
LADY ANN

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LADY ANN

BY

DONALD HENDERSON CLARKE

ALABAM' and KELLY

Two complete novels in one volume

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BY

DONALD HENDERSON CLARKE

AUTHOR OF
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ETC.

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TO GLADYS

who has put up her hair, and goes
to church on Sunday

LADY ANN

Chapter One

ELIHU STEELE was a carpenter, and in his spare time farmed the ten acres on which was set his two-story, eight-room, white clapboard house in Elm Street, Eastham.

He was a big man, well over six feet in his stockings, wide-shouldered, a little stooped, with a big, bull voice. When he wanted chewing tobacco, he and his cousin, Albert Steele, lifted up one side of the red cow barn, pushed a keg of tobacco leaves, rum and molasses under the corner, and let the barn settle back into place. This procedure made nice, strong chewing material.

Elihu went to church every Sunday with his wife, Naomi, who had been a Smith of Old Orchard when he had married her twelve years before. The first Smith, Ebenezer, had come over on the Mayflower. The first Steele, Lieutenant Elihu, first had set foot on Massachusetts soil in 1630. The Steeles and the Smiths believed that kings and queens and aristocrats all were stupid, in-bred parasites suffering of syphilis, dementia praecox and curvature of the spine. They devoutly believed that the Smiths and the Steeles were the leading families, not only of Eastham and Massachusetts, but of the world.

They were members of the First Congregational Church of Eastham, where the Reverend Joshua Hazen in a voice like a trumpet call preached a jealous and fearful God, an earth exactly six thousand and some-odd years and hours old, and a blazing hell for infants and all others not baptized.

Elihu was not a deacon as had been the seven Elihus who preceded him, but he never went fishing in Fast River, or Broad Brook, or the Old Bed, or shooting at Moss's Corners, or Old Haven, on Sunday.

On one such Sunday, having laid the foundation with a bath on Saturday night, he put on a suit of balbriggan underwear. Sitting on the edge of the inlaid walnut double bed with the crazy quilt cover, and grunting a little, he poked the toes of his right foot into the toe of a black sock, which he had turned inside out. He peeled this sock over the foot and up over the balbriggan leg of the drawers, swollen by a shapely and muscular calf.

Both socks on, he stepped into a pair of blue serge trousers, which he pulled up around his slightly bulging abdomen. Letting the suspenders hang for a moment, he opened the second drawer of the inlaid walnut bureau and took from it a white shirt with a stiff bosom. After inserting studs in the neckband, front and back, he pulled on the shirt over his head. Next, he selected a collar, and grunted, and turned red in the gills before he succeeded in snapping it into place over the studs. He stood in front of the mirror over the bureau and put a black tie under the white linen turn-down collar. Then, with the tie still hanging, he sat down again on the edge of the bed and pulled on Congress shoes, which were boots with elastic sides and no laces or buttons.

After that he arose, kicked a few inches first with one leg, and then with the other, to set himself comfortably in drawers and trousers, hitched the suspenders over his shoulders, and buttoned his fly. Stepping to the door he bellowed:

"Naomi."

"Yes, Elihu," Naomi replied from the dining room downstairs. "Coming."

She was a short woman with large breasts and hips, tapering arms and legs, small wrists and ankles, and tiny hands and feet. Her cheeks were pink from work in the kitchen, where she had been pounding top round steak full of holes with a hammer and beating up batter for sour milk griddle cakes. Elihu liked to eat a dozen or so big griddle cakes soaked in steak gravy for breakfast on Sundays.

Naomi brushed damp brown curls from a white, damp forehead, wiped her hands on her gingham apron, stood on tiptoe, and took hold of the ends of the tie. Elihu raised his chin and stretched his neck, and breathed noisily while she made a bow and patted it into place. She said:

"There. How's that?"

He put two hands, like steel hooks, under her armpits and hoisted her easily from the floor. As if it were an unusual occurrence, she squealed:

"Elihu, put me down. I've got to get the breakfast."

He had black hair and brown eyes, a high arched nose, a wide mouth shaded by a yellow mustache, and a big chin. He rubbed her straight little nose with his big one, and pressed his lips to hers. He said:

"The breakfast can wait. Give me a kiss."

She put plump arms around his neck and kissed him, her feet, in old but shapely high shoes, more than a foot from the rag rug which covered the patch of wide floor boards in front of the bed. Cheeks pink, and a little breathless, she drew back, blue eyes gazing into brown ones, and asked:

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden, Elihu?"

He grinned, and pressed his mouth to her white neck. She wriggled, laughed, and cried:

"Oooh! That tickles."

He dumped her on the mussed-up bed, so that she bounced. Brown hair came down in her eyes. She laughed and brushed it back. He took her by the ankles. She gasped, and cried agitatedly:

"Don't, Elihu. Oh!"

He lifted her up by the ankles. Her skirts and petticoats fell over her head, revealing black lisle stockings, smooth white skin, and freshly ironed linen balloon drawers. He smacked her with his open palm on the balloon drawers. She kicked and squealed, and rolled away, breathless, panting, red-faced, as he smacked her again. She was between laughter and tears as she pulled up her clothing and bared white skin on which were red marks of fingers. She exclaimed reproachfully:

"Now I'll be black and blue. You know how easy I bruise."

"I'll kiss it and make it well," he said.

He sat down on the bed, which creaked under his weight, and kissed the fingerprints. Then he kissed her. She hugged him tight, sighed, and whispered:

"I love you, Elihu. I wonder if you love me as much as I do you."

"You're my little girl," he said in what was intended to be a whisper but which was a low rumble.

After a minute, she said:

"You're terrible, Elihu. Wait till I—"

But Elihu didn't wait, and that is how it came about that two months later, in August, 1890, Dr. Samuel Benham said to Naomi:

"That's right. You count nine months from the first day of your last period, and add ten days. But, of course, having February in there mixes it up some . . ."

Elihu carried Naomi up and downstairs. Naomi said:

"I don't know why you act like this. I'm all right."

"Sure, you are," Elihu said. "But I like to do it."

Naomi's mother, Hetty, came from Old Orchard and took command of the house, the grounds, and as much of Elm Street as she could see through steel-bowed spectacles. Vina, an angular blonde girl, began to break dishes in the kitchen. Naomi said:

"This is ridiculous, Elihu. I feel just as well as I ever did. I like to do for myself."

Elihu grinned and said:

"It's kinda nice, isn't it, to have Ma here?"

"I always loved to have Ma visit us," Naomi said. "But this time she acts as if I was an invalid. You all do."

Ma occupied the southeast chamber because she liked to see the sun as much as possible. The double bed in her room was rendered useless by a wooden frame over it on which she began to make a rag quilt, with tufts. She slept on a cot, but she said every morning:

"I scarcely slept a wink last night."

She put her false teeth in a tumbler of water every night, and sucked horehound drops, and worked all day and into the night, when she darned Elihu's socks and her own and Naomi's stockings by the light of her kerosene lamp.

"It's easier on the eyes," she said of this old-fashioned illuminant.

She kept the three stone crocks in the pantry off the kitchen filled with ginger cookies, jumbles and doughnuts, and made apple pies at the rate of seven a week for Elihu. Ma said:

"It's part of a woman's chores to keep a man well fed."

Elihu sat at the organ in the front parlor and pumped with his feet, and pushed and pulled stops with his fingers, and thumped keys, and made a wheezy dirge which was supposed to be:

There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood.

This was the only tune that Elihu could play, either on the organ or on any instrument. He was tone deaf, and flatted when he tried to raise his bass voice in song. But he played *There Is a Fountain* only when he was in high spirits, so Naomi sat and listened to him, a smile on her lips and a bit of baby-size sewing in hand.

"If it's a boy we'll call him Elihu," she said.

He frowned at her and exclaimed:

"You know I don't like that name. Call him William, or Robert or James, or something like that."

"And if it's a girl we'll call her Ann, after your mother," Naomi said.

"I hope it's a girl," he said.

She turned her head to one side and looked at him from the corners of her eyes, which was a trick she had, and said:

"You're only saying that to make me feel good."

"No, I'm not. I know you want a daughter, and I want what you want."

"No, you don't. I know. You want a son because there aren't any more Steeles."

He got up, walked over and kissed her. She smiled up at him and asked:

"Isn't it wonderful, after twelve years?"

"It certainly is," he said.

"I pray every night and every morning for a boy," she said. "A son for you."

He grinned and patted her clumsily on the back.

"If you're happy that's all I ask, Little Girl."

Her legs swelled, and he sat and rubbed them by the hour. He said:

"The most beautiful legs in the world."

"They're not so pretty now," she said dubiously.

He kissed her tiny feet.

"Cinderella feet," he said.

"I have nice feet," she admitted.

Dr. Benham came to see her. He was fifty, a big man with a big head of iron-gray hair, a tawny mustache and a Vandyke beard. His head trembled the least bit, and his hands trembled, a tremor just barely perceptible. His yellow-brown eyes against a background of weather-beaten cheekbone, white forehead and Roman nose always looked tired but wonderfully sympathetic. She said:

"I didn't want to tell Elihu about the pain. I would only upset him."

He petted her hand, and said:

"Everything will be all right. You're a good soldier, Naomi."

Snow was falling heavily on the tenth of January when Dr. Benham walked out of the bedroom into the parlor and took hold of Elihu's sleeve.

"What is it, Doc?" Elihu asked.

"Now don't get excited," Dr. Benham said. "I guess the baby is coming sooner than we expected."

Elihu swallowed, blood receding from his cheeks. The doctor continued:

"But everything will be all right," he said. "I thought, though, that you might help me build an incubator."

Elihu tried to speak, and failed. He made another effort, and said:

"Naomi."

"Look here," Dr. Benham said. "Naomi is going to be all right, and the baby is going to be all right. We'll just have to make some preparations. Among other things, I'll need a box . . ."

Dr. Benham began to describe what he wanted in the way of incubators, walking with Elihu toward his shop in the barn where he kept his tools.

An hour later, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Dr. Benham said to Elihu:

"Never mind working any more on that incubator. Have you got a clothes basket?"

"Certainly, Doc. Is . . ."

"Everything is all right," Dr. Benham asserted. "But you hurry and get me the clothes basket."

Elihu hurried away and Ma Smith said:

"I could've got the basket."

Dr. Benham grinned, showing yellow teeth through nicotined stained hair of mustache and beard. He said:

"I know you could, Ma. But we've got to keep Elihu busy or we'll have him for our patient next. I could have the nurse get hot-water bottles and blankets, but I'm going to have Elihu get 'em."

Elihu was walking up and down in the hall when a baby wailed inside. Elihu leaned up against the wall. A minute later Dr. Benham poked his head into the hall. He said:

"Come here, Elihu."

The doctor held out his right hand, and on it lay a red, puckered bundle of flesh and blood. The bundle opened a toothless mouth, balled microscopic but perfect fists, and howled a Lilliputian howl. Elihu bent over, staring, afraid to breathe. The doctor said:

"Little girl baby. Cute, ain't she? Three pounds, and perfect."

"But Naomi?"

"She's fine," Dr. Benham said heartily.

Miss Dolly, the trained nurse, black-haired, blue-eyed, pink-cheeked, efficient, came to the door, and said:

"Do you want me to take her now, Dr. Benham?"

It was apparent that Miss Dolly disapproved of this exhibition of the newborn. Dr. Benham replied:

"Just a minute, Miss Dolly."

Ma Smith, who had been hovering in the background, exclaimed:

"I never heard the like of it, Doctor—exposing that baby . . ."

Dr. Benham laughed, and said to Elihu:

"Just take off your ring a minute."

Elihu removed the circlet of gold from his ring finger. The doctor added:

"Now just slip it over her hand."

Elihu hesitated, hand shaking. The doctor held up the tiny fist, and exclaimed impatiently:

"Go ahead, Elihu. You can't hurt her."

Elihu applied the ring to the fist, gently and clumsily. The doctor said:

"Go ahead and push it up. Go ahead."

Elihu pushed it too slowly to satisfy the doctor, who put his own fingers to the task and pushed the ring half-way up the tiny arm.

"Look at that, Elihu," he said. "Your ring went up to her elbow. Always remember that when she's a big woman."

"Haven't you played with that baby long enough?" Ma Smith demanded.

Dr. Benham pulled off the ring and handed it to Elihu. He held out the baby on the palm of his hand toward Miss Dolly, and said:

"Just look at that now. If that isn't one of the most wonderful sights in the world!"

"Can I see Naomi?" Elihu asked.

"Sure, Elihu," Dr. Benham replied.

Elihu hurried into the bedroom. Miss Dolly took the baby. Dr. Benham said:

"Wait a minute. We've got to measure her."

The baby was seventeen and one-half inches long; her wrist was two and seven-eighths inches in circumference, and her left foot was two and seven-eighths inches long.

After she was put in her basket, surrounded by hot-water bottles and covered with a blanket so that only a peep-hole was left, Dr. Benham said to Miss Dolly:

"Do you ever wonder what's going to happen in life to one of them?"

Miss Dolly said:

"No, Doctor, I don't. I'm generally so busy looking after them that I don't have much time for wondering about them."

Dr. Benham crooked his right elbow, and fished with his right hand in his upper left-hand waistcoat pocket. He brought out a long, light-colored cigar, Connecticut tobacco, strong and harsh. He bit off the end and spit it out on the hall carpet. He crossed his left foot over his right knee, and moved rapidly across the sole of his left boot a sulphur match. He held it until the blue flame had changed to yellow and the suffocating odor of sulphur had dissipated. Then he touched the flame to the end of the cigar and puffed. Clear, blue, pungent smoke rose in clouds. Miss Dolly held out her hand:

"I'll take the match," she said.

He handed her the burnt match, took the cigar from his lips, looked at the ignited end, sighed, and said:

"You know what the poet said about the way an astronomer feels when he first sees a new planet? Well, that's the way I feel when I first see a newborn baby. And I wonder, now, what the dickens is going to happen to this human mite?"

"Yes, Doctor," Miss Dolly said. "And I'm to give the baby her second olive-oil bath. . . ."

"Tonight," Dr. Benham said. "I'll drop in again about ten."

Chapter Two

WHEN ANN was eight weeks old she said:

"Ah!"

When she was eight weeks and three days old she said:

"Ah Goo!"

She tipped the scales at nine pounds that same night.

Elihu hitched his bay mare Nellie to the buggy on a warm Sunday in mid-May and he and Naomi took Ann for her first ride.

The following Wednesday, Ann rode for the first time on an electric car, making the trip to Paradise Park with Naomi.

When she was a year old Ann walked a few steps, but her favorite exercise was sitting in a rocking chair with a cane seat and back which Elihu had made for her, and swaying to and fro. Naomi tied her in so that she couldn't fall out.

When she was a year and one-half old, Ann pressed her cheek against her mother's cheek, and said:

"Mama."

She pressed her cheek against her father's cheek, and said:

"Papa."

And she pressed her cheek against the face of a painted cow which hung over her crib, and said:

"Tow."

She always said goodnight to her father and mother and the cow, and went to sleep with a colored rag doll, which Aunt Emma Mabie had christened Eunice, but which Ann called Oontis. Ann sat in her rocking chair holding Oontis, and rocked, while her mother sat in an adult rocking chair, and sewed. Ann liked to sit and rock and listen to the phonograph.

Ann had diphtheria, chicken-pox, measles, scarlet fever and mumps. When she was suffering of gas pains one night, she said:

"Can't you hear the pain running around inside of me?"

Naomi said to Ann one day:

"What was that I just heard you say?"

Ann replied:

"I said, 'My God'."

Naomi said:

"You must never use the name of God except when you are praying, or except when you are mentioning him in a respectful and loving way."

Ann said:

"My God! Oh, fudge!"

She said to Vina one day:

"Go way back and sit down."

She helped her mother arrange some fruit on the dining room table and said:

"How do you like that, my dear Gaston?"

Naomi said to Elihu:

"Ann is picking up slang phrases. I think it must be from Vina and from other children. I don't know what to do about it."

Elihu grinned and kissed her. He said:

"I guess she'll get over it."

Ann called after her father:

"Papa."

He turned and asked:

"What is it?"

She laughed, and said:

"Rubber neck."

Elihu growled and crouched over and ran toward Ann. She screamed and ran across the lawn. He caught her and tossed her shrieking to his wide, solid shoulder, which raised her a dizzy height from the grass. She threw off his hat, and dug her hands in his hair. He pulled her down and kissed her neck, his mustache tickling her so that she was on the verge of hysterics.

Ann had a fever, and Dr. Benham was looking at her when Elihu said:

"Doc, I wish you'd look at Naomi. She's got a bad tooth, but she won't say anything about it. I don't think she's slept more than a wink these last three nights."

Naomi opened her mouth, and the doctor peered in, his head trembling ever so slightly. He said:

"That ought to come out."

"I don't feel as if I could stand it much longer," Naomi confessed. "Can't you take it out now."

"It'll hurt," Dr. Benham said.

"I don't mind, Doctor," Naomi replied.

Elihu held a lamp so that its light fell favorably into Naomi's mouth, and Dr. Benham squeezed the tooth in a pair of bone forceps. He moved it back and forth, and drew it. Drops of perspiration sparkled on his forehead. He held up the tooth with its great roots, incarnadined, and said:

"That was a bad one."

Naomi said nothing but bent over a hand basin, which Elihu held, and spat blood in it. Her cheeks were pale. Dr. Benham poured aromatic spirits of ammonia into a glass, added a little water, and put it to her lips.

"Drink this," he directed.

She drank.

"Now sit with your head down."

Naomi sat with her head down. Dr. Benham pressed it down further. Naomi said weakly:

"I feel like a fool to give way like this."

"Most men wouldn't have stood that as well as you have," Dr. Benham said. "You're a regular old settler—the kind Indians could burn but couldn't make say 'Uncle.' "

Ann walked up and pressed her check against her mother's. She asked:

"Does it hurt, Mama?"

Naomi put her arm around Ann's waist and hugged her and said:

"No, darling. It only hurt a little. I just felt funny for a second. I'm all right now."

Ann never forgot that scene, or the lesson that her mother was the kind who could be hurt and not utter a sound and who was ashamed of even feeling faint. Naomi was wearing a puff-sleeved white waist, with a blue figure in it, and a blue skirt that day, and Ann always remembered that, as well as the red stockings.

Ann came home from school when she was in the first grade of the Eastham Grammar School, an unattractive building of yellow brick. She said she had a headache, and lay down on the couch in the sitting room. Naomi got cold water and washcloths and kept fresh, cold compresses on Ann's forehead. Ann moaned, and Naomi said:

"If you groan, I'm going away, but if you are a brave little girl I'll stay right here and love you and make you comfortable and your headache will go away."

Ann stopped moaning, and her mother massaged her head with gentle fingers, and Ann forgot the headache and went to sleep.

Naomi used to lie down with Ann every night, and they hugged each other close. Naomi gave Ann butterfly kisses, which were delicate flickerings of long eyelashes against Ann's soft cheeks.

Naomi kept a Baby's Record for Ann. In this record she filled in details under such headings as "First Outing," "Weight," "First Gifts," "The First Tooth," "The First Laugh," "First Creeping," "The First Step," "First Short Clothes," "First Shoes," "The First Christmas," "The First Word," "The First Birthday," and so on, and also in it she wrote long letters to her daughter to be read when Ann was older. These letters were addressed, "My Dear Little Ann," "My Dear Little Lamb," "My Dear Little Blessing," "My Dear Little Lambkin," "My Dearest Little Girl." The tenor of them was that Ann was going to grow up to be a fine, splendid Christian woman, with remarkable strength of character, and be a source of help and love in the world. Of course, she always was going to continue to be a source of comfort and delight to her father and mother.

Naomi and Ann arose at six o'clock in the morning on August eighth, 1902, when Ann was eleven years old. They were going on an all-day picnic in the surrey, with Aunt Emma Mabie and Cousin Helen Mabie, two years older than Ann. Naomi said to Ann:

"Don't you want to sleep a little longer?"

"No," Ann replied. "I want to help make the sandwiches."

Ann and Naomi were dressing in Naomi's room when Naomi sat down suddenly on the side of the bed and pressed her hand to her side. She closed her eyes, and shut her lips tightly together. Ann asked:

"What's the matter, Mama?"

Naomi made an attempt to smile and said:

"Nothing. I'll be all right in a minute."

Ann, frightened, put her cheek against her mother's cheek, and said:

"Where does it hurt, Mama?"

Naomi petted her daughter's hand, and said:

"Mama's precious. I'll be all right in a minute."

Ten minutes later Naomi and Ann were making sandwiches in the big, bright kitchen.

"I like to make my own sandwiches because I like them dainty," Naomi said to Ann as she spread deviled ham on a thin slice of white bread.

"I like chicken sandwiches," Ann asserted.

"There'll be plenty of all kinds," Naomi said.

Aunt Emma Mabie was tall, slim and dark, with black hair, dark brown eyes, a wide humorous mouth and a firm chin on which grew a mole from which closely clipped hairs sprouted. Her daughter, Helen, was a blue-eyed blonde, inclined to be plump. Helen's knees interfered when she walked, and she wore a contraption of gold wire intended to correct buck teeth in the front of her mouth.

Nellie dragged the four of them in the surrey over country roads to Hall's Corner, a spot on the Back Road where an expanse of rolling, green grass ran down to Borden's Brook, flowing through willows and white birches, through miniature pool and rapid, to the river.

Ann and Helen helped carry the lunch baskets and bottles of milk and ginger ale down to the brook. Then they took off shoes and stockings and went in wading. Aunt Emma said:

"I think I'll wet my feet too. Come on, Naomi."

Emma and Naomi held up their skirts and petticoats and moved white legs calf-deep in the clear water. Emma said:

"You really have beautiful legs, Naomi."

That was the first time Ann ever had thought about the possibility of legs being ornamental as well as useful, and she looked with sharpened eyes at the four pair of legs. She decided hers and her mother's were the prettiest, but that her mother's were prettier than hers. This was a scene that remained stamped in her memory.

They had lunch in the shade of some white birches. A Darning Needle flew near them, and Helen screamed. Emma said:

"Don't be silly, darling."

"If they get in your hair they snarl it all up," Helen said.

"Pouf!" Emma said, selecting another sandwich. "Don't believe all the fairy tales you hear. Those bugs are perfectly harmless."

Emma looked over at Naomi, and added:

"What's the matter, Naomi? You aren't eating."

"I'm just not hungry," Naomi said, smiling.

Ann piped up and said:

"Mama had a pain this morning but she wouldn't admit it."

Emma grunted, and said:

"It's just like her, and the rest of her tribe. They'd die before they'd peep. What's the matter, Naomi?"

Naomi shook her head:

"Really, I am all right. Just leave me alone."

Emma looked at her keenly, and arose to her feet, stuffing the last of a chicken sandwich into her mouth.

"You aren't all right, Naomi," Emma asserted. "You look mighty peeked. Where does it hurt?"

"She was holding on to her stomach," Ann said. "Weren't you, Mama?"

Emma sniffed again, and said:

"Well, we're going right home, and your mother is going to see the doctor as soon as we get there. The very idea!"

Naomi arose and shook out her skirts and said:

"I don't see what you are making all this fuss about, Emma. There is no need to spoil your and the children's day. I'm perfectly all right."

Emma was packing. She said, without looking around:

"If I didn't know you, I'd believe you, Naomi. But if you look pale and can't eat it's the same to me as if the ordinary human was throwing a fit and screaming for help."

Ann stared at her mother with wide eyes, in which tears were not far from the surface. Naomi put her arm around Ann and petted her:

"Don't worry, darling," Naomi said. "I'm perfectly all right."

Ann's lips trembled and she said:

"I don't want you to be sick."

Naomi smiled and replied:

"I won't be. Give me a kiss."

Dr. Benham took a quick look at Naomi and said to Elihu:

"Appendicitis. She'll have to be operated right away."

He looked at Naomi and asked:

"How long have you had these pains?"

"For two or three weeks," she confessed.

Dr. Benham shrugged and turned to Elihu.

"She'd never've said anything on her own hook," he asserted.

Elihu looked dumbly at Dr. Benham, his eyes asking questions. The doctor petted his back, and said:

"Now, there's nothing to worry about, Elihu. People are getting operated every day."

"I'll be perfectly all right, Elihu," Naomi said.

Elihu stooped to lift her up to carry her to the carriage. She said:

"For goodness sake, I can walk."

"Let him carry you, Naomi," Dr. Benham said. "Humor him."

He lifted her as easily as if she had been a baby, and she snuggled on his big chest for a moment. She whispered:

"You're so strong, Elihu."

He blinked his eyes rapidly once or twice and cleared his throat. He lifted her into the surrey and drove off with her to the Cooley Memorial Hospital. After the operation, Dr. Benham said to Elihu:

"The appendix was ruptured. It's a bad case, but she has a good chance."

Elihu went to see her, and she smiled up at him from the pillow no whiter than her cheeks. He took her hand, which was dry and hot, and said:

"How are you, little girl?"

"I'm perfectly all right," she said, still smiling.

Miss Dolly, who was day nurse, dark hair growing to a widow's peak over her broad white forehead, blue eyes shining from a rosy face which knew no beauty aid other than soap and water, followed Dr. Benham into the hall and said:

"I never saw anything like her, Doctor. She is suffering terribly, but she just smiles. When it gets especially bad she hums a hymn."

Miss Dolly dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. She added:

"I don't know when I've felt like this, Doctor. I thought I was pretty callous. I wouldn't care if she screamed or cried."

Dr. Benham nodded, and said:

"It's the breed, Miss Dolly."

On the second day Elihu went home from the hospital and changed into working clothes. He said to Ann:

"Your mother is better today."

Ann walked out to the carpenter shop with her father. It smelled of clean wood in there. And there was sunshine streaming through the big doors to the south, and a south wind brought the scent of new-mown clover drying in the sun in the south field. A bumble bee was droning in the honeysuckle vine. Vina came out to the barn, looking white and scared. She was wiping red hands on a gingham kitchen apron. She said:

"They want you on the telephone, Mr. Steele."

Elihu walked out into the sunshine again and through the yard, past the woodshed, into the side door, which opened into the dining room. He went through the dining room into the hall, and picked up the receiver from the telephone box on the wall. He said:

"Hello."

He stood there listening, receiver held to his ear, big head slightly bent, broad shoulders bowed in the Steele stoop. Ann, a little breathless, a little frightened, stood looking at him from the doorway. After a long time he replaced the receiver on the wall and stood there motionless, staring right at her, but not seeing her. Ann choked a sob and said:

"Papa."

Vina took her arm gently, and said:

"Come in here a moment, darling. I want to show you something."

Ann, as in a dream, went with Vina. Tears were rolling down Vina's face and she was sniffling. Suddenly Vina began to sob unashamedly. She sank down on her knees, and pressed Ann's head to her wet face, and said:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Ann began to tremble. She said:

"Is mama sicker?"

Vina choked, snuffled, and said:

"Your mama has gone away."

"Mama is dead."

Vina wailed, and Ann remained dry-eyed, pressed against Vina, Vina's tears wetting her and Vina's sobs wrenching at her heart. She had a sense that the world suddenly had become stripped of all life except hers, and that she was alone in the world —a vast, empty place.

Chapter Three

TWO MONTHS after Naomi had died and been buried in the Steele plot in Old Cemetery, Dr. Benham entered his combined office and residence in the Pease Block in Eastham, meeting George Miller at the door. The doctor said in his dictatorial manner:

"Come on in, George, and I'll take care of you."

George, who was in the roofing business, was about five feet six and weighed about one hundred and forty pounds. He was thin and nervous, with a white forehead, pale gray eyes, a beak of a nose twisted to the left, gold-filled teeth showing under a scraggly, tan-colored mustache, and not much chin. George scratched his nose, which was a habit with him. He was a morphine addict.

The doctor led the way into his private office. George took off his hat and fingered it nervously. He said:

"But, Doctor."

"Tut! Tut!" Dr. Benham exclaimed, lighting an alcohol lamp and resting a teaspoonful of water over the flame. George stared at the doctor, as if fascinated, while the doctor got out morphine tablets and a hypodermic. George cleared his throat, and said:

"I just . . ."

The doctor said:

"Come on. Get your coat off, if you want this. I haven't all day."

George dazedly removed his coat and rolled up his sleeve. The doctor dabbed a bit of alcohol on the flesh, jabbed the needle home, pressed the plunger, removed the needle, mopped up with alcohol-saturated cotton, and said:

"That should make you feel different, George."

George rolled down his sleeve and put on his coat, and said:

"I guess it will, Doc."

Then he went out. A moment later young Alonzo West, who drove Dr. Benham and helped around the office, and studied medicine in his spare time, arrived. Dr. Benham looked up from the sink where he was washing his hands in surgeons' soap, a green, liquid mixture, and said:

"Hello, Alonzo. I just gave old George Miller his five grains of morphine."

The doctor shook his hands over the sink and reached for a towel, while Alonzo, who was eighteen, tall, raw-boned, with an unruly thatch of dark hair, almost black-brown eyes, a big nose and a solid chin, looked blank. He exclaimed:

"But I just gave him five grains myself, not five minutes ago. You were late, and he was so jumpy."

Dr. Benham turned from the sink, still wiping his hands. His head, which always trembled the slightest bit when he was excited, began to shake rapidly. Alonzo said:

"Will anything happen to him, Doctor?"

Dr. Benham chuckled and said:

"Ten grains. Something certainly ought to happen."

"Is there anything we can do?"

Dr. Benham replaced the towel on a rack, and reached with familiar gesture for a cigar in his waistcoat pocket. He bit off the end and spat it on the floor. He lighted it with a sulphur match, and then said, after throwing the burnt match on the floor:

"I wonder where he went."

He looked at Alonzo an instant, and then grinned, showing strong yellow teeth. Alonzo said:

"Perhaps I could find him."

The doctor drew in a mouthful of smoke and blew it out again. He said:

"Just sit still, Alonzo. I wouldn't be surprised if old George found himself for us."

Twenty minutes later the telephone rang. Dr. Benham lifted the receiver and said:

"Hello."

He listened for a minute, nodding his head and scowling. He rumbled:

"On the roof of the church, eh? Well! Well! All right. Thank you, Will."

He hung up the receiver and wheeled his swivel chair to face Alonzo.

"What was it?" Alonzo asked.

"That was Will Prescott," Dr. Benham replied. "Will says old George is doing a Highland fling on the roof of the First

Church and that everybody is scared he's going to fall off. He thinks a doctor should be handy."

Dr. Benham and Alonzo, in the doctor's buggy, drawn by Sam, a bay gelding, twenty-three years old, stopped in the town square, on the east side of which was the white clapboard church building. A throng was gathered on the walk and the lawn in front of the church. The doctor gazed at the roof of the church and said:

"He's pretty lively, ain't he?"

George Miller was running backward and forward on the roof. He dashed to the north end, as if he were going to jump. Feminine shrieks and masculine shouts ceased as if cut with a knife when he checked himself on the edge and began to dance. Voices exclaimed:

"He's crazy."

"He'll be killed."

"I can't look."

"Come down, George."

"Must be drunk."

"He's like a cat."

"You'd never think the old feller had it in him."

"Go it, Gawge."

"Whee-ee!"

Alonzo groaned and said:

"This is awful, Doctor. I feel it's my fault. Can't we do something?"

Dr. Benham's head was nodding, but he was grinning happily and sucking his long, strong cigar. He said:

"Don't have to, boy. Here come the firemen to get him."

Members of Puritan Engine Company raised a ladder against the eaves of the church and a half-dozen of them began to climb the rungs.

From the middle of the ridge pole George looked at them quietly for a moment, and then suddenly dashed down the slope of the roof toward the ladder. The watchers from below shouted and shrieked. George put on the brakes by sticking his feet into the eaves trough, and sitting down. He crowed like a rooster, flapped his arms, and galloped along the roof next to the eaves.

The volunteer firemen, sweat dripping from red faces, grunts issuing from hairy chests, crawled gingerly after George. The scene suggested a mountain goat being stalked by six nervous delicatessen-shop proprietors.

The constantly increasing throng on the green and in the road in front of the church shouted, cheered, shrieked, gasped, shuddered and giggled in turn. Bits of personal advice rose on the air:

"Head him off, Al."

"Now you got him."

"You'd think he was greased."

"Put some salt on his tail."

"Grab his foot."

"Aw, you missed."

"Quick, up the other side."

"Better get a butterfly net, Bill."

"Want a lasso, Al?"

"Why don't you tackle him, Joe?"

"Attaboy, Al, grab his coat. Missed!"

"What you boys need is more practise."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Looka that!"

Elihu Steele, with Ann beside him, drove up in his buckboard. Elihu was not connected in what might be termed a strictly official capacity with the church, but he looked after repairs on it and generally saw to it that it was in ship-shape condition. Elihu was dressed in his usual blue suit. Ann was wearing a plaid cloak of yellow and green squares and a green turban. Elihu said:

"Howdy, Doctor."

"Hello, Elihu. Hello, Ann. How are you today? I guess you know Alonzo, don't you?"

"Hello," Elihu said, shaking hands with Alonzo.

Alonzo withdrew his hand from Elihu's, and held it out to Ann. Her naturally high color became more brilliant as she put her small hand in Alonzo's big one. He said:

"I've seen you around a lot. Seems as if we should know each other."

"I've seen you, too," Ann said.

Elihu looked up at the roof.

"What's all the excitement?" he asked. "Has George Miller gone crazy?"

"Looks so," Dr. Benham nodded, grinning.

"Why don't you call old George?" Alonzo suggested, looking up at the doctor. "He'd mind you."

"Somebody is liable to get hurt," Elihu said, gaze on the roof.

Dr. Benham raised his voice, which was strong and resonant. He called:

"Hey! You! George!"

The firemen stopped crawling and looked down from their flattened-out positions on the roof. Old George poised nonchalantly on a gable, put his right hand to the corresponding ear and bent his head in the classic attitude for listening. Dr. Benham roared:

"You come down out of that, George."

George's figure lost its elasticity. The fire went out of his pose. He called back in a thin, meek tone:

"All right, Doctor."

Accompanied by grumbling firemen, George descended to earth, where he was greeted by his wife, Miriam, a tall, square-shouldered, gaunt woman, with wispy light brown hair, gray eyes, and sharp features. She greeted him by slapping his face.

At the same time she slapped George, Clarence Smith, the constable, took him firmly by the arm. Clarence said:

"You've been disturbin' the peace, George. Much as I hate to do it, I've got to lock you up."

Miriam turned from her husband to Clarence, who was a tall, burly man with thick black hair, brown eyes, weather-beaten cheeks, a black mustache, a black soft hat, and blue suit. She clutched Clarence and shook him. She said shrilly:

"And you, Clarence Smith. You better leave my husband alone if you know what's good for yourself. He's sick. That's what's the matter."

She shook him again, and laughter arose. Clarence half-grinned and half-scowled, his good-natured face becoming even more red than nature normally provided. He said:

"I never arrested a lady, but I would if it was my duty."

"You just try and arrest me then," she snapped. "Anyway, I'm no lady. I'm a woman, a wife and a mother. That's what I am."

Dr. Benham, sucking one of his long, yellow cigars, poked his head into the group, onlookers making room for him. He said:

"Hello, Clarence."

Clarence glanced around and said:

"Howdy, Doc."

"I'd let George go along home if I were you," Dr. Benham suggested. "You see, there is something in what Miriam says about his being a sick man. If he wasn't sick he wouldn't have been cutting up didoes on the roof. You can take my word for that."

"Oh, in that case, Doc," Clarence exclaimed, stepping back. "I was just going to look after him, anyway."

"Now you come home," Miriam said to George, taking his arm. "You've caused trouble enough for one day."

Dr. Benham and Clarence returned to where Alonzo was holding the reins on old Sam and talking with Ann who was holding the reins on Nellie. Clarence, who was childless, was an uncle by courtesy to half the children in town. He said:

"Hello, Annie. Hello, Alonzo. Where's Elihu?"

Alonzo said:

"Mr. Steele went into the church for something."

"The gas was leaking, Uncle Clarence," Ann explained, "and they called papa to see about it."

"How has your father been feeling, Ann?" Dr. Benham asked. "He looks a mite thin. Mebbe he needs a little tonic."

"Papa has been different since mother died," Ann said.

A muffled sound came from the direction of the church, followed by stifled shouts. The doctor, Clarence, Alonzo and Ann looked toward the church. A man issued from the side door, stopped, glanced around, saw the doctor, and hurried toward him.

"Peter looks excited," Dr. Benham said, stepping forward to meet the short, stout figure—black hair combed in long greasy strands over a bald spot, brown eyes, the left one looking straight ahead and the right one looking to the right, bulbous, large-pored, red nose, luxuriant black mustache, blue denim overalls over bowed legs, and heavy boots, caked with dust. Peter carried with him an aroma of sweat, onions and cheap tobacco. He said to the doctor in a wheezing breath:

"Hurry up, Doctor. Come on."

The doctor took his shoulder, and said:

"Quiet, Peter. Something happened to Elihu Steele?"

Peter glanced at Ann and replied in a hoarse rumble:

"Dead, I guess, Doctor. He was looking for a gas leak, and he lighted a match."

"Wait a minute, Peter," Dr. Benham said. "Stop those men from saying anything yet."

He nodded toward two men who hurried from the basement of the church. Peter went to intercept them and Dr. Benham turned back to the two buggies. He said casually:

"There has been a little accident."

"What happened, Doctor?" Ann asked.

They both spoke simultaneously. She said:

"Is papa . . . ?"

He said:

"Your father has been hurt, Peter says."

Ann sat still, cheeks drained of blood, lips quivering. The doctor said to Alonzo:

"You hitch Sam, Alonzo, and drive Ann home. We'll be along in a few minutes."

Ann said:

"I don't want to go home, Doctor. I want to stay here. Is he hurt bad?"

Dr. Benham's was a powerful personality. His patients regarded him with a love that was almost worship. They said of him:

"I begin to feel better the minute Doctor Benham comes in the door."

His position for years as the sole judge of life and death in Eastham had made him a monarch with unlimited powers. He supervised births, promoted marriages, advised investments, settled family quarrels, lent money at no interest, and battled death with patience, skill, cunning, hate, love, devilish ingenuity, and infinite patience. They used to say of Dr. Benham:

"He ain't much interested in pin pricks, or a little fever, but you get something serious, and he takes off his coat and goes to work."

Dr. Benham was accustomed to being obeyed, and residents of Eastham were in the habit of obeying him. Ann made one more protest, and then drove off with Alonzo.

Ann sat gazing straight in front of her, a silent and pathetic figure. Alonzo glanced at her and opened his lips, but said no word. He merely chirruped to Nellie, who moved her iron-shod feet steadily through the dust, bearing them rattling past rows of trees painted with savage beauty by the magic brush of autumn, trees in vivid reds and yellows, oranges and burnt siennas, crimson, scarlet and gold, blazing in the last rays of the setting sun.

Alonzo helped Ann out at her home, and went up the walk and around to the side door with her. She tried the door, which was locked. She looked up at Alonzo and said:

"Vina always locks all the doors. She keeps her money in her stockings or under the mattress in her room."

Vina opened the door. Her homely, kindly, angular face was flushed from kitchen heat. Her light hair was in confusion, as usual. Her white cotton shirt-waist was open at the throat, revealing reddened skin over bones. Her gingham apron was damp and stained. Her once black boots had been cut at the sides to make room for corns and bunions. She glanced at Alonzo, stood aside awkwardly, and said:

"Is Mr. Steele with you, Annie?"

"There was an accident at the First Church," Alonzo said.

Vina's mouth opened, and she clapped two work-stained hands to her face, staring from horrified eyes at Alonzo. She groaned, and dropped to her knees, putting her arms around Ann.

"Was he hurt bad?" she whispered, petting Ann's back.

"We don't know," Alonzo said, shutting the door, with himself inside. "Doctor Benham is with him and should be here soon. I thought I'd stay. I might be of some help."

Vina kissed Ann's cheek and arose to her feet. Vina said:

"My cake'll be burnt."

She hurried back toward the kitchen, putting her apron to her eyes. Alonzo helped Ann remove her cloak. Then he took her hands and petted them, looking down at her. She made a very sweet, very brave, and very sad little figure. He was sure her father was dead, and he was sure she knew her father was dead. It was a numbing fact, he knew. It was like the bite of one of the flesh-eating animals. The shock was so great you couldn't really feel it or estimate it.

He petted her hands again and looked down at her head, her hair tied in back in two pigtails with a yellow ribband. She said:

"I wish they would come."

"They'll be here as soon as possible," he assured her. "They won't want to keep you waiting."

They walked toward the sitting room. She stood, dazed. He said:

"Won't you sit down?"

She sat down on the sofa and he arranged two eiderdown pillows, one covered with green silk, shot with gold, and the

other covered with yellow silk, behind her. But instead of leaning back against them, she sat up straight. She said:

"Listen."

A horse and buggy stopped outside. She went to the window and looked. Dr. Benham was just getting out of his buggy. He reached in and got the hitching strap, snapped it on Sam's bridle and knotted it deftly to the ring in the iron hitching post. Nobody was in the buggy with him. Ann didn't have to be told any more. She knew her father was dead.

Alonzo drove Dr. Benham home. The doctor puffed his cigar, spat into the dust, and said:

"Pretty tough, wasn't it?"

"Gee! It was rotten," Alonzo said.

The doctor nibbled at a loose bit of leaf on the end of his cigar, bit it through, and got it stuck on the hair on his lower lip. He brushed it off with his gloved hand and said:

"Elihu always struck me as a man with a pretty good head."

"Always seemed so to me," Alonzo agreed.

"Never struck me as the kind that would go looking for a gas leak with a lighted match," Dr. Benham said. "I always thought nobody but a first-class idiot would do that."

"I'd think so," Alonzo said.

The doctor shook his head, sighed, and said:

"But I knew Elihu Steele ever since he was a boy. He was one of the finest men you'd ever hope to meet, Alonzo. He wasn't the kind that would kill himself and leave a little girl all alone in the world."

"He didn't strike me as that kind either," Alonzo murmured.

Dr. Benham, whose head was just beginning to show the tremor incident to age, made the trembling emphatic and conscious again. He said:

"It's a funny thing. I can't figure it out unless it was this way. Elihu was pretty miserable but he wouldn't commit suicide. On the other hand he was so depressed that he wasn't thinking normally. He wasn't alert. The policeman in his brain was asleep. The policeman let him light that match. It was something mysterious that we don't know about, inside of Elihu, that killed him."

"I don't just understand," Alonzo said.

Dr. Benham shook his head, and said:

"And the older you get, son, the less you will understand."

Sam stopped in front of the entrance to the offices in the Pease Block. The doctor grunted and half arose, gripping the iron guard rail of the seat firmly in his right hand as he turned his back to the horse and groped with his left foot for the buggy step. On the sidewalk he stopped a moment, drew a fresh cigar from his pocket, and lighted it on the stub of the old one. He threw the old stub away and straightened his shoulders and said:

"Well, this has been quite a day. Good night, Alonzo."

"Good night, Doctor."

Dr. Benham's face looked tired when he went to bed in the little room off his private office. He had slept in this room for thirty years. When he grew tired of the carpet, or it became worn, he merely had a new carpet tacked down over the old one. According to Mrs. Aaron Bentley, who knew most that was going on in Eastham, there were eight layers of carpet in the bedroom. The single window never had been opened, winter or summer, during the doctor's occupancy. He believed that night air was conducive neither to health nor longevity.

He stripped off his light woolen union suit and pulled his flannelette nightgown, gray with pink stripes, over his head. He went to a medicine cabinet and took down a can of chloroform. He poured some of the contents over a handkerchief, carefully restoppered the can, and replaced it on the shelf. Then he lay down on the bed, pulled sheet and double blanket up to his chin and draped the chloroform-drenched bit of linen over his face.

That was the way Dr. Benham always went to sleep.

Chapter Four

ANN WENT to live with Clarence and Rebecca Smith on the Newtown Road, in Southfield, about a mile from Southfield Centre, and three miles from Eastham, of which it was a part. That was really out in the country. The house, as was the case with most houses in that part of the world, was white with green shutters. The front door which opened into a front hall and parlor seldom was used except for weddings and funerals. The side door, which opened directly into the dining room, shared popularity with the kitchen door, which was just off the woodshed and nearest to that establishment of fitted boards painted green, with a door on a latch, with a crescent carved over it and sunflowers growing beside it. When a member of the household was about to visit this spot, he, or she, said:

"I am going to call on the Widow Jones."

Ann used to wonder if the Fred Joneses, who lived down in the hollow, were accustomed to say on similar occasions:

"I am going to call on the Widow Smith."

But she never did learn about that.

There were four apple trees on the south side of the house. These apple trees all were Baldwins. On the north side of the house, however, was the real orchard, where were many varieties of apples, including Early Harvests and Golden Sweets, Red Astrakhans and Gravensteins which ripened early, and Northern Spies, Baldwins, Pound Royals, and Russets. A crabapple tree stood back of Mrs. Jones's, to the west, and there also were peach, pear and plum trees on that side, which was referred to as "out back."

To the northeast of the house was a big cherry tree which bore plump, black juicy fruit—Ox Hearts. Clarence used to shoot blackbirds out of that tree with his double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun. The blackbirds appreciated the superior quality of those cherries too.

Next to the kitchen on the extreme west of the house was the woodshed. Next to the woodshed was the chicken coop, in which were two score hens and a dozen or so chickens for the table. And next to the chicken coop was the red barn in which were kept a dozen cows. The milk house was just off the barn to the north, near the ice house.

The ice house was a rough timber structure, built over a square hole in the ground. Into this in the winter were dumped blocks of ice cut from Carter's Pond. The ice was covered thick with sawdust. In the summer the blocks were dug out and cut to required size for the ice box in the house, or dumped whole into the brick pool in the milk house. As soon as the cows were milked the big cans were sunk under the water with the cakes of ice. It always was chilly in the milk house, even on the hottest days in July and August. And the milk from the cans was cold.

Clarence had a brown-and-white water spaniel with long ears and soft brown eyes. He called the dog Tack because immediately after he had brought him home as a puppy six years before, the little fellow had swallowed a tack.

Rebecca and Clarence attributed to Tack many human qualities. They not only spelled out words in front of Tack when they didn't wish him to know what they were talking about but they even went to the trouble of spelling many words backward. For instance, Tack loved to go to Eastham because such trips usually included a visit to Bert Cooper, the butcher.

Bert's shop was in the line of shops and buildings in the main street of which the Pease Block occupied more than its share of space. It was cool in Bert's, with its sawdust floor, its meat hung in rows, or displayed on the counter, its scarred chopping block, its odor of animal flesh, and its many pieces of fly paper on which flies eternally were buzzing and struggling in death throes. It was a dog's paradise.

Bert admired Tack and fed Tack hugely. Tack tolerated Bert, who, unlike the popular idea of what a butcher should be, was a blond, partly bald, with blue eyes peering through gold-framed spectacles, a clean-shaven face, a lean and sinewy torso covered by a loose white coat, and his wrists and forearms protected by straw gauntlets. Bert generally had a rag tied around one of his fingers. He had a penchant for cutting himself every so often with one of his razor sharp knives. On account of Tack's delight in going to Eastham, and his despondency on being left at home, Clarence and Rebecca would spell Eastham and other suggestive words backward. Clarence would say, for instance:

"Oh, Rebecca. I'm going to e-v-i-r-d to m-a-h-t-s-a-E. Would you like to o-g?"

Clarence explained this system of spelling backward as follows. He said to Ann:

"We used to spell words straight ahead. But one day after we spelled out Eastham from front to back, with Tack listening with his eyes on me, his head cocked to one side and his tongue hanging out, we got to Eastham, and found Tack there waiting for us. He knows more'n most folks, Tack does."

Ann went to live with Clarence and Rebecca, temporarily, immediately after her father died and was buried in a plain pine

coffin, as had been his wife. Both families considered that spending unnecessary money on funerals was a sinful waste. Both the Smiths and the Steeles took deaths as calmly as they took meals, and with no more sartorial preparation. They wore their everyday clothes to the funeral, not worrying about the color, and it was a source of pride in both families that ministers weren't allowed to utter eulogies on the departed. Gramma Smith said:

"If the one that died was worthless in life he didn't become valuable by dyin'. If the one that died lived a useful life nothin' any minister could say would make it any more useful. And there's nothing more terrible and embarrassing than to sit at a funeral and hear a minister spend an hour praising a man that we all know was mean to his neighbors, poison to his family, and a blot on the landscape."

After Elihu was buried, it was learned that there was five hundred and sixty dollars in the Eastham National Bank, and twelve hundred dollars in the Eastham Institution for Savings, and a mortgage of $2,500 on the Elm Street place, which was valued at $7,500. This all was left to Ann.

Aunt Emma Mabie lived in the town of Bennington. Aunt Emma was a widow, rather careful about money. She had a pension because her late husband had been a veteran of the Civil War, and she did dressmaking. Ann didn't especially care to live with her.

Aunt Lydia Graves, in Old Orchard, younger of the two Smith sisters, closely resembled Ann's mother, except that she might have been adjudged even more comely had it not been for the fretful expression of her face and the slightly nagging quality in her voice.

Aunt Lydia and her short, stocky, rather silent, druggist husband, Richard, lived in a big yellow house with their three children, Richard, Jr., twenty, who was going to Amherst; Davis, sixteen, who was planning to go to Yale, and Marion, twelve, still in High School. Aunt Lydia was famous as a housekeeper. Her home was immaculate. She didn't allow her husband or her sons to smoke in it, because the tobacco fumes stayed in the curtains and drapes and the ashes messed up the floors. In fact, she insisted on the males using the back door most of the time, and for several years while the boys were young made them remove their shoes before they entered the house.

"You wouldn't like that, would you?" Dr. Benham asked, when he and Ann discussed the situation.

Ann's only blood uncle, her mother's brother, A. Howard Smith, lived in Westchester County and commuted to New York, where he had become more than merely well-to-do in the real estate business. The A. Howard Smiths, A. Howard and his wife, Elizabeth Newton Donellan Smith, had eight children, who all spoke with English accents, posted when they rode horseback, played golf, tennis and whist. Howard's first initial concealed the name Adonijah. Dr. Benham said of this branch of the family:

"As I see it, Annie, you wouldn't want to be an extra wheel on the cart anywhere. You'd have to be living on your uncle. He's rich and can afford it, but maybe you can't. Clarence and Rebecca have known you ever since you were hardly as big as a good-sized peanut. They haven't any children of their own, and they love you. They want you. You can pay your way in affection and a little work around with them. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to try, if you feel like it. What do you think?"

"I'd rather live with Uncle Clarence and Aunt Rebecca than anybody," Ann said.

Clarence looked up from his rose bushes and saw Dr. Benham in his buggy, heading toward Southfield Centre. Clarence straightened up and called:

"Hey, Doc."

Dr. Benham said:

"Whoa, Sam."

Sam stopped, craned his neck and looked at the doctor, and then settled himself comfortably with his off-front leg bent at the knee.

The doctor wrapped the reins around his never-used whip, put his right foot, encased in a Congress Boot with elastic sides, on the right front wheel of the buggy, and removed a half-burned Connecticut cigar from the tobacco-stained area of white mustache and Vandyke, and spat into the dust. He said:

"Nice day, Clarence."

Clarence, in collarless shirt, unpressed trousers supported by red and blue galluses, closed the gate of the white picket fence behind him and reached up a big brown hand, which the doctor shook warmly.

"A weather-breeder, though," Clarence said. "Ain't a cloud in the sky."

The doctor nodded and said:

"Wouldn't be surprised if we had a lot of rain inside of twenty-four hours."

Sam moved his front feet forward and his hind feet backward, and released a stream of water, which spattered when it hit the dust. Clarence moved quickly away. Dr. Benham grinned.

"Catch ye, Clarence?" he asked. "Sam's kidneys don't seem to hold quite so well now as they did when he was younger."

Clarence lighted one of the doctor's cigars with a sulphur match. He took two short puffs and one long one, and spat. He

said:

"I wanted to talk to you about Annie, Doc."

"I just passed her back by Si Brockaway's," the doctor said. "She didn't look very sick to me."

Clarence grinned and knocked ashes from his cigar. Then his face became solemn and his voice lowered. He said:

"I walks into the kitchen last Saturday night and there's Annie takin' a bath in the washtub. You could've knocked me over with a feather, Doc. She ain't a little girl any more. She's a woman. She's got the prettiest breasts you ever seen—plump as a partridge."

Dr. Benham nodded. Sam took a step forward. Clarence's foot slipped from the rear wheel hub on which he had been resting it. The doctor shouted:

"Whoa, Sam."

Sam looked around, with an expression as near a grin as any horse might achieve. Clarence drew a big jackknife from his pocket, opened the big blade, and began delicately to test its point on the hard rubber tires of the buggy. The doctor crossed his legs, right leg over left, holding his right shin, partly covered by a garterless white sock, with both hands.

"Annie's been menstruating for two months, Clarence," he said.

"Well, I swan!" Clarence exclaimed.

The doctor lighted a fresh cigar on the butt of the one he had been smoking, tossing the butt into the road.

"She's a beautiful little thing," the doctor said.

Clarence puffed hard on his cigar, held it up and looked closely at it, and threw it away. The doctor produced a fresh one and offered it to Clarence. Clarence waved it away. He said:

"No thankee, Doc. I guess I'll have a chew."

He dug a plug of black tobacco from his trousers, cut off a chunk with his knife, and popped it into his mouth. He put his right hand on the seat rail and rocked the buggy gently, spat, and said:

"I was never one that put much stock in the theory that artists and doctors only regarded the female of the species as one of them bug chasers looks at a butterfly in a glass case. You know, only in a scientific spirit, so to speak."

Dr. Benham blew smoke from his stogy and grinned.

"You aren't so far wrong, Clarence," he agreed. "Artists and doctors are males first, and artists and doctors second."

"And that goes for uncles by adoption," Clarence said.

He rocked the buggy again, gazing into Dr. Benham's tired, kindly eyes.

"I'm not one of them degenerates, I hope," Clarence continued, "but seeing that little girl standing there in the washtub with the soap suds on her made me think that if she ain't a woman already she'll be one quicker'n Jack Robinson."

The doctor raised his broad-brimmed yellow soft straw hat and rubbed the bald spot on the top of his head, puffed his cigar and said: "You're a good man, Clarence. I've practised medicine for more than fifty years, and human nature and the sex question is a heap more of a puzzle to me now than it was when I was a young man. I've had women come to see me that have been married for years and still were virgins. I've treated little girls that were too young to be married that weren't virgins. The only thing about the sex question that makes me rejoice is that I don't have to worry about it any more personally."

"This perticalar sex question has got me stumped, Doc. Ann is only fourteen, but she's big for her age, and something has got to be done about her. She ought to be told some things, and I was thinking you was the one to do it."

Dr. Benham nodded his head thoughtfully, grinned, and said:

"It's too bad Rebecca wouldn't do it."

Clarence spat again, and said:

"You know Rebecca, Doc. She's one of them old-fashioned Puritans. I never seen her undressed in my life. An arm or a leg is a limb to her. And sex is something that's done but isn't discussed. She thought kissing made babies up till the time we was married."

The doctor scowled and spat, and said:

"I know her."

"She's a good woman," Clarence hastened to say. "She's the salt of the earth. There ain't anything she wouldn't do for a body. But she's sot in her ways. Why, Doc, once on a cold night I broke wind in bed, and she would hardly speak to me for a week. I'm supposed to get up and go out to the backhouse same as if I was answering a call of nature."

"Some women are like that," the doctor agreed. "And some ain't so fussy."

Clarence grinned and said:

"So I've heerd tell."

The doctor knocked off ashes from his cigar against the iron tire of the rear wheel and put the cigar back in his mouth. He always champed the end, and the cigar was pretty wet and well chewed. He gathered up the reins and said:

"I'll be glad to have a talk with Ann, Clarence. But I wouldn't be surprised if she knew a lot already. She always struck me as pretty smart."

"Oh, she's smart all right, and she knows where babies come from—seen calves and kittens born—but I always figured a nice talk to a young one like that, sensible like you could do it, with no scary stuff but just hoss sense, might be good for a young one that seems to be so full of sap. I'd say she might be just the opposite of Rebecca in some respects, Doc."

The doctor nodded again, chirruping to Sam.

"She has all the ear-marks," he admitted as Sam began to move. "Get up there," he said to Sam. "Good day, Clarence."

The doctor crammed his broad-brimmed hat down further over his head. Sam broke into a trot, his hoofs and the spinning, shining wheels leaving a trail of golden dust which settled across the weeds and grass and goldenrod and asters which lined the road under the rustling maples.

Chapter Five

ANN STEELE never could have disguised herself as a boy. She had wavy brown hair which looked red in the sun, and big hazel eyes which shone with the fire of youth and health. Her forehead was sweetly moulded, her eyebrows were dark and clearly defined, and her eyelashes long. A faint powdering of freckles ran over the bridge of her nose, which was neither too small for character nor too large for beauty. Her lips were red and full, her teeth white, rather larger than the average, and her chin was well developed. Ann had a beautiful neck, round and columnar, breasts that promised plenty of food for babies and comfort for weary little heads, and a pelvis which assured babies of a comfortable entrance into life. Even at fourteen, she carried with her an intense feminine aura.

Men and boys couldn't any more help turning and looking after her than the earth can help revolving around the sun. Old Si Brockaway, whose case of locomotor ataxia generally was credited to a wild youth, said:

"The first time I seed that filly I cried because I wasn't young any more."

Si was walking uncertainly, with the aid of a cane, down his front walk when Ann walked down the road barefooted. Her brown hair was blowing in the breeze and her hazel eyes were glowing in the late afternoon August sun which made highlights on her crimson lips and white teeth.

Dr. Benham, driving his old Sam in the opposite direction, waved at Si, smiled and raised his floppy yellow straw hat to Ann, and vanished up the winding road.

Si hurried faster with awkward, spraddling steps. His disease was such that he couldn't tell where his feet were going to hit ground once he'd lifted them from it. He piped:

"Hi, Annie! Wait a minute."

Ann stopped, smiling, and said:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brockaway."

Si's gaunt face was smooth shaven. His iron-gray hair was so long that it clustered down on his neck. He wore a shirt with a stiff bosom, but no collar or coat, and his blue serge trousers, supported by white suspenders, were creased. He said:

"If I was a boy you wouldn't be walkin' alone, Annie."

Ann blushed, but held her hazel eyes on his blue ones.

"I might be," she said, mildly.

Si tossed back his head and cackled delightedly.

"By cracky," he cried, "that's one for you, Annie."

Ann's blue-and-white checked gingham dress fluttered in the breeze, which caught the fresh young scent of her and bore it to Si Brockaway's nostrils. He crossed thin, blue-veined hands over the curved handle of his cane, polished from long use.

"A cow's breath is sweet," the old man said, "but the smell of a pretty young girl is sweeter."

Ann instinctively bent her head and sniffed at herself.

"I do not smell," she protested.

Si snorted scornfully.

"Huh!" he ejaculated. "You don't even understand what it is to be young. There was a poet once who wrote that 'Truth is beauty.' He was wrong, Ann. Youth is beauty. But you don't know it. You have to get old to know it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ann asserted.

"You'd say that whether you did or not because you are a female of the species, and therefore contrary," Si Brockaway announced. "But I stick to what I said. You've got all your hair, and prettier than most. You've got all your eyesight, and all your teeth, and your digestion, and you're sound in wind and limb, without a blemish, and there's a sparkle in your eye that shows the sap is running strong."

Ann looked at him doubtfully.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"The most beautiful sight in the world, which is a pretty young girl," Si replied.

However, before she could make any comment on that remark, he added:

"What I really wanted to ask was if you would mind driving our cows back along with yours?"

Ann turned her head slightly to one side and looked at Si out of the corner of her eyes.

"Of course, I will, Mr. Brockaway," she said, heartiness in her husky contralto. "I'd love to."

"Thank you, Ann," Si Brockaway said. "If I were younger I'd drive the cows for you."

Ann laughed as she began to walk again.

"I believe what I see," she said over her shoulder.

Ann stopped at the foot of the hill and picked a handful of choke cherries. Eating them, she went a few rods further to the gate of the Smith pasture. Instead of dropping the bars, she stepped up on the lower bar and swung her left leg over the top one, followed it with her right leg, and slid down into the pasture. The cows all were down at the lower end, near Big Brook. Ann had plenty of time. She moved quickly toward the brook, making quick side steps to avoid cow dung, and keeping an eye open for snakes.

Gold Tooth Billy Bangs, discharged the day before from Eastham County Jail after serving three months for vagrancy and assault, stopped still when he rounded a turn in the road and saw Ann enter the cow pasture. He caught his breath when Ann's dress, rucked up as she slid off the bar, bared tender white skin. He slipped between the bars, and cautiously followed.

"Dis'll make me sixt'," he mumbled, trembling.

Ann arrived at Big Brook and walked down it a few yards until she was sheltered by pine trees which grew thick on both banks. No sun penetrated this cathedral-like solitude, where the only sound was the murmur of flowing water.

She unbuttoned her dress in the back and pulled it over her head. Her balbriggan undervest and cotton drawers followed. Cupping her breasts in her hands, she dipped a toe in the brook.

Gold Tooth Billy stood a dozen feet away, concealed partly by a rock and partly by heavy undergrowth. He watched her as she tested the water again with her toe and then stepped gingerly into it at a point where Nature had formed a pool and carpeted it with sand.

Soon she was in to her waist. Holding her breasts, she sank to her neck. The outline of her body was dimly visible through the clear water. She scooped up water in her hands and washed her face. She swam six breast strokes, when she swallowed some water, and scrambled to her feet coughing.

Billy crept closer to Ann's clothes, wriggling slowly along on his stomach. He dropped, silent, behind a thick pine not three feet from the cheap garments. There he waited, his right hand clutching a rock.

Ann waded ashore, stepping gingerly to avoid slipping on the smooth rocks near the bank. She stood on a broad stone, which rapidly became wet from the moisture which ran down her legs in tiny streams and dripped from her arms and torso.

Billy rose cautiously to his feet and began the single step that was to take him within arm's length of the girl. A dry twig snapped under his foot. He said:

"Christ!"

Ann whirled and dodged, with arms raised to protect her head. Billy barely missed hitting her head with the rock, which grazed her right shoulder. His shoe slipped on the wet stone, and he lost his balance. He clutched at Ann, his nails leaving deep scratches on her arm.

She pushed him away with all her young strength. The push added momentum to his falling motion, which had begun with the misstep. He pitched down the bank, his head cracking against a flat rock and snapping beneath him. He lay still.

Ann drew a long, quivering breath. A crow back in the pines cawed. A frog splashed into the pool. A cow bawled. The scratches on her arm were bleeding. An angry bruise was visible on her shoulder. She stared, fascinated, at Billy's sprawled figure.

Then she sprang into life. She scrambled into her shirt, drawers and dress, unmindful of her damp body or her bruises. She started to run, glancing back over her shoulder. She stopped, hesitated a minute, returned to the inanimate shape and dropped on one knee beside it.

Billy's body looked pitifully thin. His face was thin. He looked quiet and strangely inadequate lying beside the brook. His eyes, visible through slightly opened lids, were glassy.

Ann remembered her mother in her coffin, and her father in his coffin. Pictures of dead fowl, dead fish, a dead fox, and dead woodchucks went through her mind. This tramp wasn't breathing. He was dead.

Death in itself had no horrors for Ann. It was a state into which animals you ate, or that human beings, frequently were translated. She herself, with the aid of an ax, had helped a couple of dozen chickens into this condition of permanent inanition. Death also was something that happened to other people, not to her.

She leaned over, absorbed in an unconscious study of this shell from which the motivating force had departed. He was a terrible-looking man. It was lucky for her he was dead.

Unconscious that she was performing an ancient rite, she closed Billy's eyes, pulled his feet together, and crossed his hands on his chest.

After she had driven the cows home, and Clarence had milked them, she and Clarence ate supper in the kitchen. Rebecca was spending the day and night with her unmarried sister, Helen, and her father. Clarence drank cider which he had brought up from the cellar in a blue crockery pitcher. Ann drank milk with the cold beans and German fried potatoes, apple pie and cheese.

Clarence poured another glass of cider and took a deep drink, wiping his mustache with his fingers and sipping stray drops

from the hairs. He still was in his suspenders. Conspicuous on the right strap was the star which revealed him as the town constable. The star was gold and blue enamel, and it shone in the soft light of the kerosene lamps, in brackets in the wall over the table.

Clarence watched Ann as she arose and began to carry the dishes to the iron sink connected by hand pump with a rain-water cistern in the cellar. Drinking water came from a covered well twenty feet out from the door of the kitchen. A ten-inch speckled brook trout was lord of that well. His job was to eat up insects and any other small life which might appear in the water.

Ann poured boiling water from a kettle into the dishpan. Clarence stuffed a pipe with tobacco and lighted it. There was a choking whiff of sulphur from the slow-lighting match and then a pungent odor of tobacco. Clarence sighed, arose, stretched, yawned, and said:

"Gimme a dish towel and I'll wipe."

"You go out and set," Ann said. "These won't take me a second."

"I like to help," Clarence said, a trifle weakly.

Ann smiled.

"Washing and wiping isn't men's work, Uncle Clarence," she said.

She had heard her mother and Rebecca both say that. He put two big brown hands on her shoulders. With her hands still in the dish water, she twisted her neck and looked up at him.

"Anything botherin' you, little girl?" he asked. "You seemed kind of quiet tonight."

"I'm all right, Uncle Clarence," she said.

She raised her face as if she might be expecting a kiss. Clarence petted her cheek, and said:

"If you ever should have any troubles, you tell your Uncle Clarence. Won't you, Little One?"

She nodded, busy with the dishes. He took a muslin bag of tobacco from the shelf over the sink, filled and lighted a pipe, and stepped into the yard, Tack at his heels.

Next morning before sunrise Ann was brewing coffee and making griddle cakes and frying sausage. She made coffee by putting in one heaping tablespoonful of coffee to each cup of water, with an extra tablespoonful for the pot. Then she broke an egg, shell and all, into the grounds and mixed them up. After the mixture boiled five minutes, it was ready to drink.

She made the griddle cakes of sweet milk, adding baking soda to the flour and beating the mixture with an egg beater instead of a spoon.

"It smells good," Clarence said, coming in from the sitting room and going to the sink.

He took an agate washbasin from the shelf, set it under the cistern pump, and moved the iron handle up and down.

"But you could have had your beauty sleep," Clarence said. "I'd just as soon milk before I eat."

"I like to cook," Ann said.

Clarence picked up the basin filled with water in one hand, and a towel, a cake of yellow soap, and a comb in the other. Balancing the basin, he stepped into the woodshed, off the kitchen, where he began to splash, puff and blow.

"It's going to rain today," he said, drying himself vigorously.

"Breakfast is ready whenever you are," Ann announced.

After Clarence had eaten twelve wheat cakes, a half-dozen sausages and three cups of coffee, and had lighted his pipe, Ann said:

"There's a dead tramp down in our pasture by the brook."

Clarence took his pipe from his mouth and stared at Ann, blue smoke oozing from his nostrils and mouth.

"A what?" he asked.

"A dead tramp," Ann repeated.

Clarence stroked his mustache and exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be!"

He held his blue gaze on Ann's hazel eyes. Ann's face was inscrutable; her eyes held a curious blank expression.

"Why in the Dickens didn't you tell me last night?" Clarence demanded, getting up from the table.

"I don't know," she replied.

He pushed back his chair and arose, running his hand through his hair. He smoothed his mustache, looking at her curiously. He snorted:

"You ain't just trying to fool me, are you, Little One?"

Ann shook her head earnestly.

"Honest I'm not," she said. "There's a tramp there, dead. At least, I think he is a tramp."

Clarence bored her with his gaze. Ann smiled nervously, turned her head sidewise, and looked at him from the corner of her eyes.

"What are you staring at me like that for, Uncle Clarence?" she asked.

Clarence looked solemn and shook his head.

"Because there's something funny about this," he said. "I don't understand it. It's got me beat."

An hour and a half later, Clarence and Dr. Benham, who also was the County Physician, approached the body of Gold Tooth Billy Bangs. They stood for a moment, silent. Clarence spat a stream of tobacco juice and said drily:

"Laid out purty, ain't he?"

Dr. Benham nodded. He bit off the end of a fresh cigar, and then slowly extracted a pair of gold-bowed spectacles from a case and put them on.

"Give me a hand, Clarence," he said.

He grunted as he kneeled by the body. He peered in the face, felt the head, ran expert fingers over the torso. He examined the hands. He grunted again as he arose to his feet, and coughed as he steadied himself on Clarence's arm.

"My eyes aren't so good, Clarence," he said, holding out his right hand. "What do you make of that?"

Clarence took several long strands of feminine hair from the doctor. They were brown with reddish glints. Clarence raised his eyes to Dr. Benham's.

"There's some skin under the cadaver's nails," Dr. Benham added, stripping off his spectacles and restoring them to the case with hands which trembled in unison with his head. The doctor now lighted the cigar which he had been holding cold between his teeth. Clarence stood, looking down at the strands of hair.

"Annie," Clarence said. "I thought there was something wrong."

Dr. Benham took the cigar from his mouth with his right hand and took Clarence by the arm with his left hand.

"This tramp died of heart failure," he said, a ghost of a grin on his lips, but his tired, wise eyes fierce. "That's my official finding."

Clarence twisted the lengths of hair in big, brown fingers.

"I don't see why she didn't tell me," he said. "I knew something was the matter."

"No scratches visible on her?" Dr. Benham asked.

Clarence shook his head in the negative.

"Well," Dr. Benham continued, "then she must've been swimming in the brook when this tramp jumped her. She struggled, and she's a strong, vigorous youngster, and somehow he fell and cracked his head against a rock. And it killed him. The scratches he made are covered by her clothes."

"Then she laid him out all neat and nice," Clarence said, "and drove the cows home and fixed supper, without saying a word. It's beyond me."

Dr. Benham looked up at the gray sky.

"It's starting to rain," he said. "Let's get out of here."

Dr. Benham unbuckled the case on the dashboard of his Goddard, and pulled out the storm apron, which he called a boot. Clarence helped him to snap it into place. The reins led from the doctor's hand through a flap in the apron to the mouth of the black gelding, Tom, who alternated with old Sam in hauling Dr. Benham around the countryside.

"Might take a reef in Tom's tail," Dr. Benham suggested.

"Just a minute," Clarence said.

He crawled sidewise out of the Goddard, leaned over the shaft, caught Tom's long black tail, and put a knot in it. He was back in the Goddard within thirty seconds. He swept off moisture with a big hand.

"Teeming," he said.

Dr. Benham chirruped to Tom, who was young and frisky and nervous to be in action, and Tom stepped off, his feet squelching in the mud and splashing in suddenly formed puddles.

Tom laid himself right into his towing job as if he loved it. His handsome head was held so high that the moderate check rein hung loose along his glistening neck. His powerful hip muscles flexed and straightened, giving an impression of living power.

The two occupants of the Goddard looked ahead at the rain-slashed road, winding between stone fences and split rail fences and dripping trees and drenched bushes, through the isinglass window in the boot. It was dry and cozy in the heavy vehicle, rumbling over the narrow road. Clarence cleared his throat. He said:

"What do you make of Annie not saying anything, Doc? Is it natural?"

The doctor kept his eyes on the road. He replied:

"It's natural for Ann, Clarence. She comes of hard stock—those Steeles."

"And the Smiths," Clarence suggested.

The doctor nodded.

"I pulled three teeth for Annie," he said, "and she never said boo, just opened her mouth and held up her face and looked at me while I used the forceps. When I vaccinated her you would've thought she enjoyed it."

"She drove the cows home, same as usual," Clarence said.

The doctor lighted a fresh cigar. He said: "Pioneer stock. Most of us around here are the same, but we've softened up a

little. Those Smiths and Steeles and Crafts have kept right on being pioneers. If she could take the deaths of her father and mother as easy as she did, I guess she wouldn't be the kind to worry much over a tramp."

"That's so," Clarence said. "Annie inherited the old New England granite. It's in her blood. I'm worried about her," Clarence added. "She's got fire along with the granite. The boys are after her already."

Dr. Benham grunted. He said: "If she has any troubles nobody'll ever hear her complain."

When they went into Clarence's house, Clarence called:

"Annie."

Ann walked into the hall from the kitchen. She had one of Clarence's heavy socks in her hands. She said:

"How do you do, Doctor Benham? I was just darning some of Uncle Clarence's socks. It seems as if he pushed his toes through the ends on purpose. Will you have a cup of coffee and a doughnut?"

Dr. Benham laughed.

"You know my weakness, don't you, Annie. I'll have the coffee and the doughnut, thank you."

"It'll only take a minute," Ann said.

Dr. Benham winked at Clarence and followed Ann into the kitchen. She was measuring ground coffee into a pot.

"I thought I'd like to put a little something on those scratches you got," he said.

"How did you know I had scratches?" Ann asked, motionless for an instant.

"I could tell you a little bird told me," Dr. Benham replied, "but that wouldn't be fair. The tramp had some of your hair in his hand, and there was skin under his nails."

Ann's big hazel eyes were fixed on his face. She took a deep breath. Slowly her head twisted to one side, so that she was looking at him from the corner of her eyes, the gesture inherited, or acquired, from her mother.

"Now, let's see those scratches," Dr. Benham continued, opening his medicine bag.

"Just a minute," Ann said, going to the pantry and returning with an egg.

She broke the egg and dropped it into the pot. Then she measured out five cups of well water from a pail by the sink and set the pot on the stove. Then she unbuttoned her dress, yellow with white dots, and slipped it over her head.

"He scratched you up good, didn't he?" Dr. Benham said, spectacles already in place. "Wish you'd told me about this last night. Scratches and bites are better cauterized."

He applied iodine.

"The tramp died of heart failure," Dr. Benham said while his deft fingers of a physician touched Ann's skin.

"He hit his head pretty hard," Ann volunteered.

Dr. Benham grinned and his head began to shake harder.

"That might have been a contributing cause," he admitted, "but he really died when his heart stopped beating. You can put on your dress again," he added.

Ann swam into her dress, and Dr. Benham replaced a bottle and cotton in his bag. Then he pumped water into the basin at the sink. He said, as he washed:

"Now, if you'd cleaned the skin from that tramp's nails, taken your hair from his fingers, and hadn't laid him out so nice, nobody'd ever have known what did happen."

"I'm glad he's dead," Ann asserted. "He was an awful man."

Dr. Benham transferred dripping fingers from the pan to the roller towel on the wall at the left of the door leading into the dining room. Drying his hands, he said:

"I prefer that kind dead myself," he observed, "but you should remember, Ann, that if your Uncle Clarence wasn't the Constable and I wasn't the County Physician, you might have had to go to court."

"I wouldn't care," Ann replied. "I didn't do anything I shouldn't do."

Dr. Benham patted her back.

"I don't think you did, Annie," he said. "Give me a kiss."

She held up her face, and he kissed her cheek and then pinched it.

"You're a great girl," he said. "I wonder what'll happen to you when you grow up."

Ann's face crinkled in a smile, revealing a dimple in her left cheek.

"Oh, I know," she asserted. "I'm going to be married and have eight children."

Chapter Six

REBECCA WAS a sweet soul, and her sweetness shone from her dark, mobile face like a beacon. She arose early, and went to work singing in a melodious, bird-like voice. She had dark hair and bright dark eyes and quick movements like a bird.

She loved to make culinary surprises for Clarence, odd dishes for that speck on the map—concoctions such as baked potatoes with sausages stuffed through them, oysters wrapped in bacon—"pigs in blanket" she called them—lobster Newburgh, chicken à la king, mushrooms under glass, and chop suey.

She never said a bad word of anyone, and recited cute little verses, and sang *Annie Laurie*, *Auld Lang Syne*, and other sad old songs so that it brought moisture to Clarence's eyes.

Rebecca prayed on her knees every morning when she arose, and every night when she went to bed. Her God was a personal and immensely satisfying God to whom she took all her troubles and upon whom she leaned with confidence and not a little pride in having discovered such a dependable deity.

This God of Rebecca's was not to be confused with the God of the Reverend Joshua Hazen. Rebecca's God took babies into Heaven whether they had been baptized or not, and wasn't concerned so much with being mean to human beings as being nice to them. The only hell Rebecca's God indulged in was the hell of a guilty conscience. Rebecca really was so good, and so sweet, that one almost imagined one could smell the goodness leaking out of her.

Rebecca's family never ate in the kitchen as so many of their friends and neighbors did on occasion. She said:

"It doesn't matter if you only are having beans and brown bread. They should be served attractively and daintily."

And the way Rebecca baked the beans and the brown bread, and the way she served them in the dining room on the old mahogany table with home-dipped candles shedding a soft light over time-worn silver and hand-painted china made Saturday nights banquet nights.

She painted the China herself and had the pieces fired in Eastham, where Elvira Easterday, who gave lessons in painting china, had a kiln. She also embroidered the center-pieces and the doilies, and hem-stitched her linen and worked monograms. Rebecca was a dainty little trick, and Clarence was a big, bluff fellow, who walked about in a haze of tobacco smoke, smelling of sweat. Sometimes Clarence drank more than one pitcher of hard cider, and then the whites of his eyes turned red, and his weather-beaten cheeks turned redder than ever, and he looked quite fierce and menacing and big in the not-so-large dining room with its low, old-fashioned ceiling.

Rebecca didn't say a chiding word on such occasions. She told a funny story and laughed, but her eyes were brighter than usual. If one didn't know that Rebecca never wept one would have suspected that tears were not far away. But she talked and laughed, and Clarence would look savage and get up and say:

"Damn it."

Then he would pick her up in his arms, and she would smile at him, and he would kiss her on the cheek, and rub his whiskery cheek against her smooth cheek, and then he wouldn't drink more than his one small, blue pitcher of cider again for a month or more.

Ann often wondered what brought together such a big, hard, smelly, bristly man, and such a small, soft, aromatic, delicate woman. Rebecca wouldn't allow Clarence to do anything about the house, so, knowing nothing about it, he had nothing to do with its management, its routine, its perplexities. He was shooed out of the way when cleaning, baking, pickling, or preserving was in process. But he never was chided for bringing in mud or even manure on his boots. Rebecca said:

"Men were made to be cleaned up after."

When Clarence dropped ashes on the carpet in the parlor or the rag rugs in the bedrooms, Rebecca said:

"Tobacco ashes are good for the carpets."

When he smoked a ten-cent cigar on Sundays or holidays, she said:

"I love the smell of a good cigar."

Rebecca treated Clarence as a small boy in many ways. Every so often she washed out his ears herself, and clipped the bristles in his ears and nose. She couldn't get him to take a bath more than once a week, but she did make him wash his feet and sponge off his torso daily in the summer.

Rebecca herself was as fastidious as dainty. She made a second religion of soap and water and warfare against germs. She bathed twice a day at least, and never touched her bare feet to the floor. If she did happen to touch the sole of a foot to the floor she washed it all over again. She washed doorknobs in alcohol, and never drank from a glass that another member of the household had used until she had rinsed it thoroughly. She said:

"One's body is the temple of one's soul."

She said:

"One's house is the temple of one's body."

The only men Rebecca ever had kissed were her father and Clarence. And she hadn't kissed Clarence, except for a chaste, dry peck of the lips, until they were married. After that it was different. Old Si Brockaway said:

"I've heerd a lot of talk about Spanish and French and other furriners bein' so passionate. All I've got to say is that them as believes that sort of trash never has laid up with a good old New England female, who looks on the outside as if all she ever thought about was drapin' bathrobes on the heathen, goin' to church three times on the Sabbath, and smellin' her husband's breath to see if he's been at the cider bar'l. The days around here may have the smell of hymns, but the nights have the perfume of Paris."

Anyway, Rebecca, being what she was, never suspected that Ann was any different. Rebecca took it for granted that any one she loved lived by the same code she did.

Rebecca believed that Clarence was a he-virgin when she married him. She wouldn't have married him if she had not so believed. Clarence, and the other husbands, took it for granted that wives thought that, and encouraged the idea. To deceive a wife about one's past was one of the ordinary everyday masculine virtues.

Rebecca was quite modern and considered it was not un-Christian to read novels. She liked to read Shakespeare, Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. She read *John Halifax, Gentleman* aloud to Ann, and they both wept. She also read *Romona* aloud. The only book Clarence ever read through with unalloyed enjoyment was *The Three Musketeers*, and as many Nick Carters as he could smuggle into the barn. Rebecca said to Ann:

"Your Uncle Clarence reads those detective books and thinks I don't know about it. You'll find when you grow up that men never grow up. They're just big boys."

Ann didn't care much for Thackeray. She thought he was long-winded and a bit dull. But she liked Scott and George Eliot and Jane Austen, and she loved poetry. When she was fourteen she began to read modern novels, and she liked them and read all the best sellers that were on loan at the Eastham Public Library. She loved the thought of romance and love. Eastham seemed very small and tame to her. The world seemed large, and bright, and glamorous, and exciting. She used to ask Clarence to tell her about New York, where he had been on two different occasions. Clarence said:

"There's the Waldorf-Astoria. It's as big as the north pasture. The main dining room is bigger than our strawberry patch. And they've got other dining rooms. And they call the hallway downstairs Peacock Alley, and it is full of women all dressed up, and some of 'em no better than they should be, wearing diamonds, and everything. I et a meal there—and promise not to tell your Aunt Rebecca—and it cost me two dollars and thutty cents. And I scarcely had a nibble."

"Tell me about Fifth Avenue," Ann urged.

He told her about Fifth Avenue. Then she wanted to know about the theatres and Broadway. Clarence loved to tell her, but he always wound up by saying:

"New York is a good place to visit, but nobody with any sense would want to live there."

"I'm going to New York some day," Ann asserted.

Clarence grinned and petted her cheek. He said:

"I wouldn't be surprised if you went to London and Paris too, Annie."

Ann's eyes popped right out at that, bright with excitement.

"Oh, I'd love it," she exclaimed.

Then she pouted a little, twisting her forefinger in Clarence's lapel buttonhole, and said:

"You don't really think I'll ever see all those places, do you, Uncle Clarence?"

He grinned and replied:

"I don't see why your chances ain't as good as anyone's, Annie, and better than most. That is, unless you decide to settle right down here in Southfield, or Eastham, and get married and raise a family."

Ann made a little face, and said:

"I want lots of babies, but I don't want to live in Eastham."

Rebecca made it part of her creed to be tolerant of dancing and card playing. She wouldn't play cards herself, or dance, any more than she would do any except necessary work on Sunday. But when Clarence suggested that Ann should take dancing lessons she arranged with Professor Hammond in Eastham to take Ann into his class.

Ann was embarrassed at first, and felt conspicuous out on the huge, polished floor of the grand ballroom on the third floor of the Eastham Hotel where the dancing class was held. Professor Hammond was short and plump with curly red-gray hair around a bald spot on a billiard-ball head, and he had a red face and thick red eyebrows and eyelashes and green eyes, and warts on his face, and glaring, white false teeth. But the professor had tiny feet, which in shiny pumps bore him about so gracefully that one forgot his appearance and only considered the matchless grace of his movements, a bit of thistledown drifting on a rhythmic breeze.

About thirty boys and girls attended this class every week. They all were Ann's age, among them Howard Brockaway, one year older, and Marion Talbot, who was Ann's best friend.

Howard was sick of calf love over Ann. He wanted to dance every dance with her. He said to Marion constantly:

"Do you honestly think Ann loves me?"

"I think she does," Marion always replied.

"Then why doesn't she want to be with me as much as I want to be with her?" Howard wanted to know.

"Well," Marion said, perhaps not in these exact words but to this general purpose on a score of occasions, "a girl is different from a boy. Perhaps Ann is afraid if she makes too much over you you will get tired of her."

Howard had strange pains in his stomach and intestines because Ann danced twice one afternoon with George Baker. He turned really pale, and looked ill when Professor Hammond ordered the girls to pick partners among the boys and Ann asked George to dance. Marion went to Howard and said in a low voice:

"I know how you feel, Howard. Dance with me, and don't let on."

Howard was on the verge of tears, or murder. He danced with Marion, and wondered how anyone could love a girl as much as he loved Ann. He said to Marion:

"Gee! You don't know how much I appreciate what you're doing."

Marion had brown hair, and blue eyes, and a pleasant pink and white face. She had a compact little figure, and a ready smile. She was always helping people. She said:

"Ann just didn't want to make herself conspicuous by asking you to dance with her in front of everybody."

Howard was a tall boy with brown hair and brown eyes, and played football and basketball for the Eastham High School. He wasn't very bright in the classroom, but he was a big figure in sports and in the school life.

Ann looked at Howard as she danced with George, and thought it was funny that Howard couldn't be happy to be with her when she wanted him to be with her and just as happy when she wanted to be with someone else. She supposed she loved Howard, and that they would be married when they grew up, as Howard suggested several times daily, but sometimes he was something of a pest and she wondered if they weren't just a boy and a girl in the throes of a boy-and-girl crush.

She felt funny when she and Howard kissed and squeezed against each other, but she was going to stop that. It might lead to trouble. But it was a difficult practice to stop. It was a wonderful sensation.

Howard's mind was occupied with baseball, football, basketball, track, tennis, and even golf. He didn't know who was the Prime Minister of England, or the Premier of France, but he could give you off-hand the leading batsmen of the various baseball leagues for the past fifteen years. He wasn't very good at hitting answers to history or geography questions right, but when he hit an opposing line he brought the spectators right to their feet.

Howard was a pleasant animal to have around. He took good care of himself because he was an athlete and wanted to be a champion. He took two or three shower baths a day usually, and exhaled an atmosphere of buoyant health and conquering youth.

Ann and Howard made a fine-looking pair. Everyone agreed on that. Howard's grandfather, Old Si, said:

"With a stud like Howard, Annie should throw some prize stock."

Ann and Howard were walking in Main Street in Eastham when Howard said:

"Here comes Alonzo West. He's a doctor now."

Ann raised her eyes and saw Alonzo West's big, raw-boned figure. His clothes didn't fit so well. The jacket was tight around the wide shoulders and caught under the armpits. The trousers were unpressed, and were worn at what was colloquially termed high water. That is, they failed to meet the instep by two or three inches. The sleeves also were short, and divulged the fact that Alonzo had dispensed with cuffs and merely was wearing gold studs pushed through the wrist bands of his stiff-bosomed white shirt. His hair was curling over his collar.

Howard nudged Ann and whispered from the side of his mouth:

"Gee! He imitates old Doc Benham, even to the way he bends his shoulders and toes his feet out."

"Shh!" Ann exclaimed.

"Where does he get his clothes?" Howard whispered, grinning.

Ann didn't answer because Alonzo was only a couple of paces away. Alonzo smiled and raised his yellow straw hat, which was a companion to the hats Dr. Benham always wore. When Alonzo smiled, his big face suddenly became attractive. He held out his right hand to Ann.

"Gosh! Ann," he exclaimed heartily, "it does me good to see you. You're still the prettiest girl I ever saw."

Ann blushed and said:

"You must have seen plenty of prettier girls in New York, Doctor West."

"How are you, Doctor?" Howard asked perfunctorily, as he and Alonzo exchanged handclasps.

Alonzo said to Howard:

"You're looking fit as a fiddle, Howard."

Alonzo said to Ann:

"There aren't any prettier girls than you anywhere, Ann."

"Look out, Doctor, or you'll be making me believe you," Ann said.

"You always can believe everything I say," Alonzo said, putting on his hat.

He took a thick gold watch attached to a thick gold chain from his right waistcoat pocket and looked at it. He said:

"Well, folks, I've got to get along. I'll be seeing you soon."

He hurried down the street, big shoulders bowed imperceptibly, unpolished boots toeing out.

"Look at the big monkey," Howard said, "doing an imitation of old Doc Benham."

"He couldn't find anybody better to imitate if he looked a long ways," Ann replied.

"I think Alonzo is stuck on you, and I wouldn't be surprised if you were stuck on him," Howard exclaimed.

"I think he's nice," Ann said. "He was wonderful to me when father died."

"Looks as if he'd make a good scarecrow," Howard said. "And he wouldn't have to dress for the part either."

"He's always worked hard," Ann said, "and I guess he hasn't had much money for clothes. He worked his way through medical school."

"Aw, he's a lot of bunk," Howard said. "Let's get a soda."

Rebecca invited Alonzo for dinner on the Sunday after his return to Eastham. Alonzo wore a new suit of the same tone of gray which always seemed to catch his eye. It didn't fit any better than any of his past suits, but it was clean and pressed. He was wearing a black polka dot tie and a crisp white shirt. Rebecca said:

"Why, you're growing a mustache."

Alonzo grinned, and said:

"Folks say they like an older doctor when a feller is young. When a feller gets older they're likely to say they want a younger doctor. I figured out what they might put up with is a youngish sort of doctor that looked older than he was. So, I'm raising a mustache."

"Doc Benham tells me you turned down a nice offer to stay in New York and be assistant to Doctor Elmore."

Alonzo stopped eating homemade bisque of tomato soup long enough to say:

"This is my home around here. It's where my father, and his father, and all of my family always have lived. And what's good enough for them is good enough for me."

"But you had a good chance to be a big surgeon some day," Clarence protested.

Alonzo inhaled a spoonful of the soup, his face close to the plate. He said:

"I figure I can be just as good a surgeon here, and be happier with my own. I don't like cities."

Alonzo smacked his lips over the chicken fricassee with dumplings. He pushed a fork into the mashed potato, and with his thumb shoved the potato onto the knife, and stuffed his mouth.

"This is good," he said. "I never ate better dumplings."

Rebecca, who did the serving, redecorated his plate with meat and vegetables. She said:

"Don't you like the salad, Doctor?"

He grinned, looking at the lettuce and tomato, crisp green, and firm, juicy red. He replied:

"I don't like salad dressings, Mrs. Smith. I like vinegar and sugar."

Rebecca promptly provided him with fresh lettuce and tomato, and he doused the mixture with vinegar and sprinkled granulated sugar over it. He stuffed his mouth so that juice dribbled over his chin. He exclaimed:

"That hits the spot."

After apple pie and cheese, and chocolate layer cake, Alonzo took Ann riding with him in his new buggy behind his new horse, a big, rangy bay gelding with a white blaze and a white off-front foot. This horse's name was Frank.

It was a treat for the initiated to see Alonzo's ways with a horse. His touch on the lines was gentle, yet firm. He was patient and watchful, and knew by instinct and long training the capabilities of a horse, and he never strained them. He could drive a horse twenty miles and bring him back fresher than most persons would have after five miles.

Alonzo made a little clucking noise, and Frank moved off. Alonzo clucked again, and Frank dropped his powerful hams, and leaned against the breeching, and spurned the ground with iron-shod hoofs. Ann caught her breath, held on to her hat with one hand and the seat rail with the other, and they went ripping down the road. She exclaimed:

"He's wonderful."

"He's pretty good," Alonzo said, grinning.

Then he said soothingly:

"So-o, Frank. So-o-o-oh, Boy!"

The big young man's gentle voice calmed the speeding horse. The tempo of his hoof-beats slowed. The big wrinkles stopped showing in the muscles of his hams. He went slower and slower. Soon he was walking, tossing his head in air and throwing off foam flecks from his bit. His thighs were marked with white lather. His check rein was hanging loose. Ann pointed

to it. Alonzo said:

"Whoa."

Frank stopped, and Alonzo passed the reins to Ann and jumped out. He snapped the check rein into place, petted Frank's shining neck, and said:

"He doesn't need any check. Frank holds his head so high it's always coming loose."

Alonzo took Ann to the circus in Long Falls. She never forgot that evening because she ate uncounted peanuts and drank many glasses of pink lemonade. Then she was ashamed either to ask where the women's room was, or to excuse herself. She told Rebecca:

"I was in agony."

"You must always ask," Rebecca said. "You might do yourself a terrible injury."

Ann always associated circuses with that unpleasantness.

Alonzo took Ann riding not infrequently and was a regular visitor at the house for Sunday dinners. He always brought with him a pound of candy. He enjoyed seeing people eat, and he loved to see Rebecca and Ann searching in the fancy box from New York for favorite pieces, and nibbling them and rolling their eyes with pleasure. Rebecca and Ann always called Alonzo "Doctor" now. Even Clarence was inclined to call him "Doc" more often than by his given name.

Alonzo was making a name for himself. He carried Mrs. Otis Kinney, who weighed nearly two hundred pounds, down Sugar Mountain, and when he got her down he cut off her leg without heeding protests. The Kinneys had millions, and influence, and old Otis Kinney, who had been in Boston at the time, said as soon as he came home that he was going to find out the reason why.

Dr. Benham said that Alonzo had saved the old lady's life, but Otis Kinney wasn't satisfied till he got Dr. Will Coffin up from Boston and Dr. Elmore up from New York. He paid them each five hundred dollars and they told him that Alonzo had saved his wife's life, and Dr. Coffin told Alonzo to go to Boston and he would give him plenty to do, and Dr. Elmore renewed his offer to have Alonzo go into his office in New York.

The Kinneys were big frogs in the local puddle, and when they went around telling what a genius Alonzo was many persons round about believed that he might not be so bad as they had thought. They much preferred to call in old Dr. Benham, but when Dr. Benham wasn't available they took Dr. West with good grace.

Otis Kinney was the founder of the Kinney Mills. He was a stocky man of medium height, with close-cropped, iron-gray whiskers and iron-gray hair parted in the middle. He had iron-gray eyes, and an iron-gray complexion, and wore gray suits and black overcoats. He said:

"When I was a poor boy I paid a dollar once just to hold a one-hundred-dollar bill for five minutes. Respect for money never did anyone any harm."

He said:

"I was in Joe Bell's Barber Shop last Thursday, and one of the men from the mill was there getting shaved. I can't afford to get shaved. I shave myself, and only go to barbers to have my hair cut and my beard trimmed. This man was in the habit of getting shaved every day, and he paid fifteen cents for the shave and gave the barber a ten-cent tip. The man's wages are twenty-two dollars and fifty cents a week. Supposing he spends twenty-five cents seven times a week in the barber shop. That means he spends one dollar and seventy-five cents, at least a dollar and one-half more than necessary.

"Well," the old man continued for the benefit of Alonzo and Ann and Mrs. Kinney, who was sitting in the Kinney's landau with her husband, "what does that mean? That means that I am paying fifteen hundred men in my mills one dollar and one-half too much every week. If I had that two thousand dollars a week or one hundred thousand dollars a year I would do something useful with it."

Alonzo nodded and said:

"Most people don't know how to use money."

Ann opened her mouth as if to say something, but closed it again without having said anything. When she reached home she told of the talk with Old Man Kinney, and said:

"I think he was all wrong, and I was going to say so. I didn't like to see Dr. West agreeing with him. I thought it was only because old Mr. Kinney has all that money."

Rebecca smiled, cocked her bird-like head to one side and said:

"Doctor West is being diplomatic, my dear. Old Mr. Kinney believes he is right, I am sure. And it may even be that he is more right than you are. He is very good about supporting foreign missions and he always makes up the church deficit. I consider the Kinneys model Christians."

"But if the men earn the money it seems to me it is nobody's business how they spend it, and that instead of getting too little they should be paid more so that they could have nicer homes, and horses, or even automobiles."

Rebecca held up her hands in astonishment. She said:

"Why, my dear. You talk like a socialist or an Anarchist."

"It seems to me," Ann said, "that if Mr. Kinney paid higher wages he couldn't give so much money to foreign missions, or to colleges and other places away from where his mills are."

Rebecca smiled patiently and petted Ann's shoulder. She said:

"Why, my dear! As if there were any cause more noble than foreign missions, or more worthy than the higher education."

Ann turned her head to one side and looked at Rebecca from the corners of her eyes. Rebecca said:

"You mustn't be stubborn, my dear. 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' As you grow older you will appreciate the fact that men like Mr. Kinney know best."

Rebecca thought it was sweet of Mr. Kinney that he had Alonzo visit him and Mrs. Kinney now and then without the knowledge of Dr. Benham. She said:

"They are so kind. They don't want to hurt old Doctor Benham's feelings."

Ann told Alonzo what Rebecca said, and added:

"I don't think it's nice for you to be deceiving that sweet old man, Doctor West."

Alonzo grinned, and said in his big voice:

"Any time I fool Doctor Benham I'll have to get up mighty early in the morning, Ann."

"Then he knows? Does it bother him?"

"He thinks it's funny," Alonzo said. "And it is kind of funny because old Otis Kinney is trying to use one of us to check on the other—the young and the old."

"I hope you charge him plenty," Ann said.

Alonzo grinned again and said:

"Well, I charge him plenty, but you know old Doctor Benham. He belongs to the old school. He charges the Kinneys the same as he charges the Murphys down on the flats—and forgets to send the bill."

"Everybody loves Doctor Benham," Ann said.

"They broke the mould when they made him," Alonzo asserted. "He's a great old egg."

Alonzo stopped Frank on the Back Road, put his arm around Ann's shoulders and kissed her one foggy night in April, 1907. Her hair was sparkling with drops of moisture. Ann's lips met his fairly, and responded. He drew away, and rumbled in her ear:

"I love you, Ann."

Ann looked quickly at him, and then at Frank's tail. Alonzo continued:

"I'm seven years older than you, and I had planned to wait before I asked you to marry me. But you are too pretty, Ann. And I've loved you ever since the first time I saw you—when you were a little mite."

Ann raised her eyes to his and turned them away again. He reached into his inside coat pocket and brought out a pin-seal leather pocketbook with a burnt monogram, a present from Mrs. Kinney. He fished inside the pocketbook and produced a circlet of gold with a tiny diamond, something less than a carat. He said huskily:

"I bought this in the Falls, with the first money I could get together."

He reached for Ann's hand, but she drew it slowly back and drew a deep breath. He asked:

"What's the matter, Ann?"

She said:

"I can't."

"Don't you love me?" he asked.

"I like you an awful lot," she said.

"Is there anybody else you care more for—Howard Brockaway?"

Ann shook her head.

"I like Howard, but I don't love him enough to marry him," she said.

"Has he kissed you?" he asked.

"Yes," Ann said.

Alonzo ground his teeth, and his face darkened in a spasm of jealousy. He asked:

"Did you let him?"

Ann nodded, and said:

"Just as I let you, Doctor."

"I thought you were different," Alonzo said. "But I might have known."

His face was savage. Ann said:

"I suppose you never kissed a girl before you met me."

"That's different," Alonzo said.

"I know about men," Ann said with an air curiously knowing. "They think they can do anything, even sleep with a girl, before they get married, but they expect the girl they marry is going to be unkissed."

"I don't like to hear you talk like that," Alonzo exclaimed.

"I suppose you are just like the others."

"I'm not," Alonzo said. "I never paid any attention to any girl except you."

Alonzo was lying. Ann continued to tell the truth. She said:

"I kissed Howard and he kissed me. And I kissed Henry Ward, that man that was here from Boston last summer. Kissing makes me feel funny. It makes me kind of afraid. I wasn't going to kiss any more until I was engaged until you just kissed me."

Alonzo laughed, with no mirth in sound or appearance. He said:

"I could kill those fellows. I never loved anybody except you, and you've got to marry me."

He took her in his big arms and kissed her again. She waited until he released her, and then she said:

"I'm not going to get married for a while yet. Please drive me home now."

He pleaded with her. Her most encouraging statement was:

"No, I don't love anyone else. I don't care more for anyone than I do for you."

"I don't see how you could refuse Alonzo," Rebecca said. "He is a splendid young man, and he comes of a fine, old family."

Ann sighed, and said:

"He makes a noise when he eats, and he smells of sweat, and I don't believe he changes his socks often enough."

Rebecca held up her hands, and opened eyes and mouth in horror. She said:

"Why, Ann! I never heard of such a thing. Not in all my born days."

"And he's jealous," Ann said.

"I never knew a kinder or more thoughtful young man," Rebecca said.

"Yes, when he's having his own way," Ann replied.

"Most men want to have their own way," Rebecca asserted. "And it's easy for a woman to make them think they're having their own way."

"I don't like that," Ann said. "I'd like to be honest. I'd like to be in love with someone from whom I don't have to conceal anything at all, and who won't have to conceal anything from me. I think that would be wonderful—to find a man you could trust, and that would trust you, absolutely."

"Why, Ann, how you talk! I think most nice people are like that," Rebecca said.

Dr. Benham said to Ann:

"What's this I hear from Alonzo about your refusing to marry him?"

"That's right, Doctor Benham."

"He's a good boy," Dr. Benham said, nodding his head and selecting a fresh cigar from his vest pocket. "I've known Alonzo ever since I brought him into the world, and they don't make 'em any better."

"He's awfully jealous," Ann said.

"Why? I didn't know that."

"He was awful mad at me because I told him I'd kissed other boys."

Dr. Benham held a freshly lighted match suspended in air and stared at Ann.

"You did what?" he demanded, and suddenly dropped the match as it scorched his fingers, and added: "Tarnation take it."

"I told him I kissed some boys," she said.

Dr. Benham put his hands, the right one still holding the unlighted cigar, on Ann's shoulder, and said:

"Don't ever tell Alonzo or any other man anything he don't want to hear."

"Why, Doctor Benham!" Ann exclaimed. "And you're one of the ones that always told me to always tell the truth."

Dr. Benham withdrew his hands, stuck the cigar in his mouth, and reached for a match. He scratched the match on the sole of his boot, held it until the blue flame changed to yellow, and said meanwhile:

"There are times when telling the truth is just plain dumb. For instance . . ."

He applied the flame to the end of his cigar and sucked in smoke. He blew out smoke, waved out the flame on the match, and threw the match on the ground, and said:

"When a young woman that ought to know better starts telling a young man who is in love with her about the other young men in her life."

"But I should think honesty and understanding should be the first things next to love in marriage," Ann said.

"Mebbe they should be, but they ain't," Dr. Benham observed, spitting. "Didn't you ever notice that all the women think their husbands always was virtuous, and all the husbands think they were the only ones that ever kissed their wives, and yet we haven't reached a point yet, I'm sorry to relate, where the majority of girls haven't been kissed when they're married, and the

majority of young men don't know more about girls than they read in their school physiologies."

"Then you think I shouldn't have told Alonzo that other boys ever kissed me?"

"I know you shouldn't've," Dr. Benham asserted. "That was your private, personal business, not Alonzo's."

Ann sighed. Dr. Benham said:

"I haven't much use for people that stick their noses into other people's business, Annie, but being childless myself I suppose I've got into the habit of looking at most of my patients as my own family. Now, I've always thought you and Alonzo would make a good team.

"Alonzo is a hard-working boy. He earned his education by getting up at four o'clock in the morning and milking cows and delivering milk over his father's route, and sitting up half the night for the year his father was dying, reading to his father when his father was awake, and studying his books when his father was dozing off.

"Alonzo drove me, and looked after my office, and read my books, and always was willing and cheerful. He's strong and willing, and honest and dependable, and he's got gumption. He's got a mind of his own.

"Alonzo went to New York to medical school, and he made one of the best records in his class. He was the president of it, and was offered fancy jobs in New York. But he came back here to practise medicine with his own people.

"The boy is going to be a real doctor, and he needs a real doctor's wife to help him. He isn't like me. He isn't going to be satisfied to be a bachelor. And, Annie, you're the only girl in this neck of the woods that I know of that would fill the bill. You're what Alonzo needs, and he's what you need. You're two real folks, who could raise a good family and be a real help to your own community, which is the true normal ideal of life, so far as I can see it. If everybody could do just that, and no more, what a happy world this would be."

The doctor knocked off cigar ash against the hitching post in front of his office where he and Ann were talking. Ann took a deep breath and said:

"Honestly, Doctor, there's no one I like more than Alonzo. But, somehow, I don't want to get married yet. I want to see things. I want to go to New York. That's what I want to do."

Ann looked at Dr. Benham as if he should be astonished at this news. But Dr. Benham nodded comprehendingly. He said:

"I knew you were straining at the tether, Annie. You feel kind of tired of this one-hoss place and the one-hoss people in it, and you'd like to get out in the world and spread your wings."

Ann started to shake her head in the negative. The doctor continued:

"You think the boys around here, Alonzo included, don't part their hair the way they do in the society pages, and probably Alonzo makes a noise when he eats his soup, and forgets to stand up and act like a footman or a butler when a woman comes in the room. Also, he doesn't manicure his nails, as I don't mine, and sometimes he forgets to get a haircut for a month."

"Why, Doctor Benham," Ann exclaimed. "How did you know all that? I never told anyone."

"You didn't have to," Dr. Benham replied. "I've learnt that lesson from many women, my dear. I've even been the man who's been turned down for those very reasons, or so it's been said."

"Well," Ann said, "it sounded different the way you said it, but I don't see why men can't work, and be nice, and at the same time cultivate some of the smaller courtesies."

Dr. Benham laughed, and blew out cigar smoke. He said:

"You've been listening to your Aunt Rebecca. She'd have us men perfumed behind the ears."

"That isn't the only reason why I want to go to New York," Ann said. "I want to get away from Southfield Centre and Eastham and everybody I know, and live in New York for a while. I want to see stage plays, and the opera, and famous people, and see Fifth Avenue—and live."

Dr. Benham threw away his cigar stub and reached in his side pocket for his driving gloves. He said:

"I don't see any reason why you shouldn't go to New York, Annie," he said. "But just what were you thinking of doing there?"

"I thought I would go to a business school, and study to be a secretary," Ann said. "I would love to work for some big, successful man."

Dr. Benham grinned, and pinched her cheek. He said:

"I guess you'll find your Uncle Clarence and Aunt Rebecca ain't going to stop you," he said. "You've got a little money of your own, and you should have your fling if you want it."

He unhitched Old Sam, and turned, with the tie line in his hands, and added:

"It won't do you any harm either way. If it teaches you this neck of the woods is a pretty nice place to live in, it's worth it, and, on the other hand, if you learn that you like New York a lot better, then that's worth it too."

Dr. Benham climbed into his buggy and Ann said:

"I wish everybody was as nice as you, Doctor Benham."

The doctor grinned as he gathered up the reins. He said:

"There was a girl that didn't like me well enough to stay to home for me when I was a young feller."

He chirruped to Old Sam, and Old Sam broke into a lazy trot.

Ann graduated from Eastham High School in June, 1907. She read the class poem, and was voted the class beauty. Howard Brockaway and Marion Talbot were in the same graduating class. Howard was voted the best athlete and the best-looking boy.

Howard took Ann to the Senior Class dance, which was the last social occasion of school life. The dance was held in the casino at Primrose Park, which was hired by the Class of 1907 for the occasion, and Marvin Newcombe's Band furnished the music.

Ann and Howard sat out six dances in a rustic summer house in the woods back of the pavilion. They held each other close and pressed together from lips to toes. It was a warm night, and perspiration made their bodies damp, and their kisses salty.

Rambler roses, white and red, grew over the pavilion lattice of braces of white birch with bark still on. Lightning bugs flamed in the luxuriant green grass. The moon rolled slowly behind occasional filmy clouds, shedding a pale glow. The dance music came faintly from the pavilion.

Altogether it was one of those nights when may be said:

"Isn't it beautiful!"

"Isn't it too lovely!"

"Just look at the moon!"

"I could die on a night like this."

"Smell the roses."

"Isn't it wonderful!"

"Do you ever look at the stars and wonder?"

"It's wonderful just to be alive."

"It's wonderful to be young."

"It's wonderful to be alive."

"It's wonderful to be in love."

Youth, health, beauty, pleasant odors, moonlight, soft music, and warm blood combined to make a situation that brings human beings closer perhaps to the secret song of the planets than they ever get again, a healthily emotional delirium. Ann whispered:

"What are you going to do with me?"

And Howard arose slightly embarrassed, and very sweaty and sticky, and said:

"Don't you think we'd better be getting back for a while?"

And they went back to the pavilion. And that is the truth of why the engagement of Howard Brockaway and Ann Steele wasn't arranged on the night of the final dance at the Primrose Park Casino.

Ann and Marion were at Marion's house next afternoon, and Ann said:

"I am going to New York in the Fall."

"What do Alonzo and Howard think about that?" Marion asked.

"I haven't told anybody yet," Ann said.

"It's too bad Alonzo doesn't wear better clothes and doesn't stop sticking his nose in his plate and making funny noises when he eats," Marion said.

"He has a fine character," Ann said.

"If he wore his clothes the way Howard does, and was as polite as Howard, I bet you'd marry him," Marion said.

"Honest, I don't know whether I would or not," Ann asserted. "All I know is, I'm through kissing boys, or men."

Marion giggled, and exclaimed:

"I've heard that before."

"Well, I am anyway," Ann said. "I'm not going to let any man kiss me again till . . ."

"Next time," Marion interjected.

"I'm engaged," Ann concluded.

"You'll probably fall in love with a handsome man in New York," Marion said, "and forget all about all of us back here."

"I wish I knew just what love was," Ann said.

Chapter Seven

ANN'S FIRST lesson in connection with her residence in New York was that alterations in one's position geographically do not of themselves cut one off from one's lifetime associations.

Uncle Clarence and Aunt Rebecca made no objection to Ann's ambition to go to New York to study, but Aunt Rebecca took it for granted that Ann would go to live with her old friend, Mrs. Cynthia Graves, who ran a rooming establishment in Madison Avenue. And, naturally, Ann went to live with Mrs. Graves, whom she called Aunt Cynthia.

Aunt Cynthia was the widow of George Graves, who had gone from Eastham to New York as manager of the New York office for Otis Kinney. Her son, George, Jr., had graduated from Williams, and had gone to Chicago for Otis Kinney, and her daughter, Margaret, who was twenty, was studying voice in Germany. Margaret hoped to make her mark in Grand Opera some day.

Mrs. Graves was fifty, with light brown hair slightly touched with gray, large, pleasant gray eyes, naturally pink cheeks, a tiptilted nose, a mouth which was a Cupid's bow, and a good chin. She was a comely and attractive woman, a little on the plump side, and constantly smiled because in that way she could show her teeth which were really beautiful, each one as distinct and shapely and white as a seed pearl.

Mr. Dangerfield, who worked on *The Planet* in an editorial capacity, and never took off his hat in the house unless he met one of the feminine roomers, when he removed it for an instant and then clapped it right back over his bald spot, said that Mrs. Graves' mouth and teeth reminded him of pearls and pomegranates. Lizzie Ball, a niece of Mrs. Jarvis, housekeeper for Mrs. Graves, who was eighteen and helped with the work in the place, said that Mr. Dangerfield read that stuff about the pomegranates and the pearls in a book of poetry he had in his room.

"It isn't original with him," Lizzie said.

Lizzie had red hair, and green eyes, and freckles, and an incurable love of romance. She read love stories in books and magazines, and hoped for the worst when males and females foregathered.

Mrs. Graves had taken three four-story and basement brownstone-front private dwellings and transformed them into rooming houses. She herself lived in the basement of the original house, which was furnished most expensively, and in which roomers paid highest rents. Mrs. Jarvis managed the other two, living in the basement of one, with her son, Thomas, her daughter, Amelia, and her niece, Lizzie.

Mrs. Jarvis was a plump, lugubriously cheerful female of fifty-three who always wore black in memory of the husband who had been dead ten years. Mrs. Jarvis was careless about her toilet. Her sparse black hair generally was escaping in little wisps; she was as likely as not to have a sleeper in her eye; her skirt might be open in the back, showing a glimpse of petticoat, and her stockings seldom were trimly drawn over her ankles. But she was a kindly soul, with a ready smile for those who were in a smiling mood, and a ready tear for those who wished company in grief.

She was a pleasant cynic. She thought all men were potential seducers, liars, drunkards and gamblers, but this made men all the more exciting. In fact, it made every man that came under Mrs. Jarvis's observation a walking drama. She was very careful about not having Amelia or Lizzie visiting any of the men roomers' quarters on business unless she was lurking in the offing.

Amelia was a sophisticate. You could read her worldly wisdom at a glance. She was a plump little bundle of femininity, with quick gestures. Her large dark eyes, almost black, wore a look of habitual scorn and distrust; her small nose permanently was raised as if it sniffed an unpleasant scent, her mouth drooped in a bored curve. She was seventeen and in her last year in High School, and her ambition was to be an actress. Mrs. Jarvis clutched at the bosom of her black cotton waist, which usually needed pulling together, at that, and said:

"And do you think I am going to have a daughter of mine go on the stage where she would have to sleep with managers and stars in order to get parts? I would rather see myself in my coffin."

"They don't all have to sleep with men, Ma," Amelia said.

"Don't try to tell me," Mrs. Jarvis replied. "Haven't I had enough dealings with them actresses. Actresses! Hump—poof!"

Thomas Jarvis was dark and sallow like his mother and sister, but thin, with hollow cheeks, and bright dark eyes. His lips were red, and his teeth chalk white. He had a habit of scratching his nose. Thomas was a clerk in the Comptroller's Office, and knew so much about the inside graft of city politics that his knowledge bored him. Thomas knew, and could tell you, all the mistakes made by every city official from the Mayor down, and he also could tell you what they should have done. To hear him talk you would have thought he held a position of the most tremendous importance. It came as quite a shock when you learned,

usually from his mother, that he was grossly unappreciated, and received only fifteen hundred dollars a year. Mrs. Jarvis said:

"Tom is a good boy, and never gets in trouble with girls like so many of them nowadays."

Lizzie whispered to Ann:

"Tom goes up on the roof nights and looks at women undressing."

"Don't they pull their shades?" Ann asked.

Lizzie smiled and wagged her head in the negative. She said:

"Lots of them forget to."

The three houses over which Mrs. Graves ruled were considered extremely respectable. They were not in any way to be confused with the ordinary rooming house. Breakfasts were served in the rooms if the roomers wished, at fifty cents the breakfast, and tea and toast were to be had in the afternoon for twenty-five cents a person.

Ann was given a hall room on the top floor, rear, of the house in which Aunt Cynthia lived. This was furnished with a dresser, a rocking chair, and a straight-backed chair, a brass bedstead, and a small table. Light by day came from a single window facing west toward the backs of other houses, and by night from an electric bulb on the wall, fifty watts.

However, Ann spent little time except for sleep in this cubicle. She had the use of the spare front basement room for study, reading, playing the phonograph and the piano. This room was large and most comfortably furnished. The piano was a concert grand. Mrs. Graves was interested in music, and sang *The Rosary* whenever she was asked, and went to the opera regularly every two weeks, sitting up under the roof. One of the expenditures which Ann made at her Aunt Cynthia's suggestion was the purchase of a seat adjoining the one used by Aunt Cynthia in the gallery, near a post. Aunt Cynthia said:

"Now that Margaret is away it is nice to have you to go with me, Ann."

Aunt Cynthia insisted that Ann had a talent for the piano, and so Ann took piano lessons in addition to her work at Mrs. Bunnell's School for Secretaries. This kept her busy. She practised on the piano in the downstairs parlor, clean white curtains over barred windows separating her from the street outside.

Entrance to the basement from the street was gained by walking down six sandstone steps. A door of iron grille work barred unwelcome visitors. This always was locked. The heavy wooden door which opened directly into the hall also was kept locked. Ann had keys which fitted both these doors, as well as the front door which was reached by going up a dozen sandstone steps over the basement areaway. She used the basement entrance usually, and it came to be a sort of private entrance for her. In fact, so much was she left to her own devices in this downstairs sanctuary that she came to regard it, unconsciously, as hers.

She was never disturbed in the morning nor in the afternoon, when she studied or practised on the piano. In the evening it was not unusual for Mrs. Jarvis, or Amelia, or Lizzie, or Thomas, or all of them to drop in. Thomas brought in a half-dozen bottles of beer and some Swiss cheese sandwiches on rye bread one night, and that was the first time Ann ever tasted beer. She said:

"I don't see how anybody can drink much of that. It's awfully bitter."

"Beer is good for you," Mrs. Jarvis said. "It's a tonic. The doctor had me drink beer before my babies came so that I would have good milk."

Tom scratched his nose and said:

"Beer never hurt anyone. It's the hard stuff that causes all the trouble."

"Huh!" Lizzie said. "Some of them start in on beer and work up to the hard stuff. You've got to start bad habits somewhere."

"Lizzie's father and mother both died of drink," Amelia whispered to Ann. "That's why she's a teetotaler."

"You don't have to whisper," Lizzie exclaimed. "I know what you're talking about. I saw enough of the D.T.'s in my own family to last me the rest of my life."

"What do you want?" Thomas asked. "A hundred million people to give up the use of alcohol because a couple of thousand are such nuts they can't use it right?"

"Ha! Ha!" Amelia said. "You must've read that somewhere."

"I don't want anybody to give up anything," Lizzie said. "But nobody'll ever get me to touch a drop of any of that stuff—beer or wine, or anything."

"I'll have another glass," Mrs. Jarvis said, pulling together her black waist which was open as usual, and showing a bit of slightly soiled corset cover, and brown, wrinkled neck. "It goes good with Switzer cheese and rye bread."

Tom opened a fresh bottle with a patent opener which he carried with keys on the end of his watch chain. He poured it into his mother's glass and it foamed up. Mrs. Jarvis said:

"It could be colder."

"It was right off the ice when I got it," Tom said. "Beer doesn't stay cold long."

Mrs. Jarvis drank, wiped foam from her upper lip, on which was a slight mustache, and said:

"I'll bet it wasn't beer that young Sparks-Boyer was drinking last night."

"Is he one of the new ones on the top that all you women think are such class?" Tom asked.

"If you had sense you'd wish you were half as good-looking," Lizzie said.

Mrs. Jarvis laughed, clenched her left fist, dark and mottled, and shook it first at Lizzie and then at Amelia. She said:

"You divils! I know I've got to keep my eyes on you, and I will."

Amelia turned up her already turned-up nose, and exclaimed:

"I wouldn't give him a tumble."

Tom scratched his nose and laughed, showing his chalk white teeth on which clung fragments of sandwich.

"Ha! Ha!" he said. "A guy like that wouldn't know you're alive."

"No?" Amelia replied.

Mrs. Jarvis sipped her beer, and said:

"I went into his room this morning thinking he'd gone long since, and he was lying there in bed, with his pyjamas open showing the white skin, and his curly hair mussed and his cheeks pink, breathing just as soft and natural. He was a handsome sight, for a fact. Why, his skin is softer than a girl's, and he was breathing so quiet."

"Ha! Ha!" Tom laughed. "You talk as if you were stuck on this guy, Ma."

"She won't let me take his breakfast up," Lizzie said.

Mrs. Jarvis's face crinkled into smiles, and she said:

"I should say I wouldn't, Lizzie. I wouldn't trust any girl with a young man as good-looking as he is. There's none of your hairy, snoring, sweaty, grunting, bony business about him. He's as soft and pretty as a girl."

"Why, Ma," Amelia exclaimed.

"Listen to her," Tom said. "What are you doing, Ma, trying to sell this guy?"

Mrs. Jarvis's black eyes, which looked as if they were swimming in perpetual moisture, turned to Ann, and she said:

"If I was young I'd pick out a boy like him, Annie."

"Why don't you talk like that to me?" Lizzie demanded.

"She's busy trying to preserve us," Amelia said. "As if we needed preservation."

"Go on with you," Mrs. Jarvis exclaimed genially. "I have to have eyes in the back of my head to keep track of both of you. Annie is more sensible."

Tom scratched his nose and winked at Ann, who said:

"I don't think I'm any more sensible than Lizzie and Amelia, Mrs. Jarvis."

"Yes, you are," Mrs. Jarvis said. "You're the kind that can be trusted."

"Meaning we aren't," Amelia said.

Ann arose and said:

"It's ten-thirty. I guess I'll go along to bed."

A week later Ann was in Mrs. Jarvis's sitting room when there was a knock at the door. Mrs. Jarvis said:

"Come in."

The door opened and a tall young man in a gray suit, cut in English fashion, entered, soft felt hat in hand. He had a symmetrically shaped head covered with crisp dark blond curls, blue eyes set wide apart, high cheekbones, hard, tanned cheeks, straight acquiline nose, a handsome smiling mouth. He looked young, and vital, and of the out-of-doors. He bowed slightly to Mrs. Jarvis, his eyes noticing Ann. He said in a clipped English accent:

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Jarvis. I wanted to see you about the possibility of getting a room for a friend of mine."

"I haven't a room, Mr. Sparks-Boyer," Mrs. Jarvis said, "but I think there's one in the next house. It'll be more expensive than the one you have."

Mrs. Jarvis stopped and changed her tone, and said:

"Mr. Sparks-Boyer, this is Miss Steele. Miss Steele lives in the next house, and is in New York studying music."

Sparks-Boyer bowed, and said:

"How do you do, Miss Steele?"

He smiled in friendly fashion as Ann acknowledged the introduction, and said:

"One seldom gets the opportunity of meeting one's neighbors in New York."

"That's right," Mrs. Jarvis said. "You can live under the same roof for years in New York, and not know a soul. I always said it is the lonesomest city in the world."

"I've found it very friendly," Ann exclaimed.

"That's because you are friendly," Mrs. Jarvis asserted. "You don't put on any airs."

She turned to Sparks-Boyer, and said:

"Do you want to see that room?"

He drew his gaze from Ann, and said:

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Jarvis."

And that is how Tony Sparks-Boyer, who had been in seven preparatory schools, and two colleges, and now was starting in at the bottom to work his way up in the American Mill Corporation, changed his room from the house over which Mrs. Jarvis presided, to the house in which Ann lived. His friend, Charles (Cully) Seawell, took his old room, which was forty dollars a month. The new one was sixty. Cully said:

"How in hell are you going to pay sixty dollars rent, Tony? You only earn fifteen a week."

Tony grinned, and said:

"If I don't pay it, the Governor will."

Cully shook his head doubtfully, and said:

"Your old man is pretty sore at you this time. You'd better look out."

Tony lighted a cigarette, still grinning. He said:

"He's been pretty sore before, but he's always come through. And if he doesn't, mother'll always sneak me some dough."

Cully, who was working for the Edison Company for fifteen dollars a week, which was augmented by a small allowance from his family in Kansas City, Missouri, where his father was a lawyer, shook his head. He said:

"I'm the last guy on earth who'd preach against having a good time, Tony, but for God's sake why don't you get wise to yourself, work hard during working hours, and try to live inside your income?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Tony exclaimed. "How much longer do I have to listen to that stuff? You sound like the family. Let's go around to the Chesterfield and have a cocktail."

On their way out they met Ann coming up the front steps. She smiled and bowed to Tony, and said:

"How do you do, Mr. Sparks-Boyer?"

He raised his hat and said:

"Hello, Miss Steele."

She went quickly past them into the house. Cully, who was about five feet six, with a bullet head of sandy hair, gray eyes, a snub nose, a square chin and freckles, and a tubby, sturdy body, slightly bandy-legged, looked up at Tony. Tony said:

"How do you like that?"

Cully said:

"Too damned nice for you to be chasing, Tony."

Tony smiled smugly, and lighted a fresh cigarette. He said:

"I'm stuck on her, Cully. It's the real thing this time."

Cully frowned, hurrying his steps to keep up with Tony's long-legged stride. He said:

"Jesus! I don't know why I like you, Tony. You're such an all-around, no-good bastard."

Tony merely grinned more amiably. Cully added, after a few seconds:

"That girl ought to be warned against you."

Tony beamed, and said:

"Go ahead and warn her, Cully. It makes it a lot easier for a guy when a girl has been warned against him. She wants to know what makes a bad egg bad."

"I like you," Cully repeated, "but I'd like to see you get your head knocked off."

They turned into the Chesterfield Hotel, walked through the lobby, and into the bar. Dan, the bartender, smiled at them and said:

"Good afternoon, gentlemen."

Dan was seventy, but slim and straight. His hair was thick and white, his face long and thin and aristocratic, with a high-bridged nose, and a thin-lipped, sensitive mouth. Dan's voice was soft, his smile was heart-warming, and disclosed beautiful teeth. He never drank himself; he never served a patron more than he thought a patron should have, and he checked profanity merely by freezing into immobility and saying:

"Gentlemen!"

Tony and Cully said in unison:

"Hello, Dan."

Tony said:

"Two perfections, Dan."

Dan in his freshly starched white jacket and apron began to mix the drinks. Cully helped himself to a bit of Stilton cheese and a water cracker from the free lunch, and said to Tony:

"I'm no moralist, but a guy that fools around nice girls ought to get shot."

Tony laughed, reached for his cocktail, and said:

"Go on. You're jealous."

Chapter Eight

TONY TOOK Mrs. Graves and Ann to see E. H. Sothern in *Hamlet*. They had chocolate sodas in Mitchell's afterwards, and rode home in a hansom cab, Ann's first experience in one. Mrs. Graves said to Ann:

"I think Tony is a nice boy, and so good-looking. Why, he is positively handsome. And he comes of a fine family."

Tony said to Cully:

"You play the old ladies hard, and they help your game with the young ones."

"You're a louse," Cully said.

Tony and Ann rode to One hundred and tenth Street in a Fifth Avenue bus, and walked through Central Park. They went to the zoo, fed peanuts to the elephants, and watched the lions fed. Ann didn't like the monkeys. She said:

"Come on. I think they're awful."

Tony said to Cully:

"You never kiss a dame, ask to kiss a dame, or try to kiss her till you've waited long enough for the dame to begin to wonder why in hell she isn't attractive enough for you to make the play. That makes you different from most guys."

"I haven't changed my mind about you being a louse," Cully said. "Why I like you, I don't know."

"That's what mother says," Tony replied, grinning.

Tony asked Ann to go to the theatre again, and Ann said:

"Aunt Cynthia says there is no need of you taking her. She says I don't need a chaperone."

Tony went straight in to see Mrs. Graves. He said:

"What's the idea about not going to the theatre with Ann and me? We like to have you."

Aunt Cynthia smiled, pleased, and said:

"It's sweet of you to say it, Tony, but I know that young people like to be together."

"Aw, Aunt Cynthia," Tony said. "Come on. Honest! I don't ask you because I think I have to. I like you to come because you're so darned nice."

Mrs. Graves' cheeks flushed, and she smiled and said:

"Don't make it too tempting, Tony. But I've made up my mind. I know whom I can trust and whom I can't. I've never known my judgment of character to be wrong."

Tony went back to Ann and said:

"Since Aunt Cynthia doesn't want to go with us, let's pass up the highbrow stuff and go to Weber & Fields."

Tony said to Cully:

"Women are grand judges of character. You play up to a dame and she thinks you have a fine character. You never saw a dame yet that didn't think I was a white-haired boy."

"How much back rent do you owe?" Cully asked.

"Only two months," Tony replied. "That's all I've been here—two months. I bet I could make the aunt."

"Oh, can that," Cully said.

Tony and Cully went on a drinking party and were out all night. Tony caught cold, which aggravated his morning-after headache and alcoholic depression. He stayed in bed while Cully went to work as usual. Cully said:

"You'd go to work, too, if you had any guts. When a man has had a good time he ought to be willing to pay for it with a little suffering."

Tony threw a pillow at him and growled:

"Get the hell out of here."

Mrs. Graves went in to see Tony, and he said:

"I have a touch of grippe, but I'll be all right."

She said:

"Let me call Dr. Dixon."

He said: "I don't need any doctor. I'll be all right."

Ann went in to see him, and sat by his bed talking for an hour. She asked:

"Would you like me to rub your head?"

He said:

"I don't want to be any trouble to you."

She got a bottle of alcohol, and rubbed his forehead. Aunt Cynthia entered through the doorway which was kept open into the hall for the sake of the proprieties, and said:

"With such a pretty nurse I wouldn't blame you for being sick."

Tony rolled his big blue eyes up to Ann's hazel ones, and said:

"I wouldn't exactly call this suffering."

And they all laughed.

Tony said to Cully:

"A guy has got to remember that dames are more interested in doing good than in being done good by. Also an invalid is twice as interesting to a dame as an athlete in the pink. I guess I'll have to be sick again before long—you know, sick with my best silk pyjamas on, and all shaved and manicured."

"Some day I'll take a crack at you myself," Cully said.

Tony took Ann to dinner at Mouquin's. He asked:

"What kind of wine do you like, Ann?"

"I never tasted wine," Ann replied, "but I always wanted to. I always wanted to find out for myself what makes wine a mocker and strong drink raging."

Tony laughed and said:

"A little wine makes good food taste better, and makes life seem brighter. We'll begin with two Sherries."

When the Sherry was served Tony lifted his glass, and touched Ann's glass. He said:

"Here's to the most beautiful girl in the world."

Ann made a face, and said:

"That's just a little exaggeration."

He said:

"Here's hoping you always may be healthy and happy."

Ann smiled and said:

"I like that better. Here's hoping you the same."

She sipped the brown liquid, wrinkling her forehead thoughtfully. She put down the glass and said:

"I don't see anything so very wonderful about that. It tastes like a tonic Dr. Benham used to give me back home."

"That's what it is, a tonic and appetizer," Tony said.

He ordered *cepes* and pimentos, onion soup, a broiled spring turkey, brandied walnuts and a baked Alaska. They drank Bordeaux with the turkey. She said:

"I think I could learn to like this wine. I like the tartness of it."

Tony's cheeks were flushed and his eyes were bright. He had drunk a bottle of Bordeaux by himself. He said:

"The only way to enjoy life is to try everything there is. The Puritans put the ban on dancing, drinking and singing, but if you're young there's nothing that's more fun."

"You're right," Ann said. "I always felt stifled back home. I wanted to get away so that I could do things without the neighbors knowing everything I did."

Tony ordered brandy for himself and Tokay for Ann. She said:

"But you shouldn't do it, Tony. This must cost a lot of money."

"I don't care anything about money," Tony said, "except to buy things with it."

Ann's face was serious for a moment. She said:

"That isn't right, though, Tony. No one should ever spend more than his income. And I'm afraid you do."

Tony showed white teeth in a wide grin. He said:

"I always did, Ann. I hocked my watch this morning."

"Tony!"

Tony shrugged and said:

"I've hocked it before, and always got it back. My watch is my bank."

"I think it's terrible. I wouldn't have come to dinner with you if I'd known."

Tony laughed, and lighted a cigarette. He said:

"I hocked the watch long before I met you. I don't think any more about it than eating breakfast."

"I wish you hadn't told me," Ann said. "It isn't nice."

"But it's handy," Tony asserted.

On their way home in a hansom cab Ann looked up at Tony. Her lips were half-parted, and her eyes were moist and bright. Without a word Tony bent over and pressed his lips to hers. The hansom lurched and rumbled over asphalt. The horse's hoofs clop-clopped. The driver, perched overhead, chirruped, unheard, and struck out lazily with a worn whip. It was cozy, even secretive in the hansom, so withdrawn from the world.

They drew apart, and Tony said:

"Do you love me?"

Ann said:

"I wonder if what I feel is love or just something that people call love."

Tony squeezed her to him with a big arm and said:

"Whatever it is, I haven't the feeling for any other girl in the world, only for you. I love you."

He kissed her again. She pushed him away, and straightened her hair with a gesture characteristically feminine. Tiny wrinkles marred her smooth forehead, and her eyes were crinkled. She looked curiously at him, and asked:

"Is it the wine that makes me feel the way I do?"

"How do you feel?"

"You know, Tony. It is the wine."

Tony's blue eyes smiled into her hazel ones. He said:

"Then you have the effect of wine on me, because I felt that way when I first saw you, and more that way every time I've seen you since."

Ann breathed deep, so that her breasts rose slowly. She expelled the air suddenly, and said:

"I like you a lot, Tony, but I don't think I love you. I've had the same feeling before with boys I knew I didn't love. I liked them a lot but I didn't love them."

Tony stopped in the basement room with Ann for a moment. They talked in whispers in the dark. Ann said:

"Let me light the light."

"Bother the light," Tony replied. "We don't need one."

He put his arms around her and kissed her. She leaned back so that her abdomen was pressed against his but her face was out of kissing range. She said:

"We can't stay here, Tony."

He tried to force her face nearer, but she resisted. They both were breathing hard. He said:

"I love you—please."

She said:

"We've got to go upstairs, Tony. What if some one should come?"

He made a sudden effort and held her close. Her cheeks were burning. Warmth came from her as from a stove. His lips met hers and pressed against them. They pressed against each other, she sighing, with eyes closed. He murmured in a choked voice:

"I love you, Ann."

She pushed him away, he clinging to her. She said in a tone of finality:

"That's all, Tony. No more."

His pleas and protests didn't avail. Fifteen minutes later she was in her bed. However, her body was quivering; her thoughts were racing at high speed, picturing scenes of love. After she finally slept Tony came to her in a dream, bringing peace.

When she saw Tony next evening after dinner, he asked:

"How did you sleep?"

"Not very well," she replied. "After I got to sleep, it's funny, but I dreamed of you."

The moment she had spoken she wondered why she had told Tony. The blood flooded her cheeks. He grinned cheerfully and knowingly at her, and said:

"You did! Give me a kiss."

"Not tonight," Ann replied.

Tony kissed her cheek and said:

"I went out again, and walked up to Central Park and back. I couldn't have gotten to sleep if I had tried."

Ann went with Tony to J. B. Martin's, where a saucer was served with each drink, so that by his pile of saucers was the drinker's capacity, and indebtedness, advertised. Whisky bottles were set on tables when whisky drinks were ordered, but on each bottle was pasted a capacity measure, each theoretical drink being marked by a black line. Ann said:

"I love this place."

"It has atmosphere, all right," Tony said. "It's really quite Continental."

Ann made a face over Scotch, but drank a rye highball made with ginger ale. She said:

"I could be a drinker, I think, if I didn't watch out. It sort of makes you dreamy, and sends your conscience on a vacation."

Tony grinned, and sipped his Scotch and Club soda. He said:

"You're so honest, Ann, it makes me honest."

"So what?"

"So, I'll tell you I like to see you take a drink or two because it makes you more human."

Ann turned her head to one side and looked at him from the corner of her eyes. She said:

"Didn't you think I knew that as well as you, Tony?"

Tony ruffled his hand through his hair, and pulled a package of Egyptian cigarettes from his pocket. As he was taking out a cigarette, tapping it on the table, and lighting it, he said:

"I've often wondered how much girls do know."

Ann smiled and said:

"I think often they know as much as the boys. You know, I can't believe a girl in her right senses ever could be led astray unless she wanted to be."

Tony flushed. He was sensitive about discussing some subjects with the opposite sex. He said:

"I never met a girl like you before."

Tony was quite tight when they started for home. He insisted on stopping at Jack's for broiled pigs' feet with deviled sauce, the sauce so hot it hissed when it was mixed with butter on the hot plate. Ann ate scrambled eggs with Irish bacon.

When they reached home Tony was more asleep than awake. Ann pushed him away when he wished to become affectionate. She said:

"You're not nice tonight, Tony."

Cully Seawell and Ann met on the front steps next evening. Cully raised his hat and said:

"Hello, Ann. I hear Tony and you were on a party last night."

Ann nodded and said:

"Yes. We went to J. B. Martin's, and then to Jack's. I never heard of such a place as Jack's. The waiters all got together and pushed two college boys out into the street so hard that they didn't stop till they struck the building on the other side."

Cully laughed, and said:

"That's the famous flying wedge—those waiters. They've thrown out a bunch of fellows in their time."

"But I loved the Irish bacon, and the people," Ann said. "I was surprised every one acted so quiet, and there was no music. I had been told it was such an awful place."

"It's just a restaurant that serves good food and plenty to drink and never closes," Cully said. "But everybody in the sporting world, the underworld, and every world goes there. Jack Dunstan, the boss of the place, threw the key away when he opened up, and the doors never have been closed."

"I love to see all the different places," Ann said. "Tony is going to take me to Ruggiero's some night."

"It's none of my business," Cully said, "but I wouldn't take a nice girl to Ruggiero's."

"Why?"

"Well, it might be all right, and then it might not. Every once in so often they have a battle in that place. A friend of mine got out of there one night with his left ear just hanging on—had to get it sewed on."

"He did!"

"He did. Some people were having an argument, and someone threw a beer glass and it hit Ed on the side of the head. That's a tough spot, and Ruggiero's a tough egg."

"I'm dying to see it," Ann said.

"It's certainly one of the sights—a dollar for a bottle of beer—and you see Ruggiero do his famous dance."

"Tony told me about it," Ann said.

Cully fumbled with a package of cigarettes which were sold twenty for five cents. He lighted the cigarette, inhaled, and coughed, taking the spill of tobacco from his lips and looking at it. He said:

"Every now and then you get a piece of rubber or something in these. I guess they make 'em from sweepings on the factory floor."

Ann laughed, and asked:

"Why do you smoke them then?"

"Cheap," Cully replied, replacing the cigarette in his mouth. "I can't afford good ones."

"Tony smokes Egyptians," Ann said.

"He should be smoking these," Cully said. "Tony is a great guy, but he hasn't any sense about money. He always spends more than he has."

"I know it," Ann said. "I wish he didn't."

"Born that way, I guess," Cully said. "Hasn't any sense of responsibility where money—or women—are concerned."

Ann wrinkled her forehead. She said:

"That doesn't sound like one friend talking about another."

Cully grinned amiably, eyes wide open and fixed on hers. He said:

"That's a friend talking about a friend to a girl he'd like to be friends with. Tony is a great guy, but, like all the rest of us, he has his faults."

"Aunt Cynthia says he's only sowing his wild oats," Ann said. "He'll settle down."

Cully shrugged his shoulders, blew out cigarette smoke, and said:

"I feel like a darned chump saying this, but Tony is all right to have a good time with. He isn't a fella to be serious with. He's been fired out of all the schools he ever went to, and he's always having his debts paid by his family."

Ann looked at Cully coldly. She said:

"He told me all about himself."

Cully sighed and said:

"I suppose I put my foot in it again. I was just trying to be friends to you both. I'd just as soon tell you everything I've told you right in front of Tony. He knows what I think of him."

"Suppose we talk about something else for a change," Ann said.

Cully scowled, and said:

"Darn it. What I was trying to get at is that I'd beat Tony over the head with a baseball bat before I'd have him making love to my sister."

Ann's eyes crinkled. She said:

"I'm glad I'm not your sister."

Cully said to Tony:

"I tried to warn Ann about you, but it was no go."

Tony grinned, and said:

"I worked another point on her today. I told her how much I admired her brains. You tell a good-looking dame that she has intellect, and it goes a lot bigger than telling her she's good-looking. Where are those rubber cigarettes of yours?"

Cully took a package from his pocket and held it out while Tony selected a cigarette. Cully asked:

"Where are your fancy gold tips?"

Tony lighted the white paper roll and said:

"Jesus! This is awful. I'm busted. Can you let me have a couple of bucks till Friday?"

"Where are the hundred and three bucks you owe me already?"

"Oh, don't worry, for Christ's sake. You'll get your dough. Didn't I always pay you back?"

"When your old man gave you the dough, but it's my bet that he won't give you any more, fella."

"Come on! Come on! I want to take Ann for a bus ride."

Cully handed Tony two dollars, which Tony stuffed in his pocket. Tony said:

"Tonight I'm a guy with a secret sorrow. I haven't tried that one yet."

"Louse," Cully said.

Tony grinned and then became serious. He took Cully's forearm in a big, strong hand, and said:

"Listen."

"I'm listening."

"I'm stuck on Ann, on the level. I'm going to marry her."

Cully tilted his head back and stared up into Tony's face. He laughed with no mirth, and said:

"Jesus! About the worst trick you could play on a regular dame like Ann would be to marry her."

Tony dropped Cully's arm and said:

"I'm getting sick of hearing you knock me. Anybody'd think to listen to you that I was a bum."

"Well, aren't you?" Cully demanded. "Didn't you drink and play cards and never study in every school you were in? Didn't you always keep in debt? And now you're stalling this nice old lady on her rent, and stalling your office about work, and making love to a nice girl when you haven't got a thought in your head of supporting yourself, let alone her?"

"I'm going to change," Tony asserted. "Honest."

“I used to think you would,” Cully said, “but I’ve changed my mind. How much do you owe that newsstand guy on the corner?”

“Old Moe? Only six dollars or so.”

“I think it’s a damned shame,” Cully said. “That poor old guy works hard for his money.”

“Gee whizz!” Tony exclaimed. “I’m going to pay him, ain’t I?”

Chapter Nine

Ann led Alonzo into the basement room. He was more filled out than when she last had seen him. He looked bigger in every way, bigger in head, face, shoulder and paunch. He wore a gray suit made by N. I. Hayes of Eastham. Its boxy cut emphasized his size. His black shoes were polished. His tie was a black-and-white polka dot. Across his noticeable abdomen was strung a gold watch chain from which dangled a Masonic emblem. He reminded one of Dr. Sam Benham not only in contour, but in little mannerisms. He carried his head the same way, he toed out the same way, he reached for and lighted cigars the same way, he stated his opinions in the same way. There really was a lion look about the man.

They sat down and Alonzo said:

"Kind of surprised to learn I was in town, I guess."

"Yes, I was, Doctor," Ann said. "How is everybody at home—Aunt Rebecca, Uncle Clarence, Doctor Benham, and every one?"

"They're all fine," Alonzo replied. "Doctor Benham has albumen in his urine again and is dieting for that, and his blood pressure is a little high, but he's watching it."

Alonzo grinned, his eyes looking shrewd, as he added:

"There are some who say Doctor Benham won't live more than a year or two, but I wouldn't be surprised if he outlived us all. A doctor that makes prognoses is sort of dumb; and Doctor Benham has got enough vitality for nine men."

"He's a wonderful man," Ann said.

"You bet he is," Alonzo agreed heartily. "The best friend I've got in the world. Looked after me since I was a little shaver, not knee high to a grasshopper. Mind if I smoke?"

"Of course not," Ann replied. "I like to see men smoke."

Alonzo lighted a cigar, and said:

"You know, the old doctor has got a lot of funny little ways about him. He always used to tell me when I was a young feller:

"'Alonzo, never lend anybody any money; and never go on anybody's note.'

"And he'd look mighty fierce when he was giving me the advice. Well, come to find out, the old doctor is on more notes and lends more money than any two other men in Wilton County."

"He's a dear man," Ann said.

Alonzo looked serious and said:

"He's a wonderful man, but I didn't leave my practice to come down here to New York to talk about him. I came down to see you, Ann, and you certainly are a sight for sore eyes. Why, you look sweeter and prettier than ever, if that's possible."

"It's nice of you to say it," Ann said.

"Hey!" Alonzo exclaimed. "I don't want to start swappin' pretty little nothin's with you, Annie. It isn't nice of me just to let bu'st out what's in my mind. Is it?"

"I suppose not."

Alonzo wagged his head, something after the fashion of Dr. Benham, but with none of the incipient palsy evident in Dr. Benham's shake. There was no unconscious tremor of age in Alonzo. He looked as strong and vital as a young bull. He said:

"I was hoping to find you a little pale and peaked, and maybe a little mite homesick after your stay in New York. But to be honest, and I guess I'm too much of a fool to be anything else, you never looked happier and healthier that I know of."

"I never felt better," Ann replied.

"School coming along all right?"

"Oh, yes. Fine. I'm getting wonderful marks."

"That's fine. Coming back to Eastham when you're through?"

Alonzo gazed at her with hungry, dark eyes. She said:

"I don't know what I'll do."

He arose and moved restlessly across the room, bent and peered through the white curtains, the dusty window panes between the iron bars, at the glimpse of sky. He said:

"I was hoping you'd come back—perhaps with me—Annie. You know there's only one woman in the world for me."

Ann cleared her throat, but didn't say anything. Alonzo looked at her keenly, his eyes professional. His voice sounded hoarse as he asked:

"Is there another man?"

"I don't know," Ann replied.

His big face was grave for a moment, and his eyes gave a fleeting hint of hurt. He said:

"I've been in love with you, Annie, ever since I first laid eyes on you, and I knew then, as I know now, that you and I were made for each other."

He said this solemnly. Ann returned his gaze, half-frightened. Alonzo continued:

"If this boy you think you are in love with now didn't treat you right I would wring his neck."

Alonzo looked infinitely mature as he spoke of wringing the neck of the boy who was about his own age. Ann had a clear sense that Tony was a boy, and Alonzo was a man. Alonzo said:

"I kind of hoped you'd come out and have some beefsteak and potatoes with me. When I was in medical school a good beefsteak and potato dinner in a first-class hotel was a treat, I can tell you."

"Why, I'd be glad to go, Doctor," Ann said.

He grinned and said:

"That's fine. And perhaps you'd like to go to the Palace afterwards, and see some vaudeville. I always liked vaudeville. If there's one thing bad you know there'll be something different in a few minutes."

After the vaudeville Alonzo went home with her, and kissed her in the front hall. After Tony's caresses she understood that Alonzo's were far more brother-like than lover-like. Alonzo took a deep breath and said:

"Now I feel better."

"Why?" Ann asked.

"Because if you let me kiss you you aren't letting that boy, whoever he is, kiss you."

Ann made no reply, and Alonzo added:

"You're not that kind of girl, Annie. I couldn't feel the way I do about you if you were that kind."

He waited a minute, a big hulk of a man in the dim lit hall, and then said:

"Kind of sacred."

Ann turned on the electric light in her room, and looked at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were unhappy. She shook her head, and went to the window which looked out on the backs of other houses, private, rooming, and business, and stared aimlessly at nothing, which was another way of saying that all her senses were turned inward upon herself. She sighed, and said:

"Oh, dear!"

She undressed and put on her nightgown, and a dressing gown over that, and went out into the hall to the bathroom. When she came back she went to the window again, and then turned suddenly and kneeled down beside the bed and began to pray.

Tom Jarvis arose from a cramped position on the roof extension whence he had a sharp angle view into Ann's bedroom. He walked softly across the tarred and pebbly roof to the door by the chimney, and crept down steep stairs to the top hall.

He was descending the last flight of stairs when Lizzie walked through the hall. As soon as she saw him she stopped, put her hands on her hips, and said shrilly:

"You've been up on the roof peekin' again."

"Shh!" Tom exclaimed.

"You're a fine one," Lizzie said.

"You shut up or I'll break your God damned skinny neck," Tom replied, leaving the last step.

Lizzie said:

"Just try it, and see what happens."

Tom scratched his nose with the gesture that was habitual with him, and said:

"You make me sick."

"You make me sicker," Lizzie countered.

Tom went into his mother's apartment, and shut the door of his bedroom after him and locked it. Mrs. Jarvis said to Amelia:

"I'd like to know what Tom locks his door for?"

Amelia looked at her mother with the tired eyes of an adolescent sophisticate. She said:

"Give me three guesses, Maw, and the first one will be right."

Mrs. Jarvis's mouth, which naturally turned down at the corners, turned down further, and she looked at Amelia with a smile which might have tears behind it. She said:

"You know too much."

"I wouldn't have to be so very smart to know that," Amelia said.

Mrs. Jarvis caught together with a yellow hand the gaping front of her dress, and said:

"I can't help worrying about Tom. He's got that cough. I wish he would get himself a girl."

"Who? Tom?" Lizzie said, coming in the door. "What a break for the girl! He was up on the roof again tonight."

Amelia turned to her mother, face sullen. She said:

"If you don't look out, Tom'll get us all into trouble. He'll be arrested or something. Always peeking."

Tears gathered suddenly in Mrs. Jarvis's eyes. She dashed them away, and said:

"He was always like that ever since he was little. I spanked him enough then, and it didn't do any good. What can I do?"

"He ought to be sent away," Amelia said.

Mrs. Jarvis straightened up, a look of horror on her face.

"That's a nice way to talk," she exclaimed. "Send your own brother to an asylum! As if he was crazy."

"Well, if he ain't crazy now it won't be long before he is," Lizzie said.

"I saw his eye at the keyhole when I was taking a bath," Amelia said. "I always hang a towel on the doorknob."

"Me, too," Lizzie said.

"He'll come out all right," Mrs. Jarvis said. "He was such a good baby."

Tom Jarvis stood at the bar in Crooker's Saloon, in Ninth Avenue. He sipped from a glass of beer and scratched his nose. Mike, the bartender, sleeves rolled up to show hairy forearms, was stewing lamb kidneys over a gas flame at the lunch counter. The aroma from the stew mingled with the odor of beer, whisky, five-cent-cigar smoke, and sweat.

Puggy Cortelli, short and squat and dark, with big shoulders and long arms like a gorilla, entered from the street and joined Tom at the bar. He said:

"Gimme a beer, Mike."

To Tom, he said:

"Hello, kid. How's tricks?"

Tom said:

"Hello, Puggy. Got a cigarette?"

Puggy handed Tom a package of cigarettes, and a white packet of paper. Tom slipped Puggy a five-dollar bill. Tom said:

"Excuse me a minute. I'll be right back."

He headed for the door in the back room, labeled "Gents." As soon as he was in the toilet he opened the packet, shook white dust, which was cocaine, on the back of his hand between his thumb and forefinger, held it to his nose and sniffed.

Mike looked after Tom, glanced at Puggy, and said:

"That junky'll make trouble yet."

"Yeah," Puggy said. "He won't make it more'n once."

Tom came back, eyes more animated, acting much spryer. He pushed his partly consumed beer toward Mike and said:

"Put a new head on it, will you, Mike?"

Mike held the glass under the brass tap an instant, and set it down foaming on the perforated brass bar plate over the ice which cooled the pipes. He wiped off the foam with a beer stick which resembled a white ruler, and set the goblet down in front of Tom. Mike said:

"It's too bad you can't get a new head, too."

Mike grinned at Puggy, and Puggy grinned at Mike, and they both looked at Tom as if they were two naturalists looking for the first time at a strange bug. Tom asked:

"What's the matter with my head?"

Mike said:

"You stick to the white stuff long enough, and you won't care."

Puggy said:

"Aw, lay off him, Mike. He's a good guy."

Mike returned to his kidney stew, and Tom scratched his nose and said to Puggy:

"I can't get any more money till the first of the month. Will you hang me up for the stuff I need?"

Puggy's face lost its good nature. He scowled and said harshly:

"Lay off that, fella. You know there's no credit in this business. You pay for what you get."

"And get more sugar than the stuff," Tom said. "I'd like to get some real stuff."

"What's the matter with the stuff I got?" Puggy demanded.

"You know," Tom replied. "It's adulterated—got other stuff mixed with it."

Puggy changed his attitude from the borderline of indignation to a kindly tolerance. He said:

"All of it's cut a little, fella. But mine's as pure as you can get."

"I guess that's right," Tom agreed. "But I've got to have some more. I'll go nuts if I don't get it."

"Give us a coupla beers," Puggy said to Mike.

"Show me the dough, and you can have all you want," Puggy said to Tom.

A tall, handsome chap entered the barroom, and joined them. He said:

"Hello, Puggy. Hello, Tom."

They said, almost in unison:

"Hello, Noodles."

Martin (Noodles) Noonan had a head shaped on classic lines, and a body not unlike a Greek statue. He had dark wavy hair, and gray eyes fringed by long lashes. He wore beautifully tailored clothes, and carried a stick. He said:

"Give me a milk and vichy, Mike, and give them beer."

Noodles didn't drink, smoke, chew or use dope. He needed all his wits to carry on his professions of card sharping, blackmailing, green goods selling, and occasional ventures in the fields of burglary and highwaymanship. The police called Noodles Handsome Harry Hooper, which was the alias under which he had taken money over the card table from passengers on transatlantic liners.

Mike and all the patrons of Crooker's Saloon treated Noodles with an extra degree of respect. He was a big frog in the pond of crime. Even old Jonas Crooker, who sat upstairs in his trick office, peering down into his barroom through specially constructed and concealed peepholes to make sure that his bartenders didn't make more money than he did, and generally to keep an eye on affairs, was respectful to Noodles. As a matter of fact, Noodles demanded respect. Puggy said:

"I'm a hard guy, but compared to Noodles I'm a jelly roll. That guy'd just as soon knock off his grandmother as eat a piece of apple pie."

Noodles said to Tom:

"How're things over at the boarding house?"

"It isn't a boarding house," Tom said, "but the dame I was telling you about finally left her shade up. She's the best I ever saw."

Mike, mopping the bar with a damp rag, looked scornfully at Tom and growled:

"You ought to have your block knocked off."

Puggy grinned and said:

"She was that good, huh?"

Tom's eyes sparkled. He said:

"Good! Say, she's got a shape that you'd go a thousand miles to see. And she's got a pair of them that would knock your eye out."

Mike said:

"If the dame's that good I wouldn't mind havin' a ringside seat myself. What time does this show come off?"

Tom sipped his beer and said:

"Oh, you can't tell that. You have to sit up there quiet on the roof sometimes for days before you see anything. It was two months before I caught this one."

"For Christ's sake!" Mike said.

"That lets me out," Puggy said.

"It takes patience," Tom said.

Noodles winked at Mike and said:

"Have you tried the keyhole on her, Tom?"

"Sure," Tom said. "But I could only see a little of her in the bathroom. I can't afford to get caught, you know."

Puggy grinned at Mike and said:

"Did you ever hear of a guy like him?"

Mike said:

"Sure. The cops are pickin' up those guys all the time. They got bats in their belfries."

Puggy said:

"I'd look if it was put right up in front of me, but I'll be God damned if I'd wait around on a roof to peek into a dame's bedroom."

Tom glanced around at the three faces. He said earnestly:

"I get a kick out of it. You know. They don't know you're looking, and they scratch themselves, and look at themselves in front of mirrors."

Tom took a long breath, and the three looked at each other. Mike said:

"I'd like to catch you peekin' around my place. It'd be the last peekin' you'd do for a long time."

Puggy laughed and said:

"There's nothin' to peek at in your place, Mike."

Tom said:

"People can say whatever they like, but I know I'm no different from anybody else, except I'm honest about it. I like to peek, and I admit it. Other people like to peek, but they won't admit it."

"Aw, for Christ's sake!" Noodles Noonan exclaimed. "Shut up. You dirty, weazened little no-good leavings. Why would a

fellow like me that can have any dame he wants be peeking through keyholes and roosting on roofs? You're nuts, fella. You don't know it, but you're coo-coo."

"Coo-coo is right," Mike said.

"Well, so long, fellas," Puggy said. "I've got to be movin'."

Tom followed him to the door, and said:

"Won't you—?"

"No," Puggy exclaimed. "Don't bother me any more. Get the dough. See?"

Chapter Ten

ANN MET Marion Talbot at the Grand Central station. After they had kissed, Ann said:

"I never was more glad to see anyone in my life."

"I'm just as glad to see you," Marion replied, her pleasant blue eyes shining with friendship.

"Why didn't you let a porter take your suitcase?" Ann asked. "It looks heavy."

"It is heavy," Marion said, "but how did I know I'd ever get it back if I let a porter take it?"

Ann laughed, and beckoned to a porter. She said:

"I didn't realize how lonesome I was for a girl friend until I got your letter. I guess girls have to be with girls now and then to be happy."

"Isn't it the truth?" Marion asked. "But," she added, "you must have met a good many girls at your school."

Ann nodded. They were following the porter to the cab stand. Ann said:

"Oh, I've met some nice girls, but they aren't old friends. They aren't the kind you can tell things to."

Marion smiled and said:

"It must be a boy. Tell me."

Ann laughed and said:

"There is a boy, but I don't know whether I love him or not."

"Is he good-looking?"

"He's handsome, Marion. And he dresses beautifully. He's big, with big shoulders, and the nicest way with him."

"He sounds dangerous."

They were in the cab, still chattering. Marion said:

"I could never care for a man that drank and wasn't serious, Ann. He sounds like a man who never got over being a freshman."

"I know," Ann said. "But you can imagine how attractive he is when I tell you that he never has paid Aunt Cynthia any rent, and she adores him. He buys her candy, and takes her to the theatre."

"I'm anxious to meet him," Marion said.

"I'm anxious to have you," Ann said.

"That's a lovely dress," Marion said, reaching out a hand and feeling the fabric. "It's so becoming to you."

Ann laughed happily and said:

"If that isn't just like you, Marion."

"What?"

"Saying something nice about my dress. It makes me feel good even if I know you say the same things about everybody's dresses."

"Why, I do not."

"Yes you do. What makes me feel good is that you're not catty. So many girls never tell you you look well, or that your clothes look nice."

"Where did you get it?"

"At a little place on Thirty-fourth Street, and you'd never guess how much it cost."

"It's wonderful material," Marion observed, feeling it again. "I suppose it cost all of thirty dollars."

"Seventeen-fifty," Ann exclaimed triumphantly.

"My dear!" Marion breathed. "I wouldn't have believed it."

"Wait till I show you my new things—I've got some of the sweetest underwear—pink silk."

"Don't ever let 'em hear about it in Eastham," Marion warned.

"There are lots of things I'd just as soon they didn't hear about in Eastham."

"Why, Ann! You must've been having a time."

Ann shook her head and said:

"No, I haven't been doing much, but I've had cocktails, and wine with my dinner, and highballs, and honest, it wouldn't be hard for me to be a drinker."

"Ann!"

Ann smiled happily and said:

"And I've danced in public places, and been to Weber & Fields, and Hammerstein's Victoria, and seen girl shows, and been to all-night restaurants where street walkers go. And I wear pink silk bloomers. Look."

Ann glanced at the cab driver who was looking straight ahead, and pulled up her skirt, black, with yellow stripes, showing gray silk stockings and pink silk bloomers. Marion said:

"I'm going to get some of those just as soon as I can."

"They're a lot nicer than those old drawers we had to wear at home," Ann said. "I don't know why pink silk bloomers should be considered immoral."

They both laughed, and Marion said:

"You have the prettiest legs."

Ann said:

"There you go again. Your own legs are just as pretty."

"No, they're not," Marion said. "My ankles aren't so small, and I'm knock-kneed."

They got out, and the cabbie carried the suitcase into the house, and Ann and Marion had an argument over who should pay him. But Ann paid him, and gave him a fifteen-cent tip.

Marion came back to her room, adjoining Ann's, in her bathrobe. She said:

"Gee! But it felt good to get in the tub. That train trip makes you feel so dirty. And those bath salts are wonderful."

"I like them," Ann said.

"I've got to get some for myself," Marion said. "I'd heard about them, but somehow I never expected to use them."

"I guess we'll do a lot of things we never expected to do before we die," Ann said.

Marion took off her bathrobe, and Ann said:

"There. If those legs aren't pretty I can't see. And you have a sweet figure, and such a lovely skin."

Marion turned to look at herself in the mirror. She said:

"Anyhow, I'm not deformed."

She stooped over and looked at her lower legs, and added:

"If only I hadn't been a darned fool and shaved my legs that time. Look how the hair came in. I hate hair on a girl's legs."

She sniffed at her arm, and said:

"Those bath salts make me smell scrumptious."

Ann said:

"If you're not too tired, Tony and Cully are going to take us to the Palace, and to some place for supper afterwards."

"I'm not tired at all," Marion said. "I feel so excited about coming to New York that I could stay up three nights in succession. I hope Cully isn't as homely as you say he is."

"He isn't good-looking," Ann said. "He's short and kind of fat, but he's awfully nice."

"I'd rather have them nice than handsome," Marion said. "God deliver me from a boy who thinks he's good-looking—like Howard Brockaway."

"I can't help being attracted to big, handsome men, though," Ann said. "Probably it's the old Nick in me."

"How about Doctor West?" Marion asked. "He's big, and he's getting handsomer every day. And he's a real man."

"I know he is," Ann said. "I respect him more than any man I know."

Marion, in petticoat, stockings and slippers, stopped in front of Ann and asked:

"Why don't you marry him, Ann? He's wild about you."

"I don't know," Ann said.

Marion laughed and said:

"I remember you used to squirm because he made a noise when he ate, and you said you could smell his feet."

"He did, and I could," Ann asserted.

Marion went to the dresser and began to brush her brown hair. She said:

"If he'd ask me I'd marry him if he had flat feet and housemaid's knee into the bargain. I think he's about the nicest man I ever knew or heard of. You can see his character in his face."

Ann sighed and said:

"I don't know what it is, but I never had the feeling for him that I had for Howard and Tony. Alonzo never made me thrill."

Marion shrugged her shoulders and said:

"Perhaps it's because you know that a girl is perfectly safe with Alonzo, which is more than you could say, I guess, for the boys that give you the thrills."

"There may be something in that," Ann said. "I know Alonzo is better than any boy I've ever met, but I'd always had a sort of dream about love—that when it came it would have the thrills and all the other qualities, too. I wonder if that happens only in books."

"I don't know," Marion said. "But there certainly is a practical side to getting married. You'd want a husband you could

trust, wouldn't you?"

"And one that would pay the butcher," Ann said, laughing.

"What are you going to wear tonight?" Marion asked. "I only have one evening dress—that blue taffeta, you know."

"Oh, the boys don't dress," Ann said. "I have a green afternoon dress I'll wear."

"Would my brown be all right?"

Marion took a brown silk dress from the suitcase and held it against herself. Ann said:

"I think that's awfully pretty."

"I love nice clothes," Marion said. "I wonder if I'll ever have all the clothes I want, and not have to skimp and mend and darn."

"Hand-embroidered French silk underwear, and racks full of shoes," Ann said.

"And lots of wraps and afternoon dresses and evening gowns," Marion said. "Oh, dear! I suppose we shouldn't be so darned frivolous."

"I like to think it shows you have taste and imagination to think about dressing in pretty things," Ann said. "But after all, if people around me are nice I'm really satisfied with what I've got. It's always clean anyway."

"I'd like closets full," Marion said.

Ann made a little face and said:

"If I had too much of anything I think I'd worry about it. . . ."

After they left the Palace Theatre Tony and Cully took Ann and Marion uptown in the subway. Ann said:

"Wait till you see this place, Marion."

"What kind of place is it?" Marion asked.

Ann laughed and said:

"I'll bet you've never been in a place like it."

They left the subway at Seventy-second Street, walked north three blocks and turned into a doorway under a sign which read:

"Family Entrance."

"Why, it's a saloon," Marion exclaimed.

"It's not like an ordinary saloon," Cully said. "The German that runs it has a high-class trade in beer and sandwiches after the theatre. You never saw a more respectable place."

"Oh," Marion said.

"You sound disappointed because it's respectable," Tony said, laughing. "We can show you some places that are livelier. What about it, Cully?"

They were getting seated at a polished mahogany table. Around the large room at other tables were family parties of well-dressed men and women, of all ages, drinking beer and eating. Marion said:

"Why, they look like the same people that go to church at home. I never thought a saloon was like this."

"A lot of saloons aren't," Cully asserted. "This one is run to catch the apartment hotel trade in the neighborhood."

"I never thought I'd be in a saloon in my life," Marion said. "And now I'm here it seems rather tame; no music, nothing but just married people eating and drinking with solemn faces."

The waiter came to the table. Tony said:

"Hello, Mike."

Turning to Ann and Marion, he asked:

"How'd you like some caviare sandwiches—or Limburger?"

Ann laughed, and Marion looked first from one to the other. Marion said:

"I only thought Limburger was to make a smell with. I'll try caviare."

"We'll make it four caviares on pumpernickel," Tony said. "And four seidels of Muenchner."

"Is that beer?" Marion asked.

"Yes," Cully said, "German beer."

"Well, I'd rather have ginger ale, or a glass of milk," Marion said. "I never tasted beer, but I don't think I'd like it."

"You can taste mine," Ann said. "I didn't like it at first, but I'm getting to like it."

Tony said:

"Let's take the girls down to Ruggiero's after we leave here. That's a place they both ought to see."

"Not me," Cully said. "It's no place for a lady."

"What is Ruggiero's?" Marion asked.

"It's a saloon with a dance floor where you have to be known to get in," Tony said. "They have a doortender who looks you over, and let's you in, and there are booths and tables around a dance floor, and a gallery overhead. And they have a three-piece orchestra, and Ruggiero does a dance with a partner. Everybody goes there that goes around at all. O. Henry is

one of the regular customers."

"That doesn't sound so bad," Marion said. "I'd love to see it."

"When they do have trouble in there they have it good," Cully said. "They have some awful rows, and then the police come. But Ruggiero is supposed to pay pretty good protection so nothing comes of it."

"I'd like to see it," Ann said. "Tony promised to take me before."

"Now don't you spoil my first night in New York," Marion said to Cully.

Cully shrugged his shoulders and lighted a cigarette. He said:

"I always said I wouldn't take a nice girl into that place, but I'm not going to be the guy that spoils the party. And it's true that plenty of sightseers go there and come away in good order."

When they got to Ruggiero's, they waited in a dim hallway for a short time while an eye looked at them through a hole in the door. Marion shivered, and whispered:

"I feel thrilled already."

A second eye replaced the first. A bar grated, a chain dropped, and the door opened. A pasty-faced man of thirty, a cigarette drooping from his lips, said in a harsh bass voice to Tony:

"Didn't know you at first. Step right in."

They sat at a table in the dimly lighted main room. Their table was on the same level as the dance floor. Opposite was the gallery raised up from the dance floor, where blurred figures, masculine and feminine, were grouped at tables. The air was thick. Cigarette smoke hung in a haze. Cully said:

"Beer is a dollar a bottle here."

"Then I'll drink ginger ale," Ann said.

"They'll serve three cents worth of ginger ale in a glass with a curlycue of lemon rind in it, call it a Horse's Neck, and charge you sixty cents," Tony said. "You can't beat this place."

"I'd be glad to go right out," Ann said. "I don't think it's worth spending so much money for."

"Let's go," Marion said. "It's silly to waste money that way."

"Now we're here, we'll have a drink," Tony said.

A waiter took the order for two bottles of beer, a lemonade and a ginger ale. Tony said:

"Put a stick in the ginger ale."

"What does that mean?" Ann asked.

"It means to put some whisky in it," Tony said. "It'll make bad ginger ale taste a little better."

Alfred Ruggiero walked around, stopping at each table, and finally reached theirs. He was slightly over six feet tall, and startlingly thin, with a skin like white parchment sprinkled with yellow freckles drawn over big facial bones—high cheekbones and big chin. His eyes were mottled light brown under long-fringed black lashes which matched his head of curling thick black hair, worn rather long.

His frame was modeled for an athlete, but his strange lack of flesh made him look much more frail than actually was the case. He walked with the sliding grace of a cat, on the balls of his feet. Tony introduced him, and Ruggiero said:

"Pleased to meetcha. Let me know if everything isn't all right. Come again."

Then he went with his singularly graceful, silent tread to the next table. Ann rubbed her hand on her napkin and said:

"Ugh! What a man. He's clammy."

"He is awful looking," Marion said.

"He looks like a mummy come to life," Ann said. "I won't feel right till I've washed the place he touched me."

"Plenty of girls like him," Tony said. "Wait till you see him dance."

"He looks cruel," Ann said.

"He has the reputation," Cully said. "He is famous for fighting with his feet in the French style—la Savate. He kicks a man in the chin or stomach and gets him on the floor, and then kicks him into the hospital—or the morgue."

"How dreadful!" Ann said.

"Wait," Tony cautioned. "There go the lights. He's going to dance. Now you'll see something."

Ruggiero danced with a young blonde partner, their bodies glued together, his head against her head, his legs against her legs. They moved slowly over the floor while a spotlight followed them.

This was before the days of the modern dances. It was the expiring era of the waltz and the two-step, and the dance which Ruggiero was doing at that time had to be done behind locked doors and made New York rounders sit up and take notice. But it wasn't going to be long before nobody would have looked twice at Ruggiero, for soon everybody was dancing the same way.

Marion stared fascinated at the suggestive, sinuous movements, and said:

"It's disgusting, I think."

"But fascinating," Ann said. "There's something elemental about it."

"I'll say there is," Tony exclaimed, laughing. "They'd only have to give one more wiggle to be entirely elemental."

"Tony!" Ann said, and laughed.

Marion and Cully laughed while the dance ended and everyone clapped applause. Then Tony and Ann, and Cully and Marion joined the dancers on the floor. Ann said to Tony:

"You're the best dancer I ever danced with."

Tony said:

"I couldn't dance that way except with you."

"I don't like flattery," Ann said.

"Yes, you do," Tony said. "All girls do—especially when they have a suspicion that the flattery may contain a lot of truth."

Ann and Marion went to the ladies' room, and Marion said:

"Tony is a handsome thing, Ann. I never saw any man more handsome."

"And wasn't I right about his dancing?"

"Simply divine," Marion said. "I suppose with his looks he's simply been spoiled by his mother and every woman that has met him ever since he left the cradle."

"He has a good mind, too," Ann said. "He says awfully smart things sometimes."

"Oh, he's bright enough," Marion agreed. "But I guess he's bright in a show-off kind of a way, and not in a grown-up sort of way. He's like the favorite child who's always looking his prettiest and making bright remarks for the benefit of the callers."

"You don't like him very well, do you, Marion?"

"I like him well enough, Ann, for a playfellow, but I never could take him seriously."

Ann sighed and said:

"It's too bad the world wasn't just made to play in, isn't it? This living is such a serious business if you stop to think about it."

"Don't worry. Tony never stops to think about it. Have I got too much powder on? I can't see in this light."

"Just a little too much on the right—not there. That's it."

Marion took Ann's arm, and squeezed it. She said:

"I hope Tony asks me to dance some more. It's like floating through the clouds."

Ann laughed and said:

"You'd rather dance with a boy like Tony, but be married to a man like Cully."

"Something like that," Marion said.

"That's the trouble with me," Ann said. "I'm two people. I'm all feelings on one side, and all thinkings on the other. My feelings make me care for Tony, and my thinkings tell me I should marry Doctor West."

"Your thinkings are right and your feelings are wrong," Marion said.

"I don't know," Ann said hurriedly, as they were nearing the table. "I wish I didn't have a New-England conscience, though."

Tony and Cully went to the men's room. Ann said:

"I don't see anything very exciting about this place."

Ruggiero bowed in front of the table, his eyes fixed on Ann, and said:

"Wanta dance this with me?"

Ann glanced at Marion, and said:

"Why, no, thank you, Mr. Ruggiero. I am tired."

His face looked as if a smile never crossed it. The white skin, spotted with big freckles, was drawn so tightly across the big bones that it seemed as if the muscles around the cold eyes and the hard mouth had no chance to relax. Ruggiero said harshly:

"Come on and dance. Ladies are glad to dance with me. I'll show you something."

Tony and Cully approached the table across the floor. Ann looked at Tony with relief. Ruggiero took her arm, and tugged. She pulled away. Tony said:

"Hey! Let the lady alone."

Ruggiero turned and looked at him with chilled eyes.

"You better go home to mama," he said.

Tony hit at Ruggiero with doubled left fist, and Ruggiero leaned back and kicked, his foot glancing off Tony's shoulder. Tony staggered but did not fall. Marion screamed.

A waiter picked a goblet from the table and, with a single motion, knocked off the liquid-holding portion, making an improvised dagger. He slashed at Tony's face, just as Cully hit the waiter, and Tony smacked his right fist against Ruggiero's jaw.

The place was in an uproar. Four big young fellows joined Tony and Cully. Four voices said:

"We're with you."

"It's all right."

"Sock that bum."

"This way, Columbia."

"We're with you. It's all right."

"This way."

Marion screamed again. Ann jumped with joy as Tony knocked Ruggiero down. They began to move in confusion toward the door. One of the rescuers' faces suddenly showed slashed and bleeding. He was saying:

"Oh, you bastards! You bastards!"

And he flailed away with strong young arms, the crimson drenching his shirt.

There was an argument at the door, a shoving and pushing and swearing and grunting in the dimly lighted hall. A woman's voice said:

"Let 'em out. Quick. For God's sake."

They were in the open air again. One of the young fellows said:

"Ruggiero's wife. She doesn't want the police, and neither do we."

Cully took a deep breath and said:

"I'll never go against my judgment again."

Ann snuggled against Tony. Tony said:

"Did you see me give that guy the works?"

Ann whispered to Marion:

"He is brave, isn't he?"

Marion whispered back:

"But he didn't have sense enough to keep us out of there. I'm glad I'm alive."

Chapter Eleven

Ann and Marion were leaving a concert at Carnegie Hall. Ann said:

"Poor Cully has a terrible crush on you, Marion."

"He's awfully nice," Marion said. "I never knew a nicer boy."

"It would be nice if boys liked to go to concerts and the opera and to church and to the Metropolitan Museum as much as we do," Ann said. "I see plenty of other men in those places, but nobody I know wants to go."

"They don't have to be asked twice to go to a musical comedy or Weber & Fields or Hammerstein's," Marion said.

"We must attract the wrong kind of men, or be attracted to the wrong kind, or something," Ann said. "Life certainly is a puzzle."

"But we manage to get some fun out of it," Marion said. "I wonder what the boys did tonight."

"Probably played poker or drank beer at Mike's," Ann said.

Marion pulled her sleeve, and exclaimed:

"Look! There are the boys now. They see us. See. Across the street."

"We thought we'd hang around and take you home," Tony said. "It was Cully's idea."

Cully blushed. He said:

"It was both our ideas."

"It was nice of you both," Ann said. "Were your ears burning?"

"No," Tony said.

"Why?" Cully asked. "Talking about us?"

"We were just saying that it was too bad men we know didn't like to go to opera and concerts and the museums and the Public Library," Ann said.

"And church," Marion added.

Tony and Cully looked at each other and grinned, and Tony said:

"Aw, what do you want us to be—a couple of hot-house violets?"

Cully looked at Marion. He said:

"I'll go to church with you next Sunday, or any Sunday."

Cully blushed, and Tony stared at him a moment, open-mouthed, and exclaimed:

"My God! He must have it bad."

"I don't think going to church once in a while does a fellow any harm," Cully said modestly.

"I admire you for it," Marion said.

Tony said:

"Hey! He isn't offering to go to church for the sake of the church. He's just going to be with you."

"That's all right," Marion replied. "If I can be a good influence on him I guess that satisfies me."

"Now will you shut up?" Cully demanded.

"And he'll take you to concerts," Tony said. "Won't you, Cully?"

"I'd like to," Cully said. "I used to go with my mother all the time. I like music."

"My God!" Tony said. "Think of all the beer money you'll waste on contributions and tickets."

"Let's go down to the Hotel Manhattan and have a Welsh Rabbit," Cully suggested.

"Keene's is better," Tony said.

"It is not," Cully rejoined. "The Manhattan is the best place in town, serves 'em in chafing dishes with the toast separate, and plenty of it."

"I don't think I like rarebits," Marion said.

"Oh, I love them," Ann exclaimed.

"You can have Chicken à la King," Cully said, "or frogs' legs, or anything."

"The Brevoort or the Lafayette are the best places for frogs' legs," Tony said.

"Or snails," Cully said.

"Don't mention the horrid things," Marion exclaimed.

"We could go down to Chinatown and get some chop suey," Tony said. "I haven't had any Chinese food for a long time."

"Oh, I'd love that," Marion said. "I've never seen Chinatown, but I don't think I could eat their food. Do they have rats in

it?"

"They're the cleanest cooks in the world," Cully said. "Come on down to the Port Arthur, and they'll be glad to show you the kitchen. It's the cleanest place you ever saw."

"Would you like chop suey?" Tony asked Ann.

"I'd love to do anything anybody else wants to do," she said. "As a matter of fact, I think you boys should come back to the house, and we can make something there. I have a chafing dish, and it would be so much cheaper."

"Oh, gosh!" Tony exclaimed. "Always thinking of money. It gives me the Willies."

"You'd better think of it," Cully said. "It's nice to have when you need it."

"What I mean is, I'd like a party somewhere," Tony said. "Let's go to Chinatown."

They went to the Port Arthur and ate chop suey and chow mein.

A week later they ate Turkish food in the Constantinople, pilaffs, followed by desserts made of honey that were so sweet their teeth ached.

They ate roast ducks and geese, sauerbraten, potato soups, onion soups, cheese cakes and apfel strudels in Luchow's in Fourteenth Street, and drank imported beer. They absorbed imported frankfurters and sauerkraut, or liverwurst and sandwiches in Allaire's, and drank Culmbacher.

When the boys were poorer than usual they ate wheat cakes and hot biscuits in Childs, or went down to Lorber's Restaurant, then in Grand Street, and ate enormous seven-course dinners, with wine, for forty-five cents.

There was an Italian place in Mulberry Street where they ordered chicken, and the wife of the proprietor hurried into the backyard. The sound of chickens squawking was followed by the sounds of chickens frying. A few moments later nothing was left of the chickens except bones. With smuggled Chianti the meals cost thirty-five cents each.

They ate oyster stews and the steamed bellies of soft-boiled clams in the Grand Union Hotel, across the street from the Grand Central station. Tony never paid for room, board, clothing, or anything necessary. He spent all his money, and everything he could borrow, for entertainment. Even his friends had no idea of the magnitude of his debts, the heartache of his father and mother, or his heartlessness and unconcern in causing distress to others.

Personally, he was so charming, that he had credit everywhere. He took cabs whenever he wanted to, and finally drove to a hotel or other building, where he could walk in one door and out of another, leaving the taxi man unpaid. Drivers traced him, and he hypnotized them with his talk and his personality.

Tony had the large, expansive ways of the man born to the purple, but also the hearty manner that becomes the honest Democrat. When he became friends with a taxi driver to whom he owed money, the taxi driver felt that a great favor was being bestowed upon him by a superior being.

"He's class, but he doesn't put on airs," frequently was said of Tony.

When he walked into a restaurant, the maître d'hôtel or the head waiter couldn't give him sufficient attention. They bowed to him while more worthy guests fumed and fretted.

Tony had an air. Aunt Cynthia and Mrs. Graves and Lizzie and even sceptical Amelia broke their necks waiting on Tony, who not only owed money for services, but borrowed more from time to time. Cully got just enough service to pass muster, and he paid his bills regularly, and owed nobody.

Many of the parties on which Ann, Marion, Cully and Tony went, where Tony couldn't get credit, were financed by Cully. Tony, however, did all the ordering, got all the bows and all the praise. Cully merely paid the bills.

They went to Coney Island and ate hot dogs and drank beer, and rode the chute the chutes, and saw all the sights, and arrived home at three o'clock in the morning, tired and weak from laughing and screaming when the cars dipped suddenly, or air blew up their skirts.

Then Marion decided to go to Teachers' College, and become a teacher, and she moved uptown to be near Columbia University. She said to Ann:

"It's too bad you can't live up here. The air is better."

Ann said:

"It's cheaper for me to live with Aunt Cynthia."

One afternoon in May Tony and Ann walked through Central Park where the Japanese Cherry blossoms made a canopy over the newly green grass. They walked under the blossoms, and on the fallen blossoms, in the scented air. Ann said:

"It's too beautiful—having this so near hot pavements and ugly tenements."

Tony took her to Sherry's afterwards. Ann said:

"I would be happier eating in Childs."

They ate canapé of caviare, green turtle soup with Sherry, pheasant with champagne, and crêpes suzettes with more champagne. Ann drank a Benedictine, and Tony drank a Napoleon brandy.

In the basement room, Tony said:

"I'm crazy about you."

Ann said:

"Oh, Tony. Why aren't you different?"

"Different? How?"

Ann sighed as Tony took her in his arms. She said:

"You wouldn't understand."

He kissed her, and she kissed him. He whispered:

"If I was different you wouldn't love me."

Ann said:

"If you'd only do the best you could."

Tony kissed her and said:

"I do. I love you. Can't you feel how much I love you? You must."

Ann sighed and was silent in his embrace. He drew her to the couch and squeezed her in strong arms and kissed her. Her eyes shone up at him in the gloom. Her lips were warm and willing.

She met him more than half-way.

Tom was stooped-over looking through the keyhole in the door of the basement room when Lizzie entered the hall. Tom started, looked around, waved a silencing hand at her, and said:

"Shhh!"

Lizzie walked toward him down the hall, saying in an unmuffled, shrill voice:

"I thought you'd be peeking, Tom."

Tom straightened and rapped on the door. He said to Lizzie in a muffled murmur:

"You shut up."

Tom's cheeks were red and his eyes were bright. He scratched his nose and rapped again. He whispered to Lizzie:

"I know why she don't come to the door in a hurry. You should've seen what I saw."

"You dirty bum!" Lizzie said.

Ann opened the door, and said:

"Why, hello, Tom. Hello, Lizzie. Won't you come in?"

Tony was standing in the background, a tall, engaging figure in loose-fitting clothes, cigarette smoke curling around his head. Tom scratched his nose and said:

"No, thanks, Annie. Ma just asked me to bring you over this, and she said to thank you."

Tom handed Ann an umbrella, which she took from him. Smiling, she said:

"Why, there was no hurry about it, Tom. Thank you for bringing it."

She looked questioningly at Lizzie, and Lizzie said:

"I'm just the bodyguard to see that Tom delivered the umbrella."

Ann, puzzled, looked from one to the other. Lizzie said:

"Come on, Tom. So long, Annie."

Ann laughed uncertainly and said:

"Goodby, call again."

She closed the door, shot the bolt, and said to Tony:

"That was funny."

She stared at him thoughtfully a second, holding the returned umbrella, of black- and gray-checked silk.

"I wonder if Tom was peeping," she said. "He has a reputation for it."

She propped the umbrella in a corner, re-opened the door and stepped into the hall while Tony was saying:

"A sweet feller. I'd like to bash his head."

And she was saying:

"Wait a minute. Stay right there."

She closed the door, and bent to the keyhole. She arose, opened the door, and exclaimed:

"That's what he was doing—peeping. And he could see."

They looked at one another. Tony pressed the fire from his cigarette end in a china candlestick holder on which were painted roses which looked more like tomatoes. He said:

"What the hell! We're going to get married anyway."

He held out his arms to her, but Ann moved aside. He asked:

"What's the matter? For God's sake, if that little punk annoys you I'll spank him."

Ann's hands went to her hair, patting it into place. She smiled up at Tony, a twisted smile. She pressed him back gently, and said:

"It isn't Tom, Tony."

"Well, what's the matter?" he asked.

She said:

"Nothing."

"You love me, don't you?"

She looked at him, her head to one side. She said:

"I feel just the way I always did, Tony."

"Then you love me?"

She smiled again, and kissed him, petting his cheek. She said:

"I've got to go to bed now."

He said:

"You're the most wonderful girl I ever knew. We can get married right away."

"We'll talk it over in the morning," she said.

Ann looked at herself in her mirror. She thought:

"It's funny what can happen to human beings, and still they look just as if nothing had happened at all."

She went to bed thinking she would lie awake, but she went right to sleep.

Tony was waiting for her next afternoon at six o'clock. He followed her into the basement room and closed the door and started to take her in his arms. She did not withdraw but put out restraining hands and shook her head. She said:

"Please don't, Tony."

He looked astonished, and asked:

"Why?"

She said:

"Because that's all over between us."

He tried to draw her to him, but she resisted merely by being all elbows and top of head. He said:

"But I can't understand. What's happened? After last night you can't act this way."

She said:

"Last night was last night. And that is all over. It never will happen again."

He said:

"But we are going to get married. Don't worry about that."

She said solemnly:

"I'm sorry, Tony, but we aren't going to get married, and I'm not worrying. I just found out something."

He stared at her and said:

"You aren't kidding, are you, darling?"

She shook her head and replied:

"I was never more serious in my life. I guess what happened last night simply had to happen, Tony. I'm not going to ask you to forget it. But I am going to ask you to please believe that it will never happen again between you and me."

He seized her roughly and kissed her. She merely looked up quietly at him. He was red-faced and angry and puzzled. He panted as he said:

"What's the idea? I'm on the level. I love you. I've loved you from the beginning. And you loved me. You still love me."

He tried to pull her to him again. She said:

"Honest, Tony. It's all over."

He dragged her to him again and kissed her passive lips. Then he pushed her from him savagely. He cried:

"But you wanted me as bad last night as I wanted you."

She straightened her hair and smoothed her skirt and said:

"That's true, but I know now that it was just that feeling I've talked to you about before, and not love."

He stared at her, breathing hard. He said loudly:

"I've half a mind to bash you. You're out of your mind."

"Go ahead and bash," Ann said. "I've been out of my mind for several months, and I've just found it again."

His shoulders sagged, and his body sank in on itself as he asked plaintively:

"Is it something you've heard about me? Have I done anything?"

She shook her head, the promise of tears in her eyes. She said:

"I feel just the same about you as I always have."

"Then what in Christ's name is it, unless you've just gotten a religious streak or something today? I tell you I want to marry you. I'm crazy about you."

Ann took a deep breath, her lovely bosom rising and falling with the inhalation and exhalation of air. She said:

"I hope you'll understand, but I never truly did love you, Tony. I had a feeling for you, and I still have it. But I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth."

He stared at her, bewildered, and said:

"I can't understand. You must be crazy."

She said:

"I haven't much hope that you'll understand because you're the kind of boy you are. But the best way I can think of to explain it is that I couldn't possibly be a man's mistress because I haven't that sort of conscience, and you couldn't possibly be a woman's husband because nature didn't intend you to be a husband."

He laughed, a sound which was more of a snort than a symptom of mirth. He said:

"Now I suppose you're telling me that all I'm fit for is to be a lover."

She nodded and said grimly:

"I suppose lover is a word that answers the purpose."

He grabbed her by the arms and squeezed them and shook her. He said:

"You can't make a damned fool of me."

She said:

"Go ahead and shake me. Beat me. You're stronger than I am. But I've told you the truth. You and I are through. You are only succeeding in proving to me my own opinion that you are more of a child than a man."

There was scorn in her tones. He released her. She smiled, more a nervous than a humorous reaction. And he slapped her face, leaving red marks on her cheek. Instantly, with the sound of flesh meeting flesh, he stepped forward, and cried:

"Oh! I'm sorry."

She said:

"I'm not angry, or surprised. You're just a baby that's been refused a new toy. Of course, you'd be likely to kick and squall a bit, and even slap."

"My God! I could beat you. You're driving me nuts."

She stepped to the door, and opened it. She said evenly:

"I'm sorry that we had to have a scene. I had a vague hope that we might remain friends, but I didn't really think it was possible."

He grabbed his hat from a stand and said:

"I can't understand you, Ann. Perhaps tomorrow you'll change your mind."

She said:

"I can understand myself finally, and that is all that counts with me."

He said:

"I don't care what happens to me. I'm going out and get stewed."

He hesitated a moment, angrily wistful. She said:

"I'm not responsible for what you do."

She closed the door, leaving him in the hall, and went over and sat down in a chair, staring at the wall. Tears came to her eyes. One leaked down her cheek. She bit her lips and clenched her hands.

Chapter Twelve

AFTER THE sixth cocktail in the hotel Chesterfield bar, Dan refused to serve Tony any more. Tony said:

"I'm perfectly all right, Dan. Look."

And he walked a straight line, wobbling just a bit. Dan said:

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sparks-Boyer, but I can't serve you any more. If you'll go out and take a walk in the fresh air I'll serve you again."

"I'm perfectly all right, Dan," Tony said. "Go on. Gimme another drink."

Dan remained firm, so Tony started to go out, hesitated, and went into the writing room. He sat down at one of three desks there, and wrote:

> "*Dear Ann: I don't understand what has happened to change you. But I always will remain the same. Whatever happens I was the first man. You can't forget that. I will never forget last night, and you can't forget it either. If I don't get word from you tomorrow that you will marry me it is all off. Lots of love. (signed) Tony.*
>
> "*P. S. I am getting drunk, and I don't care what happens to me. (signed) T.*"

Tony folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope, and wet the flap with his tongue and pressed it tight. He wrote on the envelope:

"Miss Ann Steele."

He walked out of the hotel, and blinked in the sunlight. He walked around the corner and over to Mrs. Graves's, and let himself in with a latchkey. No one was about. He climbed three flights of stairs, and went down the hall to Ann's room. The door was ajar. He pushed it open and went in.

He looked around. Two pair of stockings were drying on a coat hanger. A handkerchief, which apparently had been pasted while damp on the mirror of the bureau, had dropped to the bureau cover. The odor of violet water was apparent. A photograph of a frowning little girl, who was easily identified as Ann, stood on the bureau beside two photographs, one of Elihu and the other of Naomi.

The eyes of the two photographs seemed to focus on Tony. The faces, posed for the rural camera, showed only the lines of strength and solidity. They looked grim and uncompromising. Even Naomi's sweet mouth was set in a straight line in this counterfeit presentiment, and the angle of her jaw stood out. Tony murmured aloud:

"I'd hate to face that pair."

He propped the letter against the blue silk pin cushion, in which was stuck an old-fashioned gold brooch with seed pearls and three tiny gold baby pins, and tiptoed out.

Five minutes later Tom walked into the room. He picked up the letter, held it up between his eyes and the window, and hesitated. A door slammed below and he waited, listening. There was no other sound. He put the letter in his pocket, and opened the right-hand drawer, where were handkerchiefs, and an amber necklace. He opened the left-hand top drawer, and disclosed a box of face powder, a pair of manicure scissors, orange wood sticks, and three bottles of toilet preparations.

Under a neat pile of underwear in the second drawer he found a roll of bills. He scratched his nose and counted it. It contained fifty dollars.

He stood, hesitant, listening. He scratched his nose and closed the drawer and tiptoed from the room.

Ten minutes later Tom was in Crooker's Saloon. And one minute later Puggy joined him at the bar. Tom was trembling. Puggy said:

"Don't come around here, you bastard, unless you got the dough."

"I got it," Tom said. "Gimme forty bucks' worth."

Mike served two goblets of beer and said:

"You guys have got to be careful."

Puggy said:

"Where did you swipe it?"

"I didn't swipe it," Tom replied. "I borrowed it."

"Yeah," Puggy said. "I'll tell you somet'ing, fella. If you want to live, you'll keep your trap shut if you get caught."

Mike said:

"For Christ's sake, why don't you guys go in the gents' room. I ain't got nothin' to do wit' this."

"Aw, shut up," Puggy said.

They went into the room labeled *Gents*, and Puggy came out first. When Tom appeared his cheeks were flushed and his eyes no longer were dull. Tom stuck out his chest and said:

"Give us two more beers."

"You could lick de woild now, couldn't you, kid?" Mike asked.

"Nobody asked for your opinions," Tom said.

Mike wagged his head and drew two glasses of beer. Serving them with hairy hands, he said:

"Me! I'm in de saloon business. I don't know nuttin' about what youse guys do."

"Yeah," Puggy observed.

Mike put two wet, red, ugly hands on the bar and leaned forward toward them. He hadn't shaved that morning, and his beard bristled from his cheeks, giving him a more than ordinarily forbidding look. He said:

"I ain't makin' no promises, but I'm gonna get sore if any junky mentions me."

"Aw, forget it," Puggy said.

"Don't worry," Tom said.

Tom took out a packet and shook white powder on his hand. Mike said:

"How many times have I told you not to do dat here? Go in de gents' room if you gotta have a shot."

Tom sniffed the crystals and said:

"There's nobody here. What the hell are you beefing about? Give us two more beers."

Puggy winked at Mike, and said to Tom:

"After this powder we'll take a little walk, fella."

Tom walked home on air, and went into the kitchen. Nobody was at home, but a kettle was spouting small jets of steam on the stove. He held the envelope addressed to Ann over the spout and rolled back the flap with a pencil. He read the note, and grinned, and said aloud:

"I'd like to fix that dame. She's too stuck up."

Lizzie walked in in her hat and light blue coat, and Tom stuck the envelope and enclosure in his pocket. She asked in her shrill voice:

"What were you doing, Tom Jarvis?"

"Aw, for Christ's sake, shut up," he replied.

"What did you put in your pocket?"

"None of your God damned business," Tom said. "I'll teach you to sneak on me."

"Ha! Ha!" Lizzie laughed. "Sneak on you! That's a good one. And you always peekin' in windows and keyholes, and sneakin' into rooms."

He raised his hands as if to strike her. She cried:

"You just touch me once and see what happens, you bum."

"I'd like to kill you," Tom exclaimed, his voice high pitched.

Mrs. Jarvis entered the kitchen in black widow's bonnet. Her cheeks were quivering with emotion, her manner conciliatory. She asked:

"What's the matter, Lizzie? Tom, can't you two stop fighting?"

Five minutes later Tom was up on the roof. The envelope and enclosure which he had taken without thought, and which he had intended to return after reading, were rumpled, torn and stained, because of their hasty return to his pocket.

He went to a containing wall and removed two bricks, revealing a small recess. In it he placed six packets of cocaine and the letter and envelope. He took another sniff of crystals and returned downstairs.

Ann was changing her dress while Marion sat on the bed. Ann said:

"Can you understand a girl giving herself to a boy once, and then not wanting to have anything more to do with him?"

"I hadn't thought of it," Marion said. "You haven't with Tony?"

Ann said:

"Leave personalities out of it, Marion. Can you understand a girl who really admires and respects one man enough to marry him, feeling enough physical attraction for another man to sleep with him—and then never want to see him again?"

Marion arose from the bed, and said:

"Ann! Have you and Tony—?"

Ann was straightening her dress in front of the mirror. She said:

"I'm not going out with Tony any more."

"Then you—"

Marion opened her mouth aghast. Ann turned quickly and kissed Marion. She said:

"I've learned one thing, Marion. And that is the only man I know that I'd think of marrying is Alonzo; and I want to be married and have children, and have solid friends, and live like the folks we know, live."

"Did you?" Marion asked. "You can tell me, and I never would tell a soul. Oh, Ann!"

Ann turned her head to one side and looked at Marion from the corner of her eyes. She said:

"I'm not sorry for anything I've done, Marion. But I know I must be careful all the rest of my life about drinking, and about confusing my feelings with what I know is right."

Marion looked at Ann uncertainly and said:

"I don't understand, I guess. But I admire you more than any girl I know, and I'm glad you've come to your senses about Tony and Doctor West. But why did you say that funny thing about sleeping with one man when you truly cared for another?"

"Didn't you ever think of it yourself?" Ann asked.

"I certainly did not," Marion said. "Of course, I'm not saying I haven't been out with boys that I liked, but I never thought of doing that until I was married."

Ann smiled and shrugged her shoulders. She said:

"I guess no one knows the answers to life. You've just got to live and find out for yourself."

"That sounds funny," Marion said.

"You didn't like Cully at first, but now that you've tried him out for a while it seems to me that you like him pretty well."

Marion flushed. She had a clear skin through which the pink of surface blood always showed anyway, and her hair was bright brown, and her eyes bright blue. She breathed of health, sweetness and honesty. She said:

"Cully is one of the nicest men I've ever met. He isn't drinking so much now, and he's saving his money."

"He hasn't grown any taller or thinner, and he's still got his freckles," Ann said.

"He's a nice man," Marion said. "And I think he loves me the right way."

Ann kissed her again and said:

"Blessings on you both, if it happens, and blessings if it doesn't happen."

She drew back, smiled, and asked:

"But isn't he awfully shy?"

Marion blushed again and said:

"He is the most awkward kisser I ever met. He's afraid of me."

"You'll teach him," Ann said.

She went to the first long drawer and opened it, pulled back underwear, and groped with her hand. She straightened up, and said:

"Why! My money is gone."

Johnny Grogan and Bert Adelman were tough detectives. Johnny was short and square and chunky, with brown hair and the light blue eyes which often are seen on dead shots with rifles and revolvers and fists. They were not the kind of eyes that ever concentrated on the back of an adversary, but the kind that met other eyes face to face, and held the straightest and coldest aim.

Johnny was kind to his mother and to his wife, who was fat and sloppy and gossiped over the back fence out in Queens. He'd get up in the morning and let out a warhoop and chase her through the seven-room, semi-detached house. His four sons loved him. He taught them how to box and wrestle and fly kites.

However, Johnny was a bad one when it came to handling prisoners. He batted them first and asked questions afterward. He hated pimps and cokies and burglars and gunmen and all crooks.

Bert Adelman was six inches taller than Johnny's five feet nine, and had pleasantly curling crispy black hair and big brown eyes and red cheeks. He was a statue of a man, with a powerful physique, wide shoulders, and a slim waist. He looked kind and rather soft. This made him and Johnny a good team.

Johnny would abuse a prisoner, and then Bert would come in and apologize for Johnny in a soft voice, and get the prisoner's confidence, and then Bert would beat up the prisoner worse than Johnny had.

The chief difference between Bert and Johnny was that Johnny concentrated his sadism on enemies of society, while Bert exercised his love of inflicting pain wherever he thought he could get away with it. Johnny chased his wife for the pure fun of it, and she loved the game. Bert lashed his wife with his belt, and she was afraid to complain to anyone. He'd rather kick a puppy than pet it.

Ann said to Johnny Grogan:

"I wish I never had reported the loss to the police. I'd rather lose the fifty dollars."

Johnny said:

"Don't feel like that, Lady. This guy is a junky. He won't come clean, but we've got him right. He's been peeking in windows and sneaking into rooms for years, and yours ain't the first dough that has been missed. We found enough coke on him for eight guys."

"When I go to court," Ann said, "I'll testify to what you and that other detective did to him. You both should be in jail yourselves."

Johnny laughed and Bert smirked. Johnny, who always did the talking for the pair, said:

"We only argued with him. Lady. You wouldn't stand up for a dope fiend against two police officers, would you?"

"I certainly would," Ann said. "I was almost going to say that I'd rather be a dope fiend than a detective."

Mrs. Jarvis sat with her apron thrown over her head and wept. She said:

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Please help me. Help me save my Tom. He always was such a good baby."

Tom went to Bellevue, and had stitches taken in his head and bandages put on the places where Johnny and Bert had argued most potently with him. Tom said:

"I'll get even. You wait. Oh, God, why do I have to suffer like this!"

Aunt Cynthia said:

"This is a terrible thing, but it is better to know the truth. And after all I've done for that boy!"

Ann had a difficult half-hour with the Deputy Assistant District Attorney in Magistrate's Court. He was a big, fat human of thirty-five, who smelled of Irish whisky, sweat and cheap tobacco, had reddish hair on a big oval head, ovally bald on top, blue oval eyes under reddish brows and lashes, a snub nose, rather red, and a wide-gashed, thin-lipped mouth. He said:

"You can't withdraw this charge. It's your duty as a citizen to press it."

Ann said:

"I saw enough of what was done to that boy by those two detectives. I don't know what I would do now if they had been fair, but I do know that in my code justice doesn't include brutality."

The D.A.D.A. said:

"That's the trouble. Sentimental women always are squawking about the way crooks are treated. If you go through with this you are doing your duty and making society safer for other women. If you don't you are just encouraging more degenerates like this Thomas Jarvis."

Ann said:

"He's only a boy and probably didn't know what he was doing."

The D.A.D.A. said:

"That's the way you women always act. This isn't the last you're going to hear of this. The law has teeth in it. We've got him for dope, anyhow."

The D.A.D.A. that night met a man in the back room of O'Connor's Saloon across from the court-house, and took two hundred dollars from him. He said:

"You're a bunch of cheap skates, but we'll do the best we can."

"The man uptown can't stand a squeal now," was said.

Puggy said to Mike:

"We can't afford to let the punk down now. He ain't told a thing. We'll get him all the stuff he wants, and he never will say a thing."

"I knew that dough was hot," Mike said.

Tom returned home after six months on the island, where he was supposed to have been cured. His mother said:

"But you can't blame Annie for what happened to you, Tom."

He said:

"She's the only one I can blame, and I'll get her. You wait. She's nothing but a chippy."

"Why, Thomas," Mrs. Jarvis exclaimed. "She's a sweet girl. She did her best to save you after she found out about you being arrested."

"Oh, yeah!" Tom said. "Well, if you want to know it, I hate her more than anybody else living. Look what she got me into. And what is she?"

"She's a sweet girl," his mother said.

"Ha! Ha! That's what you think," Tom said. "But I know she's a floosy."

"Now, Tom. You don't want any more trouble."

"He always was looking for it," Lizzie said.

"You shut up," Mrs. Jarvis said.

"He was always sticking his nose in other people's business," Amelia asserted.

"You'd talk like that about your own brother," Mrs. Jarvis said.

“Oh, for God’s sake!” Tom exclaimed. “It’s quieter in jail than it is at home. But I’ll get that dame yet.”

Chapter Thirteen

ANN WAS riding with Dr. Benham in the buggy behind old Sam. Dr. Benham's head wavered a little more than it had the year before, and his hands trembled more perceptibly, but his firm features still gave assurance of power, and his personality radiated confidence and helpfulness.

It was October, and a chill was in the air. Nature was gaudy with bright colors.

"You don't know how glad it makes me feel that you and Alonzo are going to get married," Dr. Benham said.

He reached over with a gloved hand and petted her hands lying clasped in her lap, and added:

"It does the old man's heart good."

Ann looked up at the doctor, her face troubled. She said:

"Doctor, I——"

She hesitated and stopped. Dr. Benham chewed on his cigar, his face assuming a peculiar hard, forbidding expression. To one who didn't know him this expression might be construed as one indicating disgust and dislike. However, to those who understood him this expression merely meant that the old doctor had his mind made up and was prepared to override all opposition. His head bobbed as he said:

"There was a man in New York, I suppose."

Ann was startled for an instant. She gasped a little and said:

"Some people say you can read their thoughts, Doctor Benham. Of course, I don't believe that. But how did you know? I haven't told a living soul."

Dr. Benham bit savagely into his cigar. He said:

"You went away to New York because you were looking for excitement. You stayed there despite everything your family and Alonzo could do, apparently pretty perky and sassy. That Aunt Cynthia of yours let on there was a young man in the offing. Then, all of a sudden, you pack up and come home, looking as innocent as a lamb, but kind of quiet and subdued-like."

"I'd like to tell you about it, Doctor," Ann said.

Dr. Benham chirruped to Sam. Sam merely ambled along at his usual gait. Dr. Benham said:

"You're perfectly sound and whole, aren't you?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Healthy as they make 'em?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Never sick?"

"Why, no."

"Good temper?"

"I guess so."

"Not a jealous disposition?"

"Not that I know of."

"Can palaver people around a little?"

"I don't know about that."

"Make a fine appearance?"

"I'm not a scarecrow."

"Good manager?"

"I've always thought so."

"Good mind?"

"Oh, Doctor Benham. What is all this about?"

Dr. Benham bobbed his head, threw away his cigar, and said:

"It all means you'll make a good doctor's wife, and that Alonzo will live and die without realizing how blessed he was to get you instead of some of those neurotic, jealous, or hell-raising females that have been after him. You're conferring a blessing on the young feller, Annie, but he'll never know it till his dying day."

"But Doctor Benham, I've got something I should tell you. I haven't anyone else I can talk to."

Dr. Benham reached for a fresh cigar with his familiar gesture and passed the reins to Ann while he lighted a match, cupping the flame from the breeze with his hands in soiled tan driving gloves, with three red lines of thread on their backs. He threw

away the match, resumed the reins, and said:

"I'll be glad to hear your story, Annie. But before you tell it, I want to remind you that a good way to train for life is to depend on yourself as much as you can. They call it self-reliance, I guess. But it goes deeper than that sounds. It goes right down to the foundation of character.

"You'll find most people running around asking Tom, Dick and Harry advice about everything. They'll say:

"'Would you go to town today, or wait till Wednesday when there'll be a sale at Wharton's?'"

"'Do you think it'll rain tomorrow?'"

"'What would you do for an ingrowing toenail?'"

"'If you was me, would you wear the blue dress or the green one to Emmy Ball's tomorrow afternoon?'"

"'Do I need a shave?'"

"'Would you buy American Tel. and Tel., or would you take a chance and buy some Gold-plated Shipping instead?'"

"'What can I do about my husband? He's drinking again.'"

"'I'm having a hell of a time with my wife. She's spending more money than I earn. What can I do?'"

The doctor grinned, leaned over, spat, wiped a bit of moisture from his chin, and said:

"Most people go around blatting their troubles and asking for advice. That's why there are so many employees and so few executives. That's why Alonzo made a hit when it came to cutting off Mrs. Kinney's leg. He didn't ask anybody's advice. If he'd been wrong it would have ruined him. If he'd been right, as he was, and asked advice, he'd just've been another promising young doctor. He wouldn't have gotten the reputation he's got so quick."

The doctor pulled on the reins, took the cigar from his mouth, and said:

"See that pa'tridge?"

"No."

He pointed to a ruffed grouse sitting on a log off to the left. Ruffed grouse were pa'tridges thereabouts.

"He'll go up in a minute," Dr. Benham said.

Sure enough, the grouse arose with a roar of wings, and the doctor grinned and wagged his head. He said:

"Nice birds. Fine eatin'."

He puffed on the cigar and said:

"There's just one more thing I want to tell you, Annie. It's this. The only way I know to keep a secret is to keep your mouth shut. Most people rush to someone else and say:

"'Promise not to breathe a word of this—but'—and then they go ahead and tell a secret someone else has told them. Or they tell a secret about themselves, which is worse. If you want to have nobody know nothing, Annie, just keep your mouth shut."

Ann nodded her head, face solemn. The doctor said:

"Among the blessed of this earth are they who can take responsibility, because they are a comfort to their neighbors. But those who take responsibility sometimes are a great burden to themselves. And, if they're worth two hoots, they can't afford to let anybody know about it."

"I see," Ann said. "I've thought about it like that myself, but without seeing it so clearly."

The doctor grinned and bobbed his head, and said:

"Your folks have been that kind, Annie. They kept their troubles to themselves, and their secrets were buried with them."

Ann's face was set in lines more mature than her age as she looked into the far northern hills, blue on the horizon and said:

"I guess we admire backbone more than we do any other quality up around this way."

Dr. Benham said:

"And they say so little about it that I never heard it said before to my knowledge. And there's another thing, Annie."

She raised her eyes to his. He petted her hands again, and said:

"You're a good woman, Annie, no matter what has happened. You haven't done anything that you didn't think was all right."

Ann sighed. The doctor added:

"Don't try to put any memories that are unpleasant out of your mind, Annie. Study those memories, and analyze 'em, and learn from them. A person who hasn't sinned and benefited by it hasn't an ounce of human sympathy in his veins, any more than a person who hasn't suffered pain can understand pain in others."

"You've done me a lot of good, Doctor Benham," Ann said.

"I saw you were getting a little worried," Dr. Benham said. "Having a revival down to the church, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't be stampeded by your emotions into doing anything your mind tells you is irrational," Dr. Benham advised.

"I wasn't going to tell any story of my life publicly," Ann asserted. "But I thought perhaps I should tell Alonzo."

Dr. Benham snorted so hard he blew his cigar from his mouth. It fell on his knee, and he flicked it to the ground. Brushing

off the ashes which remained, he said:

"Tell him nothing," he said. "What he don't tell you, and you don't tell him, probably'll be the foundation of a happy marriage."

He looked around, hauled gently on the reins, and said:

"Whoa, Sam."

Sam stopped. The doctor pulled the right rein, opening the wheels on the left side, on which Ann was seated. She said:

"What're you going to do?"

"You wait," he said.

He went around to the back of the buggy and took out a gun case. While Ann watched, smiling, he opened the case and carefully extracted first the barrels, then the lock and stock, of a double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun. Ann said:

"A gun! What are you going to do with that?"

"Shoot a little," Dr. Benham said.

"I never knew you were a hunter, Doctor."

Dr. Benham grinned, his hands, small for his size, and trembly, fitting the pieces together expertly. He turned to Ann and said:

"Look through this."

She looked through the barrels, shining and clear as unsullied glass. She exclaimed:

"Ooh! It's clean and shiny."

He stuffed shells in his pocket, took the gun under his arm, and said:

"Come on, Annie."

"But you didn't load the gun."

"I don't load it till we've climbed the fence here," he said. "I only keep a gun loaded when I need it."

He grunted, crawling awkwardly through the barbed-wire fence. She tore a triangular hole in her green suit jacket. On the other side he slid two shells into the breech. They walked along together. He made a sudden movement. The gun exploded from his hip. Ann suppressed a little scream. She asked:

"What was it?"

"A rabbit over there," he said.

"Oh, Doctor!"

He grinned, and advised:

"Just go over there and look."

The rabbit was there, dead. They walked on a short ways, and again he shot from the hip. He said:

"Pa'tridge, that time."

When Ann arrived home, she brought with her three grouse. She said to Clarence:

"You know, Uncle Clarence, I always admired Doctor Benham more than any other man I ever met, but I admire him even more now. You should just see how he can shoot."

Clarence laughed and said:

"You don't have to tell me about that old coot. He's got eyes like an eagle, and he can see game where nobody else can. Carries a gun in his rig and gets out and shoots himself a meal when he feels like it."

"I had a wonderful ride with him," Ann said. "I like to ride behind a horse on a dirt road."

"Give me automobiles," Clarence said.

"To get there," Ann agreed. "But I love old Sam and Frank. Old Sam especially. He gave me a wonderful welcome when I came home from New York. I was walking by the Pease Block, and old Sam was hitched out in front. He began to whinny so loud that everybody looked around. I went over, and he kissed me and nuzzled me with that soft nose of his. He was so glad to see me—the dear old thing."

Clarence chuckled, lifted a stove lid, and spat onto the coal. Replacing the lid, he said:

"Sam was just looking for sugar, Annie. Always fed him sugar, didn't you?"

"Oh, you make me tired," Ann said.

"Look at Tack," Clarence exclaimed. "Tack is grinning at you."

Ann looked at Tack, who was sitting on his haunches beside Clarence, the Lord of his universe. Tack's tongue was hanging out and there was a look of mirth on his wise old face. Ann ran over and rubbed her hand over Tack's forehead. Tack had a cataract over his left eye, but the right one was bright and knowing. Ann said:

"You're a dear, Tack. But just because dogs are nice doesn't make horses any less nice."

Ann and Alonzo were married in the Clarence Smiths' parlor. Ann had wanted a simple wedding with Alonzo and herself in the clothes they would wear for the honeymoon. But Rebecca was horrified. She said:

"You only get married once, Ann. It is the second most important step in your life; the first is birth, the second is marriage, and the third is death. It is one of the great events. It must be memorable."

"But people do get married more than once, sometimes," Ann said.

"Not our kind of folks," Rebecca asserted, with the accent on the "our."

Ann not only gave in, but gave in gracefully and with apparent cheerfulness to the wishes of others. Rebecca wanted her to wear her mother's wedding dress, but Ann was too tall and too large in every way for it. She did wear the veil, and she accepted orange blossoms as a necessary part of the ceremony. She was carrying symbolical orange blossoms so far as all these good folk were concerned. To carry real ones was placing little, if any, emphasis on deceit.

When Ann was being dressed for the wedding, Rebecca called down the front stairs:

"Pa. Where are you, Pa?"

"And where's Doctor Benham?" a voice asked.

"And Clarence," Rebecca exclaimed breathlessly, looking around.

Suddenly she said:

"I know."

She went to the cellar door in the hall next to the kitchen, wiping perspiration from her face as she went. When she opened the door a cool, musty smell was released. She called:

"Pa. Doctor Benham. You come right straight upstairs. The idea of men of your age being at the cider barrel this early."

Grampa Blodgett, Rebecca's father, was a veteran of the Civil War, and his blue suits and soft black hats looked exactly like uniforms, minus metal buttons and other official insignia.

Grampa's hair and beard were long and white, but his eyes, like a pair of turquoises on either side of a beaked red nose, sparkled with life and vitality. He was broad in the shoulder, thick in the chest, and his legs were slightly bowed. He was about five feet eight, a sawed-down giant. Rebecca said:

"If you don't come right straight up here, I'll come down there after you."

"All right, Rebecca," Grampa's voice replied. "We'll be up right away."

"I know all about your 'right aways'," Rebecca retorted.

She addressed Gramma Smith, who was sitting in the living room, hands with swollen veins folded in her meagre lap, lips mumbling at ill-fitting false teeth. She said:

"Seems as if the older men get, the more like bad little boys they can act."

Gramma Smith clicked her false teeth and made more wrinkles in her face, which was her way of smiling. She reached for her tin snuff box, and said:

"I allus like to see the men havin' a good time. Land knows they got troubles enough with their women folks havin' humors, and mortgages comin' due. I like to see a man that shows some life. I allus did, and I allus will."

Gramma was talking to herself at this point, although she didn't mind. A moment later into the room walked Grampa on his hands, his stout blue clad legs waving in the air, and his naturally red face purple from his upside-down position. Laughters and applause greeted this strange appearance. Rebecca said:

"Pa! You stop that this instant. You'll break a blood vessel."

"Oh, let him have his fun," Gramma said. "Anybody'd think that just because a body gets old in years he doesn't feel skittish once in a while."

She cackled delightedly to herself at this idea, and took a good whiff of snuff and sneezed into her tobacco-stained handkerchief. Grampa said:

"There ain't none of you can do this."

He dropped his feet over his head to the floor, and stood up, pulling down his waistcoat.

"And lemme see any of you do that," he added.

"Well, I don't see anything to be proud of," Rebecca said.

"Stand back," Grampa said with authority.

"He's going to do a handspring now," Rebecca said.

Dr. Benham took her arm, and said, grinning:

"You're proud of him."

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are too," he insisted.

"You should stop him, Doctor," she said. "You know it isn't good for him."

Dr. Benham's head trembled as he smiled and reached for a fresh cigar. He said in a gentle rumble:

"Wouldn't I look like a fine galoot if I went around telling all my friends when they are having a smoke to stop, that they may get smokers' heart; or telling my friends that like a drink now and then not to take it because they'll get cirrhosis of the liver or Bright's Disease; or telling someone that's on a diet not to eat this, or eat that. Not me, Rebecca. I believe in having a

good time while you're alive, and anyhow, I've reached the point when I don't know anything about anything anyway. I don't know but what tobacco is good for the heart, and alcohol softens the liver."

"Why, Doctor Benham. OOOH!"

Grampa did a complete handspring, and faced his audience, triumphant. He said:

"They aren't many as fit with General Grant that can do that."

Rebecca patted his hair into place, adjusted the lapels of his blue jacket, smoothed his whiskers, and returned to his pocket the huge gold watch which hung on a cable of a gold chain. Grampa looked around and said:

"It don't ever seem's if a feller could get old enough to get away from wimmen folks a pawin' of him. They begin before he knows anythin', and keep right on from the cradle to the grave. Anybody'd think I was a six-year-old."

Dr. Benham, head shaking with enjoyment, said:

"You ought to've stayed a bachelor like me, Ezry."

"The girls wouldn't let me," Grampa retorted with a cackle.

Elvira Snow, white hair done in a scanty bun on the back of her neck, and dressed in black for the husband she had lost thirty-five years before, clicked false teeth into position, thrust her chin forward and said shrilly:

"Sam Benham. You may be a bachelor, but there's plenty of women still pawin' over you. Don't tell me. I haven't known you all these years for nothin'."

Dr. Benham put his arm on Mrs. Snow's generous waist. He couldn't possibly have gotten it around. He said:

"Remember when you kicked me in the pants when we were slidin' on Moss's Hill, Elviry! I must've been fifteen then."

Mrs. Snow laughed shrilly and said:

"You bet I do, and I'll kick you again if you get too fresh, Sam."

Everybody laughed. He kissed her withered cheek. She pushed him away. Sam said:

"Elviry is the only girl I ever loved. And that's as near as I ever got."

"How you do talk, Sam," Elvira said. "You always was the greatest talker in the county."

Sam's head bobbed happily. He said:

"Well, Elviry, anyway, I've got you to thank that I've lived this long without any petticoat government. And I don't know but what I might have done different and not been so independent."

Elvira sniffed and exclaimed:

"Independent! That Bridget, your cook, makes you walk a chalk line, Sam Benham, and everybody in town knows it."

Elvira looked around and laughed so hard that her protuberant abdomen, which made her look perpetually in the family way, wobbled up and down. She had been the prettiest girl in the countryside in her day, and Sam Benham and Thornton Snow had been her chief suitors. Thornton had died after two years of married life, leaving her a widow, more beautiful than ever. Many expected that she would marry again. There were those who said that the reason she had kept in mourning all these years and had not married was fear of adverse comment. But those who knew Elvira knew that she was at bottom a very simple, old-fashioned Christian soul, who believed her Bible, and her particular burning brand of religion from "a" to "izzard." And this code of hers included a belief that when a woman and a man married they not only became one in body, but also in soul, and that no matter what their fate might be in this life, a glorious eternity of never-ending love awaited them in the life to come.

Dr. Benham seldom went to church, and was known as somewhat of a skeptic. But deep down in Dr. Benham, and in many other men and women of the community, was this same glowing belief. Dr. Benham was so sensitive to this spiritual feeling in Elvira that he never in all the years that followed her husband's death suggested marriage to her. And she didn't appreciate it. Why should she? Sam was of the same sort of stock as herself. He ate three meals a day, and went to bed at night. He knew what was proper. He knew fundamental truths, and how to act about them.

But Elvira, and one or two others of the same sort, were none of your mooning-around, long-faced widows. They were full of innocent vinegar and pepper. Their laughs were loudest, and their good deeds in church and charity work were softest. They were in their element at strawberry festivals, rummage sales, the Y.W.C.A., church work, and just a-settin', and a-talkin', and a-laughin'.

Si Brockaway, who dressed for the wedding, just as he dressed for funerals and political speeches for the Republican ticket—that is, merely by unbuttoning his waistcoat, turning it in, and exposing the hard bosom of his everyday shirt—said:

"Bring on that bride and groom. By cracky. There's a young feller with sense. Best filly in these parts since Hector was a pup."

His grandson, Howard, most elegant in tailored clothes from Boston, said:

"Shh! Grandfather."

"I won't be shushed," old Si said, so that everybody could hear, much to the embarrassment of his grandson.

Old Si laughed a shrill, high falsetto. He exclaimed:

"I like you young chicks tellin' an old cock like me to shush. Why, if you'd had half the git-up and git of a real Brockaway, you'da married her yourself."

Howard flushed and whispered:

"Aw, for Pete's sake, keep still, won't you, Grampa?"

"That sounds more like it," Old Si said. "Just remember, young feller, that those airs you get yourself when you go away to college don't mean nothin' to me. I been there too—on'y it didn't take much."

He tossed his head back, banged his cane on the floor, and nearly strangled, laughing and coughing.

The wedding was in the parlor, at twelve o'clock, the hour set by Rebecca, who said:

"In the long run it is easier to do things right than wrong."

Alonzo wore a new Prince Albert and striped trousers. He had a fresh haircut, and was shaved around the neck. Alonzo didn't have much faith in clippers, and liked the smooth feeling the razor gave his skin.

His big body and head towered over most. His laugh rang out loudest. Alonzo certainly made no secret of his love for Ann. His dark eyes, full of fire, were on her through the ceremony, which was performed by the Reverend Joshua Hazen.

Joshua Hazen was a tall, gaunt man with the head of an archangel, the face of a saint, the voice of a mellow bell, and the fire of a zealot. He truly felt that he was called to preach the gospel, and had refused many offers to go to great churches in order to remain in Eastham, whence his fame had gone over the land. As Dr. Benham said:

"No finer man than Doctor Hazen ever walked the earth."

Rebecca said:

"There are those who think that Doctor Hazen is too harsh in his religion, but there aren't any that don't admire the purity of his life and the high honor of his character."

Even old Si Brockaway, who was an agnostic, and was believed to be an atheist, and loved scandals about clergymen, and who told about absconders who were active Christians, said:

"Doctor Hazen is different. He's a real man."

Voices murmured as Ann, accompanied by Marion, and Alonzo, accompanied by Dr. Dick Bedford, of New York, his roommate in college, walked into the parlor. They said:

"He's nervous."

"Doesn't she look sweet?"

"Look at him sweat."

"Shhh!"

"I didn't know Annie was so pretty."

"Handsome couple."

"Brainy."

"They say he can operate. . . ."

"Shhh."

"Wouldn't want to marry a doctor . . ."

"Women after doctors . . ."

"Shhh."

Smell of roses, rustle of silk, murmur of voices, sniffles of women, creaking of men's new shoes, hard breathings of those sitting unaccustomedly quiet. Dr. Hazen's beautiful voice said:

"Man and wife. Now kiss each other."

Alonzo and Ann kissed. Rebecca, with wet eyes, kissed Alonzo and said:

"Now I have a son to love."

Clarence kissed Ann and said:

"This is the happiest day of my life."

Kisses, handshakes, and congratulations surrounded the bride and groom and hemmed them in. Si Brockaway was saying:

"Git outa my way, consarn ye. I've got to git to kiss the bride."

When he started to kiss her on the cheek, Ann kissed him on the mouth. Si opened his mouth, and his false teeth dropped, and he exclaimed:

"That's the best present I ever got from a woman."

Howard Brockaway kissed Ann on the cheek, and shook hands with Alonzo. Howard tried to look sad. He was slim, and handsome, and his big-city-made clothes didn't have the box-like appearance of Alonzo's, but Ann secretly thought he was greatly inferior to Alonzo. Alonzo was so big, and confident, and open. There was nothing weak, or secretive, or nasty about him. He bellowed like a bull at times, and at no time could he be called restrained, but he lived his life in the open. He was old-fashioned and considered love sacred and the man the head of the family. Well, that suited her. She wished . . .

They started for Canada on their honeymoon, but a telegram recalled Alonzo, so that three days after their marriage

Alonzo carried Ann across the threshold of their new home, the old Charlie Brown place.

Alonzo kissed Ann and dropped her to her feet in the living room downstairs. A slab-sided female figure in gingham apron appeared in the door. Ann exclaimed:

"Vina!"

Vina said:

"Miss Annie."

Ann went to Vina and kissed her, and Vina's cheeks flamed crimson. She said to Alonzo:

"Miss Annie always was like my own."

Alonzo nodded, hugely pleased. He kissed Ann again and said:

"I got Vina back from over at Constable for you. I thought you'd like to begin housekeeping with somebody you knew."

He put on his hat and said:

"Well, Ann, I've got to be getting along."

He kissed her hurriedly and went out. After the front door slammed behind him, Vina said:

"It's too bad your honeymoon trip had to be ended."

Ann smiled and began to take off her hat. She said:

"My husband is a doctor, Vina, and his patients come first."

Vina shrugged her shoulders and replied:

"I know he's a doctor, Miss Annie, but before he was a doctor people got along without him; and after he's dead people will get along without him, and even a doctor can only have one honeymoon in his life."

Vina shook her head, and picked up a suitcase. Ann laughed, and lifted a handbag. She said:

"You don't know how glad I am to have you with me, Vina. It was one of the pleasantest surprises of all."

Chapter Fourteen

ALONZO'S INCOME was small, but he and Ann were careful about spending money in every way except one. He insisted on enough food on the table to have kept a family three times the size. He wanted lamb chops for breakfast, a roast at noon, and a steak at night. Ann said:

"I never heard of anything like it, Doctor. Porterhouse steaks, chops and roasts, and you won't let us ever serve anything warmed-over."

"If we don't do anything else, Ann, we'll have good meat," Alonzo asserted.

"But we owe Mr. Cooper a hundred and eighty dollars now."

He lifted her high in air, and said:

"Don't you worry about it. Now that I'm married I'm working twice as hard."

They both went to the First Church on Sunday mornings, where they had a pew six rows from the front. Alonzo sat awkwardly beside his wife, her head coming to his shoulder. He twitched, and turned, and fidgeted, and she soothed him. He hated to sit quiet through the twenty-minute prayers.

Alonzo came home and found Ann housecleaning, skirts tucked up and arms bare. He tickled her, and she screamed and ran. He smacked her hip, and she ran faster, shrieking with laughter. Suddenly she ran through the front door, and out into the street, Alonzo after her. He caught her, hoisted her to his shoulder and ran back into the house with her. Mrs. Baldwin said:

"Did you know Doctor West came home drunk yesterday afternoon, and chased that poor wife of his all around, and finally when she ran out into the street half naked he caught her and carried her in again. I guess such shenannigans won't get him very far in Eastham."

Ann persuaded Alonzo to go to a harvest dance in Long Falls that fall. Howard Brockaway was there with Marion, and he danced two dances with Ann. He said:

"It's wonderful to dance with you again."

George E. Burch, proprietor of the Eastham Hotel, danced with Ann. He was a foppish man of fifty, with iron-gray hair worn long and curled and perfumed, and a waist which looked as if it might have the benefit of corsets. He hopped when he danced. He said to Ann:

"You are the most beautiful woman in our part of the state, Mrs. West."

Alonzo, waiting near by, stepped up. Burch said:

"Hello, Doctor. I was just telling your wife that she is the most beautiful woman in this part of the state."

"I heard you, Mr. Burch," Alonzo said. "I think she's the most beautiful woman in the world."

He offered Ann his arm and said:

"Come on and let's go home, Ann."

On the way home, Ann said:

"Why did you leave so suddenly, Doctor?"

Alonzo said:

"I'm not going to have you dancing with all those old rakes, holding you up against them."

"Why, you're jealous."

"Call it jealousy if you want to," Alonzo said. "But no wife of mine is going to be ogled at and pawed over by a lot of men whose dirty minds I know too much about."

For the first two or three months Alonzo arrived home on time for dinner at noon, and supper at six o'clock, but soon he began to be late. He said:

"Don't wait for me, Ann. Just keep my food hot on a plate in the oven, and I'll eat when I can."

Ann often ate alone.

She soon found out that the only reading Alonzo cared for was contained in medical books and periodicals. He stopped going to church Sunday mornings, and couldn't be dragged to a lecture. When a dance was about to be given in the Eastham Hotel she suggested that they go, and he said:

"You'd better stay home, Ann."

Ann bathed herself at least once a day, and sometimes twice a day, but Alonzo was shy of general baths. He washed his face and neck and hands often, scrubbed his feet in a basin two or three times a week, and took a bath once a week if Ann insisted.

It was a custom of his not to shave himself, but to go to Joe Bell's Barber Shop in Eastham, lie back in the chair and listen to the male gossip while he was lathered and scraped with the razor. He had a thick, ruddy beard, but he always said to Joe:

"Two days under the skin, Joe."

And Joe would shave against the grain, testing the surface with trained fingertips, until he had Alonzo's skin as nearly like silk as such a hide might be.

Alonzo and Dr. Benham settled what the weather was going to be that day, and the next, in Joe Bell's. Alonzo had a barometer just like Dr. Benham's, and like him he checked thermometer, barometer, wind direction and appearance of the sky every morning. They were known as the two best weather prophets in Eastham, with Dr. Benham having slightly the better reputation.

From Dr. Benham, also, Alonzo derived his life-long habit of having a watch that kept deadly accurate time. Dr. Benham used to say:

"In one minute and twenty seconds the Montrealer will go past the mill."

Alonzo would say:

"In one minute and eighteen seconds, Doctor."

And they would sit gravely with watches in hand to test the accuracy of their timepieces, and of the crack train.

Alonzo made long visits on his patients, particularly the Kinneys when they were in town, and the Brockaways. Ann drove him in the winter, and used to sit outside of the Kinneys when the mercury was below the zero mark in the tube, feeling that in another moment she would freeze into a solid block of ice.

She could visualize Alonzo in there smoking one of Otis Kinney's fifty-cent Havana cigars, telling stories, and laughing, and the Kinneys laughing with him. Probably they were in the big library with six-foot logs flaming in the vast fireplace. He would stay there for two hours, and come out smiling cheerfully, a fresh cigar glowing in his mouth, warmth exuding from his person and garments. He'd grin and ask:

"A little chilly, Ann?"

She'd say:

"It isn't hot."

And he would laugh, the ring of it echoing across the snow. Then he would kiss her, and sniff hard at her rosy cheeks, and say:

"There's no perfume like it in the world, Ann."

He would stay in Brockaways for an hour or so, too. And it seemed so silly to drive him there because the Brockaways lived less than a quarter of a mile from Dr. West's house and office. But Alonzo never walked when he could ride, and he liked company while he rode. That is, he liked someone to whom he could talk.

In the Brockaways' he visited in the kitchen on cold nights. The window panes of that room glowed warmly yellow against the white, gritty snow stretched out under a steel cold sky in which were a frigid moon and a sprinkling of icicle stars. A wind out of the north blew hard particles of the snow into crevices in Ann's clothing and down her neck. And she sat there and shivered, and knew that Alonzo was sitting by the stove, smoking a cigar while Si Brockaway sucked his pipe. Minnie Brockaway served Alonzo coffee and doughnuts. She was famous for her doughnuts.

Ann never even considered suggesting to Alonzo that she go into one of these homes on extra cold days and get warmed. She understood Alonzo's point of view. When he was on official business there shouldn't be the slightest touch of the social about it. Ann was merely a means of making the visiting more comfortable for him. She sat in the cold for three or four hours so that he would be saved lonesomeness for five minutes and the annoyance of tying his horse a half-dozen times.

Alonzo was not unthoughtful of Ann's comfort. She had a warm coat, interlined with wool, and he always wrapped her in a woolen blanket, being sure that her feet were snugly covered, and then a Buffalo robe was drawn over the outside.

Both Alonzo and Ann were born and grew up under the tradition that whatever was bought or made should "last a lifetime."

Ann was careful that no cotton was in her woolens or in her linens. The best food obtainable was in her pantry, and with the help of Rebecca and Vina her storeroom in the cellar was destined to be a mine of preserves—pickled sweet apples, homemade ketchup, picklelili, pickled green tomatoes, mince meat, homemade grape juice, blackberry and elderberry wine, and preserved pears, peaches, plums, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and cherries, and jellies of all kinds, quince and crabapple, and grape and wild grape, and apple and strawberry preserves, and pickled watermelon rind.

Alonzo was made miserable if there were not mountains of food on his table. He wanted two steaks where one would have been too much, and six pies where there was no chance in the world that they could be eaten. He said:

"Anything I hate is to think there might not be enough to eat."

He grew stouter almost visibly. He and Ann had pillow fights in the morning, and he chased her over the upper floor of the house so that it trembled and shook and Vina down in the kitchen said:

"Lawsa mercy on us."

Alonzo was boyish about his love-making and his bedroom play, but he was far older than his years in his attitude toward the world. He invited no masculine friends to the house. His days were given up to making calls and awaiting visitors in his office.

In June, 1911, one year after her marriage, Ann's first baby was born. He was a boy, and she named him Samuel after Dr. Benham. Sam weighed eight pounds and six ounces at birth, proved he had a pair of lungs worth considering and an appetite second to none.

However, Ann had so much milk, rich and nourishing, that she was able not only to satisfy the enormous demands of young Sam, but also to provide nourishment for Sarah Green's newborn baby, Grace Helen. Sarah Green was the wife of Arnold Green, a shiftless farmer, who was tubercular, and unsuccessful, and morose.

Arnold was a thin man, with a long head of thin fair hair, a bulging forehead, wrinkled but not with thought, light blue eyes, a straight nose, large at the nostrils, a bushy blond mustache, no chin worth mentioning, a concavity where his chest should have been, a little bulge outward just beneath his umbilicus, and if his knees didn't knock they looked as if they did.

Sarah was tired and blonde, too, having had six children in about seven years. Her wispy light hair, always straggling, was drawn back as tight as possible from her tightly screwed-up face. Her voice was a whine. Her breasts were flabby and empty. Her body was bony.

Dirt appeared around their home where grass should have been. Inside it always looked like moving day. Dirty dishes usually were in the sink and on the table in the kitchen. They never ate in the dining room, and they never ate much. Alonzo said:

"I'm sorry for Sarah. She has migraine added to all the rest of her troubles, and has infected tonsils which she won't part with. You know, when she gets time she goes up in her bedroom and locks the door and writes a poem. Sells it to the magazines. They say it's good poetry."

"It is," Ann said. "Whatever she saw in Arnold Green, I can't see."

"I guess he was nice enough before they were married, and right after his father died and left him the farm and some life insurance. He was the best-dressed, best-talking young man in Eastham."

Ann loved to nurse the two babies. Upon the insistence of her husband she drank a bottle of Bass's Ale with her dinner, so that her milk would be rich and plentiful. He sat and watched the babies snuffling and sucking at her lovely breasts, swollen with milk. He said:

"Doctor Benham says there's no more beautiful sight in the world than a young mother feeding her baby, and darned if I don't think he's right."

He kissed Ann on the forehead, and she smiled up at him. Her face looked sweeter and softer, and there was a gentle importance and loving knowingness about her as she handled the babies. Alonzo said:

"You are building up good constitutions in those two little people."

Ann ran the house, and nursed the two babies, and answered the telephone. Alonzo gulped his dinner, veins standing out on his forehead, which was white in contrast to his weather-beaten cheeks. He sat hunched over with his nose in the plate, pushed vegetables onto his fork with his thumb, and washed down each huge mouthful with a gulp of water. The instant he was through he belched, arose, and rushed out again, to look after his patients. He repeated this process for supper.

He performed an appendicitis operation in emergency on Lucy Cullom, in Benrow, ten miles from Eastham. He turned the kitchen into an impromptu surgery and got out the appendix, which was in bad shape, gangrenous. He dug a half-pint of gall stones out of Si Brockaway, and Si recovered. He began to get many operative cases which formerly had gone to specialists in Boston and New York.

Just as the word began to spread that Dr. West was a butcher, and that if he looked at you, it meant an operation, the case of Willie Lester came up. Willie Lester had an infected leg. The family had stock in the mills controlled by Otis Kinney, and old Mrs. J. Robert Lester, Willie's mother, was said to be worth two millions. They had Dr. Herbert up from the Falls, and Dr. Herbert said the leg would have to be amputated. He called three other doctors in consultation, and the opinion was unanimous that the leg would have to come off.

Then Mrs. Otis Kinney, who was a friend of Mrs. Lester and a nosey old lady in a kindly way, said:

"You've simply got to have my doctor, Doctor West, see Willie before anything is done."

"Delay may be fatal," Dr. Herbert said.

Alonzo finally was called. He said:

"There's no need of taking off the leg. It can be saved."

Old Dr. Benham, who looked on with bobbing head, said:

"I've saved legs just as bad in my time."

Willie recovered, with two legs instead of one. And Alonzo, almost overnight, as it seemed, became the great medical-surgical figure of the surrounding country.

Sam was two years old when Alonzo, Jr., was born. Ann looked up from the red, wrinkled mite in her bosom and said to

Alonzo at the bedside:

"It's nice to have a baby now and then, Doctor. It gives me a chance to get acquainted with you."

Alonzo looked at Dr. Benham, who had officiated at the birth of his son, and said:

"I'm home all I can be."

Ann smiled and said:

"My husband is beginning to be a complete stranger, Doctor Benham. Little Sam doesn't know his father as well as he knows the butcher or the ice man."

"A successful doctor is always on the go," Dr. Benham said. "But Alonzo should have some diversion."

Alonzo grinned and said:

"I've got bills to pay, a family to support, and children to educate."

"But you could go to a dance, or a lecture, or the theatre, or read a book once in a while," Ann said.

Alonzo shrugged impatiently and looked at his watch.

"I've got to run along, Ann," he said. "The baby is wonderful and healthy, and you are fine, and I'm proud of you both."

He leaned over and kissed Ann on the forehead. Out in the hall he said to Dr. Benham:

"Nobody seems to understand that my work is all I care about," he said. "I don't really enjoy anything except practicing my profession."

Dr. Benham lighted a cigar and tossed the match on the floor. He said in his calm voice:

"I'm not going to give you any advice, Alonzo. You won't live to be very old, and you'll be sclerotic. You're old already before your time."

"I want to drop in my boots, working," Alonzo said. "Just give me a great big apoplexy, and that's all I want. I don't care about living too long."

Alonzo stopped smoking cigars during the day. Only after his office hours at night he consumed enormous quantities of long, light yellow, deadly strong, Connecticut Valley cigars. He said:

"These are nice mild cigars."

His favorite rendezvous after evening office hours was George Jenks's Drug Store. He and George Jenks and Ralph Holton, George's chief clerk, were great friends. They used to sit in the back, in the prescription department, and talk, mostly baseball and trotting horse racing. But their comments on the news of the day and on the business situation of the moment were shrewd and incisive.

Dr. Benham was the dean of the gathering. His holdings of stock were small, but they were choice. He couldn't have much of anything in the way of property because he never sent out bills and loaned money to anyone who asked for it.

George Jenks and Alonzo were of a different temperament. George was a shrewd business man, and as soon as Alonzo entered practice he made George his chief adviser. George said:

"When you start making one hundred dollars a week don't change your scale of living. Invest your money in real estate, and in good securities."

Alonzo had been married only three years when he bought the Pease Block. He paid three thousand dollars in cash, owed a note for five thousand dollars, and a mortgage for sixteen thousand. He said to Ann:

"I couldn't have done it except for George Jenks. He's about the best friend I've got."

Alonzo sent out bills regularly every month, which was an innovation. The practice always had been to send out bills every six months or forget to send them at all. He collected, in advance, fees for operations on patients whom he didn't know or else he did them frankly for nothing. He did a great amount of charity work, and did it with love and enthusiasm, but he charged high fees to those who could afford it. Otis Kinney said to him one day:

"You know, I always have given Doctor Benham a Christmas present of five hundred dollars. You'll never get a Christmas present from me, Doctor."

"I don't want one," Alonzo said. "My Christmas presents from you are taken care of in your bill."

This tickled Otis Kinney, who was a shrewd business man and knew how to make a five-cent piece sit up and talk. There was no waste around his house or his business. He went into the kitchen, and the barns, and into the laundry to see that he was getting the number of hours of work for which he was paying. One day he said to Kitty Regan, the laundress:

"I've been checking up on you, Kitty. I've been paying you for eight hours work a day. You've been coming to work a half-hour late every morning, and spending an extra half-hour at lunch. After this I'll pay you for the seven hours you seem to want to work."

"And him a multi-millionaire," Kitty said when she told the story to Vina.

"But Kitty respects him," Vina said to Ann immediately afterwards. "It's people like Mr. Kinney that know how to run people that work for them."

After a week Otis Kinney restored the original pay. But he said to Kitty:

"I like to pay the highest wages but I expect to get the best work."

"It beats all how a man that runs mills, and banks, and is on the boards of directors of railroads and steamship companies, can find time to monkey with his household help," Si Brockaway said.

Otis Kinney paid Alonzo's bills promptly, and as Otis and Mrs. Kinney both liked to have Alonzo drop in twice a day, these bills amounted to more in a year than Dr. Benham ever had received in two years from his entire practice. Dr. Benham said to Ann one day:

"Alonzo certainly is a go-getter. There was a woman in the office the other day, a Polish woman. When she was going out she said to Alonzo:

"'Doctor, how much is it?'

"'Alonzo said:

"'Two dollars.'"

"The woman gave him a five-dollar bill, and Alonzo put it in his pocket, and held the door open for her. The woman waited a minute, and then said how about some change, and Alonzo said:

"'That's all right. You'll be in again!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Dr. Benham said. "What do you think of that for a husband?"

Ann was expecting another baby. She went to bed at ten or eleven o'clock, tired from her day of overseeing the housework, mending, darning, shopping, and making charity visits and a few social calls. Alonzo seldom came home before midnight. Sometimes he didn't get in until three or four o'clock in the morning.

When Ann arose to look after the children he still was snoring. She had breakfast at eight. He gulped coffee and chops and wheat cakes, and a doughnut or two, and perhaps some cereal and bananas and popovers or johnny cake, between nine and ten, gave her a coffeeish, butterish kiss, and rushed out. He often said to Ann:

"I don't know what I'd do without you."

Ann often said to her babies:

"I don't know what I'd do without you."

Her third baby was a girl. They named her Martha Naomi after Alonzo's mother and Ann's mother. She was a healthy little girl, with a good appetite, and Ann's supply of milk was plentiful. Martha Naomi suckled and grew fat and rosy.

Alonzo, Jr., was sixteen months old when his sister was born, on February 11, 1915, and he kicked at his sister whenever he got the chance. He didn't like her. He still preferred the breast to other food, and Ann, from her plenitude, good naturedly gave him her breast too. Dr. Benham, who dropped in during feeding time one day, said:

"If there's anything in the theory that mother's milk makes exceptional constitutions, your children would have 'em, Annie. How long are you going to be a cow?"

Ann smiled, looking down at the two dark heads. She said:

"I always wanted babies ever since I was a little girl, but I never imagined how wonderful they are until I had them. I have so much milk I'd like to nurse them until they were six or seven as I've been told the ancient Egyptians did."

Dr. Benham shook his head, and said:

"I wouldn't go beyond the first year, if it includes the summer, Annie. Wean 'em, and keep 'em weaned."

"I feel I am giving them strength," Ann said. "I want them to have all the resistance that is possible."

Mrs. Butler, who lived across the street, with an old, fat pug dog and a little fat husband—all three of them wheezed and looked alike—stopped in to see Ann one afternoon. She had small black eyes in a fat, white face, and a mouth that looked as if it loved food and conversation. She said:

"Aren't the children beautiful, and so healthy looking! Did you hear of the baby over in the Falls dying of scarlet fever day before yesterday? I see the doctor didn't get home until two o'clock this morning after driving that blonde nurse from Boston over to Bascombe. Everybody is talking about them, but, of course, I know that it is professional business."

Ann looked up from her babies and said:

"It's so sweet of you to take such an interest in our affairs, Mrs. Butler."

Mrs. Butler looked hard at Ann and said:

"Naturally, lots of people think it's rather strange that Doctor West should always be driving a good-looking blonde nurse instead of one of the older and more experienced nurses."

"I should think that was his business and nobody else's business," Ann said, taking her breasts from her babies.

She buttoned up her waist, laid the babies down, and arose, facing Mrs. Butler. She said:

"Mrs. Butler, I have perfect faith in my husband, and I don't care to hear any stories which aren't pleasant about him or about any one else from anybody in this town."

Ann walked toward the door, looking back at Mrs. Butler:

"Now, if you'll please excuse me—I have so many things I must attend to."

Mrs. Butler bristled; and said:

"Why, Mrs. West, I—"

"Please excuse me, Mrs. Butler," Ann said. "I have so much work to do."

Mrs. Butler walked across the street looking like a hen that had just been whirled around the wheels of a passing vehicle. She said to her husband:

"I called on that young Mrs. West just now, and she was impertinent to me. Why! I've never been talked to like that in my life."

Mr. Butler, wise from long experience, held his peace. His wife said:

"I just spoke to her for her own good about her husband driving around nights with that blonde nurse. I could have told her about him and that silly young Mrs. Edgar Newton, too, but I didn't. And the way she snapped me up. Well, she'll see."

Ann said nothing to Alonzo, but she was awake when he arrived home at three o'clock that morning. She closed her eyes while he undressed. He always undressed the same way. He draped his jacket and waistcoat over the back of a chair next the bed. He put his shoes in front of the chair, and his trousers, neatly folded, over the seat. Then he threw his underwear and shirt, from which he had extracted the studs, into the white wicker soiled clothes basket. He took a fresh shirt and collar from a dresser drawer. He put studs in the shirt, and laid it, with the collar and a fresh tie, on his trousers. He was wearing white wash ties at this period, and wore a fresh one every day. He added a clean pair of socks to the pile, went to the bathroom, and returned and climbed gently into bed. Now he was ready to dress about as fast as a fireman. And he had to dress frequently during the night because all his life Alonzo was a doctor who answered all calls, from friend and stranger, from rich and poor, for better or for worse, in sunshine and blizzard, whether he himself were sick or well. That was one of his legacies from Dr. Benham. The pair of them would go around during an epidemic of la grippe with temperatures running higher than any of their patients.

Ann breathed regularly until Alonzo snored, and then she slipped quietly out of bed and went into the nursery. The children were sleeping quietly. She picked up a book and went into the living room and turned on a light and began to read. She sat there until the babies awakened at six-thirty. Then she went in to them.

Chapter Fifteen

ANN AND Alonzo had been married ten years in June, 1921. Sam was nine; Alonzo, Jr., was seven, and Martha Naomi was five and one-half years old, when Anne had another girl baby. She was called Caroline.

The other children were like their father and mother, with dark brown hair and dark eyes, but with white skins. Caroline was a blonde with curling hair like flax, great blue eyes, and a thin, delicate skin through which tiny blue veins showed like fairy markings on fairy vellum. Alonzo said:

"Caroline is a throwback to her greatgrandmother Hackett on my mother's side. There is a tradition that my grandmother West told me that every three or four generations there is a perfect blonde born into our family."

Ann wrote in her baby book:

"*My darling little Caroline*:

"*I love all my children, but you have a peculiar hold on my affections because you are so delicate. Where they were always little gluttons you were very dainty. Where they were strong and vigorous and howled at the top of their lungs you were quiet, and seldom cried. You used to lie so quietly and look up at me from your big blue eyes, and smile so lovingly.*

"*You were a little bundle of love from the very first. You couldn't be hugged, or hug me enough. And you worshipped your father. I would like to make these letters I am writing to you now much more detailed and accurate so that when you read them when you are grown up you will be able to know yourself as you were when you were a tiny baby. . . .*"

Again Ann wrote:

"*My dearest, sweetest, girlie lamb*:

"*While I am writing to you tonight you are lying snugly asleep in your little crib. You love your crib when you are tired.*

"*Your brothers and sisters who love you very much have been playing with you, which they like to do, and you have a wonderful time with them. You are so full of love. . . .*

"*You are sleeping now with your doll, Nannie. You hold out your little arms for her every night, and really ask for her very plainly indeed.*

"*Today you tried to talk into the telephone. You made sounds that you thought were conversation, and looked up at me and smiled. I played the piano for you. You love that, and the phonograph, and I think you will be very musical when you grow up.*

"*As I sit here writing to you, the wish comes into my heart like a prayer that you may have a great many years of happiness and usefulness in this great world where God has sent you . . .*"

Caroline was building blocks when she was two years old, while her mother and her Uncle Clarence and Aunt Rebecca watched. The nursery faced to the south, and the sun shone on the lovely child, seriously intent on her task. She laid one block on top of another, with a touch so delicate that none of the supporting blocks quivered. Rebecca whispered:

"I never saw such a child, so sweet, so talented, so loving. She really is too beautiful."

"Don't say that, Aunt Rebecca," Ann murmured.

Clarence laughed and said:

"Gosh! None of the other kids can build blocks half as high as the baby."

On the way home in their automobile, Rebecca said to Clarence:

"It is a terrible thing to say, Clarence, but I have a fear for Caroline. She is more like an angel than a child."

Clarence, driving carefully, continued to look straight ahead as he replied:

"She's the sweetest mite of humanity I ever saw. Seems as if I couldn't stand it to even think of her being unhappy."

Caroline was amazingly brilliant, and talked like a little magpie when she was little more than two. One night in July, she said to her mother:

"If you would take off the blanket I would be very much obliged, mother."

Right after that Sam called from his room, and Ann went in. Sam said:

"I feel so sick."

Ann felt his forehead. He had a fever. She went to the telephone and began to call numbers. She reached Alonzo at the Kinneys. He came home at the limit of speed of his fast car. He turned from the bed to Ann and said:

"It's all right. We'll have him well in a jiffy."

He smoothed Sam's forehead, and petted his hand. Ann followed Alonzo from the room. His face was drawn and serious. She asked:

"What is it?"

He said:

"Meningitis. I'll get nurses."

"Could you get Miss Dolly?"

"I'll try."

Miss Dolly came. There were streaks of gray in her smoothly coiffed black hair, but her eyes still were the deep blue of the sea, her cheeks still were pink, and her movements quick but easy and efficient, but softly so. Ann said:

"I don't think I ever have been as glad to see anybody as I am to see you, Miss Dolly."

"Nothing could have kept me from coming, Annie," Miss Dolly said.

Dr. Benham came, and doctors from the city. In two days all the children were ill. Sam, Junior, Martha, and Caroline. Miss Ryan, another nurse, a heroic crusader against death, came to the house.

Miss Ryan was a difficult nurse for doctors to handle. She disliked soft berths, yet she was such a remarkable nurse that people with comfortable diseases, or no disease at all, wanted her. She felt that she wasn't earning her salt unless she was at grips with Death.

Miss Dolly and Miss Ryan worked like well-oiled machines. They never took a moment off, really. They dozed in their clothes. They changed their uniforms, and took baths, and ate, but they always were on the job.

Only upon their insistence did Ann bathe or change, or eat, or try to sleep. It rested her to see Dr. Benham, older and grayer, and more stooped than ever, but as solid as a rock. And she was glad of Alonzo. He might have his faults, but he was a knight in shining armor when he entered a sick room. There he had no human attributes, but emerged as a paladin, calm, and shedding calmness, sure of himself, and assuring others, poised, and bringing poise.

Sam died on the fifth day—meningitis and uremia.

Caroline lay quietly in her crib, her blue eyes big, her cheeks pale, the blue veins showing even more clearly through her delicate white skin. Rebecca met Clarence at the door when he came home that night. Clarence got one look at her and took her in his arms She whispered:

"Caroline—has—gone back to Heaven."

He stood, his throat working, holding his wife in his arms. After a few minutes, he said:

"How is Annie taking it?"

She wiped her eyes and said:

"You should know how she is. She hasn't shed a tear. She's working with the nurses now over Junior and Martha. They are awfully sick, with uremia and meningitis."

"She's an old Roman," Clarence said.

Rebecca sniffled a bit, and wiped her eyes again. She said:

"I'm afraid for her. It would be so much better if she'd just break down and cry."

"I guess she ain't the kind that breaks," Clarence said.

Ann went through the simple funerals for her children, Sam first, and then Caroline. She rode with Alonzo to the cemetery. Rain was falling. Dr. Hazen's voice said:

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. . . ."

The funeral was private but everybody knew them, and many were present, tears streaming from eyes and sobs breaking from overstrained lungs. But Alonzo stood even more erect than usual, his face as hard as the gravestones, and as unmoved. And beside him, no small figure herself, but dwarfed by his bulk, was Ann, in a black and white dress, and a black and white hat, a green raincoat, and a green umbrella, face white but eyes tearless. She smiled when she greeted friends.

Mrs. Otis Kinney said when she reached home:

"I never saw a woman with the control of that Mrs. West. I must see more of her."

"She's a chip of granite out of the old New England hills," her husband replied.

Junior and Martha recovered. While they were convalescing, Alonzo came home one afternoon and bellowed from the front hall:

"Ann. Oh, Ann."

"Here I am," Ann called from the upstairs sitting room, where she was hemstitching sheets.

Alonzo trudged up the stairs. Ann met him at the top. She said:

"What brings you home at this hour?"

Alonzo never came home in the afternoon. He was at his office from two until nearly four usually, and then made calls until six, when he went home to dinner, for the Wests had changed their system of meals from dinner at noon to lunch. Alonzo said:

"I've bought the Penfield place."

Ann stared at him a moment. She said:

"But that must have been expensive."

Alonzo said:

"Look, Ann."

He took from his inside pocket a brown leather wallet, and from the wallet he extracted a yellow package, and handed it to her. She held the packet and looked at it. She exclaimed:

"Thousand-dollar bills! Where . . . ?"

He grinned, and nodded. He said:

"Eighteen of 'em. That's what I'm paying for the Penfield place. They wanted twenty-five thousand at first, but I held out for eighteen thousand in cash."

Ann counted the bills, and Alonzo, watching, said:

"I'd never held a thousand-dollar bill in my hand before myself. And there's eighteen of 'em."

Ann handed them back, and stood on tiptoe and put her arms around Alonzo's neck, and kissed him. He put his arms around her and kissed her. He said:

"You're a wonderful woman, Ann. You may not think I appreciate you sometimes, but I want you to know there isn't another woman in the world that I think can hold a candle to you."

Ann said:

"Do you know something, Alonzo?"

He shook his head and grinned.

"Know what?" he asked.

"I didn't love you when I married you, and I've had bad moments since, but I've come to love you, Alonzo, and respect you more than any other man I ever knew."

"You didn't love me?" he said, hurt.

"No, I didn't," Ann said. "I didn't know what love was when we were married. But I've learned what it is. Love must have in it honor and respect and self-sacrifice and character, to be worth the name."

Alonzo frowned, half in jest, and half in earnest. He said:

"That's not very flattering to me, Ann. I loved you from the minute I first saw you when you were a little girl in pigtails. I made up my mind then that I'd marry you or nobody."

"I don't believe it."

"It turned out I was a pretty good picker," Alonzo said.

He kissed her again. She said:

"I know why you bought the house, Alonzo. You bought it because you thought I don't like this house since the children died."

"I know you didn't like it," Alonzo said.

"I never even let myself think it," Ann said.

"Come on," her husband exclaimed, giving her a gentle shove. "Get on your bib and tucker, and let's drive over and look at the new house."

The new house had twenty rooms, and had twenty acres around it, landscaped, and lovely. The house was brick with a colonial porch. Alonzo was reckless about buying new furniture.

"But can you afford it?" Ann asked.

He grinned and petted her back. He said:

"I'm worth about two hundred thousand right now," he said. "I've got fifty thousand in life insurance, and I've got my health."

"I don't see how in the world you ever accumulated so much money," Ann exclaimed.

Alonzo looked seriously at her, and said:

"As a matter of fact, it's been due to the advice of George Jenks. I suppose outside of Dr. Benham he is the best friend I have in the world."

"They both are wonderful men," Ann said.

"George has gone on my notes at the bank," Alonzo said, "and has gone into one or two things with me that Otis Kinney suggested."

“Mr. Kinney’s tips should be valuable.”

“They are,” Alonzo said. “And now, don’t you worry about money. We’ll need two maids, and a nurse maid, and at least two men on this place. And don’t argue about it, but go get ’em.”

Ann shook her head dubiously. She replied:

“I don’t think I would have let you buy it if I’d realized how much it was going to cost to run it.”

Alonzo got Ann a touring car for herself, and she learned to drive. Martha and Junior had ponies.

Clarence said to Rebecca:

“Sometimes I wonder if Alonzo isn’t spending all he makes. The way he lives is a caution.”

“I wouldn’t worry about him,” Rebecca said. “Alonzo’s no fool.”

Chapter Sixteen

MARION MET Ann at the grand central station and they kissed. Marion said:

"Why, you look just like you always did—and I don't believe you use a bit of make-up."

"I use powder," Ann said. "But you look just the same yourself, only a little stouter."

Marion groaned. She said:

"Don't mention it. It doesn't seem as if I could eat anything I really want."

Ann laughed and said:

"I don't mind being a little plump. I always was, you know. Alonzo likes it."

"You always had a lovely figure," Marion said. "And, anyway, it's different in the country."

Ann had what might be termed a statuesque figure. She had gained weight in proportion, but she had a large bust and large hips. She was inordinately proud of her small feet and ankles.

They rode to the Seawell apartment in a taxicab, and there they met Charlie Seawell, Jr., and his Maltese terrier. Charlie was a replica in miniature of his father, but Marion said:

"He doesn't even know there is such a name as Cully."

"Why did you stop with one baby, Marion?" Ann asked.

Marion shrugged her shoulders and said:

"We figured we couldn't afford any more then, and we haven't been able to figure any way to have another since. Think what preparatory school and college costs."

Ann smiled and said:

"I guess the doctor and I never thought of that when we were having babies."

Marion sighed and said:

"Charles would have liked more, but he has no sense when it comes to budgets."

"I never thought of babies in connection with budgets," Ann said.

"You'd have to if you lived in New York," Marion asserted.

Marion was proud of the seven-room apartment, with three bedrooms and three masters' baths. She said:

"Look at the three-way ventilation."

Ann said:

"It's wonderful."

Marion said:

"You don't really mean what you say because you have four sides to your house."

Ann said:

"Sometimes, though, I wish there were four sides to each room. It can be pretty hot in Eastham."

Cully came home, slightly sweaty and slightly soiled as to collar and cuff. Ann said:

"Hello, Cully."

Cully said:

"Hello, Ann, it does me good to see you. But nobody calls me Cully any more. Marion doesn't like it."

Ann's eyes crinkled and she said:

"I think I'm going to kiss you, Cully."

Cully said:

"It always was a suppressed desire of mine to kiss you."

Ann kissed him, and he glanced at Marion, whose lips were pressed together. He said:

"You don't mind, do you, dear?"

"Of course not," she replied. "Why should I?"

Cully took a deep breath and said:

"I saw Tony yesterday."

Marion said:

"You'd better be taking your shower and getting into your dinner clothes."

Ann asked:

"And how was Tony?"

Cully made a face and said:

"Just the same. He hasn't changed. He's always ready to split all he's got with anyone, but he never has anything. I lent—"

Marion faced Cully, grim-eyed. She said:

"I should think I've told you enough times not to waste your money on that man."

Cully said:

"Aw, after all, he was my roommate, and he was a square fella in a row in the old days."

"He always was no good," Marion said.

"He just never grew up, I guess," Cully said, glancing at Ann.

"You run along now and get dressed," Marion said:

"If you'll excuse me then. I'll only be a second."

When he was gone, Marion sighed, and said:

"That Tony is one of the banes of my existence. He's always meeting Charles downtown and eating lunch with him and borrowing money from him."

"Poor Tony," Ann said. "He always had such big ideas and such limited effort."

"He's just no good," Marion said.

They had cocktails before dinner and went to the theatre and then went to a place to eat and drink. Ann said to Marion:

"It's fun to come to New York once in a while but I don't think I would like to live here."

She went out with Charles, Jr., to walk in the park next morning, and at the Ninety-sixth Street entrance on Fifth Avenue a vaguely familiar figure approached, hat in hand. The clothes were well made and pressed, but shabby. The collar was soiled and the soft hat was shapeless, but there was a certain jauntiness, combined with a certain quality that couldn't be called cringingness, but might be called bravado to overcome the feeling of cringingness, that made her heart beat faster.

The slightly bloated face with engorged veins, the loose mouth, the general atmosphere of degeneration and decay, were—Tony. He held out his hand, and said:

"Hello, Ann."

She took the hand, smiled and said:

"Hello, Tony."

He said:

"I didn't know if you'd be glad to see me or not, but I heard from Cully that you were in town and I took a chance."

She said:

"It's perfectly all right, Tony. What are you doing?"

His face assumed a Bryant Park look—the look of one who sits on a bench with a newspaper over one's knees gazing hopelessly into a hopeless future with no desire to expend energy to make the future hopeful. He said:

"I'm not doing anything right now."

Charles, Jr., shied away from him. But Tony walked along. Ann had no feeling at all about him. He might just as well have been a person she never had met. She felt a vague irritation with him, and accused herself of hardness. She thought she should feel sorry, but she didn't.

After a quarter of an hour of vague talk in which nothing of importance was mentioned, he lifted his hat again, and said, rather awkwardly:

"Well, I guess I'll be getting along."

Ann stepped away from Charles, Jr. and impulsively said:

"Can't I lend you some money?"

He drew back, face suddenly more red, and said, with a show of indignation:

"I couldn't take any money from you."

She opened her bag and took out some loose bills, without even noticing their denomination. She said:

"Take them, Tony. It would please me if you did."

"I couldn't," he protested.

"Take them," she said, "and you can send them back to me when you are on your feet again."

He took the bills and stuffed them into his pocket. He said:

"That makes it different, Ann. The first thing I'll do will be to send this back to you. I hate to take it from you, but my landlady is holding my luggage, and I can't get my laundry."

Then emotion clutched at Ann's throat. She thought of the shining figure of a man this blurred etching might have been. She said:

"Goodby, Tony."

He said:

"Goodby, Ann."

He went to the nearest speakeasy and began to get drunk. And when he came to a week later he didn't know whether Ann had given him fifty dollars or five hundred dollars. She had given him three hundred and fifty dollars. He said, whenever anyone would listen:

"Say, I had a swell jane once. You wouldn't believe who she is now. If I told you it'd knock you dead."

Then he'd smack his lips, and straighten out his shoulders and stick out his chest.

When Ann got home Alonzo asked:

"Did you have a good time?"

"All right," she replied, "but I'm glad to be back."

"And I'm glad to have you back," he said.

Chapter Seventeen

Dr. Benham sat on the front porch of the Wests' beach cottage. His hair was white, and his head shook now most of the time. His nose and chin were not as far apart as they might be because he left out his false teeth for comfort's sake.

He wore a yachting cap, a blue jacket and white trousers, and white, rubber-soled shoes. He was thinner than formerly because he was on a diet. He had high blood pressure, diabetes, sugar and albumen, and angina pectoris.

He took vast amounts of medicines. When he had an attack of angina it was nothing for him to pop into his mouth one after another forty or even fifty nitro-glycerine tablets. He would take six different kinds of the strongest laxatives known in double doses, and then take an enema. He hated men nurses, so Miss Dolly was his nurse.

Dr. Benham lowered a pair of ten-power binoculars from his faded old eyes, and balanced them on his shrunken thigh, with hands that wavered. He dug out his watch, and said:

"Miss Dolly, the President Johnston is thirty seconds late passing the Point this morning."

"I wonder what caused that, Doctor?" Miss Dolly asked.

The doctor shook his head, and said:

"I dunno. It's funny, though. You know, they run those big ships just like express trains."

His right hand wavered toward his upper left-hand waistcoat pocket in a gesture acquired through sixty years of habit, but it encountered no long, light-colored cigar. He sighed and said:

"It seems a long time to wait till after dinner for one cigar, Miss Dolly."

She smiled and said:

"That's what Doctor Hartneet said you would have to do."

Dr. Benham scowled ferociously. He said:

"The devil with Doctor Hartneet. I'll bet Alonzo wouldn't order any such fool thing."

He looked at his watch again, and said:

"Alonzo ought to be here any minute now."

A motor horn sounded on the road side of the cottage. Dr. Benham's head shook harder than ever as he beamed triumphantly at Miss Dolly. He said:

"What did I tell you? There he is now."

He restored the watch to his pocket, and, putting trembling hands on the arms of his chair, started to stand up. Miss Dolly put a hand under his armpit. He shook it away and said:

"You leave me alone. There's some life in the old carcass yet."

He was standing when Alonzo, huge, graying, dominant, came onto the porch. Alonzo took his hand, and said:

"How are you, Doctor?"

"I'm fine," Doctor Benham said.

Alonzo took off his Panama, baring his head to the sea breeze which gently lifted his grizzled hair, still shaved in a sharp curved line around his red neck. Alonzo took a deep breath and said:

"That's the first cool breath I've had in a week. It's hot as blazes in Eastham."

Alonzo took out two cigars and offered one to Dr. Benham. Dr. Benham took it quickly and reached into his pocket for a penknife. Miss Dolly made a little face and said:

"Now, Doctor, you know what the orders are about smoking."

Dr. Benham made an impatient gesture, and exclaimed pettishly:

"Those are fool orders anyway. Didn't Alonzo give me the cigar? He's my doctor."

"What orders?" Alonzo asked, lighting his cigar, cupping his fingers expertly around the blazing match against the wind.

"Doctor's Hartneet's," she said. "He was very strict about it."

Alonzo smiled, and glanced at Dr. Benham, who promptly said:

"I know what you're thinking, Alonzo."

"What?"

"You're thinking that old jackass, Hartneet, might just as well have let me have a good time as long as I last because I won't last long."

Dr. Benham was clipping the end off his cigar. Alonzo grinned and said to Miss Dolly:

"Doctors are human just like everybody else. We all of us have our bugs, I guess. But there's no need of being strict with

Doctor Benham. Let him smoke and eat as he wants to."

Dr. Benham had stuck the cigar in his mouth. It wobbled perilously as he closed his knife and straightened to tuck it back in his pocket. He cried:

"There you are, Miss Dolly. And you better tell 'em to have strawberry shortcake tonight or I'll raise the roof."

He beamed delightedly as Alonzo held the lighted match to the end of his cigar. He leaned back and breathed out aromatic smoke. He sniffed appreciatively and said:

"You know, boy, I never could afford these cigars. Must be twenty-five-centers."

"Forty-five," Alonzo said.

"Damn fool business," Dr. Benham said, "paying forty-five cents for a cigar."

He took a long puff, and let the smoke curl from his nostrils.

"Good, ain't it, though?" he asked, leaning back luxuriously.

Alonzo nodded, watching the old man. Alonzo said:

"There's only one thing, Doctor. You're not to climb any stairs, or do any unnecessary walking."

Dr. Benham grinned and nodded:

"All right, Doctor," he said, shooting a humorous side glance at Miss Dolly. "They treat me like a baby," he said directly to her.

Ann saw them on the porch from the Naomi, the thirty-foot sloop the children sailed in the summer. The children and four of their friends were singing:

"*See them teeter-totter. . . .*"
"*Out there on the water. . . .*"

The sun was sinking over the bay, and the fresh evening breeze was coming in from the southwest. The young voices began to sing:

"*My Bonnie lies over the ocean. . . .*"

The smell of salt and iodine was in the air. Gulls cried harshly. Seaweed drifted past. Life seemed at last to have become calm and beautiful, the bitter struggles over. Junior and Martha were lithe, healthy, tanned, athletic, full of energy and vigor. They smelled of the sun and wind and healthy flesh. Ann didn't believe they had a secret from her.

And there was Alonzo, and Dr. Benham.

Alonzo met Ann at the head of the beach stairs, having just kissed Martha and Junior, who had run ahead. They kissed like old friends, and Ann said:

"I hope you'll be able to stay this time, and get a real rest."

He smiled and said:

"Always trying to get me to rest. Somebody has got to look after the sick people, and earn money to pay the bills."

"When you're dead and gone, there'll still be sick people."

He brushed aside the remark and said:

"It's nice down here, ain't it? And you and the children look brown as Indians."

"It's wonderful," Ann said. "If you only could be with us."

She saw Dr. Benham smoking, and turned to him, and added in the same breath:

"Why, I thought Doctor Benham wasn't supposed to smoke."

Alonzo put his warm, firm hand on her shoulder and said:

"He might as well enjoy himself, Ann. He might die any time. I've told him to eat and to smoke if he feels like it. He's a doctor. He won't abuse the privilege—too much."

"I love that man," Ann said.

"I guess everybody does," Alonzo said. "When you stop to think about it, he is one human being that never did anything but good to everybody he ever came in contact with. And he never charged anybody anything either. I've seen him sit up all night doctoring a sick rooster just the same as if the rooster was a human being. Performed a tracheotomy on it."

"He used to doctor cows and horses and dogs, I know," Ann said. "I've heard Mrs. Otis Kinney tell the story of how he set her Prince's hip."

"There won't be any more like him, I guess," Alonzo said. "Times have changed from when the clergyman and the doctor were about the only members of a community that knew anything. Fast transportation and education have changed our ways of living more than we know."

Dr. Benham's voice was querulous. He said to Miss Dolly:

"Now, Miss Dolly, I'm not going to take any more morphine."

"But Doctor West ordered it for you."

Dr. Benham brushed his hand across his forehead, and said:

"And the other doctors agreed with him that I should have it, didn't they, Miss Dolly?"

"They all said you should have it," Miss Dolly agreed gravely, approaching the bed with the hypodermic held ready.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to take it then," Dr. Benham said.

She gave him the hypodermic, and he said:

"Now can I have a cigarette?"

"Don't you think you've smoked too much, Doctor?"

"Pah! There's nothing to a cigarette."

"But you've smoked nearly a package."

"Didn't Doctor West say I could smoke what I liked."

She put a cigarette between his lips and lighted it. He said:

"Alonzo is a good boy."

"He's a wonderful man," Miss Dolly said.

"They're awfully nice to the old man, aren't they?" he asked.

"No nicer than they should be," Miss Dolly said tartly.

He puffed at his cigarette. Miss Dolly deftly sawed off a projection of ashes with a saucer, and he said:

"I'd always expected to die while I was working. I never expected to be a burden to anybody."

Miss Dolly's face flushed, and she said indignantly.

"You stop talking like that, Doctor Benham. You've taken care of everybody around you all your life. Did you ever think they were burdens?"

"That was different."

"It wasn't different at all, except that Doctor and Mrs. West love you just as much as if you were their own father."

"Do you think they do?"

Dr. Benham's eyes were solemnly inquisitive, like those of a small child.

Miss Dolly snorted. She said:

"I know they do."

Dr. Benham smiled, his features catching a fleeting reflection of the old magnetic charm. He said:

"I always kind of liked them."

Miss Dolly sniffed. She said:

"You think they're both the salt of the earth—like everybody else that knows them."

"I guess I do," he admitted sheepishly.

"Alonzo has been a fine man, hasn't he? And a good doctor."

"He certainly has."

"And Annie has been a good doctor's wife," he said. "She's pitched in and run her home, and stayed there. She saw a woman's job in the world, and she's done it. I always think of her as Lady Ann."

"Lady Ann!" Miss Dolly said. "That's nice. Come to think of it, there's no one I know deserves a title more than she does."

The doctor smiled. The smile remained on his face, and the cigarette end dropped from his mouth and rolled over his chin onto the sheet, whence Miss Dolly retrieved it. The doctor was still smiling as he slept.

Ann sat looking in her mirror. There were gray hairs among the brown ones, not very noticeable yet, but coming in. There was a little sag to her columnar throat. Her breasts, while not exactly gunnysacks with stones in their bottoms, nevertheless were not the hills of ivory they had been.

Her complexion still was good, but it had lost the delicate peach bloom of youth. The tiny blood vessels had thickened. She had lost three teeth. There was a little roll of fat around her waist.

The bloom of youth had gone.

Ann smoothed her forehead with tapering fingers. If she weren't careful, its smooth whiteness would be marred with permanent wrinkles. There was an almost invisible network of lines about her eyes.

Ann sighed. When did youth leave a woman, and middle age begin? It must be when she was in the neighborhood of thirty-five. Ann nodded to her reflection in the polished surface.

She lifted a box of rouge, hitherto untouched. She applied a small amount to her left cheek, high up, as she had been told. It was the first time she ever had applied any make-up. There was a new lip-stick pencil lying on her dressing table, and a box of face powder. When she went down to dinner, in a multi-colored dinner dress, her hair caught up from her neck, Junior said:

"Gee, Mother. You get younger and prettier every day."

He was a big boy, nearly six feet already. He had her eyes and hair and his father's nose and big frame. He hugged her and

said:

"I think you are beautiful."

Ann loved that, but she knew it was a lie. She vaguely had realized that the bloom of youth was going, but she had not realized it was gone until now. She always had scorned artificial aids to beauty. Now . . .

Ann and Dr. Benham sat in the smaller of two downstairs living rooms, the one which on the sea side was furnished with a vast sheet of plate glass, looking out to sea. Ann said:

"I used to despise women who used make-up. And now I am using it."

Dr. Benham said:

"Perhaps the reason you felt so strongly against the women who used it was because you wanted to use it yourself."

Ann turned her head to one side and looked at Dr. Benham from the corner of her eyes. He exclaimed:

"Now you look just like your mother."

Ann said:

"She was a wonderful woman."

"She was a good woman," Dr. Benham said, "but no better than you are."

Ann shook her head impatiently and exclaimed:

"You don't know the real me, Doctor Benham. I have the devil inside of me, really. I've had to get right down on my knees and fight the bad in myself more times than I can remember."

Dr. Benham nodded, and said:

"There's no character in people who just do things because it's the easiest way, Annie."

Ann leaned forward in her chair, sweetly moulded arms along the rests, and said earnestly:

"Don't mistake me, Doctor. I have wanted to go out and dance so much that I thought I would be willing to die just to have one good time, with music, and men and women in evening clothes, dancing together. But Alonzo was jealous of me. We only went to one dance."

"And you would have liked to have had guests at your house," Dr. Benham said, "men and women, and lived a pleasant social life. But instead of that, you devoted yourself to being a wife and mother, and housekeeper and gardener, and head cook and bottle washer."

"I'd ask how you knew, Doctor," Ann said, "but long ago I came to the conclusion that there was nothing you didn't know."

"There wasn't anything difficult about that," the doctor said. "I knew something about your father and mother, and their families, and there was hot blood in 'em. It was that which took you to New York to have your fling. But it was the New England conscience that brought you back and kept your nose to the grindstone. The Steeles have been a passionate race, but they've been Puritans. And they've had a hell of a time."

He grinned sympathetically at her. She said in a low voice:

"Well, I've had a hell of a time. Even giving up cocktails—"

She suddenly relaxed, laughed a little and leaned back. She said:

"But I've had great compensation from the thought that I was able to do the job I'd marked out for myself."

Dr. Benham said:

"What else can any of us do, Annie, except do the job we think we should do?"

"Nothing, I guess," Ann said. "But I'd always thought that life for me might be full of interesting people, men and women, artists, writers, poets, statesmen, actors and actresses, great figures in the world. And I've spent my life in four walls, arranging for three meals a day, and seeing that servants swept out the corners and cleaned behind the radiators."

"Well, Annie, you've done a great job, and you've got two fine children. What else could a woman want, after all?"

Ann said:

"I know I get a great deal of credit I don't deserve. Many things for which I am praised I was forced to do by circumstances."

"It's character—strength to meet situations for which you're praised."

Ann smiled and held out her hands, palms upward. She said:

"You know, it seems to me that I have lived my real life in books. They have been my true friends."

Dr. Benham wagged his shaking head in vigorous negative and said:

"That's where you're wrong, Annie. Your real life has been lived with your husband and your children, and the books only have been an escape for you."

Ann laughed, and got up, and kissed Dr. Benham's forehead.

"Then I certainly love my escapes, as you call them," she said. "They make life lots easier. Here comes Miss Dolly with your medicine."

Miss Dolly entered and Dr. Benham said:
"Every time I forget I'm sick you have to come around, Miss Dolly."
Miss Dolly smiled, a healthy, generous, genial smile, and said:
"Oh, I guess you're kind of glad to see me at that, Doctor Benham."
Dr. Benham turned his trembling head to Ann and said:
"Isn't Miss Dolly a handsome woman—for her age?"
"Just for that, Doctor," Miss Dolly said, "I'll try to find a nerve with this needle."
"If you do," the doctor cried, scowling in mock rage, "I'll fire you. Darn all nurses anyway."
"Come on now, Doctor," Miss Dolly said soothingly. "Let's get this over with."

Chapter Eighteen

Tom Jarvis and Noodles Noonan stood at the bar of Crooker's speakeasy in Forty-sixth Street near Ninth Avenue in New York. Noodles was fresh from Sing Sing, by way of the Federal penitentiary in Atlanta. He had been in Atlanta for conspiracy to use the mails to defraud and impersonating a Federal officer in a badger game, and in Sing Sing for holding up Mark Thomas, the bookmaker.

Noodles was not so jaunty as he once had been. His hair, now graying, was cut close. Lines had been etched into his handsome face—lines which, to the close observer, spelled meanness, fear, deceit and treachery. An opaque aura surrounded him. It was as if from somewhere inside himself he was peering out at the world.

His shoulders were as wide as ever, but the jacket that covered them was of cheap material and badly cut. His trousers were merely leg coverings. His shoes kept his feet from the pavement. He had sixty-eight dollars in his pocket—money earned in prison added to the twenty dollars he was given as a means of aid to starting life anew.

Tom was pasty-faced, and twitching. His hair was prematurely white, and he had hectic patches of red in his cheeks. His thin lips were crimson. His teeth no longer were chalk white. They had rotted. His breath was bad. Now and then he suffered a paroxysm of shallow coughing. He looked exactly what he was, a dope fiend in next-to-last stages of tuberculosis of the lungs. Tom had just come from the last of a series of drug-inspired sojourns in various institutions. Tom scratched his nose and sipped beer. Noodles twisted a glass of vichy in long fingers. Tom said:

"I feel rotten."

"You ought to," Noodles said. "You take enough dope to kill eight longshoremen. You'll land in a bug-house yet."

Tom scratched his nose, and took a drink, and said:

"I was in one—boy!"

"It's where you belong," Noodles said.

"George," Tom said to the bartender, "give me another beer."

He turned to Noodles and said:

"I'll never forget the first day I was there—Broadmoor. They stuck me in a bathtub and looked me over for scars. They took away the electric light bulb in my room—afraid I'd bump myself off. Cheese!"

Noodles said:

"Jails are good enough for me."

Tom drank some beer and said:

"I laid there in the dark, without a shot or anything, and they dragged a guy through the hall who kept saying:

" 'Oh, why didn't I do it? Oh, why didn't I do it?'

"That guy almost drove me nuts."

"Go on," Noodles said. "You already was nuts."

Tom scratched his nose and drank some beer, and said:

"I found out later what the guy wished he had done was jump off the roof of his apartment house when he had the chance. I wish to Christ he had. He gave me the Willies. They gave him a dry pack."

"What's a dry pack?"

"They wrap you up in dry blankets. A wet pack is when they wrap you up in wet ones."

Noodles lifted the glass of vichy and sipped it delicately. He set it back on the bar and resumed twirling it with long fingers. He said:

"You cokies lead a hell of a life, don't you?"

Tom drank a mouthful of beer and set his glass down and coughed. He put both skinny hands on the bar rail, and bent over and coughed, not deep, but authoritatively. He took out a little bottle and spat in it. The bartender and two other patrons looked askance at him. Tom said:

"They give you a prolonged bath. They stick you in a bathtub and let the water keep running at body temperature."

"They don't do that at Sing Sing," Noodles said.

"It's supposed to be soothing," Tom said.

He looked up at Noodles. Tom's teeth were black, and his breath smelled, and his face twitched. He said:

"Have you ever talked to the Emperor of Japan with a safety-match box and a rubber band?"

Noodles stopped twisting around the vichy goblet, and looked hard at Tom. He said:

"You ain't serious?"

Tom scratched his nose and said:

"Sure, I'm serious. There was a guy there that used to talk to the Emperor of Japan just as easy as I'm talking to you, and all he had was a match box with a rubber band around it."

Noodles straightened up. He took a cheap handkerchief from his breast pocket and touched his lips with it. He said:

"I'd go nuts myself in a dump like that."

Tom said:

"I laid there awake the first night, thinking a flock of yellow and green faces were looking at me. A snake with diamond headlights came through the wall, but I didn't give him a tumble. Every so often a guy in a white coat stuck a searchlight in the door and flashed it in my face. I kept my eyes shut and pretended it was all right by me."

Noodles looked at his reflection in the mirror behind the bar. He could never get back on his feet looking like he did. It would take a month for his hair to grow. Tom scratched his nose and said:

"Did you ever hear the system of doubles?"

Noodles shook his head in the negative, and twirled the glass of vichy in the attitude of one bored, but anchored. Tom said:

"There was a nice-looking fella there, with a nice look about him, and one day I was taking a shower next to him, and I put my hand under his shower. Well, you got to be careful of the guys in a place like that. They may be nuts."

"As likely as not," Noodles said.

Tom finished his beer and pushed the glass across the bar. He said:

"George. Give me another beer."

Noodles lifted the glass to his mouth and finished his vichy. He said:

"Give me one more shot of that belly wash, and then I'm through."

Tom bent over carefully and spilled foam from his fresh beer into a cuspidor. He took a little sip, and said:

"I was telling you about this guy with his system of doubles. Well, not to offend this guy, I explained to him that the reason I was feeling of his water was so as not to burn myself maybe under my own shower. I was going to turn it on just like his. See?"

Noodles said nothing, merely twisting his glass of vichy. Tom said:

"Well, this guy all of a sudden pokes his face into my shower laughing himself sick. I says:

" 'What's the joke, fella?'

"And he says:

" 'The joke is that if that water in your shower had been too hot it wouldn't have burned you, it would have burned me.'

"I said:

" 'How come, fella?'

"And he says:

" 'Didn't you ever hear of the system of doubles?' "

Tom drank some more beer, and reached for a package of cigarettes. He put a cigarette in his mouth, lighted a match, and touched it to the cigarette. He puffed out smoke, and coughed. Noodles said:

"If I had the con I'd leave those things alone."

Tom said:

"You get used to the con just like you get used to anything."

Tom spat in his little bottle and continued. He said:

"This guy says:

" 'A horse down in the stable kicked another horse last night, but the horse that got kicked wasn't hurt. I was.'

"He laughed till he looked silly, and he says:

" 'That's the system of doubles. If the hot water hits you, you don't get burned, I do.' "

"Sounds nutty to me," Noodles said. "All you nuts together must've had a good time."

"They had a good time," Tom said, "but they didn't know they were having a good time. Three meals a day and a good place to sleep, and nice grounds. There were lots of educated guys there, lawyers and doctors. There was a lawyer that used to think everybody was saying he was a son-of-a-bitch. And one day he's trying a case, and he says to the Judge:

" 'Even you, your Honor, can't call me a son-of-a-bitch.'

"And they grabbed him and threw him in this dump."

"What are you telling me about it for?" Noodles asked.

"I don't know," Tom said. "I get thinking about it. There was the guy that told me he was all right except he was shrinking. I always liked that guy. I guess he's still there."

"I suppose they had a couple of Napoleons," Noodles said.

Tom drew himself up, and said:

"How could there be two Napoleons, when I'm Napoleon?"

Noodles said:

"How in hell did you get that last shot into you? I didn't see it."

Tom paid no attention. He said to the bartender:

"Give me another beer."

And he said to Noodles:

"It's a woman that's doing all this to me. She got me arrested for stealing fifty dollars, and I was sent away, and she's been tipping off the People about me ever since. She thinks I don't know, but I know her system of numbers. She keeps track of me by numbers."

Noodles stared at Tom, and winked at the bartender. The bartender tapped his head with the forefinger of his right hand. Noodles said:

"That's the dame you used to peek at, ain't it?"

Tom bent over and began to cough. He doubled up and put his hands to his chest and then he clung to the bar with both hands and writhed and twisted. Noodles said:

"For God's sake! You got it bad. You ought to get out of this climate."

Tom took a bit of toilet paper from his pocket and spat in it and said hoarsely:

"I can't do anything with that dame after me. She's hounding me."

"You ought to go to Arizona, or some place," Noodles said.

Tom shook his head, holding the little wad of paper. The bartender said:

"For Christ's sake! T'row that in the can. We got enough germs in this place without no extra ones."

Tom wrapped the wad into a piece of wrapping paper, and stuffed it in his pocket. Noodles winked at the bartender and said:

"That dame probably was sore at you for peeking at her."

Tom's eyes brightened for a moment and he said:

"I never saw any better than that dame, and I've been looking through windows from the roof, and peeking through cracks, and looking up through grates ever since I was a kid. I get a kick out of it."

"I never could get a kick out of peekin'," Noodles said. "I always like to be with 'em. It's a long time since I had a dame. They give you saltpeter where I've been—put it in the coffee."

"Where I was too," Tom said.

"The bastards!" Noodles said. "They haven't any right to, either. It isn't in the law."

"They do lots of things that ain't in the law," Tom said. "Look at me being hounded by a dame."

A cunning expression marked his features, and he added:

"But I've got a line on the dame now, and I'll get square."

"How?" Noodles asked.

"I'll make her sing another tune," Tom said. "She's married to a big doctor up in Massachusetts now—one of those damn' hypocrites going to church every Sunday and doing charity work, and got her nose a mile in the air. But I've got it on her."

"Got what?"

Tom's cheeks flushed more than ever and his eyes narrowed. He slapped a skinny hand on the bar and said:

"I saw her and a guy together before she was married."

Noodles laughed. He said:

"Nobody'd believe you, fella. They'd throw you into the can again. That's all."

"No, they wouldn't," Tom said. "I got a letter the guy wrote to her—guy by the name of Tony Sparks-Boyer. Hell of a name, ain't it?"

"Blackmail's hard to get away with," Noodles said. "I was a pretty smart guy, but they nailed me to the cross."

Tom drank more beer and said:

"This isn't blackmail. It's justice. The dame has been after me ever since that time she got me arrested and sent away. I'll just make a deal with her."

He stared at Noodles with strange eyes. He added:

"After that I can go to Arizona."

The bartender caught Noodles's eye and tapped his forehead again significantly. Tom said:

"She put this Tony on the bum, too. I see him on Broadway now and then, and she's on his trail, too, only he don't believe it. She gave him some money a while ago, and he was drunk for a month, and worse than ever. He says she's rich."

Tom finished his beer and said:

"Excuse me a minute."

He walked back toward the men's room. The bartender leaned across the bar and said:

"Know that guy well?"

“I used to see him in the old place,” Noodles replied. “He’s a junky, but harmless.”

The bartender nodded and said:

“He’s always talking about this woman that’s supposed to be keeping him in nut factories.”

“He swiped fifty bucks from her to pay for coke,” Noodles said. “That’s all I know. Used to get it from a fella I knew.”

“You don’t have to be mysterious, Mister,” the bartender said. “The fella was Puggy, and he’s dead.”

“Dead?”

“Took for a ride over in Philly,” the bartender said.

The bartender filled Noodles’s glass with vichy and said:

“I wouldn’t want a nut like that to be sore at me. You can never tell about them kind. A doc that comes in here says he’s got a persecution complex, whatever that is—para-something.”

“Paranoia,” Noodles suggested.

“That’s it,” the bartender said. “And those kind of nuts sometimes turn out to be murderers.”

Noodles twisted the glass of vichy in his fingers and said:

“Not a poor sap like this one. He hasn’t guts enough to kill a fly. He’s just a degenerate—peeks in keyholes and fools with himself and sniffs happy dust.”

“Ssh!” The bartender whispered hurriedly. “Here he comes. Do you think the Giants or the Cards’ll win tomorrow?”

“I wouldn’t give a damn which one won,” Noodles replied. “Ball players are nothing but a lot of hired men swinging at a ball anyway. Give me a good horse.”

“I gotta good one in the third race at Belmont today,” the bartender said. “Crystal.”

Tom arrived at the bar and said:

“Anybody that plays the ponies hasn’t any sense. That’s all I’ve got to say.”

Chapter Nineteen

Dr. Benham was sitting on the divan in the library of the Wests' home in Eastham in October. Ann came in, cheeks flushed and eyes bright. She said:

"I really believe autumn is the most glorious time of the year. The air is like wine, and the coloring now is simply gorgeous."

She took off her close-fitting hat of green, rumpled her thick hair and, stooping over, kissed Dr. Benham's forehead. He reached with trembling hand into an inside pocket, opened a leather spectacle case, extracted steel-rimmed spectacles, and adjusted them on his nose. His teeth were again out for comfort. He looked at her through the lenses and his face lighted up. He said:

"It's always a treat for the old man to see you, Annie. You're so full of health and vitality."

"If I don't feel well, I never say so," Ann asserted, rearranging flowers in a tall vase. "I learned from Rebecca that no one is interested in a person's troubles."

Dr. Benham shook his head, pouted his lips, and watched her in silence for a moment. Then he said:

"Come here, Annie."

She went over to him, looking down at him. He put out his hand, once so firm and vigorous, and now thin and weak, and took her wrist. The dew of weakness was on his high, white forehead, but there was no dimming of the intelligence and affection in his eyes. He said:

"What is worrying you, Annie? You know you can tell the old man."

"Nothing," she said. "What makes you think there is."

"You can't fool me, Annie," Dr. Benham asserted. "I haven't been studying people, and doctoring people, and helping people in their troubles for sixty years without learning a little something. You tell the old man, Annie."

"It's so silly," Ann said.

"Come on. Tell me."

Ann sat down and crossed her knees. Her feet still were small, and she was extremely fastidious about her shoes. Her legs were beautiful, and she was extravagant about her stockings. She loved her shapely, white legs, with no hair on them, and her smooth, soft white feet, with no marks on them. She looked at the doctor from the corner of her eyes, with her head twisted to the side. He chuckled:

"I'd know you had a secret now anyway," he said. "That look is the one your mother had. Come on, now. Out with it. What has been troubling you?"

She took a deep breath and said:

"I have seen traces of blood from my rectum."

Dr. Benham was frowning now, in his old professional manner, his head trembling and bobbing. He said:

"That might not be anything serious, but it shouldn't be neglected."

Ann said:

"You know, if you would, Doctor Benham, I'd like you to examine me."

"All right. Call Miss Dolly. She'll get you ready."

A half-hour later, Dr. Benham said:

"We'll have to send a specimen of that to New York."

"Is it malignant?" Ann asked.

"I can't tell," Dr. Benham said. "Nobody can tell without a laboratory test."

"You wouldn't try to hide anything from me?" Ann asked. "If it was cancer you would tell me?"

Dr. Benham nodded, and said:

"Certainly I'd tell you, Annie, but there's no need of crossing any bridges until we come to them. I wouldn't have told you as much as I have if you were a different sort of person."

"I'd have to know the truth," Ann said. "I never could stand being lied to the way doctors lie to patients when they have a serious disease. If it is cancer, I must know it."

"You'll know it, Annie."

"But you do generally lie to patients about cancer, don't you, Doctor?"

Dr. Benham smiled and frowned, and reached for a cigar with the old familiar gesture. He fumbled it a bit, and Miss Dolly took it from him, and snipped the end off, and put it in his mouth. She was holding a match to the end of it when the doctor

looked up at Ann with a comical expression and said:

"Looks as if I was a baby all over again."

Ann smiled and said:

"I've heard you and Alonzo telling about patients that were really dying but thought they were getting better."

Dr. Benham puffed out tobacco smoke and said:

"I'll tell you, Annie, what I always have done. When I have decided that a patient has an incurable disease, a cancer, for instance, I have gone to this patient, and I have said:

" 'Now, I am going to tell you once and for all the truth about yourself, and it will be the last time I ever will tell you the truth, so listen to it. You have a cancer, and it is incurable. Now that's the last time you'll hear the truth from me.' "

"That's fair," Ann said. "I didn't know you did that."

Dr. Benham grinned and continued:

"The next day I'd call to see the same patient, and the patient would ask:

" 'How am I today, Doctor?'

"And I'd reply:

" 'You're much better today. Big improvement. Surprising!'

"And the patient would believe that, and go ahead and die thinking all the time he was getting better."

Ann said:

"I wouldn't like that."

Dr. Benham said:

"You aren't the usual sort of patient, Annie. I'd tell you the truth. But in your case, just supposing the growth was malignant, you could be operated on."

Ann made a little face. She said:

"I know that operation. It takes out your rectum, and you have to have a tube in your abdomen instead."

"Some people consider it's better than dying," Dr. Benham said. "Others don't."

Ann laughed and said:

"I'd consider it my duty to fight to live as long as possible. I don't know why, but that's the way I feel."

"I guess it is a feeling, and not a thinking," Dr. Benham said. "I can't get very indignant myself over men who kill themselves after they can't do their work in the world any longer, but it isn't in me. It might be a bad example to someone who loved you. It might destroy youngsters' illusions in your character. And, lastly, I don't believe in running away. Self-destruction is running away, in my mind."

"I'd know that without your telling me," Ann said.

Miss Dolly came in with a fresh hypodermic. Dr. Benham groaned and said:

"I'm getting to be quite an addict."

Miss Dolly smiled and said:

"I wouldn't mind being an addict when I got to be eighty."

Dr. Benham looked wistfully at Ann and Miss Dolly, and said:

"I only take it because Alonzo and all the doctors said I should. I fought against taking it."

"Don't be silly," Ann said. "We all are delighted that you can have the opiate to ease your pain."

"Are you?" he asked.

"I suppose if you took enough of that you'd never wake up," Ann said.

Miss Dolly withdrew the needle from the doctor's skin, rubbed the pricked spot with alcohol, and pulled down his sleeve. She said:

"It wouldn't take much—fifteen grains would even finish off an addict."

Dr. Benham tilted his head back and laughed. He said:

"I'll never forget when Alonzo and I gave old George Miller five grains apiece. George came into the office—"

"You aren't going to tell that story again, are you?" Ann asked, laughing.

"Let him tell it," Miss Dolly said. "He tells it so differently each time that you'd never recognize it."

Dr. Benham looked hurt. He said to Ann:

"You know I never exaggerate."

"Why, Doctor Benham," Ann exclaimed. "You know the stories you tell."

"The whole town was there when old George did a buck-and-wing on the First Church roof."

"I remember," Ann said. "It was funny. But it was sad, too."

"I guess lots of times we laugh when we feel like crying," Dr. Benham said.

He stuck a cigarette between his lips and raised his eyes to the nurse. He said:

"Give me a light for this piece of hay, Miss Dolly."

He puffed several times, eyelids drooping, grinned, and said:

"I'm glad there's always someone around to catch my smoke when it falls. I always was afraid of fire."

A moment later he nodded, and the burning cigarette fell. Miss Dolly picked it up and snuffed it out. She and Ann looked down at the great head and splendid old face. Miss Dolly said:

"I suppose there wasn't ever a man that lived who took more part in the lives of all the people of a community than that man."

A dew of sweat formed on the high, wide forehead. Miss Dolly wiped it off softly. Ann said:

"He hadn't any real family of his own, but all the families were his. What a useful, helpful, serviceable life he has lived."

Miss Dolly said:

"We all love him."

Ann said:

"I'm glad you don't say anything about the dignity of death. To me there is nothing dignified in the spectacle of a once forceful, magnetic human being falling apart before your eyes. It fills me with indignation that such a thing could be."

"At least, narcotics have robbed death of some of its unpleasantness," Miss Dolly said. "I've heard so many people say they didn't mind death. It was the process of dying that annoyed them."

"I honestly don't think I mind either, for myself," Ann said. "I don't know absolutely, of course."

"I don't think you would, Annie," Miss Dolly said. "But you have many good years left ahead of you. I wouldn't worry about that growth. It's probably nothing but a tumor."

"That kind of talk is no satisfaction to me," Ann said. "I always dislike pap-talk. Truth-talk satisfies me. To know the truth. And that's so hard in this world of lies."

Two days later Alonzo came home at two o'clock, and said to Norah, one of the maids:

"Where is Mrs. West?"

"In the upstairs sitting room, Doctor. Will I call her?"

"No, I'll go up," Alonzo said, dropping his soft hat on a big divan in the hall.

Ann met him at the head of the stairs. He put his arms around her neck and kissed her gently. She said right away:

"So, it *is* cancer, and I have to be operated."

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"How long is it since you came home at this time, and asked for me, and walked upstairs, and kissed me?" she retorted.

"I kiss you every day," he said.

"But you don't come home in the afternoon to do it," she retorted.

They walked toward the upstairs sitting room, where were photographs of the family, a radio, a card table in front of a brick fireplace, a big couch, and easy chairs. She started to sit in a chair, and he pulled her back, and sat down, drawing her on his knee. He pulled her head, with its brown hair with red highlights still showing, down on his big shoulder. He smelled of clean skin, and good tobacco, mingled faintly with the smudge of burning leaves; he had come home through smoke from bonfires lighted by children.

She put her head back against his chest, and he smoothed her forehead. She relaxed for several seconds, and said:

"It's so nice for a big woman like me to be married to such a big man. You make me feel like a little girl again, and I like it."

He rubbed her forehead with the gentle hands of the surgeon, such strong hands, and clever hands, but each finger more gentle than a rose petal. It seemed that each finger had a brain that knew just where to touch to heal and not to hurt. She said:

"I love your hands, Doctor."

She called him Doctor more than she called him Alonzo, even when they were alone. He said:

"I love you, Ann. There isn't another woman like you in the world."

"It's lucky there isn't," she said. "And it's nice you don't know all about me."

"I know all about you," he said. "You're all I need to keep me from losing faith."

"It's funny," she murmured in a small voice, utterly unlike her usual tone, "that I love you so much more as the years go by —and they go by so fast."

He grinned, and hugged her, looking down at her. He said:

"You always liked that pose that you didn't love me when you married me, but that you gradually were won around."

She smiled, gazing up at him from the corner of her eyes. She said:

"I used to think you were sort of uncouth, Alonzo. You didn't breathe often enough, and you didn't change your socks often enough, and you ate like a wolf who hadn't had anything in his stomach for a week."

"I suppose I was a kind of diamond in the rough," he said, a little hurt.

She snuggled against him and said:

"As far as I'm concerned, Alonzo, you can inhale your coffee so that it can be heard in the Centre."

"But you'll continue to lay out the change of socks and underwear every day."

"I won't be able to do it in the hospital, Alonzo," she said. "I suppose I'll have to go right away."

He nodded, and said:

"You know what these things are. There's no use trying to fool ourselves about it. The quicker they're gotten after, the better."

They sat still for a moment. She said:

"Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, or next day," he replied. "I want Doctor Squires to do it."

"I wish you could do it, Alonzo," she said. "I have such trust in you, and your hands."

"I've been walking the floor," he said, "thinking about it. It seems as if I couldn't do it myself. And it seems as if I couldn't trust anybody else to do it."

"Whatever you decide is all right," she said. "Only living with you has made me have such perfect faith in you."

"Squires is a good man," Alonzo said.

"He isn't you."

Alonzo laughed, pleased, and said:

"You know it's faith like that which sometimes makes a quack a better doctor for certain people than a great specialist."

Ann said:

"We mustn't let the children know."

"I think they should be told."

Ann shook her head and said:

"No. I'll just write them a letter and say I'm going to the hospital for a slight operation. There is no need of upsetting them."

They sat in silence for two or three minutes. He said:

"It's a serious operation, but it will be all right. I will be there."

She said:

"I wasn't even thinking about it, Alonzo. I was thinking, sitting here on your lap, that you and I have grown closer together through the years. I truly love you, Alonzo."

She kissed him. He kissed her back, lifted her up, and set her gently down on a sofa. He said:

"I've got to run now, but I'll be home early, and stay home this evening."

He walked rapidly out of the house, and got into his car. Martin O'Hare, his chauffeur, started the car, and said:

"Where to, Doctor?"

Doctor West took off his soft hat and, crumpling it in his right hand, hit blindly at the windshield three or four times. Tears were in his eyes, and his face was working. Martin turned away his head and drove slowly along the road.

Doctor Squires operated on Ann. Alonzo was present.

A few days after the operation, Ann waked in her bedroom at home with excruciating pains in her right leg. She lay in the dark, biting her lips. She didn't want to disturb anyone. She whispered:

"God help me."

Miss Dolly rose from a chair behind a screen at the window, and came to the bedside. Miss Dolly placed a cool hand on Ann's forehead and asked:

"Where is the pain?"

"I'm all right," Ann said.

"There's no use in lying," Miss Dolly said. "Where is the pain?"

"In my right leg," Ann said.

Miss Dolly stripped back the covers and touched the leg. She bent her head near it, and listened. Then she straightened, and said:

"It hurts terribly, doesn't it?"

"It does," Ann said.

"Just a moment," Miss Dolly said.

She went out, and returned with Alonzo, in pyjamas. Alonzo made a quick examination, and put a light hand on Ann's forehead. He said cheerfully:

"We'll get you out of this."

Miss Dolly jabbed a hypodermic into Ann's deltoid. Waves of pain and nausea overwhelmed her.

Ann had a vague knowledge of being carried to an ambulance. She was fighting to keep from making any sounds of pain.

She waked up in a hospital room. She opened her eyes and saw the dresser and the curtained window. A figure in rustling white moved into her line of vision. She recognized Miss Dolly. Miss Dolly said:

"So you've decided to wake up."

Ann's eyes lowered to the contours of her body outlined under the blankets. She frowned as if puzzled. The frown cleared and she looked up at Miss Dolly and said:

"Oh, they took off my leg."

"They had to," Miss Dolly said, preparing a hypodermic. "You had gas poisoning."

Ann closed her eyes for a half minute. She opened them again and said:

"Miss Dolly."

"Yes, Annie."

"The children mustn't know about this," Ann said. "It would spoil their Christmas holidays."

Miss Dolly was talking to Miss Murfin. She wiped her eyes and said:

"I've just got to bawl. And I don't care."

"Go ahead," Miss Murfin said. "It'll do you good."

Miss Dolly sniffled, while salt water ran from her eyes and dripped down her cheeks. She said:

"I'm pretty hard-boiled. If patients holler and cry it doesn't bother me. But to see Mrs. West just wake up out of the anesthetic, and look down at the bed, and say as if she was passing the time of day:

" 'Oh, they took off my leg.'

"Then, while I'm getting a hypo ready, she opens her eyes and says:

" 'Don't let the children know. We mustn't spoil their vacation.' "

"I always heard Mrs. West was a remarkable woman," Miss Murfin said. "They call her 'Lady Ann'."

Miss Dolly's sobs began to subside. She said:

"I nursed her when she was a baby, and her mother before her. She's the salt of the earth, Mrs. West is. And the way she stood those gas pains. You could hear her leg crackling."

"I know," Miss Murfin said. "I've heard 'em."

"Gas just bubbling and boiling in the flesh."

Miss Dolly freshened herself up, sniffing in diminuendo. She said:

"She almost passed out after the amputation. Doctor West had fallen asleep, dead to the world in the next room, and there was no one around when I went in and saw she had stopped breathing. Well, I'd never given a hypo of adrenalin into the heart but I'd seen it done enough, and I got the needle and shoved it in. It worked all right because she started to breathe right away."

Miss Murfin said:

"Deliver me from nursing friends."

"I'm glad I happened to be with her," Miss Dolly asserted. "I feel she might not be alive now if I hadn't been."

"Some people wouldn't want to be alive in her condition," Miss Murfin said. "There's old man Gladstone up in 46. He wouldn't let 'em do one of those operations. He'd rather die."

"Not Mrs. West," Miss Dolly said, putting up her damp handkerchief and going toward the door. "I've got to get back."

"She had such pretty legs, too," Miss Murfin said.

Ann leaned on Miss Dolly's arm and laughed delightedly. She said:

"It feels funny, but I'll be able to walk. Isn't that wonderful!"

Ann's hair was bobbed. She wore a green dress, a favorite color with her, and one which set off her brown-red-white coloring. Dr. Benham, more shaky than ever, shoulders stooped, shaking white-bald head bent forward, walked into the room and stopped, grinning, in the doorway. He said:

"Annie, you look prettier than ever."

She turned to him, moving a little stiffly, and said:

"Isn't it marvelous! Why, I'll be able to walk like anybody else."

He dry-smoked a cigar, and said:

"When are you going to tell Junior and Martha about it?"

"After I can walk a bit," she replied. "I don't think the shock will be so much for them if they see me walking around and realize I'm not really crippled."

"Isn't she a bird?" Dr. Benham asked Miss Dolly.

"What do you mean?" Ann demanded.

At the same instant Miss Dolly said:

"I'll say she is a bird."

"I never heard anyone use so much slang," Ann said. "Come on now, Miss Dolly."

She faltered and stumbled slightly. Dr. Benham said:

"Hey! Look out there. You'll break your fool neck."

"All right," Miss Dolly said. "Just take it easy."

Ann laughed so that the rippling sound welled through the house. She cried:

"I haven't had so much fun since I was a little girl trying to walk on stilts. Come on now, Miss Dolly."

"Perhaps you'd better stop for today," Miss Dolly suggested.

"Go on," Dr. Benham exclaimed dictatorially. "Go on with you, Annie. Sit down, and rest. You don't want to try to do too much at a time."

Alonzo entered from the upper hall, grinning. He said:

"What's all this excitement?"

Freed from Miss Dolly's grasp for an instant, Ann started to walk toward Alonzo, saying:

"Look! I can walk."

She swayed and Alonzo caught her, while Dr. Benham started in his chair, and said:

"Condemned foolishness."

He gripped his chest, and closed his jaws, and doubled over, gasping for breath. Miss Dolly hurried to him, and Alonzo sat Ann in a chair and joined her. Alonzo asked:

"When did he have his morphine last?"

Dr. Benham, gasping with pain, said:

"I wouldn't take the darned stuff."

"He threatened to discharge me if I insisted on giving it to him," Miss Dolly said.

"Well, give it to him now, and we'll add a quarter-grain to the dose," Alonzo said. "And don't listen to him. He's an awful patient."

"That's a nice thing to say," Dr. Benham protested, in gasps.

"It's the truth," Alonzo said. "Why don't you obey your doctor's orders?"

Dr. Benham's face wore an aggrieved look. He said, pathetically:

"Gosh! I'm taking everything I'm told to. I just don't want to die a dope fiend."

"It's better to live with a little morphine in your system than live in agony, isn't it?" Ann asked.

"Do you think I should take it, Annie?" Dr. Benham asked.

"Of course I do," Ann replied. "I'd think you were very silly if you didn't."

"All right, then," Dr. Benham said. "I'll take it."

Alonzo grinned. Dr. Benham was showing him where he got off by taking the medicine for Ann, and not for him. Ann smiled and said:

"When I reach your age I'll be glad to be a morphine addict."

Dr. Benham pursed his lips and said:

"I never expected to be just hanging along like this."

Alonzo sat down and crossed his legs. He looked what he was. He was big in bone, and head and stomach, and thew, and jaw. His abdomen rested comfortably on his lap. He never took any exercise except to step in and out of his automobile, and walk in and out of homes of patients, and in and out of hospitals. He was of the old school of medicine, the last tag of it, taken over from Dr. Benham.

He had a powerful personality, a vigorous, quick mind, a psychic insight into other minds. He wasn't interested in ordinary ills, but give him death to fight, and he was a champion. He used to say:

"I don't mind so much losing old folks, but when I lose a young one it makes me sick."

The big man often walked the floor all night when he had a case that was on the borderline. Ann would say:

"Why don't you come to bed? Walking and worrying isn't going to help. And you need your strength."

"Leave me alone," he'd answer.

He was more than a doctor in his own mind. He was an anointed champion, as Dr. Benham had been, against the arch enemy of mankind, death. And although he fought what must in the end be a losing fight, he had had many triumphs, and these triumphs showed as he sat there now. He had an air with him. He was one to whom patients instinctively told their secrets. He was one upon whom others naturally leaned. He was a battler for life against death, and creeds and politics and isms and asms meant little or nothing to him.

Dr. Benham and Alonzo could sit for half an hour without saying a word and understand each other better than most persons could understand each other after talking for a year. They had no veil over their eyes and saw clear.

Ann looked across the room at Alonzo, and thought of the past. He was a jealous man, and she had had little of social life. She would have loved it. She would have enjoyed nothing better than to have presided over a glittering dinner table, to have

danced and played bridge, and to have entertained celebrities and listened to brilliant conversation.

But Alonzo hadn't been that kind. He was a jealous man. No other man might touch his wife. He was concentrated on his work. Theatres were just something to be gone through while he sat shaking a nervous foot and wondering what was happening to this or that patient. Celebrities meant nothing to him. He was the biggest celebrity he knew about, after Dr. Benham.

To Alonzo, an actor was a neurotic with an exhibition complex, a writer was an oral type, perhaps on the borderline, or perhaps over it, and an orator was hopelessly oral. He had use only for the scientific workers of the world, the laboratory men, and the psychologists.

Ann looked across the room at him, and felt a great contentment. She had given up many activities she would have liked, but she had helped a man who had done a man's work in the world. She had pulled with him without complaint. They had weathered the storms. And they had two beautiful children. Now they could face old age with happiness, and a sense of peace.

Perhaps she could even get Alonzo to leave his practice long enough to take a trip abroad—a tour around the world. She motioned to Miss Dolly, and arose with some difficulty. Alonzo got up at the moment that, resting on Miss Dolly's arm, she started toward him. He asked:

"What is it?"

She said:

"I just felt so happy, Alonzo, I was going over there to kiss you."

Alonzo grinned at Miss Dolly, and kissed her. He said:

"You never have to come to me to kiss me. You're the most wonderful woman in the world."

Alonzo, Jr., was taller than his father. His hair was thick and luxuriant like his mother's, and showed the same reddish glint. He had a well-shaped head, and small ears, and eager, glowing, dark eyes. He was on the golf team at Harvard, was out for the crew, and was a Socialist. He was going to be a doctor.

He turned his head to one side, and looked at his father from the corner of his eyes. Alonzo, Sr., said:

"You got that trick from your mother."

"What trick?"

"Looking sidewise when you've got something on your mind."

"I hope I've inherited, or acquired, a lot of other qualities from her, Pater. Few fellows have a mother like her. She's a regular human being."

Dr. West reached into his upper left-hand waistcoat pocket, and extracted a cigar. The gesture was a replica of Dr. Benham's. He bit off the end, and lighted a match, and held the flare to the end of the cigar. Dr. West had no use for patent lighters. He puffed smoke, and turned to Martha Naomi. Martha was on her class crew at Vassar, and played on the tennis team. She took more after the Wests. Her hair was almost black, and her nose and cheekbones were high. She was a handsome, vigorous girl, with the glow of health and the shine in the eyes that spelled a happy forward-looking soul within. Alonzo said:

"Before I hear what Junior has on his mind, I want to talk to you both about your mother."

Both young, earnest faces became more intent. Junior said:

"What about her, Pater?"

Martha said:

"What?"

They looked solemn, as only young folks can look solemn. Their father smiled at them. He wondered by what magic it happened that a son of his could wear clothes so becomingly. He said:

"Junior. How did you ever develop that way of lounging? Is it part of a modern college education?"

Alonzo, Jr., laughed, and straightened up, uncrossing his long legs. He asked:

"What do you mean?"

Martha said:

"What were you going to say about mother?"

Dr. West said:

"I've waited a long time to tell you this because it was your mother's wish."

"Her operation was more serious than she admitted," Martha exclaimed. "I always thought there was some secret."

"Both of us did," Alonzo, Jr., said. "But if that was the game we were going to play it."

"That was good sportsmanship," Alonzo, Sr., said. "Your mother had an operation, and a very nasty one, for cancer."

Before words could issue from his children's open mouths, he continued:

"But she's all right now."

"Cancer!" Junior exclaimed.

Martha said nothing, but moisture gathered in her eyes. Her father puffed the cigar again, and said:

"Your mother had a devil of a time, I'm telling you."

"You should have told us," Martha said.

"She wouldn't have it," their father explained. "The first words she said when she learned that she must be operated were that you children weren't to be told. And when she had her leg amputated—"

Junior and Martha both had wet eyes. Junior said:

"Miss Dolly told us."

Dr. West threw his cigar away and arose from the wicker porch chair in which he had been sitting. He faced his children, and said:

"What I wanted to tell you both is that I haven't been so thoughtful of your mother as I might have been. I've been wrapped up in my work, and I've kept her away from fun that she would have liked—dances and theatres and things like that. And I've taken home my troubles to her. I've never read books with her, and she loves books, and I've never been to concerts with her. She loves concerts, and I'm tone deaf."

He stopped a minute, and looked at his two children, the son and the daughter. He said:

"I'm a pretty healthy man, I suppose I'll live quite a few years yet, although my arteries are hardening already. When I go, it'll be the doctor's favorite disease, angina."

"Don't talk about dying," Junior said.

Dr. West grinned and said:

"I wasn't even thinking about that. I got you two together to talk to you for the first time in my life, I guess, because I wanted to tell you something about your mother."

"What?" they asked together.

Dr. West looked solemn. He said:

"Your mother has taken care of us all for years, and managed the house, and seen that we ate regularly, and slept peacefully. Hasn't she?"

Alonzo, Jr., and Martha glanced at one another. Martha said:

"Of course, Father. No one can manage things like mother."

Dr. West nodded, and said:

"There's something neither of you know, and that your mother doesn't know I know, and that is, that she really is a little girl who would like to be taken care of herself and have a good time like other little girls."

The good-looking boy and the handsome girl said nothing. Their father continued:

"I'm just telling you this so if either of you could think to take your mother to a theatre, or a movie, or buy her a box of candy, or some flowers now and then—"

"Why, Pater."

"I never thought of it that way, Father."

Dr. West reached for a fresh cigar. He bit off the end, and scowled. He lighted the cigar, puffed, and said suddenly:

"Neither did I—till lately."

Martha stood on tiptoe and kissed her father's weather-beaten, bristly cheek, and Alonzo, Jr., put his arm around him. Alonzo, Jr., said:

"Gee, Dad, it's wonderful to have a father and mother like we have."

Dr. West cleared his throat and said:

"Well, let's not talk about it. Let's see that from now on your mother gets some attention as well as gives it. We want to make her happy, don't we?"

"You bet," Martha said, her heart in her voice.

"Gee! We never really knew you, Father," Junior said.

Chapter Twenty

ANN WAS walking in back of the swimming pool which Alonzo had built for the children by damming a small brook which ran through the grounds. She carried a malacca walking stick with a rubber ferrule and brown leather strap which fitted over her wrist. She was a striking woman, with her clean-cut features, her hazel eyes which retained their youthful fire, the clean sweep of her beautifully modeled chin, and the smoothly flowing curves of a matron. A slight, almost imperceptible, drag in her walk was the only indication that she had an artificial leg.

She wore a tweed skirt of olive green mixture, and a sports sweater of green and yellow, with fine golden threads running through it, and brown-and-white sports oxfords. The skirt, as a concession to her deformity, was cut longer than is the custom with such garments.

It was August, and cool. Hundreds of dahlias, which had become a hobby with Alonzo, showed their multi-colors on tall stalks. Scores of hydrangea bushes bent under the burden of their white blossoms. Slim cedars stood sedate and slim. A clump of white birches contrasted with them and with many other varieties of evergreen trees. A sentinel line of Lombardy poplars, set out as a screen for the swimming pool, stood tall and graceful between her and the house and the road a half-mile beyond.

Phlox and marigolds grew in well-ordered beds. Goldenrod and asters and sumac, turning red, made gay the uncultivated land beyond the border of hydrangeas. She heard a sound, and turned to face a man with a cadaverous face, under a straw hat which once had been white, but now was yellow with age; it was perched high on the head it failed to fit.

The hair was dark with weird patches of white, and was unkempt. The visitor wore a brown jacket which was apparently designed for a larger man, and dark trousers which were too short. He had red patches on his thin cheeks, and his eyes were staring. He stood still, a dozen feet away, and watched her. She said with a rising inflection:

"Yes? Can I do anything for you?"

The man coughed shallowly and scratched his nose, and she exclaimed:

"Tom Jarvis!"

He said in a hoarse, harsh voice:

"Oh, you recognized me, did you? It's a wonder, after all I've gone through on your account."

"On my account?" she said.

He stepped closer, his hands clenched, cheeks twitching and lips trembling. He said:

"I've heard you talking to them—rapping on the walls. I know the system as well as you do—better."

He laughed mirthlessly, coughed, and stepped closer, his head bent forward. She regarded him from hazel eyes, calm, but watchful. She said kindly:

"Perhaps you wanted to see the doctor, my husband. You don't look very well, Tom."

"Don't stall!" he cried. "You're through persecuting me and telling people about me. It's my turn now. I've got you where I want you."

Her voice carried a note of sympathy as she said:

"Why don't you sit down here and tell me all about it, Tom? If there is something that troubles you I am sure my husband will be glad to help."

"Ha! Ha!" Tom said, scratching his nose. "He'll help, all right, after I'm through telling him what I've got to tell him. He'll fix you so you won't be sending me to insane asylums any more."

He shuddered, and added, with a raised voice:

"I've been beaten in those places, I have. I've had two fingers broken, I have. Look."

He held up a claw of a hand.

"I can't work those fingers any more," he said. "That's your doing. How do you like it?"

Ann continued to smile, as if she were humoring a child. She said gently:

"I'm really sorry to hear you have suffered, Tom. I'm sure my husband, who is a doctor, will be glad to help you, if you'll just come back to the house with me."

"Soft soap won't work," Tom said. "Nothing'll work any more. I'll tell the doctor, and then you'll take my place as the one that suffers, and I'll be free."

"I don't understand," Ann said. "You'll tell the doctor what?"

"About you and Tony years ago," Tom said. "I saw you, and I didn't know you knew I saw you till you had me arrested, and then kept on having me put in those insane asylums."

He laughed and scratched his nose, and said:

"If it wasn't for you they'd know I was Napoleon."

Ann's voice was steady as she said:

"Why, Tom. You must have just imagined these things you talk about."

He laughed again, hoarsely and without mirth, and drew closer, sticking his harrowed face close to hers. He said:

"That's what I thought you'd say, and nobody would believe me, but I've got the evidence. I'm too smart. Wait till I give him the evidence, and then what will your husband and your children think about you? I saw you myself, and I've got the letter."

"What letter?" Ann asked, face intent, and slightly puzzled.

"One you never saw," Tom said. "One Tony wrote to you."

He slapped his breast pocket. "I've got it, and after they've all read it where will you be?"

He stopped and began to cough. He bent over, and coughed shallowly and terribly, and finally, weak, he spat into a bit of toilet paper, and wrapped the toilet paper in a bit of wrapping paper, and returned the gruesome packet to his pocket. He said:

"You'll be in hell where I've been and where you belong."

His bad breath smote upon Ann's nostrils, and she turned away slightly. He said:

"That's right. Act as if I stink. But when I get through that's the way people will act with you."

Ann said:

"Why don't you sit down, Tom, and rest? And we can talk this over."

"I wouldn't sit down with you," Tom asserted. "You're no better than a streetwalker, with all your airs."

He patted his breast pocket and coughed, and said:

"This letter says you've been Tony's. That's all I can prove. I don't know how many other men's you've been."

Ann's voice became firm. She said:

"Listen, Tom."

He didn't reply, merely watched her sneeringly, his eyes ugly, his face and body twitching. Ann said:

"What you are planning to do would not hurt me so much as it would hurt innocent people—my husband, my children."

"That's a lot of blah," Tom said. "It'll finish you, and then I can live in peace."

"Let me see the letter."

"What do you take me for—a damned fool?" Tom asked.

She took his right wrist in her left hand, and fixed her eyes on his. She said in a tone of quiet command:

"You're going to give me that letter, Tom."

He hit at her with his left hand, and screamed:

"I'll fix you. I'll spoil your lying face. You let me go."

She swayed on her artificial leg. His blow was feeble or she would have fallen. She struck him on the forehead with her walking stick, and he choked and began to cough. He stood for a moment, stooped over, coughing. He sank down on his knees, and bright crimson gushed from his mouth, staining the grass.

She supported his head for a long minute. His breath came painfully, rattling in his throat. His eyes, full of hate, held hers. He tried to speak, but the syllables were drowned in the flow of vital fluid.

A moment later he shuddered and was still, a horrid, incongruous figure on the tidily kept green grass. She pressed her hand to his heart and looked into his face. He was dead. She drew a long breath, put her hand into his inside pocket and took out a soiled and torn envelope. She took out the time stained enclosure, and read:

> "*Dear Ann: I don't understand what has happened to change you. But I always will remain the same. Whatever happens I was the first man. You can't forget that. . . .*"

She arose with difficulty and looked down at the sprawled figure. There was no pity in the look. She would have boiled in oil six Toms before she would have brought a comparatively slight discomfort to her husband and her children.

She stood for several seconds, motionless. Then she looked at her right arm and shoulder. The fabric of her sweater had been torn away, and her arm was scratched.

Painfully she got down to the ground again and examined Tom's hands. She took from between his fingers a shred of sweater. She cleaned under his nails.

She met Norah in the hall. Norah exclaimed:

"Why, Mrs. West. What happened to you?"

"Nothing to amount to anything," Ann said.

"But your sweater."

"It got torn," Ann said.

She went into the library, where Dr. Benham, who was making his home with them, was sitting in a wing chair at the south

window. He puckered his toothless lips and said:

"Hello, Annie. Been for a walk?"

She stood quietly looking down at him and said:

"There's a dead man down by the swimming pool."

He blinked and raised his wavering head. She added:

"And I took a piece of my sweater out of his hand, and cleaned the skin where he had scratched me from his nails."

He said:

"You remembered, huh? What happened?"

"He died of T. B., I think," Ann said. "He had a hemorrhage."

"I see," Dr. Benham said. "I see."

"But it was brought on in a struggle with me for a letter which. . . ."

Dr. Benham scowled ferociously and said:

"No more, Annie. No more."

"But," she said. "I can trust you. I'd like to tell you."

"Don't tell anybody anything, Ann," Dr. Benham said. "I gather a chicken came home but found a cold roost instead of a warm one. Now, you run along and change your clothes."

"I'm not sorry he's dead," Ann said. "I think he's better that way."

"A lot of people would be," Dr. Benham said. "A lot of people would be. A little whisky or brandy might be good for you."

Ann said with an odd smile:

"I like to see people drink that can drink, but I found out some time before I was married that I'm not one of them."

"Sometimes a little alcohol can make a lot of misery," Dr. Benham said. "But on the other hand, when you're old, and past the danger line, it warms the blood."

"A little alcohol was connected with that secret you've made me keep," Ann said as she walked away, dragging her artificial leg.

"Anyway, it might be good to put on those scratches," Dr. Benham said. "Be sure and put some on 'em."

Chapter Twenty-one

THE TELEPHONE rang. Norah answered it. She said:

"No, the doctor is out."

She said:

"I'll see."

Dr. Benham poked down the lower hall, dry-smoking a cigar. He said:

"What is it, Norah?"

Norah said:

"Sure, Doctor, it's that Mrs. Jacobs that always has trouble with her husband. Her baby is sick."

"Let me talk with her."

Norah said:

"Sure, Doctor. Those Jacobses never paid any bills, and Doctor West has been doctoring 'em for years. Sure, they're better off dead, the lot of 'em."

Dr. Benham took the receiver in a trembling, bony hand. He clamped it to his ear, and said:

"Hello, Mrs. Jacobs."

He listened, and said:

"Yes. He feels pretty bad, hey?"

He listened, and said:

"This is Doctor Benham. I'll be right over."

He replaced the receiver on the hook, and Norah said:

"Now, Doctor Benham, you know you can't go out at all, at all, and those Jacobses live up three flights on the flats. I know 'em."

Dr. Benham scowled at Norah and said:

"Shut up, and get me a car."

Norah said:

"It would have to be this day that Miss Dolly picked to go to the movies, and nobody home. You know, sir, you're supposed to be layin' down."

Dr. Benham faced her, his face stern.

"I'm not going to waste any more time with you, Norah," he said. "You do what I say, or pack your things and get out of this house."

Norah curtsied, and said:

"Yes, sir."

Tom, the handy-man, helped Dr. Benham into the car. He said:

"You're sure you don't want me to drive you, sir?"

"No, Tom," Dr. Benham replied, reaching into his upper left-hand pocket and extracting a cigar.

He held out the cigar to Tom, and said:

"Have a cigar, Tom."

Tom had a face like a horse, long and white, with a walrus mustache and a long, square chin. He said:

"Thank you, Doctor, but should you be driving alone, sir?"

"Damn!" Dr. Benham said. "You mind your business."

"Yes, sir," Tom said. "Yes, Doctor."

Dr. Benham said to Mrs. Jacobs:

"Now just hand me whatever I tell you."

Her three-year-old son, Herman, was under ether, his abdomen smeared with iodine. Mrs. Jacobs said:

"Those towels of yours, Doctor. They're kind of dirty. I've got nice clean ones."

"Clean!" Dr. Benham roared. "Your towels are full of germs. Those I've got are sterilized."

"What are those brown spots, Doctor?"

"Blood," Doctor Benham said.

He pulled his spectacles down over his nose, and said:

"Now, shut up, and hand me that there."

He pointed.

In a trance, Mrs. Jacobs handed him instruments and gauze and clamps and drains, as he directed. When he finished sewing, Mrs. Jacobs said admiringly:

"Why, I never knew a doctor could sew so pretty."

Then she fainted.

Dr. Benham walked downstairs and got into the car. He reached into his left-hand jacket pocket, and took out a cigar, and lighted it and then he meshed the gears. He drove over a road of long ago to a white clapboard house in front of which stood two maple trees he had helped plant fifty years before. He stopped the car, and said:

"And we thought those trees were too close to the house when we planted 'em."

They found him there the next morning, sitting still in the car with a smile on his face, in front of the now empty house in which Elvira had lived as a girl. He had thrown apples from pointed sticks with her, and played "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief," and "Big house, little house, backhouse, barn," and "Now he loves me," and he sat there dead, smiling.

They tried to have a small funeral for Dr. Benham, but no house, not even the chapel, would hold the flowers that poured in. The First Church was banked solid with flowers. And there wasn't room inside for the men and women who sat there, and who walked past the casket, weeping. Ann said to Alonzo:

"Somehow, Alonzo, I feel that what was needed here was not an organ but a trumpet."

He nodded, and said:

"The old fellow certainly triumphed, didn't he? And he got his life-long wish. He died with his boots on."

Ann went alone to the crematory. Dr. Benham often had asked her to be sure that he was cremated. She looked through the crevices, and saw the bright flames transform his mortal remains to ashes. It was dark, and the fire was still burning. She went outside on the green grass among the trees, and looked up at the chimney from which the smoke was issuing. A bright spark leaped up.

It rose through the darkness high in the night, shining.

Ann went back to her car, and drove home. She said to Alonzo:

"I think that about all any of us can get out of life is a spark of spirit that flies upward."

Alonzo grinned, and said:

"Don't get poetical about Doctor Benham. He died just the way he wanted to, on the job."

"I guess that's something of what I meant," Ann said. "To live a life you've got to do a job."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed. Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Lady Ann*, by Donald Henderson Clarke.]