born. He was thin and brown and had a pure aquiline profile—but it's no use describing him. Think of the most attractive person you ever knew and make him ten times more so and perhaps you'll get some idea.

"He was quite poor—that also took my fancy. He was trying to earn money enough to put himself through law school. Those who knew him said he was a brilliant student and that a great career lay before him, and I believed it. He certainly was as bright and keen as they make 'em, and very witty and amusing. Occasionally Harry reminds me of him, and that makes me worry about Harry.... Of course I was tremendously taken with his mental qualities, and I had all sorts of romantic notions about helping him to make a great place for himself in the world, and all the rest of it. But as a matter of fact what drew me to him chiefly was simple animal attraction. It wasn't wrong and it wasn't unnatural, but—well, it was unfortunate.

"Even my stepmother felt it. I don't know how long it was before she knew what was going on, but she never made any effort to stop it. Like a sensible woman she kept her mouth shut and determined to let things take their course. But she never talked to me any more about Milton Leffert, and as a matter of fact I know she would have been perfectly willing that I should marry Adrian. Yes, that was his first name. I shan't tell you his last, because he's still alive.

"I remember telling myself when I first saw him that such an absurdly handsome person could not have much to him, but he appeared better and better as time went on. He was thoughtful and tactful and knew how to efface himself. He was splendid with the boys; Hilary in particular took a tremendous fancy to him and would do anything he said. He was the greatest influence in Hilary's life up to that time, and I really think the best. He was an extraordinary person. By the end of the first month I suspected he was the Real Man. By the end of the second I was convinced of it, and by the end of the third I would willingly have placed my head under his foot any time he gave the word. By the end of the sixth month I wouldn't have touched him with my foot—I'm sure [352] of it. But there never was any sixth month.

"In the month of June we were on the Lake of Como. There happened to be a full moon. Como in the moonlight is not the safest place in the world for young people, under any circumstances. In our case it was sure to lead to something.

"We had strolled up to a terrace high above the lake and stood for a long time leaning over the

balustrade drinking in the beauty of the scene. For a long time we said nothing, and apparently the same thought struck us both—that it was all too beautiful to be true. At any rate after a time Adrian sighed and said: 'Oh, this damnable moonlight!'

"'Why?'I asked.

"'Because it makes everything seem so unreal—the lake, the mountains, the nightingales, everything. It's like a poem by Lamartine. But I don't mind that—I like Lamartine. The trouble is it makes you seem unreal too. Oh, I know that you're where you are and are flesh and blood and that if I pinched you you'd probably scream and all that—'

"'No, I shouldn't,' said I. 'I wouldn't be real if I did.'

"He sighed. 'That shows it,' he said; 'that proves exactly what I say. You're not really living this; your soul isn't really here. I'm not really in your life. I'm just a pretty little episode, a stage property, a part of the lake and the moonlight, a part of every summer vacation!'

"'If you're not really in my life,' said I, 'doesn't it occur to you that it's because of your unreality, not mine?'

"'You admit that I'm not real to you, then?'

"'No,' said I, 'but it would be your own fault if you weren't.'

"'What about that man in New Haven, is he real?' he asked suddenly. I only flushed, and he went on: 'That's it—he's the real man in your life. You're willing to play about with me in the summertime, but when the winter comes you'll go straight back and marry him. I'm all right for the moonlight, but you want him in the cold gray light of the dawn! He's the Old and New Testaments to you, and I'm only—a poem by Lamartine! And with me—oh, Lord!' He buried his face in his hands.

"I don't know whether it was pure accident or whether he somehow guessed part of the truth. At [353]
any rate it roused me. I was very sure that what he said was not true, or at least I was very anxious that it should not be true, which often comes to the same thing. I argued with him for some time, and when words failed there were other things. But he did not seem entirely convinced.

"After a while, as we sat there, Hilary appeared with a telegram that had just arrived for me. I saw that it was a cable message and thought it was probably from Milton Leffert, as he had said that he might possibly come abroad on business during the summer and would look me up if he did. And somehow the thought of Milton Leffert at that moment filled me with the most intense disgust....

"'Now,' I said when Hilary had gone, 'I'm tired of arguing; here may be a chance to prove myself by actions. Open this telegram, and tell me if it's from Milton Leffert!'

"He looked at me in a dazed sort of way. 'Open it!' I repeated, stamping my foot. I was drunk with love and moonlight and I imagine I must have acted like a fury. I know I felt like one.

"He opened the telegram and read it, gravely and silently.

"'Is it or is it not from Milton Leffert?'

"'Yes. He—'

"'That's all I want to know—don't say another word! Do you hear? Never tell me another word about that telegram as long as you live! And now destroy it—here—before my eyes! I'm going to put Milton Leffert out of my life forever, here and now! Go on, destroy it!'

"Adrian hesitated. He seemed almost frightened. 'But—' he began.

"'Adrian!' I turned toward him with the moonlight beating full down on me. I was not so bad-looking in those days; I daresay I was not bad-looking at all as I stood there in the moonlight. At least I know that woman never used her beauty more consciously than I did in that moment.

"'Adrian, look at me! Do you love me?'

"He allowed that he did.

"'Then do what I say. Destroy that telegram and never mention it or that man's name to me again!'

"A change came over him. He hesitated no longer; he became forceful and determined. [354]

"'Very well,' he cried, 'if you're not mine now you will be! Here's good-by to Milton Leffert!'

"He took some matches from his pocket and lit the end of the paper. When it was burning brightly he dropped it over the edge of the terrace and it floated out into the space beneath. We stood together and watched it as it fell, burning red in the moonlight....

"Then for some weeks we were happy. Adrian seemed particularly so; he had had his gloomy moods before that but now they passed away entirely. And if there was a cloud of suspicion that I had done wrong in my own mind I was so happy in seeing Adrian's joy that I paid no attention to it.

"Only one thing struck me as odd; he would not let me tell my stepmother. He gave a number of reasons for it; it would make his position with us uncomfortable; he could not be a tutor and a lover at the same time; he was writing to his relatives and wanted to wait till they knew; we must wait till we were absolutely sure of ourselves, and so forth. One of these reasons might have convinced me, but his giving so many of them made me suspect, even as I obeyed him, that none of them was the real one. I wondered what it could be. I found out, soon enough.

"We left Italy and worked slowly northward. Several weeks after the scene on the terrace we reached Paris. There we met a number of our American friends, some of whom had just arrived from home. One day my stepmother and I were sitting talking with one of these—Elizabeth Haldane it was—and in the course of the conversation she happened to say: 'Very sad, isn't it, about poor Milton Leffert?'

"'What is sad?' asked my stepmother.

"'Why, haven't you heard?' said Elizabeth. 'He died a short time before we left. Brain fever or something of the sort—from overwork, they said. He was planning to run for the State Legislature this fall.' I saw her glancing round; she couldn't keep her eyes off me. But I sat still as a stone....

"As soon as I could I took Adrian off alone.

"'Adrian,' I said, 'the time has come when you've got to tell me what was in that telegram.'

"'Never,' said he, smiling. 'I promised, you know,'

"'I release you from your promise.' [355]

"'Even so, I can't tell you.'

"'Adrian,' said I, looking him full in the face, 'Milton Leffert is dead.'

"'I'm sorry to hear it,' said he.

"I blazed up at that. 'Stop lying to me,' I cried, 'and tell me what was in that telegram!'

"He confessed at last that it was from Jane Leffert saying that her brother was dangerously ill and asking me to come to him if possible or at least send some message. I knew well enough what it must have been, but I wanted to wring it from his lips....

"'Well, have you nothing to say to me?' he asked.

"I didn't answer for some time—I couldn't. To tell the truth I hadn't been thinking of him. At last I turned on him. 'You contemptible creature,' I managed to say.

"'Why?' he whined. 'You've no right to call me names. You made me do it. If you're sorry now it's your own fault.'

"'I was to blame,' I answered. 'Heaven forbid that I should try to excuse my own fault. But do you think that lets you out? Suppose the positions had been reversed; suppose you had been ill and Milton with me. Do you imagine he would have let me remain in ignorance while you lay dying and in need of me, no matter what I told him to do or not to do? Are you so weak and mean that you can't conceive of any one being strong and good?'

"'It was because I loved you so much that I did it,' he said.

"'Oh, Adrian,' I told him, 'if you really loved me, why did you let me do a thing you knew I'd live to regret? If you really loved me, what had you to fear but that?'

"'You might have saved his life,' he answered.

"Oh, James, the anguish of hearing those words from his lips! The man I did not love telling me I might have saved the life of the man I did! For now that it was too late I knew well enough who it was that I loved. In one flash I saw the two men as they were, one strong, quiet, unselfish, the other selfish, cowardly, mean-spirited. Now I saw why he had not wanted me to tell my stepmother of our engagement. He wanted to cover up his own part in the affair in case anything unpleasant happened when I heard of Milton's death.

"I told my stepmother everything as soon as I could and she behaved splendidly. She sent Adrian [356]
away and I never saw him again. And as I announced my intention of going home on the next steamer she decided it was best to give up the rest of her trip and take the boys along back with me. So we all went, that same week.

"People wondered, when we arrived so long ahead of time, and came pretty near to guessing the whole truth. But I didn't care. The one thing I wanted in the world was to see Milton's sister, his one surviving relative.

"'Jane Leffert,' I wrote her, 'if you can bear to look on the woman who killed your brother, let her come and tell you she's sorry.' She was a good woman and understood. The next day I went to her house. She took me upstairs and showed me his room, the bed where he had died. I never said a word all the time. Then, as she was really a very remarkable woman, she handed me an old brooch of her mother's containing a miniature of him painted when he was four years old, and told me it was mine to keep. Then for the first time I broke down and cried....

"If it hadn't been for Jane Leffert I think I should have gone mad. She never tried to hide the truth from me. She admitted, when I asked her, that Milton had, to all intents and purposes, worked himself to death for me, and that the doctor had said the one hope for him lay in his seeing me or hearing I was coming to him. But never a word of blame or reproach did she give me, never a hint of a feeling of it. She knew how easy it is to make mistakes in life, she knew how hard it is to atone for them. She it was who gave me the blessed thought that it was worth while to go on living as part of my atonement, and that if I put into my life the things I had learned from him I might even, to a certain extent, make Milton live on in me.

"So instead of taking poison or becoming a Carmelite nun I went on living at home as before, stimulated and inspired by that idea. It was hard at first, but somehow the harder things were the greater the satisfaction I took in life. By the time I had lightened the remaining years of my stepmother's life and nursed Jane Leffert through her last illness I became content with my lot and, in a way, happy. I never asked for happiness nor wanted it again on earth, but it came, at last. There is something purifying about loving a dead person very much. The chief danger is in its making one morbid, but as I was always a thoroughly practical person with a strong natural [357] taste for life it did me nothing but good. But I don't prescribe it for any one who can get anything better....

"One thing in particular helped me to keep my mind on earth and remind me of the far-reaching effects of wrong-doing. I have said that Hilary, your father, was extremely fond of Adrian. Well, somehow he got the idea into his head that I had thrown him over because of his poverty, and he never forgave me for it. Till his dying day he believed that I really loved Adrian most but was afraid to marry him. Over and over again I told him the truth, taking a sort of fierce pleasure in being able to tell any one that I had never loved any one but Milton Leffert.

"'Then why did you let Adrian make love to you?' Hilary would answer, 'and why did you make him burn that telegram? I know, I heard you as I walked down the path.' Nothing I could say ever made him understand. And the hardest part of it was that I couldn't exactly blame him for not being convinced.

"Taking him at that impressionable time of life the thing had a tremendous effect on him. The idea grew into him that no human feeling could stand the test of hard facts; that that was the way love worked out in real life. From that time on his mind steadily developed and his soul steadily dwindled. He became practical, brilliant, worldly wise, heartless. We grew gradually more and more estranged; you seldom heard him mention my name, I suppose? That's why you never heard before what I've been telling you, or at least the whole truth of it.... And so, as he consciously modeled certain of his mannerisms after those of Adrian he unconsciously grew more and more like him in character; and I had the satisfaction of watching the change and realizing that it was due, in part at least, to me. And the thought of how I unwillingly hurt him has made me all the more anxious to make reparation by being of service to his two boys. Perhaps you can imagine some of the things I've feared for them...."

Here Aunt Selina broke off, choked by a sudden gust of emotion. James said nothing, but sat staring straight in front of him. Presently his aunt, steadying her voice to its accustomed pitch, went on:

"Well, James, I told this to Beatrice, much as I've told it to you, though not at so great length, and [358] I could see it made an impression on her. She came over and sat down by me and took my hand without speaking.

"'You lived through all that?' she said at last, 'and you never told any one?'

"'Why should I have told?' I answered. 'There was no one to tell. I've only told you because I thought it might have some bearing on your own case.'

"She caught her breath, gave a sort of little sigh. And that sigh said, as plainly as words, 'Dear me, I was so interested in your story I almost forgot I must get ready to go to New York to-morrow.' It was a setback; I saw I had overestimated the effect I had made. But I set my teeth and went on, determined not to give her up yet.

"'Beatrice,' I said, 'I haven't told you all this for the pleasure of telling it nor to amuse you. I've told it to you because I wanted to show you how such a course of action as you're about to take works out in real life. There is a strange madness that comes over women sometimes, especially over strong women; a sort of obsession that makes them think they are too good for the men they love. I know it, I've felt it—I've suffered under it, if ever woman did! It may seem irresistible while it lasts, but oh, the remorse that comes afterward! Beatrice, how many times do you suppose I've lived over each snubbing speech I made to Milton Leffert? How often do you suppose my laugh at him when he told me about the tax board has rung through my ears? Those are the memories that stab the soul, Beatrice; don't let there be any such in your life!'

"She didn't answer, but sat staring at the floor.

"'Beatrice,' I went on, 'there's no mortal suffering like discovering you've done wrong when it's too late. It's the curse of strong-willed people. It all seems so simple to us at first; it's so easy for us to force our wills on other people, to rule others and be free ourselves. Then something

happens, the true vision comes, and it's too late! Beatrice, I've caught you in time—it's not too late for you yet. Do you know where you stand now, Beatrice? You're at the point where I was when I told Adrian to burn that telegram!'

"Still she said nothing, and the sight of her sitting there so beautiful and cold drove me almost wild. 'Oh, Beatrice,' I burst out, losing the last bit of my self-control, 'don't tell me I've got to live [359] through it all again with you! Don't go and repeat my mistake before my very eyes, with my example before yours! It was hard enough to live through it once myself, but what will it be when I sit helplessly by and watch the people I love best go through it all! I can't bear it, I can't, I can't! It takes all the meaning out of my own life!...'

"She was moved by my display of feeling, but not by my words. She said nothing for a time, but took my hand again and began stroking it gently, as if to quiet me. I said nothing more—I couldn't speak. At last she said, in a calm, gentle tone of voice, as if she were explaining something to a child:—

"'Aunt Selina, I don't think you quite understand about my marriage with James. It isn't like other marriages, exactly.'

"'It seems to me enough that it is a marriage,' I answered. 'Though I haven't spoken of that side of it, of course.'

"'Oh, you won't understand!' she said.

"'Beatrice,' said I, 'I couldn't understand if you kept telling me about it till to-morrow morning. No one ever will understand you, except your Creator—you might as well make up your mind to it. I don't doubt you've had many wrong things done to you. The point is, you're about to do one. Don't do it.'

"Always back to the same old point, and nothing gained! I had the feeling of having fired my last shot and missed. I shut my eyes and leaned my head back and tried to think of some new way of putting it to her, but as a matter of fact I knew I had said all I had to say. And then, just as I was giving her up for lost, I heard her speaking again.

"'Aunt Selina,' she said, 'you have made me think of one thing.'

"'What's that, my dear?' I asked.

"'Well, I don't doubt but what I have done wrong things already, without suspecting it. Oh, yes, I've been too sure of myself!'

"'It's possible, my dear,' said I, 'but you haven't done anything that you can't still make up for, if you want.'

"'I think I know what you mean,' she said slowly; 'you mean I could go and tell him so. Tell him I had done wrong and was sorry—for I did sin, not in deed, but still in thought.... I never told him [360] that, of course....' Then she shivered. 'Oh, but Aunt Selina, I can't do it, I can't! If you only knew how I've tried already, how I've humiliated myself!'

"'That never did any one any harm,' I told her.

"'And then,' she went on, 'even if I did do it, he'd never take me back—not on any terms! He'd only cast me away again—that's what would happen, you know! What would there be for me then but—Tommy?'

"Well, I knew I'd won a great point in making her even consider it.

"'Several things,' I answered, taking no pains to conceal my delight. 'In the first place, it's by no means certain that he will refuse you. But if he does—well, you'll never lack a home or a friend while I'm alive, my dear! And don't you go and pretend that I'm not more to you than that brainless, chinless, sniveling, driveling little fool of an Englishman, for I won't believe it!'

"She laughed at that and for a moment we both laughed together. Then it suddenly occurred to me that I couldn't do better than leave it at that, let that laugh end our talk.

"'Good night, my dear,' I said, kissing her. 'The time has come now when you've got to make up your mind for yourself. I've done all I can for you.' And with that I left her.

"But, oh, James, it wasn't as simple as all that! It was all very well to tell her that and go to bed, but if you knew what agonies of doubt and suspense I went through during the night, fearing, hoping, wondering, praying! Those things are so much more complicated in real life than they are when you read them or see them acted. What should have happened was that I should have one grand scene with her and make her promise at the end to do as I wanted. And I did my best, I went as far as it was in me to go, and knew no more of the result than before I began! And we parted laughing—laughing, from that talk!

"But almost the worst part of it was next morning when we met downstairs after breakfast, with the family about. I could scarcely say good morning to her, and I never dared catch her eye. And all the time that one great subject was burning in our minds. And we couldn't talk of it again, either; we couldn't have if we'd been alone together in a desert! You can't go on having scenes with people. [361]

"At last, after lunch, I was alone on the verandah with her, and managed to screw myself up to asking her whether she was going to New York or not.

"'Yes, I'm going,' she answered.

"'What do you mean by that?' I asked.

"'Oh, I don't know what I mean!' she said desperately. I knew she was as badly off as I was, or worse, and after that I simply couldn't say another word to her.

"But I saw her alone once again, just before she started. She kissed me good-by and smiled and whispered: 'Don't worry, Aunt Selina—it's all right,' and then the others came. Just that—nothing more!

"I didn't know what to think—what I dared to think. One moment I rushed and telegraphed you, because I was afraid she was going to the Englishman, after all. The next minute I was hurrying to catch the night boat to Boston, because I thought she was going to you and that I might have to deal with you. I wanted to be with her in any case. Oh, I was so mad with the uncertainty and suspense I didn't know what I did or what I thought! But the impression I took away finally from her last words to me were that she was going to you.... But I never knew, James, *I never knew*! And now I never shall!..."

CHAPTER XIV

[362]

A POTTER'S VESSEL

By a great effort Aunt Selina had kept a firm control over herself throughout her narrative, but now, the immediate need of composure being removed, she gave way completely to her natural grief. James, whose attitude toward her had been somewhat as toward a divine visitation, an emissary of Nemesis, suddenly found he had to deal with an old woman suffering under an overwhelming sorrow. This put an end for the present to the possibility of expanding on the Nemesis suggestion. He fetched her some more whisky, reflecting that it must be not unpleasant to have reached the age where grief wore itself out even partially in physical symptoms, to which physical alleviations could be applied. For the first time he found himself considering Aunt Selina as an old woman.

He could not help remarking, however, that even in age and even in grief Aunt Selina was rather magnificent. There was about her tears a Sophoclean, almost a Niobesque quality. It struck him that she must have been extremely good-looking in her youth.

Of course Aunt Selina, even in that extremity, knew enough to refrain from pointing a moral already sufficiently obvious. She said little after finishing her account, and that little was expressive only of her immediate sense of loss.

"Oh, James," she moaned, "I had always thought my life went out in a little puff of red flame forty years ago and more, but it seemed to me that if I could use my experience to mend her life I should be well repaid for everything. And now...."

They sat silent for the most part, both laboring under the terrific hopelessness of the situation, which certainty and uncertainty, together with the impossibility of action, combined to make intolerable. For a while each found a certain comfort in the other's mute presence, but at last even that wore off.

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"Well, my dear, you don't want to be bothered by a hysterical old woman at this time," said Aunt Selina finally, and James obediently telephoned, for a taxi. Nemesis must be met, sooner or later....

Only once, as they sat side by side in the dark cab, did Aunt Selina give utterance to the one idea that animated her thoughts of the future.

"Well, I've lost my own life and I've lost her, and now you're the only thing I have left. Oh, James, for Heaven's sake don't let me lose you!"

"No, Aunt Selina, no," he replied, laying his hand on hers and speaking with a promptness and a fervor that surprised himself.

"One thing," she began just before they drew up at the hotel.

"Yes?"

"One thing I've learned in all these years is that there's nothing so bad that it isn't better to face it than dodge it. Nothing!"

"Yes," said James. "Thank you, Aunt Selina."

He walked back to his apartment with a feeling as of straightening his shoulders. His aunt's words rang in his brain. There was need of courage, he saw that. Well, he had never lacked that and would not be found wanting in it now. Not even—the thought flashed on him as he opened his front door—not even if the kind of courage that was now needed implied humiliation. He entered his home with the consciousness of having made a good start.

He walked straight into the bedroom.

"Well, I've done you an injustice," he said aloud. "I misjudged you. I'm sorry."

"Oh, you didn't give her credit for being capable of loving YOU, did you?" rang a mocking voice in his brain. A palpable hit for Nemesis.

"Oh, you know what I *mean*," he answered petulantly. He thought it was unworthy of her to quibble thus, particularly when he was voluntarily assuming that Beatrice had started from Bar Harbor—well, with the right idea. He had a right to doubt there, which he was willing to waive.

"I'm sorry," he repeated, "truly sorry. Isn't that enough?" His eyes fell on the photograph of Beatrice which still stood on the dressing table. He turned quickly away again. [364]

"Not by a long shot," said Nemesis, or words to that effect.

No, somehow it wasn't. He realized it himself; even feeling that didn't give him the sense of repletion and calm that he sought. He paced the room for some time in silent anxiety.

"I really don't know what to do," he admitted at last. "Suppose"—he was appealing to Beatrice now—"suppose you tell me what."

He glanced involuntarily at the photograph. Its unchanging half-smile informed him that all help must now come from himself. A sudden access of rage at that photograph seized him.

"Don't you laugh at me, when I'm trying my best!" he cried.

The picture smiled on. In a burst of fury James picked up the frame and hurled it with all his strength into the mirror. There was a crash and a shower of broken glass, amid which the picture bounded lazily back and fell to the floor, face downward.

James stood and stared at it, and as he stared a curious revulsion came over him. He stooped slowly down, unaccountably hoping with all his soul that the photograph was not hurt. He scarcely dared to turn it over....

The glass was smashed to atoms, but the picture itself was unhurt. No, there was a cut across the face.

"Oh, I've hurt her, I've hurt Beatrice!" he whispered.

Nemesis said something that made him sink into a chair and gaze before him with horror. Cinders, ashes, black coals, some of them still glowing—oh, the mere sight of them then had been unbearable! And now, in view of what he had learned.... He could not face the thought.

Yet it was true: if it had not been for him Beatrice would still be alive. Whether she took that train intending to go to him or to Tommy it did not matter; she would not have taken it at all if he had behaved as he should.

He turned his attention back to the picture, gently and carefully smoothing out the cut, as though in the hope that reparation to her effigy would make it easier to face the thought of having compassed her destruction.

Somehow it did no such thing....

Of course what Nemesis wanted was a confession that he loved the woman whose death he was morally responsible for. James realized that himself, almost from the first, but it was not in his nature to admit easily that such an unreasonable change of feeling was possible to him. Long hours of struggle followed, hours of endless pacing, of fruitless internal argument, of blind resistance to the one hope, as he in the bottom of his soul knew it was, of his salvation. Resistance, brave, exhilarating, hopeless, futile, ignoble resistance to whatever happened to him contrary to the dictates of his own will—it was as inevitable to him as feeling itself. [365]

From time to time he thought of Tommy, and this, if he did but know it, was the best symptom he could have shown. For though at first he thought of him with little more than his usual contempt, envy soon began to creep in, then frank jealousy and at last a blind hatred that made him clench his hands and wish, as he had seldom wished anything, that Tommy's throat was between them. In fact he ended by hating Tommy quite as though he were his equal. He never stopped to consider that this change was no less revolutionary than the one he was fighting.

The hopeless hours dragged on. A sense of physical fatigue grew on him; every muscle in him ached. His brain also staggered under the long strain; it hammered and rang. Certain scraps of sentences he had heard during the day buzzed through it with a curious insistence, taking

advantage of his weakened state to torment him. A great chance, a great chance—Uncle James' parting words to him. Sorrow was a great chance—for some. For Aunt Selina, yes; for Beatrice, yes; or Uncle James, frozen and unresponsive as he appeared, yes. But not for him. Oh, no, he must admit it, he was not even worthy to suffer greatly. He was not really suffering now, he supposed; he was merely very tired. Otherwise those words, a great chance, a great chance, would not keep pounding through his head like the sound of loud wheels....

Railroad wheels.

Then what was it that Aunt Selina had said about finding out something too late? Oh, yes, people found out they loved other people when it was too late. Especially strong people. He was strong.... Could it be that *he* was going to discover something too late—*that*? It was too late for something already, but surely not for that! Just think—Aunt Selina had found out too late, and [366] Beatrice had found out too late, and now....

Yes, if it was horrible it must be true. It was he who was too late. He understood about Aunt Selina, all she must have felt. And Beatrice too; he saw now how strong and noble and warm-hearted she had been, and how she must have suffered. Especially that. And now he had found out it was too late to tell her so!

"We can't tell you what we don't know," the man in the station had said that morning. Words spoken mechanically and without thought, but containing the very essence of human tragedy. While there was yet time he had had no knowledge, not the slightest glimmering....

"Oh, Beatrice!" he groaned, "if I had only been able to hope! Just a little hope, even at that last minute on the platform! That would be something to be thankful for!"

And then in the anguish of his remorse all his fatigue and uncertainty suddenly fell from him. Nothing remained but the thought of her, strong, generous, brave, humble, all that he had professed to admire—dead! And he, false, mean, cowardly, cold-hearted, alive. And the idea of never being able to tell her that at last he understood became so intolerable, so cruel, so contrary to all that was good in life, so blindly unthinkable, that....

Well, in a word, it simply ceased to be. Such a life as had been hers could not fade into nothingness, such a heart as hers could not fail to understand, be she dead or alive.

"God," he whispered, clutching with all his strength at the hope the word now contained, "God, make her understand! I recant, I repent, I believe—anything! Forgive me if you can or punish me as you will, only let her live, let her know...."

Then, as the crowning torment, came hope. After all, he knew nothing; he only supposed. Nothing was certain; only probable. Something might have happened; he dared not think what or how, but it was possible, conceivable, at least, that Beatrice was not on that train when it was wrecked. Beatrice might still be alive!... The anguish of the fall back into probability was sharper than anything he had yet known, but every time he found himself struggling painfully up again toward that small spark of light.

He fell on his knees beside the bed—her bed—and tried to pray. Nothing came to his lips but the [367] words he had so long disdained to say, uttered now with a fierce sweet jubilation:

"Beatrice, I love you. I never did before, but I do now—at least I think I do! I never knew, I never understood, but I do now! Beatrice, I do love you, I do, I do! Beatrice...."

But apparently they satisfied the power that has charge of such matters, for even as he stammered the words that saved him a blessed drowsiness stole over him and before long he slept as he knelt. It was morning when he awoke.

CHAPTER XV [368]

THE TIDE TURNS

A gray morning, wet and close, whose very atmosphere was death to hope. James did hope, nevertheless, with all the refreshed energy of his being. Hope came as soon as he started to wake up, before he began to feel the cramps in his limbs, before he had time to rub his eyes and wonder what had happened.

A hot bath, and then breakfast. Physical alleviations; he was humiliated to realize they did make a difference, even to him. He shuddered at the thought of how he had patronizingly envied Aunt Selina for being helped by them last night, much as he shuddered at the remembrance of having once dared to pity Beatrice....

But the present was also with him, and the present was even harder to face than the past. Hope

sprang eternal, but so did certainty. One might have thought that they would have neutralized each other's effects and left a blank, but as a matter of fact they only doubled each other's torments. The moment breakfast was over James started off for the station to set one or the other at rest.

He went straight to the press room, which was only just open; he had to wait for the agent to arrive. When he came he was able to tell James nothing new, but he conducted him to a departmental manager. He was no more satisfactory, but he undertook to make every possible inquiry. Leaving James in an outer office he called various people to him, got into telephonic communication with others and ended by calling up Stamford and then Boston. But James could guess the result from his face the moment he reentered the room.

"Nothing?" he asked.

"Nothing. But don't give up yet."

James walked slowly down the corridor toward the elevator. It was a long corridor, dark and empty; James could not see the end of it when he started. The sound of his feet echoed hollowly along the dim walls. Altogether it was rather an eerie place, not at all suggestive of a modern [369] office building. Much more, it seemed to James as he walked on, like life.... A blind alley, the end of which was in shadow, where one must walk alone and in almost total darkness. A place where one's footsteps echo with painful exactness—one must walk carefully lest the sound of their irregularity should ring evilly in one's ears and pierce unharmoniously into those mysterious chambers alongside, perhaps even into other corridors, other people's corridors....

He roused himself from his reverie with a jerk, but his mood remained on him, translated into a larger meaning. He was alive; no matter what had happened to Beatrice, he was still alive, with a living person's duties and responsibilities—and chances. Beatrice, even though cut off in the bloom of her youth, had succeeded in making a person of herself, justifying her existence, supplying a guiding light to some of those who walked in greater darkness than herself. He had not as yet done that. Well, he must. He would. Beatrice's gift to him should not be wasted. In a flash he felt his strength and his manhood return to him. He looked into the future with a humble yet unflinching gaze; hope and certainty had lost their terrors for him. If Beatrice had died, he would thank God that it had been given him to know her and do his best to translate her spirit into earthly terms. If by any impossible chance she still lived—well, he could do nothing to make himself worthy of such happiness, but he would do his best.

He walked out of the elevator into the concourse, the huge unchanging concourse where so much had happened yesterday. It was comparatively empty at this moment, only a few figures waiting patiently before train gates. One of these caught his eye; it took on a bafflingly familiar appearance. He moved curiously nearer to it....

Tommy!

At last, at last, at last he was going to feel that throat between his fingers, get a chance to exterminate that—that—He sprang forward like a wildcat.

He stopped before he had taken two steps, with a feeling of impotence, hopelessness. Who was he, who under the sun was he to teach Tommy anything? Tommy—why, Tommy had loved Beatrice, not after it was too late, but before! Beatrice had preferred Tommy to him. Tommy was [370] a better man than he was; he took a morbid joy in thinking how much better.

It was conceivable that Tommy might know something. Perhaps he had even come to this very spot to meet Beatrice.... Well, he would not blame her or offer objections, if it were so. He would accept such a judgment gladly, as a small price for knowing she was alive. He hurried across the concourse.

"Tommy, can you tell me anything about Beatrice?" James' voice was so matter-of-fact, so strikingly unfitted to a Situation, that Tommy was rather irritated. He flushed.

"No, of course not. Why should I?"

"I only thought—seeing you here—"

"No." The tone was abrupt to the point of rudeness, wholly un-Tommylike. There was an odd moment of silence, which Tommy ended by breaking out: "Why the devil do you have to come here and crow over me? Why can't you let me clear out in peace?"

James was so penitent for having hurt Tommy that he did not at first notice the implication in his words.

"I'm sorry—I meant nothing! I've been out of my head with anxiety.... I only thought she might have gone somewhere else to meet you—it was my last hope...."

"*What?*" Tommy cocked his eyebrows incredulously, with a sort of fierceness. "Hope of what?"

"Why, that Beatrice was still alive."

"Still alive? What on earth—! What makes you think she isn't?"

"Do you mean to say—"

Again the two stared at each other in a strained silence. Then Tommy produced a crumpled yellow envelope from his pocket and handed it to James.

"I got this yesterday morning—that's all I know. I haven't been able to destroy the damned thing...."

James took it and opened it. A telegram:—

It's all off, Tommy. Please go away and forgive me if you can. Beatrice.

He looked at the date at the top. Boston, 8:37 A. M. Boston! The Maine Special did not go into Boston; Beatrice had left it before—before.... [371]

"Tommy," he said faintly, "Tommy, I—" His head swam; he felt himself reeling.

"All right, old top, all right; easy does it." He felt Tommy's arm about him and heard Tommy's voice in his ears, the voice of the good-hearted Tommy of old. Suddenly the idea of a disappointed lover calling his fainting though successful rival old top and telling him that easy did it struck him as wildly and irresistibly humorous. He laughed, and the sound of his laugh acted like a stimulant. He bit his lip hard.

"All right now—I'll go up and get into a taxi. You see," he began explanatorily to Tommy as he walked beside him, "I thought—I thought—"

"I see," supplied Tommy companionably, "you thought she was in the accident, of course. Beastly thing, that accident; no wonder it knocked you up. Knocked me up a bit myself when I heard of it, although I knew she couldn't be in it. Easy up the steps—righto! Everything turned out all right in the end, though, didn't it? Pretty hefty steps, wot? Pretty hefty place altogether—nothing like it in London...."

A cab puffed up beside them. James turned with his hand on the door. An unaccountable wave of affection, respect, even, for Tommy surged through him. "Tommy, you're going away now, I take it?"

"Yes—Chicago." (He pronounced it *Shickago*. That was nothing; when he arrived in the country he had pronounced it with the ch sound. In a few more weeks he would get it correctly; you couldn't expect too much at a time from Tommy.)

"Well, Tommy, see here—"

"Yes?"

"It may sound silly to you, but—come and see us some time!"

"Righto. Not now, though—got to see the country—train leaves in two minutes. See America first, wot? Good-by!" and he was off.

James sank back into the cab, admiring the other's tact. A thoughtless, brutal proposal; of course he ought never to have made it. It was not in him, though, to deny Tommy any sign of the overwhelming love for the whole world that filled him.

When he reached his apartment his physical strength was restored, but mentally he seemed [372] paralyzed. There was much to be done, but he had no idea how to go about it. A bright thought struck him; he called up Aunt Selina. He laughed foolishly into the transmitter; Heaven knows how he made her understand at last. The two babbled incoherently at one another for a moment and abruptly rang off, without saying good-by.... Another bright idea—Uncle James. He was more definite, but James had little idea of what he said. He caught something about a Comparatively Simple Matter.... Uncle J. undertook to do everything, whatever it was. A satisfactory person.

After that James sat down in an armchair and for a long time remained there, reduced to an inarticulate pulp of joy.

An hour or two later Beatrice's telegram arrived. It was dated from an obscure place in the White Mountains. "Quite safe and well; only just heard of the accident," it read. Just ten words. But quite enough! To think of her telegraphing *him*!...

Immediately he became strong and efficient again. He rushed back to the station, dashed off a telegram and caught up a time table. Confound the trains—nothing till eight-fifteen!

When she left Bar Harbor, Beatrice had no very clear idea of what she was going to do. Of one thing she was fairly sure; she was not going to Tommy. Where Aunt Cecilia's tentative suggestions concerning the dangers besetting a young wife had failed, Aunt Selina's uncompromising realism had gone straight to the point. Her eyes were opened; she saw what pitfalls infatuation and pique and obstinacy might lead her into. She was willing to admit that the thing she had planned to do would be equivalent to throwing away her last hold on life—all she read into the word life. No, she would not go to Tommy. Not directly, anyway....

Ah, there was the rub. Suppose her imagined scene of confession and appeal turned into one of mutual recrimination and resentment—the old sort. What was more likely, in view of her past

experience? Were things so radically changed now that either she or James would be able to understand the other better than before? With the best intentions in the world she could not help rubbing him the wrong way, and she feared the anger and hopelessness that it was his power to [373] inspire in her. With Tommy at hand, in the same town, could she trust herself to resist the temptation of throwing herself into his ready arms? It was all very well for Aunt Selina to say that she was worth more to Beatrice than Tommy; Beatrice was quite convinced of it, in the calm light of reason. But in the hour of failure, with her pride and her woman's desire for protection and love worked up to white heat, would she still be convinced of it? Could she dare entrust her whole chance of future happiness to the strength of her reason in the moment of its greatest trial?

Thoughts like these mingled with the rattle of the train in a sleepless night. In the morning one thing emerged into clarity; she must wait till Tommy was out of the way. If her determination to try to regain James was worth anything, she must give it every possible chance for success. Her hopes for a happy issue out of her dreadful labyrinth were not so good that she could afford to take one unnecessary risk.

Well, if she wasn't going to New York she would have to get off the train, obviously. So she alighted outside Boston early in the morning, took a local into town and telegraphed Tommy. Then, as she wandered aimlessly through the station her eye fell on a framed time-table in which occurred the name of a small White Mountain resort of which she had lately heard; a place described to her as remote and quiet and possessed of one fairly good hotel. She noticed that a train was due to leave for there in an hour's time. In a moment her decision was made; she would go up there and wait for Tommy to get safely out of the way, carefully plan out her course of action and—she scarcely dared express the thought, even mentally—give herself a little time to enjoy her newly-awakened love before putting it to the final test.

She arrived in the evening, took a room in the hotel and went to bed almost immediately, sleeping soundly for the first time in weeks. About the middle of the next morning the Boston papers arrived. Until then she had no notion that the train she had traveled by had been wrecked.

She telegraphed immediately to Aunt Cecilia and then, after some thought, to James. It seemed the thing to do, everything being considered. She wondered if he knew she was safe, how he [374] would take the news, if he had been much disturbed by uncertainty. She was inclined to fear that her escape had not done her cause any particular good....

His reply arrived surprisingly soon: "Stay where you are, am coming." She was touched. Apparently the turn of events had had a favorable effect on him; if he cared enough now to come up and see her the opportunity for putting her plea to him must be fairly propitious. There was a fair chance that if she acted wisely all would turn out well. But oh, she must be careful!

She knew he must arrive by the morning train and arose betimes so as to be on hand. She was in some doubt about breakfast, whether to get it early or wait for him. Either way might be better or worse; it all depended on the outcome of their meeting. She ended by deciding to wait; she would let him breakfast alone if—if. Small interest she would have in breakfast in that event.

She was downstairs long before the train was due to arrive. The weather had cleared during the night and the morning was sunny and cool, a true autumn day. She tried waiting on the verandah, but the wind was so sharp that she soon returned to the warm lobby. She could watch the road equally well from the front windows; there was a long open ascent from the station. At last she saw the hotel wagon appear round a curve. There was only one passenger in it. He, of course. She could recognize the set of his head and shoulders even at that distance. She hoped he had a warm enough overcoat.

The wagon reached the steepest part of the incline, and he was out, walking briskly along beside it. Before it, very soon; he went so much faster. How like James, and how unnecessary! He the only passenger, and what were horses made for, anyway? Still perhaps it was better, if he were not warmly dressed....

The ascent grew steeper before him and his pace visibly decreased. But the wagon merely crawled, far behind him! He was a furious walker. That hill was enough to phase any one....

Presently the sight of him plodding painfully up toward her while she waited calmly at the top grew perfectly intolerable. She could bear it no longer; hatless and coatless she rushed out of the [375] hotel and down the road toward him. After a while he raised his face and their eyes met. Nearer and nearer they came, gazing fixedly into each other's eyes and discovering new things there, new lives, new worlds....

They did not even kiss. She, looking beyond him, saw the driver of the station wagon peering up at them, and he caught sight over her shoulder of the staring windows of the hotel. They stopped with some embarrassment and immediately began walking up together.

"It's nice to see you, James; did you have a good journey?"

"Yes, very, thanks. You comfortable here?"

On they walked, in silence. Gradually their embarrassment left them and gave place to a sort of awe. Something was going to happen, something great and wonderful; they no longer doubted it nor felt any fear. But—all in good time!

It must be coming soon, though, to judge by the way it kept pressing down on them. Good time? Heavens, there never was any time but the present moment, never would be any....

"Beatrice," said James, staring hard at the ground in front of him, "I know now how wicked I've been. Do you think you can ever forgive me?"

"Why, James," said Beatrice gently, "dear James, there's nothing to forgive."

Then he looked up and saw there were tears on her cheeks....

Yes, right there in the open road!

CHAPTER XVI

[376]

REINSTATEMENT OF A SCHÖNE SEELE

The sunlight of a golden October afternoon poured down on a little brick terrace running along one side of the farmhouse in the Berkshires Harry had bought and reformed into a summer house. It was not the principal open-air extension of the place; the official verandah was on the other side, commanding a wide view to the east and south. This was just a little private terrace, designed especially for use on afternoons like the present, when for the moment autumn went back on all its promises and in a moment of carelessness poured over a dying landscape the breath of May. The only view to be had from it was up a grassy slope to the west, on the summit of which, according to all standards except those of the New England farmer of one hundred years ago, the house ought to have been built. Not that either Madge or Harry cared particularly. They were fond of pointing out that Tom Ball, or West Stockbridge Mountain, or whatever it was, shut out the view to the west anyway, and that they were lucky enough to find a farmhouse with any view from it at all.

On the terrace sat James and Beatrice, who were spending a week-end with their relatives. Madge was with them. Presumably there was current in her mind a polite fiction that she was entertaining her guests, but she did not take her duties of hostess-ship too seriously. It was not even necessary to keep up a conversation; they all got along far too well together for that. They simply sat and enjoyed the fleeting sunshine, making pleasant and unnecessary remarks whenever they felt moved to do so. Probably they also thought, from time to time. Of the general extraordinariness of things, and so forth. If they all spent a little time in admiring the adroitness with which the hands of fate had shuffled them, with the absent member of the pack, into their present satisfactory positions, we should not be at all surprised. But of course none of them made any allusion to it.

[377]

Harry suddenly burst through the glass door leading from the house and flopped into a chair. His appearance was informal. The others turned toward him with curious nostrils.

"I know, I know," he sighed. "The only thing is for us all to smoke. You too, Beatrice. Because if you don't you'll smell me, and if you smell me I'll have to go up and wash, and if I go up and wash now I shall miss this last hour of sunshine and that will make you all very, very unhappy."

"I am smoking," said Beatrice calmly, "because I want to, and for no other reason."

"And I," observed Madge, "because Harry doesn't want me to."

"If you want to know what I've been doing since lunch," said Harry, disregarding the insult, "I don't mind telling you that I've mended a wire fence, covered the asparagus bed, conducted several successful bonfires and filled all the grease-cups on the Ford. I have also turned—"

"Yes," said James, "we've guessed that."

"And now only a few trifles such as feeding fowls and swine—or as Madge prefers to put it, chickabiddies and piggywigs—stand between me and a well-deserved repose. Heavens! I don't see how farmers can keep such late hours. Harker, I believe, frequently stays up till nearly nine. I feel as if it ought to be midnight now; nothing but the thought of the piggywigs keeps me out of bed."

"Can't Harker feed the piggywigs?" inquired Beatrice.

"Oh, yes," said Madge, "just as he can do all the other things Harry does a great deal better than he. But it keeps him busy and happy, so we let him go on."

"Just as if you didn't cry every night to feed your old pigs!" retorted her husband.

Madge laughed. "Yes, I am rather a fool about the poor things, even if they aren't so attractive as they were in June. You should have seen them, so pink and tiny and sweet, standing up on their

hind legs and wiggling their noses at you! No one could help wanting to feed them, they were so helpless and confident of receiving a shower of manna from above. I know just how the Almighty felt when he fed the Israelites."

"Better manna than manners," murmured Harry, and for a while there was a profound silence. [378]

"What about a stroll before tea?" presently suggested the happy farmer.

"I should like to," said James. "We'll have to make it short, though."

"Very well. What about the others—the fair swine-herd?"

"I think not," answered the person referred to, smiling up at him. "I took quite a long walk before lunch, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Harry, blushing for no apparent reason. "Beatrice?"

Beatrice preferred to stay with Madge.

"You see," said Harry when the two had gone a little way; "you see, the fact is, Madge—hm. Madge—"

"You mean," said James, smiling, "there is hope of a new generation of our illustrious house?"

"Yes! I only learned this morning. If it's a boy we're going to call it James, and if it's a girl we're going to call it Jaqueline."

"I wonder," mused James, "how many times you have named it since you first heard."

"There have been several suggestions," admitted Harry, laughing. "I really think it will end by that, though."

"Jaqueline—quite a pretty name. Much prettier than James—I rather hope it will be a girl."

"Yes, I do too," said Harry. And both knew that they would not have troubled to express that wish if they had not really hoped the direct opposite....

They walked slowly up the hill and presently turned and stopped to admire the view that the foolish prudence of a dead farmer had prevented them from enjoying from the house. It was a very lovely view, with its tumbled stretches of hills and fields and occasional sheets of blue water bathed in the mellow light of the sun that hung low over the dark mountain wall to the west. Possibly it was its sheer beauty, or the impression it gave of distance from human strife and sordidness, or perhaps the subject last mentioned imparted to their thoughts and impulse away from the trivial and familiar; at any rate when Harry next spoke his words fell neither on James' ears nor his own with the sound of fatuity that they might have held at another time.

"James," he said, "we're getting on, aren't we? I don't mean in years, though that's a most [379] extraordinary feeling in itself, but in—in life, in the business of living. If you ask me what I mean by that high-sounding phrase I can only say it's something like coming out of every experience a little better qualified to meet whatever new experience lies in store for you. Of course we've heard about life being a game and all that facile rot ever since we were old enough to speak, but it's quite different when you come to *feel* it. It's a sensation all by itself, isn't it?"

James drew a deep breath. "Yes, it is quite by itself," he agreed. "And I'm glad to be able to say that at last I have some idea of what the actual feeling is like. It was atrophied long enough in me, Heaven knows! It's still very slight, very timid and tentative; just a sort of glimmering at times—"

"That's all it ever is," said Harry. "Just an occasional glimmering. The true feeling, that is. If it's anything more, it isn't really that at all, but just a sort of stuckupness, an idea that I am equal to the worst life can do to Me! I know people that seem to have that attitude—insufferable! Only life is pretty apt to punish them by giving them a great deal more than they bargained for."

James was silent a moment, as with a sort of confessional silence. But he knew Harry would not understand its confessional quality, so he said quietly: "That's exactly what happened to me, of course."

"Oh, rot! Did you think I meant you?"

"No, but it's true, for all that. Thank Heaven I have been permitted to live through it!... The truth is, I suppose, I was too successful early in life. In school, in college and afterward it was always the same—I found myself able to do certain things with an ease that surprised and delighted people—no one more than myself. For they weren't things that mattered especially, you see; they were showy, spectacular things that appealed to the public eye, like playing football. I was a good physical specimen, not through any effort or merit of my own, but simply through a natural gift, and a very poor and hollow gift it is, as I've found out. I don't think people quite realize the problem that a man of the athletic type has to face if he's going to make anything out of himself but an athlete. From early boyhood he's conscious of physical superiority; he knows perfectly well that in the last resort he can knock the other fellow down and stamp on him, and that gives him a [380] certain feeling of repose and self-sufficiency that's very pernicious. It usually passes for strength of character, but it's nothing in the world but faith in bone and muscle. And people do worship physical strength so! It's small wonder a man gets his head turned.... Good Lord, the ideas I used

to have about myself! Why, in college, if any one had made me say what, in the bottom of my heart, I thought was the greatest possible thing for a man of my years to be, I should have said being a great football player in a great university. That is, I wouldn't have said it, because that would have been like bragging, and it isn't done to brag: but that would have been my secret thought.

"And then, if the man has any brains or any capacity for feeling, he runs up against some of the big forces of life, and he finds his physical strength no more use to him than a broken reed. It's quite a shock! I've been more severely tried than most people are, I imagine, but Heaven knows I needed it! Everything had gone my way before that; I literally never knew what it was to have to put up a fight against something I recognized as stronger than I and likely to beat me in the end. Well, I'm grateful enough for it now. Thank Heaven for it! Thank Heaven for letting me fight and find out my weakness and come through it somehow, instead of remaining a mere mountain of beef all my days!"

Both stood silent for a moment after James had ended this confession, less because they felt embarrassment in the presence of the feeling that lay behind it than because for a short time the past lay on them too heavily for words. After a few seconds they moved as though by a common impulse and walked slowly along the grassy crest of the ridge, and Harry began again.

"What you say sounds very well coming from you, James, but I have reason to believe that very little, if any of it, is true. It was my privilege to know you during the years you speak of, and I seem to remember you as something more than a mountain of beef. Don't be absurd, James!"

He paused a moment and then went on more seriously: "No, James; if there was ever any danger of any of us suffering from cock-sureness it's I, at this moment. Do you realize how ridiculously happy I've been for the last year or so? This success of mine—oh, I've worked, but it's been [381] absurdly easy, for all that—and Madge, and everything—it seems sometimes as if there was something strange and sinister about it. It simply can't be good for any one to be so happy! It worries me."

"Well, as long as it does, you needn't," said James.

"Oh, I see! That makes it quite simple, of course!"

"What I mean," elucidated James, "is that, if you feel that way about it, it's probable that you really deserve what happiness you have. After all, you know, you have paid for some. You have had your times; I don't mind admitting that there have been moments when you weren't quite the archangel which of course you are at present!"

Harry laughed. "The prophet Jeremiah once said something about its being good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. If that is equivalent to saying that the earlier a man has his bad times the better, it may be that I got off more easily by having them in college than if they'd held off till later. One does learn certain things easier if one learns them early. But that doesn't mean that your youth has passed without your feeling the yoke, or that your youth has passed yet. You're still in the Jeremiah class! One would hardly say that at thirty—you're not much over thirty, are you?"

"A few weeks under, I believe."

"I'm sorry!—Well, at thirty there are surely years of youth ahead of you, which you, having borne your yoke, may look forward to without fear and with every prospect of enjoying to the fullest extent. Whereas I—well, there's even more time for me to bear yokes in, if necessary. I don't much believe that Jeremiah has done with me yet, somehow!"

"You're not afraid of the future, though, are you?" asked James after a pause.

"Oh, no—that would never do. I feel about it as.... One can't say these things without sounding cocksure and insufferable!"

"You mean you'll do your best under the circumstances?"

"Yes, or make a good try at it! And then.... Of course I can't be as happy as I am without having a good deal at stake; I've given hostages to fortune—that's Francis Bacon, not me. And if fortune should look upon those hostages with a covetous eye—if anything, for instance, should happen to [382] Madge in what's coming, why, there are still plenty of things that the worst fortune can't spoil!... Well, you know."

"Yes," said James; "I know."

"In fact, there are certain things in the past so dear to me that perhaps, if it came to the point, it would be almost a joy to pay heavily for them. But that's only the way I feel about it now, of course. It's easy enough to be brave when there's no danger."

"Yes," said James, "but I think you're right in the main. After all, the past is one's own—inalienably, forever! While the future is any man's....

"Of course you know," he went on after a pause, "that my past would have been nothing at all to me without you. It sounds funny, but it's true."

"Funny is the word," said Harry.

"But perfectly true. I should never have come through—all this business if it hadn't been for you."

"Look here, James, you're not going to thank me for saving your soul, are you? That would be a little forced!"

"My dear man, I'm not thanking you, I'm telling you! You were the one good thing I held on to; I was false and wicked in about every way I could be, but I did always try, in a sort of blind and blundering way, to be true to you. You've been—unconsciously if you will have it so—the best influence of my life, and I thought it might be well to tell you, that's all."

"Well, I won't pretend I'm not glad to hear it," said Harry soberly. "It is rather remarkable when you come to think of it," he went on after a moment, "how our lives have been bound up together. It's rather unusual with brothers, I imagine. Generally they see a good deal too much of each other during their early years and when they grow up they settle down into an acquaintanceship of a more or less cordial nature. But with us it's been different. Being apart during those early years, I suppose, made it necessary for us to rediscover each other when we grew up...."

"Yes," said James, "and the process of rediscovering had some rather lively passages in it, if I remember right."

"It did! But it was a good thing; it gave us a new interest in each other. One reason why people are commonly so much more enthusiastic about their friends than about their relations is because their relations are an accident, but their friends are a credit to them. It just shows what a selfish thing human nature is, I suppose." [383]

"I see; a new way of being a credit to ourselves. Well, most of it's on my side, I imagine."

Harry turned gravely toward his brother. "It seems to me, James, you suffer under a tendency to overestimate my virtues. You mustn't, you know; it's extremely bad for me. I should say, if questioned closely, that that was your one fault—if one expects a kindred tendency to shield me from things I ought not to be shielded from."

"Oh, rot, man!"

"You needn't talk—you do. I've felt it, all along, though you've done your job so well that for the most part I never knew what you'd saved me from."

"Well.... I might go so far as to say that when I've put you before myself I generally find I'm all right, and when I put myself first I generally find I'm all wrong. But as I've been all wrong most of the time, it doesn't signify much!"

"Hm. You put it so that I can't insist very hard. It's there, though, for all that. Funny thing. I don't believe it's a bit usual between friends, really, especially between brothers. Whatever started you on it? It must have been more or less conscious."

For a moment James thought of telling him. They had lived so long since then; it would be amusing for them to trace together the effects of that one little guiding idea. But he thought of the years ahead, and they seemed to call out to him with warning voices, voices full of a tale of tasks unfinished and the need of a vigilance sharper than before. So he only laughed a little and said:

"Oh, it's you that are exaggerating now! You mustn't get ideas about it; it's no more than you'd do for me, or any one for any one else he cares about. But little as it is, don't grudge it to me, for though it may not have done you much good, it's been the saving of me...."

So they walked and talked as the sun sank low and the night fell gently from a cloudless sky. To Madge and Beatrice, seeing them silhouetted against that final blaze of glory in the west, they seemed almost as one figure.

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